POWER, METAPHOR AND THE POWER OF METAPHOR

- work in progress -

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Introduction: the sages of Indostan and metaphorical politics

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
“God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!”

These are the opening lines of John Godfrey Saxe’s fable The Blind Men and the Elephant. As the poem progresses, each blind man proceeds to investigate the elephant. One feels its tusk and decides that the elephant is ‘very like a spear’. Another one touches its trunk and concludes that the elephant is ‘like a snake’. And so on, as each man assumes the whole is like the part he touched or experienced, the elephant continues to be described as a tree, a fan and a rope. The poet concludes:

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

Following Daniel Rigney, I claim that Saxe’s fable, originally written as an ironical critique of the certitudes of the theologians, can be read more broadly as a ‘story about fallible human attempts in every age to comprehend elusive realities of every kind’ (Rigney 2001: 2). This nineteenth-century poem presumably based on an ancient Indian tale has a contemporary postmodern flavor in its overt recognition of the multiplicity and partiality of human perspectives.

Like the fabled elephant, the social and political life is puzzling in its complexity and all those who seek to explain, understand or influence it are in some ways like the scholars in Saxe’s poem. We all experience fleeting fragments of some large and complex social and political entity and we try to make sense of it with our limited capacities for observation and analysis. To make things even more complicated than in the fable, we are not external observers of a secluded elephant, but rather active participants in the very social and political life we seek to grasp and describe. Or, put it in Foucaultian terms, we are shaped by the very discourses we endeavor to understand.

Just like the men from Indostan, we often make recourse to metaphor, simile and analogy in our attempts to render complex and unfamiliar phenomena from social and political
life into simpler and more familiar terms. This applies to all the ‘story-tellers’ of the political, including policymakers, representatives of the media and academics alike. The language of European Union’s (henceforth EU) eastern enlargement, just to give you some examples from the subject that has recently captured my attention, is replete with metaphors. For instance the European commissioner for enlargement, Olli Rehn, has assured that Romania and Bulgaria’s full membership of the EU will follow in 2007 provided that ‘they complete their homework successfully’. Then, when Rehn calls Romanians a ‘great football nation’ and then describes himself as the ‘referee to judge fairly and objectively’ if Romania is meeting the criteria of membership our imagination switches from the school site to the football stadium. Or, we are prepared to deal with family matters when the Romanian president or the cartoonist Vali Ivan (see Figure 1) present, though in very different ways, Romania’s forthcoming EU accession in terms of a wedding. And any of these metaphors would not have been possible, of course, without the underlying personification metaphor in the light of which we see states, such as Bulgaria and Romania, and institutions, such as the EU, as human-like beings involved in all kind of relations and activities with one another.

Despite the prevalence of metaphors in the language of politics and international relations, of which the above examples represent just an insignificant fraction, until recently, political scholars have been very reluctant to admit the importance of the study of metaphors. Yet, many of the very political theories they advance for analysing political phenomena are heavily loaded with metaphors. To begin with ancient political philosophy, Plato’s political writing is very rich in metaphors, despite his open condemnation of them. No less metaphorical are the political writings of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Ironically enough, Hobbes, like Plato, combines a warning about the danger of metaphors to lead the human mind into intellectual and political confusion with a very prolific use of them (Hesse 1993: 49, Mooij 1993: 67, Musolff 2004: 1). For what is the notion of ‘the body politic’ that runs throughout his work other than an organicist metaphor? Approaching the present age, we are faced with the Rawlsian metaphor of ‘the veil of ignorance’, the ‘capillaries of power’ metaphor in Foucault’s writings or the mechanics metaphors in Waltz’s argumentation. These metaphors are not merely

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1 Strictly speaking, the scholars of Indostan are using similes when they associate the elephant with one or another familiar object.
5 See Ankersmit 1993 for an illuminating discussion of the metaphorical nature of the Western political philosophy.
6 For the use of metaphors in International Political theory, especially by the main authors of ‘realism’ and ‘neorealism’ see Chilton 1996: 79-119.
decorations of the political theories that incorporate them but rather their acceptance is required for the theoretical argument to work (Ankersmit 1993).

In spite of the abundance of metaphors in political practice and political theory alike, it is only recently that metaphors in a political context have received some more academic attention (cf. Beer and De Landtsheer 2004: 5). Traditionally, metaphors have been studied by scholars in the fields of communication, language, literature and rhetoric. This paper starts by outlining the main approaches in the study of metaphor and continues by exploring the possibilities of giving the study of metaphor a stronger socio-political dimension. It argues that power is the essential element that makes the study of metaphors relevant for social and political analysts, but the explicit or implicit conceptualization of power influences both the forms of representation that are taken into consideration in the study of metaphors as well as the formulation of the research questions. The theoretical argument is illustrated with examples from my current research on Bulgaria and Romania’s EU accession.

