



# Mythos Magazin: Politisches Framing

## Metaphor Framing in Political Discourse

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STICHWORTE	ABSTRACT
cognitive linguistics frame heart of Europe metaphor nurturant parent morality strict father morality scenario	This paper analyses applications of “framing” theory to figurative political discourse. It reviews in detail Lakoff et al.’s Cognitive approach, which has been the main paradigm for metaphor framing studies in the last decades and highlights its objectives, advantages and limitations. Specific attention is paid to the relationship with Fillmore’s “Frame” theory developed in the 1970s. By going back to this source, the crucial issue of framing reception, i.e. the difference between <i>frame activation</i> and <i>frame acceptance</i> is made salient. The third part provides a case study illustrating this difference by charting the discourse history of the metaphorical slogan ‘Britain at the heart of Europe’, which was widely accepted at its launch as framing UK policy but lost acceptance over the course of three decades (whilst retaining its potential for activation). In conclusion, it is argued that receptive <i>acceptance</i> is the product of enriching schematic frames to rhetorically and pragmatically elaborated scenarios.

### 1. Introduction

Even though the term *framing* did not feature prominently in Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors we live by*,<sup>1</sup> it has become a key-word in Cognitive Metaphor Analyses since the 1980s. In recent years its usage has indeed skyrocketed: in two research reviews, Brugman et al. have counted over 300 studies from the last 15 years that focus on *experimental* research (Brugman et al. 2017, 2018), and a complementary review compared 64 experimental studies with 45 analyses that were oriented towards Critical Discourse Analysis (Boeynaems et al. 2017). There are many more empirical and theoretical studies of framing, including Lakoff’s 2004 book: *Don’t Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*.<sup>2</sup> In his latest, popular-cum-research-based presentation of the Cognitive approach to Political Metaphor, *Your Brain’s Politics. How the Science of Mind Explains the Political Divide* (2016), Lakoff, together with co-author Elisabeth Wehling, gives a detailed introduction into framing in the central chapter (6, *Political Framing*) and applies the

category ubiquitously. We can use Lakoff and Wehling’s treatment as a starting point to discuss its implications before investigating an exemplary case study from contemporary British political discourse and then outlining some perspectives for further applications.

### 2. Metaphors and the ‘Political Divide’

In the first chapter of *Your Brain’s Politics*, entitled *Normal Thought: Reasoning in Metaphors*, Wehling and Lakoff go over well-known axioms of cognitive semantics and “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” (CMT), as developed since the first publication of *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980. Metaphors are structuring principles of thought that organize most of our experiences through mappings between familiar (source) and unfamiliar (target) domains of knowledge. Source domains are ultimately based on physical experiences that we start acquiring after birth and that are continuously reinforced, building “neural

<sup>1</sup> The term framing does in fact appear in the last chapter of *Metaphors we live by*, highlighting its ideological power: “Political and economic ideologies are framed in metaphorical terms. [...] A metaphor in a political or economic system, by virtue of what it hides, can lead to human degradation” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980/2003, 236).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Boyd 2013; Burgers et al. 2016; Coulson 2000; Debras and l’Hôte 2015; Degani 2015; Lehrer and Kittay 1992; Plastina 2018; Reijnierse et al. 2015; Sandkcioglu 2000; Sinding, 2017; Sullivan 2013.

circuits”, whose workings are automatic, unconscious and universal, at least as regards “primary” mappings such as MORE IS UP, and AFFECTION IS WARMTH.<sup>3</sup> Complex metaphors, on the other hand, which are built from several primary metaphors, can vary cross-culturally.

Metaphorical communication has two main effects: it activates the neuro-physiologically based metaphoric structures in our minds and these in turn provide a selection filter for understanding target concepts by simultaneously hiding some of their aspects and highlighting others. Hence, an unconscious choice is made for a particular interpretation of reality, which seems unquestionable to its users. Lakoff concedes that this spell of metaphorical thought can “theoretically” be broken through “rejection” of commonly accepted metaphors and conscious construction of alternatives, but that in everyday political reality people often “do *not* do any such thing” (2016, 25).

Chapters 2 to 4, *How to Parent a Nation: The Role of Idealized Family Models for Politics; Moral Politics Theory: The Strict Father and Nurturant Parent Models; and Morality, Times Two: How we Acquire and Navigate two Moral Systems*, introduce the two “idealized cognitive models” (ICMs) of Public Morality in the USA, i.e. the “Strict Father” and “Nurturant Parent” versions of the NATION-AS-FAMILY metaphor.<sup>4</sup> These models are not just superficially different versions of one and the same metaphor; rather, they represent diametrically opposed worldviews that inform the fundamental divide in US political cultures, as epitomized by the Republican and Democrat party politics. Both models reflect fundamental experiences and interests, i.e. social dominance, self-discipline and competitiveness on the one hand and on the other, social empathy, tolerance and mutual responsibility. Both morality models have a basic evidentiality and legitimacy in people’s social experience and are accessible in principle to every citizen. Whilst they exclude each other as ICMs, in the reality of everyday moral reasoning and political competition they are effectively deployed side by side, without their users necessarily realizing that they “endorse both models in different areas of their [own] lives” (2016, 66). Lakoff and Wehling also stress that the two models are *not* determined so much by specific attitudes, gender roles, or upbringing, but mainly by their more or less efficient use in public discourse. Here US conservatives have a huge advantage over liberals because they are more competent in using the STRICT FATHER model, whereas “many progressives do not always understand this mechanism or

take it seriously enough” (2016, 67) and fail to connect their statements to their own “nurturant” value-system.

Lakoff and Wehling’s explanation of this cognitive-communicative ‘handicap’ of progressive vs. conservative politicians forms the main subject of the three central chapters that also contain the gist of Lakoff’s framing theory, (5) *Deciding Politics: Why People Vote Values*, (6) *Political Framing: Value Laden Words*, (7) “*God Bless America*”: *Religion, Metaphor, and Politics*. First, Lakoff confronts head-on the - in his view - flawed assumption that people vote for candidates based on factual details (2016, 68). Against it he maintains that “factual” information always needs to be incorporated into a conceptual “frame”, which provides a “larger interpretative template” for them to become meaningful: “So if you want to communicate the pressing relevance of certain political facts, then the first thing you want to do is make sure that you’re using frames in which those facts actually make sense” (2016, 75).

Lakoff and Wehling’s chief example for the power of political framing is the conservative argument in favor of “tax relief”, which presupposes the notion that taxes are a metaphorical “burden” that is imposed on taxpayers and hinders them from engaging in optimal competition and pursuit of their own interests and the “Strict Father”-inspired ideal of maximum self-reliance. Lakoff rightly points out that in the real-life political context of the USA the “relief” frame “hides [...] the fact that people who are economically successful have built that success largely on the basis of the tax-supported public infrastructure” (2016, 85). This is a convincing example for metaphorical framing as the “relief” metaphor’s reasoning power derives from the ‘anti-public’ bias of the STRICT FATHER frame, in which facts about taxation are embedded. Once the ‘relief’ metaphor is accepted for the discussion of tax issues, the outcome of arguments about them can be in little doubt. ‘Lightening a burden’ is generally regarded as a good thing, and the hidden knowledge that much of the ‘added value’ of individual or corporate enterprises is in fact owed to a public infrastructure plays no further role.

Similarly predetermined pseudo-arguments are then listed for US debates about immigration, terrorism and abortion (2016, 86–87). On all these issues, conservative slogans and arguments have an advantage, according to Lakoff, because they link relevant topical information to one-sidedly value-laden strict father frame versions that are presented as common-sensical and even extend to religion. As an example of the latter, Wehling and Lakoff contrast the two opposite versions of the Biblical story of

<sup>3</sup> In line with conventions in cognitive linguistic literature, concepts including conceptual metaphors, are indicated by small capitals.

<sup>4</sup> The distinction of these two morality models has been developed by Lakoff in numerous publications, e.g. Lakoff 1996, 2004, 2006; for critical testing and

debate see Ahrens 2011; Cienki 2005, 2008; Degani 2015; Musolff 2016, 25–31.

Abraham and Isaac that they were told in German and American schools respectively. In one version, God tests Abraham's obedience by demanding him to sacrifice his son in earnest (and then magnanimously prevents the sacrifice from going ahead after Abraham has proved his loyalty), whereas in the opposite version the sacrifice is a test of the father's "moral compass", which he fails by attempting the sacrifice, so that God has to intervene and rescue the son (2016, 92–96). As regards God's own role in this sordid business, the two versions respectively fit the opposing STRICT FATHER - NURTURANT PARENT frames: here the authoritarian father-God that demands human sacrifice; there the nurturing, caring, 'motherly' God who prevents infanticide.