‘What is metaphor?’ and ‘what is metaphor for?’ or from semantics to pragmatics

This section looks at how metaphors have been conceptualized within the major areas of semantics and pragmatics. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive list of theories of metaphor, but rather to highlight the major traditions in thinking about metaphor while evaluating their usefulness for the student of social and political life. It should be said from the beginning that all these theories agree on the general definition of metaphor as describing ‘something in terms of something else’ that derives from Greek verb ‘meta-pherein’ meaning ‘carry over’ (which is itself a metaphor, of course!)

We have inherited the earliest semantic analyses of metaphors from classical philosophy. For instance, Aristotle’s definition of metaphor, based on the substitution of one name for another, in Poetics and in Rhetoric remains influential to this day. According to Aristotle, metaphor ‘is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy’ (Aristotle quoted by Ricoeur 1978: 13). Aristotle’s view of metaphor is a very broad one since it subsumes tropes in general under the category of metaphor. Aristotle’s definition assumes that each name or word has a proper or literal meaning through which the proper name is attached to the proper form. Metaphor, then, breaks this literal meaning dyad and creates figural meanings. In the Aristotelian substitution model of metaphor, the focus is on the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of meaning production. As Aristotle put it in Rhetoric, metaphor gives ‘perspicuity, pleasure and a foreign air’ thus elevating and ornating language. The interest in the stylistic and aesthetic aspects, together with the location of metaphor at the level of

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7 For a comprehensive list of works see Beer and De Landtsheer 2004: 31-2, n.2 and n.3.
8 ‘Tropes are usually divided into metaphor, discussing something in terms of something else, metonymy, in which the whole is described in terms of a part and synecdoche, in which a more comprehensive term is used for a less comprehensive one or vice versa. Sometimes irony is also classified as a rhetorical trope (e.g. Burke 1969).
words limits the usefulness of the substitution model for the student of social and political matters.

While the substitution theory addresses questions related to the nature of metaphor (‘what are metaphors?’), two other approaches – the interaction and the cognitive models – move the focus from the meaning towards the uses of metaphors by asking ‘what are metaphors for?’ (Ortony 1979: 4). In what follows I shall briefly introduce each of these positions in the study of metaphor in turn, insisting more on cognitive theory in the form proposed by Lakoff and Johnson as it represents the starting point for most of the studies of metaphors in social and political contexts.

In Models and Metaphors (1962), Max Black proposes an interaction view of metaphor introducing a cognitive dimension. In a subsequent article, he calls metaphorical thought a ‘neglected topic of major importance’ and proposes to get a better grasp of it by pondering ‘what is to think of something (A) as something else (B)?’ (Black 1979: 32). According to Black, metaphor is not located at the level of words or names but rather metaphorical meaning is created in the interaction between the two terms of the metaphor. Moreover Black underscores the importance of context in the interpretation of metaphors. As he puts it, a metaphorical statement ‘will be identified by quoting a whole sentence, or a set of sentences, together with as much of the relevant verbal context, or the nonverbal setting, as may be needed for an adequate grasp of the actual or imputed speaker’s meaning’ (Black quoted in Forceville 1996: 7).

The cognitive dimension introduced by Black was picked up and extended by numerous other authors, Lakoff and Johnson among them. In their highly influential book Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson argue that ‘[O]ur conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature’ (1980: 3). That ‘[M]etaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action, and only derivatively a matter of language’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 153), reformulated more succinctly by Lakoff as metaphor is ‘not a figure of speech, but a mode of thought’ (1993: 210) is certainly one of the central tenets of the cognitive theory of metaphor.

From this perspective, metaphor is defined as a cross-domain mapping between the source and target domains. To take an example for illustration, the metaphor STATES ARE PERSONS, consists of a source domain (persons) and a target domain (states) and a mapping between these domains (properties or features that persons and states have in

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According to Ricoeur (1978), the Aristotelian approach of metaphor, restricted to the study of changed meanings of words, has been followed up to the twentieth century, until the realization that the basic semantic unit is larger than the word.

Black’s theory of metaphor is sometimes popularized as the ‘projection’ approach, e.g. Ankersmit and Mooij 1993.

Different traditions use different names for the two terms of the metaphor. For example in the metaphor STATES ARE PERSONS, ‘states’ represent the ‘primary subject’, ‘target’ or ‘tenor’ and ‘persons’ represent the ‘secondary subject’, ‘source’ or ‘vehicle’. For consistency reasons, the couple of terms ‘target’ – ‘source’ will be used throughout this article.

I follow Lakoff and Johnson in using capital letters when referring to conceptual metaphors. Metaphorical expression are spelled in italics.
common). In this metaphor, some of the features of persons are used to highlight some of the features of states. That is, when states are metaphorically conceptualized as persons, it is entailed amongst other things that states have motives, gave goals, can be weak or strong, sick or healthy, will desire to survive or to dominate (Chilton 1996: 56-7). Lakoff and Johnson distinguish between CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR and linguistic expressions of it. For example, expressions such as ‘to accelerate the preparations for accession’ is part of the conceptual metaphor of EU ACCESSION IS MOTION.

The cognitive theory of metaphor argues that the human conceptual system has its origins primarily in everyday bodily experiences that are projected onto more abstract categories. For example, standing up signifies health and lying down represents illness. This translates metaphorically in up is more/good and down is less/bad. Based on this notion, Lakoff and Johnson distinguish between orientational metaphors (which have to do with spatial orientation e.g. UP IS MORE), structural metaphors (cases where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another, e.g. ARGUMENT IS WAR) and ontological metaphors (that is, ways of viewing activities, emotions, ideas, etc. as entities and substances, e.g. STATES ARE PERSONS).

The interaction and especially the cognitive theories have opened the door for the study of metaphors for social and political analysts. These theories have shifted the concern from metaphor as meaning-producing towards the ways in which meaning-producing metaphors structure the ways in which people make sense of the world. For the student of political matters, this implies that it makes sense to study metaphors because an investigation of metaphors in one sphere of politics, let us say the EU enlargement, captures an important dimension of political thinking in that given area. This paper undertakes to investigate the ways in which metaphors in social and political contexts have been studied and to show how that is linked with the understanding of power. Before that, however, I want to address to one aspect that has recently sparked a lot of debate among scholars of metaphor, that is, whether the concept of metaphor properly applies to pictures.

**Pictorial metaphors**

Despite the diversity of perspectives from which metaphors have been approached, all the positions presented so far agree on one thing, namely the existence of linguistic metaphors. Actually, most authors assume that metaphor is ‘a verbal event – a verbal “thing” of some sort’ (Worth 1981). In the case of pictures, the situation is rather different, for the very idea of pictorial metaphor is controversial. According to some, metaphor expressed in ‘visual displays is more basic than metaphor in language’ (Cathy Dent-Read quoted by Kennedy and Kennedy 1993: 151). Others have argued that there is no possibility of metaphor in visual form because metaphor requires the transformation of the target up until that moment when it becomes consubstantial with the source (see Edwards 1997: 33, n.4). Visual displays can take a multitude of forms (e.g. paintings, maps, photographs, advertisements, cartoons) and it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate whether (and how) metaphor can be realized visually in all of them\(^\text{13}\). Nor do I

\(^{13}\)For a review of studies that focus of pictorial metaphor see Forceville 1996: 37-66.
attempt to provide here a theory of pictorial metaphor. Instead, I make a much more limited claim, namely, that political cartoons can depict something in terms of something else.

In an oft-quoted essay, the art historian E.H. Gombrich (1963, reprinted 2001) argues that metaphor is a common device in political cartoons: it is one of the main ‘weapons’ in the ‘cartoonist’s armoury’. Having noted the abundance of metaphors in politicians’ talks, Gombrich seems initially inclined to claim that cartoons ‘merely secure[s] what language has prepared’ (ibid.: 128). Later on, however, he concedes that ‘cartoonists at all times have claimed the right to’ ‘characterize new events in terms of familiar situations whether or not language has preceded them’ (ibid.: 132). Another scholar who tackles visual metaphor is Sol Worth. In his studies of visual communication, he notes that caricature has the capacity to encompass the central feature of metaphor, namely transformation. ‘A caricature’, writes Worth, ‘is neither true nor false, but, like a metaphor, is a structure that reveals a set of meanings intended to communicate a certain set of relationships within some understood or understandable context and bounds. A caricature is a structure that means neither that something is as it is or as it is not’ (1981: 156, emphasis in original). A caricature, argues Worth can be both the target and the source, it captures the moment of transformation and embodies both aspects of the metaphorical equation in a singular image.

Many examples of verbal metaphors have been given so far and at this point it is useful to look at an example of visual metaphor. In Figure 1 the Romanian president, Traian Basescu, is depicted simultaneously as the EU’s bride and the USA’s potential mistress. A caricature, in order to be successful has to look like its original subject – Basescu, in this case. But the caricature, as a metaphor also embodies something that Basescu is not – bride and mistress. The Romanian president is recognizable by his facial features, characteristic (if exaggerated) pointed nose and thinning hair. The artistic skill of the cartoonist is important, for Basescu has to be made recognizable. At the same time, the source must be made clear. The bride characterization is conveyed through the illustration of aspects associated with marriage, the bride dress and the signing of the marriage certificate. The mistress characterization is communicated mostly verbally but also visually through the presence of a wicked partner in the person of Uncle Sam.

Without difficulty we can also point out the personification metaphors: both the EU and the USA have a corporeal male presence. Yet we can go even further in unveiling the metaphorical layers conveyed by this cartoon. The publication date of the cartoon (spring 2005) and the label Luxemburg provide some more context for moving to yet another level of understanding. In Luxemburg, on the 25th of April 2005, the Romanian president was one of the officials who signed for Romania the Accession Treaty to the EU. Taking these aspects into consideration, the visual and verbal elements of the cartoon can be put

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14 Caricatures and cartoons are closely associated but not completely similar. Caricatures are the immediate forerunner of contemporary political cartoons, and caricature remains a common element employed by cartoonists (see also Edwards 1997: 20-2).