The last two chapters, *Words with no single meaning: Communication and Contested Concepts* and "*Once upon a time*": *the Fairytale of Objective Journalism*, draw further conclusions from the basic premise of the frame-dependency of meanings: words have no "objective" meanings, due to the fact that "there is practically no morality-free language in political discourse" (2016, 119). As a consequence, Lakoff demands a "more 'conscious' journalism", underpinned by the demand for a requirement of "basic cognitive science" training in journalism school (2016, 120–122). Lakoff and Wehling's main concern is not to preach a particular political "truth" but to educate their readers to understand the moral relevance of political language and disperse the myth that facts can be known "objectively" on their own in terms of a (fictitious) "morality-free language" (2016, 119).

This brings us back to the central insight into the power of framing, which is indeed constitutive for any theory of moral-political argumentation as based on conceptual metaphors. The authors supply not one but three sources for framing theories: the linguistic concept developed by Charles Fillmore, the socio-psychological one propounded by Erving Goffman (1974), and the AI-based one outlined by Marvin Minsky (Lakoff Wehling 2016, 75, note 32), in addition to the above-mentioned neurophysiological finding of "mirror neurons" that are hypothesized to underlie both empathy and figurative framing effects (through simultaneous stimulation of physiologically distant brain regions (cf. 2016, 61–64), Gallese and Lakoff 2005; for critical evaluation cf. Hickock 2014). Here we will focus on Fillmore's theory, which is the main linguistic/semantic one. In his two seminal articles cited by Lakoff and Wehling, Fillmore introduced the concept of "frame" as an essential category for a *theory of meaning* that aims at modeling understanding (Fillmore 1985, 222) for a *theory of the*

*nature of language* (Fillmore 1976). Framing pervades every form of language as "particular words or speech formulas, or particular grammatical choices, are associated in memory with particular frames, in such a way that exposure to the linguistic form [...] activates in the perceiver's mind the particular frame – activation of the frame, by turn, enhancing access to other linguistic material that is associated with the same frame" (Fillmore 1976, 25).

Crucially, Fillmore speaks of "activation", not of *acceptance*. The fact that a frame is activated in a perceiver's awareness horizon, does not entail its acceptance or wholesale adoption. It can be explicitly rejected, ironically subverted or replaced by alternative frames. As Lakoff and Wehling themselves point out and exemplify through their own defence of "nurturant" morality, counter-framing against a preceding frame is always possible. But how can we then distinguish more and less important or more and less dominant/influential frames? An appeal such as Lakoff's (2004) imperative *Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* clearly assumes that it is possible to make one frame or set of frames – preferably one's own – dominant, if not exclusive, in the respective discourse community. It implies a differentiation between simply *using frames*, which, according to Cognitive Semantics is indeed inevitable for any meaningful communication because frames are constitutive for cognition (Lakoff 1987, 68–76; Kövecses 2015, 36–38; Taylor 1995, 81–92), and *framing* in the more emphatic sense of establishing a particular set of frames as the dominant one in the public political debate, thus setting its agenda as well as target topics and values, and influencing its outcome. It is the latter sense that Lakoff relies on in his politically focused 2004 and 2016 publications, thus going decisively beyond the mere assertion of the existence and use of frames. An account of framing in this emphatic sense has to perform a double task, i.e., 1) to identify and describe the existing frames for a target topic, including the emergence of a new frame and 2) to diachronically analyse their discursive development through semantic-pragmatic exploitation and contestation so as to demonstrate the possible dominance of one frame or a set of frames over others. In the following section I provide a case study that aims at providing the outline of such an account for both frame emergence and frame development by analysing a metaphoric slogan that has been developed for more than 25 years in British political discourse, i.e. the formulation *Britain at the heart of Europe*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The basis for my analysis is a multilingual corpus of figurative press texts on EU-politics (EUROMETA) that goes back to 1990. Overall, EUROMETA is currently 689.000 words large and has more than 2900 separate text entries. For a general overview and analysis of EUROMETA see Musolff 2004a; for detailed analyses of the Britain at the heart of Europe slogan in comparative (i.e.

British-German) and discourse-historical perspectives see Musolff 2004b, 2013. Its (British) English sample has 250 texts that contain 292 tokens of the *heart of Europe* metaphor. Just one third (32%) of all tokens are used by the respective journalists as primary authors, whereas 68% of all occurrences allude to the

### 3. Framing and de-framing: the curious case of the HEART OF EUROPE

#### 3.1 The rise, fall and resurrection of a metaphor across varying frames

The phrase *at the heart of Europe* meaning ‘at the centre of the “European Union”’ (until 1993, “European Community/Communities”) can be found in British political discourse before 1991, but it was the Conservative Prime Minister John Major who first established it as a slogan for optimistic sounding policy-visibility in a speech in Germany in March 1991: “Our government will work at the very heart of Europe with its partners in forging an integrated European community” (*The Guardian*, 12.03.1991).

By announcing his government’s wish to *work at the very heart of Europe* Major intended to signal a new approach to European Community policy, which would “improve [Britain’s] profile in Europe” following a period of strained relationships during the last years of his predecessor Margaret Thatcher’s premiership (Major 2000, 268–269). Due to the high degree of idiomatization and conventionality, his use of the phrase *heart of (x)* did not necessitate much interpretative effort on the part of the media reporting on Major’s speech.<sup>6</sup> The phrase was quoted without much comment and the public reception of Major’s announcement was supportive across the political range (*The Guardian*, 13.03.1991; *The Times*, 16.03.1991; *BBC*, 18.07.1991). The liberal magazine, *The Economist*, even took the policy for granted:

Of course Britain should be at the heart of Europe whenever it possibly can, for that is where the decisions that affect many British interests are being taken. (*The Economist*, 23.11.1991)

In terms of metaphorical framing, we can analyse the phrase as invoking a rather schematic, metaphorical frame HEART-AS-CENTRE (of a CONTAINER), which is grounded in a body-based metonymy that utilises the central position (and to some extent, function) of an organic heart in the human body to metonymically refer to any centre of a container-like entity. A bodily-organismic frame HEART-AS-CENTRE (of a living body) is of course also latently present but not especially highlighted vis-à-vis the centrality aspect. This interpretation is borne out by the (relatively few) criticisms that Major incurred from his parliamentary opponents in late 1991, when negotiations for a new European Community Treaty (the “Maastricht Treaty”) led to his government’s “opt-outs” from the Treaty’s provisions for a common currency and a common social charter. Opposition politicians questioned his enthusiasm for *being close to the heart of Europe* by

contrasting his March speech with his negotiation results: the Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, asked him how he could “claim to be at the heart of Europe when, because of his actions, our country is not even part of the key decisions that will shape the Europe of the future” and the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown, alleged that Major had “condemned this country to be semi-detached from [the heart]” (Hansard 1991, 200: 863, 864).

During the following two years, Major’s statement was quoted time and again as a reference point for a positive stance on Europe, with most commentators still giving him credit for attempting to keep Britain close to the centre of EU policies and assuming that being close to the EU’s heart/centre was something desirable. However, his government’s perspective changed decisively, when in August 1994 the governing parties in France and Germany published proposals for further EU integration, which envisaged a division of the Union into an “inner core” or “circle” of member states committed to faster socio-economic integration on the one hand and several outer “circles” of less committed states, to which Britain belonged (CDU/CSU Fraktion des Deutschen Bundestags 1994). Major immediately rejected the proposals, which led the pro-EU-leaning *Independent* newspaper to point out his dilemma of being too close to the centre of EU policy for his own party’s liking and not sufficiently close enough in the eyes of the French and German governments and British EU-supporters:

He wanted Britain to be at the heart of Europe. Yet too often he found himself alone at the end of a limb. (*The Independent*, 08.09.1994)

If this comment still gave Major the benefit of the doubt and only mildly ridiculed his stance with the pun on the idiom “out on a limb” (*Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* 1999, 864), another *Independent* article denounced his position more sharply by reviving the *heart* idiom of the slogan as a full-blooded metaphor frame and using it for a devastating critique:

One British metaphor, at least, has ceased to beat. John Major said in Bonn in March 1991, that he wanted to put Britain “where we belong, at the very heart of Europe”. [...] Neither Mr Major nor, increasingly, others in Europe, have been speaking in quite this way [...]. An editorial [...] earlier this year suggested that if Mr Major wanted to be at the heart of Europe, it was, presumably, as a blood clot. (*The Independent*, 11.09.1994)

In this commentary, the author, A. Marshall, (re-)activated the slogan’s implicit relation to the body frame through using further heart-related phraseology (*ceased to beat*, *blood clot*) to expose the discrepancy between Major’s rhetorical promise and political reality, and to attack and denounce his public political “face” (Culpeper 2011, 114–

metaphor as used by other media or politicians. Most of these quoting uses express an evaluative (endorsing or critical) stance.