15 Personification metaphors are a subtype of what Lakoff and Johnson call ‘ontological’ metaphors (1980: 33-4).
together to establish two other metaphors, namely EU accession is wedding and relationship (with the US) is affair.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Vali Ivan in Jurnalul National\textsubscript{17}}
\end{figure}

Caption translation: After he falls asleep I’ll wait you on the shore of the Black Sea, you know that place turns me on. And don’t you worry, you’ll see, as a mistress I’ll be more appetizing. (my translation)

Having (hopefully) made the case that political cartoons can contain metaphors in the sense of representing something in terms of something else, we have to be aware that in order for these pictorial metaphors to be amenable to discussion they have to be ‘translated’ into language. The use of label ‘metaphor’ which originates and has been popularized in the description of verbal phenomena to pictorial phenomena is in itself a creative act: the similarity between the verbal phenomenon and the pictorial phenomenon is often not pre-existent, but has to be created (Forceville 1996: 209). To accept that calling a visual phenomenon metaphor is an act of creativity inevitably raises the question whether that is the only possible labeling. Opinions are divided on this issue:

\textsuperscript{16} I do not attempt to go any further in the interpretation of these metaphors. The existence of pictorial metaphors in political cartoons is the main point that I want to make here.

\textsuperscript{17} Jurnalul National is a Romanian daily newspaper; the on-line political cartoon archive is available at http://arhiva.jurnalul.ro/modules/pnCPG/coppermine/displayimage.php?album=3&pos=31, last accessed 16.9.2005.
while some argue that various verbal tropes (e.g. comparison, metonymy, synecdoche, simile) have distinct pictorial counterparts (e.g., Durand 1987, Forceville 1996) some other are more inclined to accept that the borderline between various categories is rather flexible (Gombrich 2001/1963: 132, Kennedy 1982: 596, 603, Whittock 1990: 68). Drawing on Whittock, I argue that categorization should not worry us too much as we ‘do not discern metaphors in order to categorize them but in order to profit from what they have to offer us: density of meaning intensely experienced’ (1990: 68).

In the example above, the visual metaphors have been verbalized as noun is noun (Forceville 1996, El Refaie 2003), but this should not be taken to mean that this is the only form that they could be translated into language. The verbalizations employed are no more than approximations designed to render into language what is presented pictorially, and other formulations are obviously conceivable. The difference between the visual and the verbal media also means that visual metaphors are not necessarily convertible to adequate verbalizations. There is no reason to suppose that the effect of pictorial metaphors – as Whittock puts it in relation to cinematic metaphors – ‘may be captured in words without loss’ (1990: 49). To return to the example in Figure 1, the verbalization of the metaphors EU accession is wedding and relationship (with the US) is affair has not taken into consideration the abundance of visual details, including the wicked expression of uncle Sam, the naïve attitude of the groom or the old-fashioned garments of the main characters. Of course, paying attention to such details is part of the process of interpretation (and that falls outside the objectives of this paper), but it is without doubts that the pictorial realization of the metaphor brings something more which cannot be reduced to words without loss. To this we can add Gombrich’s claim:

> When we write or even think about history and politics, the individuals, their sufferings and waverings, their efforts to be left alone, inevitably disappear behind the abstractions. … It is the strength and the danger of the cartoonist that he appeals to this tendency and makes it easier for us to treat abstractions as if they were tangible realities (2001/1963: 128).

The metaphor EU accession is wedding has been presented in this paper in two different contexts. The metaphor was used by the Romanian president in Luxembourg in his speech on the occasion of the signing ceremony of Romania’s EU Accession Treaty. It was also employed by Vali Ivan in one of his cartoons published by the Romanian daily newspaper Jurnalul National and reproduced here in Figure 1. Even though I have not gotten into the details of interpreting the metaphor, it comes without saying that its meaning depends on the context of its use. While the former is related to a ‘commitment and determination to be an integral part of the European family’ (emphasis added), the latter tells about fake commitments to the EU and a preferred relationship with the US. This observation obviously raises the question ‘where should the student interested in political metaphors look for them?’. Which forms of representation should be included and which should be excluded? Is it reasonable to focus only on politicians’ rhetoric or should we include some other material, such as political cartoons, in our political analyses of metaphor? The next section shows that the tendency has been to concentrate on the metaphors used by politicians and this is related with the conceptualization of power.
Metaphor, politics and power

The changes in the way metaphors have been approached in Political Science and International Relations (henceforth IR)\(^{18}\) are part of the wider shifts in the social sciences, and particularly in the conceptions of the relationship between language and reality. The positions vis-à-vis metaphors have been affected by epistemological tensions between realism and relativism, positivism and constructivism.