<sup>6</sup> See *Roget’s International Thesaurus* 1996, 143; *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 2002, vol. 1, 1213; Niemeyer 2000.

117; Nodoushan 2012) as a trustworthy politician. In this re-contextualisation, the HEART-AS-CENTRE frame is changed into a HEART-AS-ORGAN (of a human body) frame, which makes it much more concrete by relating it to human physiological experience and affective/emotional concerns, and thus also enhancing its usefulness for emphatically evaluative and polemical exploitation.<sup>7</sup> The HEART-AS-ORGAN frame also lends itself to a more or less elaborate *narrative* exploitation, insofar as it tells a mini-story of a (near-) death experience that includes a specific biological/biographical outcome for the heart-owner. In other publications (Musolff 2006, 2014, 2016) I have labelled this aspect *scenario* in the sense of a special type of frame that has more argumentative and narrative content and structure than a minimal schematic frame, which consists just of participants and their relations. The HEART-AS-ORGAN frame has much more potential for development into a pragmatically powerful scenario of a 'life-and-death story' than the HEART-AS-CENTRE frame.

After 1994, further denunciatory uses of HEART-AS-ORGAN frame gained popularity, in parallel with the rise of "Euro-scepticism" among the Conservatives and media sympathising with them (i.e. *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and most of the tabloid newspapers). In 1995 the former EU official B. Connolly published a book under the title *The Rotten Heart of Europe* (Connolly 1995), which alleged widespread corruption in the EU bureaucracy and became a favourite with EU-opponents. During the 1996 Conservative Party conference, the former Tory Chancellor, N. Lamont, won standing ovations when he declared that there was "no point at being at the heart of Europe if the heart is diseased" (*The Guardian*, 10.10.1996). By the time of the 1997 general election, the *Guardian* found that the "'Britain at the heart of Europe' fudge" (i.e. its rhetorical pretence of *being close to that heart*, whilst in fact distancing itself ever more from the EU's integration policies), had completely destroyed Major's governmental authority (*The Guardian*, 17.04.1997).

After defeating the Tories in May 1997, the incoming new Labour government under Tony Blair wasted little time in reclaiming the slogan *Britain at the heart of Europe* for themselves (*The Guardian*, 10.06.1997). After the passing of their 'honeymoon period' in office, however, they too experienced difficulties in trying to live up to that promise (Daddow 2013; Whitman 2016, 214–215) and started being mocked in terms of the HEART-AS-ORGAN frame. In December 1997, for instance, the *Guardian* observed:

The litany passes from government to government. A Britain at the heart of Europe. [...] But hold the stethoscope and listen carefully, for the heart has some curious murmurs. [The important debates in Brussels] bear no relationship to the British "debate", hearts, livers, gall bladders and all. (*The Guardian*, 01.12.1997)

By dismissively calling the slogan a 'litany' and combining the *heart (of Europe)* allusion with a random list of 'lower' organs, the commentator rubbished the slogan as a national catchphrase with little currency outside Britain. With Labour under Blair failing to connect more closely with EU policies, the slogan's optimistic promise lost more and more of its erstwhile appeal. When in 1999 the whole EU commission under J. Santer had to resign on account of nepotism allegations, drastic denunciations of *the heart of Europe* spread across all the British press media: "Report [about the scandal] strikes at heart of Europe" (*The Guardian*, 16.03.1999); "the rotten heart of Europe will never be cleaned out" (*The Sun*, 17.03.1999); "changes in personnel will not be enough to stop the rot at the heart of the EU" (*Daily Mail*, 17.03.1999); "abruptly the heart of Europe got sick" (*The Economist*, 18.03.1999); "a hole suddenly opened up at the heart of the European Union" (*The Independent*, 21.03.1999); "Britain can't be at Europe's heart. It doesn't have one" (*The Sun*, 06.05.1998). For a while, *heart of Europe*-bashing became a kind of fashion across the whole political spectrum, due to "pressures of coherence" (Kövecses 2009), and it remained popular throughout the first decade of the new millennium (Musolff 2013, 140–141).

In 2010, the incoming new Conservative-Liberal coalition under Prime Minister David Cameron attempted a cautious re-appropriation of the slogan from Labour, for instance in promises by the conservative Foreign Secretary William Hague and the Liberal Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg to "put Britain back at the heart of Europe" (*The Scotsman*, 01.07.2010; *The Guardian*, 16.12.2011). With the growing likelihood of a Brexit referendum, however, denouncing *the heart of Europe* as *dead*, *dysfunctional* or *irrelevant* for Britain became again the dominant usage. In autumn 2014, for instance, at a time when the Brexit referendum was already being mooted by Cameron's government, one *Financial Times* article exposed the slogan's demise by making it the punchline of an invented (spoof-)dialogue between Cameron and the incoming new President of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker:

Jean-Claude Juncker: "So just to clarify. Aside from not joining the euro, you want to limit the free movement of people, cut the power of the European Court and the European Parliament [...]"