For a long time, the study of metaphors had been considered an inappropriate undertaking for the student of social and political life. Metaphors were traditionally considered to be vehicles of *emotion* or *persuasion*. Whereas Aristotle viewed metaphors as ornaments which decorate texts (without affecting their meaning) and argued the merits of metaphor as a powerful means of achieving insight\(^{19}\), the empiricists warned against the danger of *metaphors* to lead the human mind into intellectual and political confusion. The latter view is clearly illustrated by Thomas Hobbes:

> […] The Light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; […] And on the contrary, Metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui*; and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention, and sedition, or contempt. (Hobbes quoted by Musolff 2004: 1)

Hobbes’s attack on metaphor is based on the assumption that speech consists of names that are connected by us so that we may record our thoughts, recall them in memory and express them to others. One of the main reasons for expressing our thoughts is to communicate our knowledge. This function is impeded whenever we use metaphors, as (in the Aristotelian tradition) metaphor means for Hobbes the transference of a name from its proper object to some other object. Accordingly, reasoning by metaphor and other such ‘senseless and ambiguous words … is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities’ (Hobbes quoted in Rigney 2001: 5). Ironically though, Hobbes’ fervent critique is doubled by a constant use of metaphor: his argument in *Leviathan* depends on the metaphor of the political state as a powerful giant (or Leviathan).

The negative view of metaphor has continued to dominate Political Science and International Relations Theory for as long as these disciplines have sought to constitute themselves as precisely that – science and theory and embraced positivism as their dominant paradigm. Positivism asserts that objective accounts of the *real world* can be given and treats language as a means of reflecting upon this objective knowledge as accurately as possible. The positivist critique of metaphor is, according to Johnson based on two points: first, the distinction between the ‘cognitive’ and ‘emotive’ functions of language and second, the belief that scientific knowledge can be rendered into literal

\(^{18}\) I use capital letters for Political Science and International Relations when I refer to them as disciplines of study and small letters when I refer to their object of study.

\(^{19}\) Aristotle praised poetic metaphor, adding that metaphor is of great value in prose, too, when *properly employed* (*Poetics* and *Rhetoric*). He however warned against the potential misuse of metaphor in framing definitions, as ‘a metaphorical expression is always obscure’ (*Topics*). In other words, he drew a distinction between the cases when a metaphor is fitting and provides insight (good or proper use of metaphor) and those in which it is potentially misleading (bad use).
statements, capable of verification and falsification (1981: 17). In this context, metaphor is dismissed on the basis that it either serves emotive functions or that its truth claims can be captured by the translation into a literal paraphrase without loss of cognitive content.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, under the influence of cognitive linguistics – and especially of the work of Lakoff and Johnson – a much more positive view of metaphor has won ground. As we have already seen, this approach is premised on the assumption that meanings associated with words and linguistic forms derive from the human conceptual system, which itself derives from interaction with the physical environment. Metaphor, from this perspective, is not any more an ornament, a ‘garment of thought’, as Quintilian put it, but rather an indispensable ingredient of thought itself. It refers primarily to the process of forming concepts, rather than to the words and linguistic expressions that are the result of such processes.

The cognitive-linguistic literature claimed that metaphorical processes are one of the most important means, though not the only one, by which humans form concepts of, and reason about, their environment. It was moreover maintained that this is especially the case for conceptualizations of abstract, unfamiliar or complex domains. Those interested in the study of politics and international relations realized soon that such domains include social and political institutions, strategic doctrines or foreign policy and started to regard cognitive linguistics as a main source of inspiration for their analyses of metaphors in such contexts.

Most of these studies, though, focus on one sphere of political discourse, that is, politicians’ rhetoric. Randall Schweller, for instance, argues that ‘the Truman administration employed the contagion metaphor to justify intervention in Greece in 1947’ (Schweller quoted by Shimko 2004: 201). In a similar vein, Charteris-Black claims that metaphor is necessary for successful leadership. He writes that ‘choice of language in general and metaphor in particular is essential to their [politicians’] overall persuasiveness’ (2005: 2). From here he continues to illustrate how a number of famous twentieth-century political leaders – namely, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Margaret Thatcher, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and George W. Bush – ‘have successfully exploited metaphor and myth in their use of rhetoric in the persuasive communication of ideology’ (ibid.: 4). To concentrate on politicians’ rhetoric seems just natural because, as Lakoff and Johnson put it, ‘whether in national politics or in everyday interaction, people in power get to impose their metaphors’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 157, emphasis added) and this means that they can initiate or enforce actions consonant with the metaphors they uphold.

Recently it has been acknowledged that metaphors are part of political speech in all its forms, including politicians’ rhetoric, political information mediated by television, radio and press and political texts written by popular and academic authors (Beer and De

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20 To be sure, the idea that metaphor is a matter of thought rather than language is much older. As early as 1936, I.A. Richards claimed that: ‘Thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom’ (Richards quoted in Johnson 1981: 18). Twenty year later, the idea was reiterated and reinforced by Max Black whose contribution was briefly reviewed in this paper.
It was also recognized that metaphors are not confined to the realm of public speeches and texts but can also be part of photos or videos, such as those used in political campaigns (ibid.: 23) (though, as we have seen, the existence of pictorial metaphor is still debated). Why the focus on politicians’ speech, then? Why not analyse other forms of representation, such as political cartoons, as they are forms of political discourse and can contain metaphors (as exemplified by Figure 1)? I argue that the focus on politicians’ rhetoric derives from a conceptualization of power as power with a face\textsuperscript{21} – that is, the understanding of power as an instrument that powerful agents use to alter the free action of the powerless – and an attendant belief in pre-constituted subjectivities. Moreover, I argue that the conceptualization of power as a phenomenon that wears a face not only constrains the forms of political discourse that are taken into consideration in metaphor analysis, but also informs the questions that can be formulated.

\textit{Power-with-a-face}

The literature on power is vast enough to resist any attempts at an exhaustive overview within the space constraints of this article. Facing the risk of a gross simplification, in what follows I try to summarise some elements of the debate which are relevant for my discussion about metaphors. Without doubts, Dahl’s definition of power had long been the most influential for political theorists and IR scholars (Baldwin 2002, Hayward 2000). He undertakes to systematically explain ‘the central intuitively understood meaning’ of the concept and refers to power as the ability of A to get B to do what B would not otherwise do (Dahl 1957: 202-3). Three main characteristics underlie Dahl’s concept of power. First, there is A’s intentionality; what counts is that A wants B to alters its actions in a particular direction. If B acts under the mistaken impression that A wants it to do so, that would not count as power because A’s intent is missing. Second, there must be a conflict of desires, meaning that A and B want different outcomes and B loses and alters its behaviour. Third, A is successful in making B to change its actions because it has material and ideational resources at its disposal.

In the decades that followed, nearly every element of Dahl’s conception of power has been challenged, including the scope of power and the scope of responses by B that A might affect, Dahl’s claims about the role of intention, conscious knowledge and volition in power’s exercise and the logical empiricist basis of his theory (Barnett and Duvall 2005, Hayward 2000: 11-27).

Against Dahl’s famous claim that there is ‘no action at a distance’ (1957: 204) some theorists pointed out that power can refer to actors’ indirect control over the conditions of existence and actions of other actors. For instance, scholars concentrating on concrete institutions have examining how evolving rules and decision-making procedures can shape outcomes that favour some groups over others. The focus has been on the formal and informal institutions that mediate between A and B, as through the rules and procedures that define those institutions A exercises power over B’s actions and circumstances, intentionally or not.

\textsuperscript{21} I borrow the metaphor of \textit{power with a face} from Hayward (2000).
Another substantive challenge for Dahl’s understanding of power came from Steven Lukes who in *Power: A Radical View* asked ‘is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things …?’ (1974: 24). Lukes’s conceptualization of power is thus based on the distinction between agents’ *subjective* and *objective* interests and maintains that power is being exercised when B acts contrary to its objective, real interests.

Despite the variety of positions concerning power, what has remained largely unchallenged throughout the debate was the question which its contributors aimed to answer: ‘what do we mean when we say that A has power over B?’ and its underlying conceptualization of power as a social phenomenon that necessarily *wears a face*, that is, as an instrument that powerful agents use – directly or indirectly – to alter the free action of the powerless (Hayward 2000). I argue here that this understanding of power is not the most useful when thinking about metaphors. Not only it deflects attention from analysing certain forms of representation but also restricts the questions that can be asked.

Scholars of power-with-a-face take as their starting point the agent who has access to and can use power in the form of mechanisms (s)he might control and direct. Power’s mechanisms, in this view, include not only material but also symbolic and normative resources, such as metaphors. From the perspective of power’s various faces, metaphors appear as mechanisms of power that (powerful) political elites can act upon to manipulate the powerless or to induce them to misapprehend their own preferences and act in ways contrary to their interests. This tradition is exemplified by Paul Chilton’s work on security metaphors. He defines power ‘in terms of capability and resources, which include the discursive power to promote and impose concepts as the basis of preferred policies’ (Chilton 1996: 6; emphasis added). Theorists of power-with-a-face suggest the questions that we should ask in relation to metaphors: ‘How did the political elites, on the inter-governmental and/or on the domestic level, seek to impose their own metaphors?’, ‘How successful were they, and what were the consequences?’.

To return to the example of Romania’s and Bulgaria’s EU accession, this kind of approach suggests that the analysis should concentrate on the metaphors used by politicians because they seem to be the *powerful* actors in the process. It also suggests as a working hypothesis that Bulgarian and Romanian politicians might use metaphors to induce people to alter their behaviour, desires, attitudes in ways contrary to their interests (for instance, by accepting a new EU regulation, such as closing a nuclear unit). As in the contemporary television-dominated world the power of cartoonists to affect public attitudes or provoke political actions is limited22, approaches of power-with-a-face would not encourage the location and analysis of metaphors at this level, in the first place. Or

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22 Research does not provide any conclusive evidence concerning the capacity of cartoons to foster change in public attitudes or in policy. Some studies find evidence of opinion change from both cartoon and written editorials, whereas others indicate that political cartoons are not even widely understood by readers, let alone have any direct persuasive effects (Sewell 1987: 267, see also Edwards 1997: 6).
they would suggest that political cartoons, contrary to politicians’ rhetoric, are forms of *empowerment* in that they allow the *powerless* to participate, if only vicariously, in the symbolic deflation of the *powerful* (DeSousa and Medhurst 1982).