<sup>7</sup> In terms of appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005), the reframing of the slogan covers two key aspects of evaluation at the same time, i.e. judgement and affect.

David Cameron: “And since we are opting out of so much, we should pay less too.”

Jean-Claude Juncker: “This is quite a list of demands, David. What do we get in return?”

David Cameron: “A Britain at the heart of Europe, of course.” (*Financial Times*, 30.10.2014)

Cameron’s final answer can be read as ironically revealing his government’s by now minimal commitment to the EU, i.e. the fact that the slogan has been emptied of any concrete meaning. Cameron’s government (as viewed by the *Financial Times* journalist) claims to be “at the heart of Europe” on no other grounds than its own say-so. Replacing the *Financial Times*’ subtle irony with open sarcasm, *The Daily Telegraph* decried the “unstoppable process of integration [...] at the heart of the EU” and claimed “that the only viable British relationship with the EU is one that keeps this country at a healthy distance from the whole doomed European project” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 14.07.2015). Major and Blair’s historical promises to *put Britain at the heart of Europe* were quoted during the run-up to the referendum chiefly as reminders of a bygone era, with no further framing appeal in a Brexit campaign dominated by IMMINENT DEATH scenarios for the EU.<sup>8</sup>

After the pro-Brexit outcome of the referendum in June 2016, the *Britain at the heart of Europe* slogan might have been considered dead and buried, and some comments applied it in this sense: the *Guardian* (26.02.2017) and the *Independent* (26.06.2016) bemoaned it as “threatening the heart of Europe” or plunging “a dagger into the heart of Europe”, while *The Daily Telegraph* (26.06.2016) triumphantly denounced even cautious criticism of the referendum by EU officials as betraying “a deep contempt at the heart of the European project for the collective will and concerns of the [British] people”. However, there were also voices that kept the slogan alive, in the old sense of the HEART-AS-CENTRE frame: politicians such as A. Salmon and N. Sturgeon who supported Scottish independence from the UK advocated that after a future Scottish referendum their nation had a strong “desire to be at the heart of Europe” (*Daily Express*, 15.10.2016; 18.12.2016), and even the Chancellor (Finance minister) of the new Conservative government negotiating Brexit conditions, Philip Hammond, was reported to hold “an ‘ardent wish’ to remain at the heart of Europe” (*The Independent*, 27.06.2017). The *heart of Europe* metaphor in its application to the British *body politic* (or at least parts of it) thus seems to have survived even Brexit; albeit, in the ‘neutralized’ abstract HEART-AS-CENTRE frame.

### 3.2 Metaphors, framing and discourse history

Surveying the “discourse history” (Wodak 2009) of the slogan *Britain at the heart of Europe*, we have found a distinctive trend in its appraisal (i.e. positive to negative judgements) that is linked to frame change. First, the slogan and its constitutive metaphor were part of the rather abstract centre-periphery frame, in which closeness to the centre was positively valued; hence, Major’s promise of *Britain working at/close to the heart of Europe* was understood as depicting a desirable outcome. The (relatively few) early negative evaluations signalled mainly a mistrust in the Prime Minister’s ability to deliver that outcome, but not in its desirability in principle. Hence, his policy was criticised as leading to a *separation, distancing* or *detachment* from the EU’s political centre. The first instance of the slogan invoking the HEART AS ORGAN frame appeared in autumn 1992 (“Coronary at the heart of Europe”, *The Economist*, 26.09.1992) but they remained relatively rare until 1994/1995 when substantial political conflicts between Major’s government and the EU arose. From then on, the slogan gradually lost its function as an optimistic promise (along the lines of *being close to the heart is a good thing*) and was replaced by warnings that the European *heart* was *sick, dying, rotten* etc., which were explicitly connected with the HEART AS ORGAN frame. Peaks of such highly negative, often sarcastic denunciations of the EU-*heart’s state of health* can be observed around every major crisis in EU-UK relationships, e.g. during the March 1999 Commission scandal, the 2002 introduction of “euro” coins and notes that physically manifested