My aim here is to make the case that if power is, in Clarissa Rile Hayward’s terms, *de-faced* – that is, conceptualized not as an instrument that particular actors use to alter the independent action of others, but as a *network of social boundaries* that delimit for all the field of what is possible and constitute what actors are as social beings – then, not only is the study of metaphors in all kinds of representations (including political cartoons) rendered meaningful for political analysis, but also the hypotheses of the previous approaches are exposed as misguided in important ways.

*De-facing power*

Against the prevailing understanding of power as an instrument used by powerful agents, students of power de-faced, drawing on Foucault’s writings, re-conceptualize power as a social process of constituting what actors are as social beings through systems of knowledge and discursive practices. Power’s mechanisms, from this position, are conceived not as instruments powerful agents use to coerce, manipulate or prevent the powerless from acting independently or authentically, but as boundaries that define the field of what is socially possible for all social actors.

Scholars of power de-faced argue that all social actors are situated within relations of power, but this is not to mean that they are equally or similarly situated. Rather there are usually *patterned asymmetries* in the social capacity for action, meaning some actors are positioned such that they can act on power’s mechanisms in ways that shape the field of possibility for the others. But students of power de-faced do not reduce these positions to qualitatively distinguishable states of ‘powerfulness’ and ‘powerlessness’. Instead of asking ‘who has power?’ and ‘how is power used?’, they ask ‘how do power’s mechanisms define the (im)possible, the (im)probable, the natural, the normal, what counts as a problem?’ and ‘how do the workings of power produce (political) subjectivities?’.

If debates about how to conceptualize power were no more than debates about how best to define a political concept, it would make little difference which terminological convention would be accepted. But they are not. The overt or implicit understanding of power informs the forms of representation which receive attention and the questions that can be formulated. Applying a de-faced approach of power to the study of metaphors has two major sets of implications. *First*, it directs critical attention to social relations and forms of representation that do not involve individual or collective actors who meet prevailing intuitions about what ‘powerful’ agents are. By this view it makes sense to analyse metaphors in both politicians’ rhetoric as well as political cartoons, without ignoring, though, the asymmetries in the social capacity for action between politicians and political cartoonists.
Second, de-facing power involves the reformulation of the questions that can be asked. Instead of ‘how did political elites seek to impose their metaphors?’ and ‘how successful were they?’, the student of power de-faced will ask ‘how do metaphors define the (im)possible, the (im)probable, the natural, the normal, what counts as a problem for all social actors?’, ‘what kind of political subjectivities do metaphors produce?’ and ‘in which ways metaphorical meanings reproduce, challenge or transform relations of power’.

Turning from a cognitive to a discursive position also involves a change in appreciating the ‘truth’ value of metaphor. Whereas cognitive theories seem inclined to apply a true/false dichotomy to metaphor, a discursive approach emphasises the productivity of metaphor and asks what political truth specific metaphors construct and what social and political consequences result from these.

To exemplify the differences between a power-with-a-face cognitive based approach and a power de-faced discursive approach to metaphor consider the following example:

![Figure 2](http://www.dnevnik.bg/)  
Ivan Kutuzov in *Dnevnik*, 14.4.2005

The image of European enlargement or integration as a ‘journey’ is certainly not something new. The ‘journey’ or ‘transport’ metaphor as an illustration of the process of European integration is so well established that parts of its conceptual frame have become *dead* metaphors (Musolff 1996). As the movement schema allows for the introduction of a means of transport, the preferred vehicles in the EU rhetoric are ships, trains and bicycles (Schäffner 1996).

In the drawing in Figure 2, however, the vehicle used by the Balkan people to go to ‘Europe’ is a boat. It is not exactly clear who sits in the boat, but the traditional dress signifies that the last man jumping in is Turkish. Visual elements related to traditional clothing, especially hats, and stereotypical facial features would suggest that a Romanian – the man standing on the left-hand side of the boat with his left hand raised – and a Bulgarian – the one with an exaggerated big nose standing up beside the Romanian – have also joined to EU-Balkans boat to Europe. The nationalities of the travellers are,

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23 *Dnevnik* is a Bulgarian daily newspaper; the on-line edition is available at [http://www.dnevnik.bg/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/)
however, debatable, as in each country there are large variations of the traditional costumes from one region to another\textsuperscript{24}.

If the men’s nationalities are left to a certain extent uncertain, no doubt is placed over the excited atmosphere in the boat – mouths are open and hands are raised – and its destination which is clearly indicated by the sign ‘Europa’. But this only means that the Balkans are not part of ‘Europe’, they are merely going towards ‘Europe’, not by ships or trains or any other modern means of transport, but by boat. And yet there is something more to this cartoon, for nobody is rowing and the boat is actually on land, so how could it move at all?! And even if the boat were on water, the outcome might not be that different: the overcrowded boat could easily sink. We have here a whole chain of visual elements representing a complex metaphorical argument, namely the EU accession of the Balkans is a boat on land.

Cognitive studies teach us that metaphors are used to understand more abstract, sometimes problematic, situations in terms of more concrete situations, situations that we understand and are familiar with. In the example above, a complex situation concerning the EU accession of the Balkans is rendered familiar by presenting it as a boat on land. Metaphors, we learn further, provide schema for thinking one domain (the target) in terms of another (the source). To continue with the example, this would translate into something like: the perspectives of EU accession for the Balkans are (as bright) as the prospects of a boat to advance while sitting on land.

So far, a discursive approach to metaphor does not have to say much against. Of course, discursive approaches tend to emphasize the productive, rather than the cognitive aspects of metaphors, but most scholars would agree that the two aspects are inextricably intertwined (Mottier 2005). However, the underlying epistemological existentialism of cognitive theories coupled with a conceptualization of power as power-with-a-face which usually accompanies their application to the analysis of metaphors in political contexts influences the questions that will be asked. To start with, such studies are not likely to be interested in the (semi)pictorial expression of the metaphor EU ACCESSION IS JOURNEY in political cartoons. Rather they would focus on how the metaphor is used by those who seem powerful, that is, the politicians, and how persuasive the metaphor is. Scholars of power de-faced would twist these questions and ask instead: ‘how does the metaphor define EU accession for all actors?, ‘what kind of political subjectivities for the Balkans does it produce?, ‘does it reproduce or subvert the relations of power around the Balkanist discourse?’.

Like Orientalism, Balkanism\textsuperscript{25} has been organized around a set of binaries (rational/irrational, centre/periphery, civilization/barbarism) arranged hierarchically so

\begin{itemize}
  \item It should be clarified that the word Balkanism has been used in two opposite ways. Sometimes it refers to the body of knowledge about the Balkans and some other times to the critical study of this very discourse. To avoid confusion, I use the term Balkanism for the former meaning and critique of Balkanism for the latter.
\end{itemize}
that the first sign (‘Europe’) is always primary and definitional of the second (‘Balkans’), and so the second is always an internal effect of the first. The most fervent critique of Balkanist discourse, Maria Todorova, argues in her highly influential *Imagining the Balkans*, that the term Balkan has become ‘one of the most powerful pejorative designations in history, international relations, political science, and, nowadays, general intellectual discourse’ (Todorova 1997: 7). The rhetoric in this view amounts to ‘a persistent hegemonic discourse from the West, continuously disparaging about the Balkans, which sends out messages about the politicization of essentialised cultural differences’ (ibid.: 59). Todorova also treats Balkanism as a discourse that severely constrains the options of the people in the Balkans. Confronted with the hegemonic Western construction imposed on them, she writes, ‘it is hardly realistic to expect the Balkans to create a liberal, tolerant, all-embracing identity celebrating ambiguity and a negation of essentialism’ (ibid.: 59).

How does the drawing in Figure 2, then, stands in relation to Balkanism is a potentially relevant question for the student of power de-faced. I argue that the cartoon in Figure 2 actually deploys the Balkanist discourse by framing ‘Europe’ as distant place that the Balkans could only aim to reach one day. Furthermore, ethnic costumes, agitated spirits, and the boat as the means of transportation – all add to, rather than subvert, the Balkanist discourse.

**Concluding remarks**

This paper has attempted to create a bended space where metaphors and politics can meet each other. This is not an unusual encounter. Metaphors lie at the heart of political analysis, communication and decision. They have always been. For a long time, however, the study of metaphors had been considered an inappropriate undertaking for the student of social and political life. They were deemed incompatible with reason (because metaphors get in the way of clear ideas and plain truth) or, at best, garments of rational thought (ornaments which decorate texts without affecting their meaning). In recent discussions, however, the relevance of metaphors for social and political conceptualization has been acknowledged in much more positive terms. Drawing on seminal work in cognitive linguistics, some scholars have suggested that metaphors might have a more profound impact. If our experiences and conceptualizations are organized in terms of metaphors, as Lakoff and Johnson strongly argued, then politics, as part of the social domain, must also be perceived and constructed metaphorically. A number of analyses of metaphors in social and political contexts emerged from here. The majority of political studies of metaphor, however, have focused on verbal metaphors in politicians’ speeches and official documents. This paper argued that this is the result of combination between cognitive linguistics’ underlying epistemological existentialism and an attendant understanding of power as a phenomenon that necessarily wears a face. Furthermore, I claimed that if power is de-faced, that is reconceptualized as network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors, not only will that open the analysis of other forms of representation but it will also reorganize the research questions.
References


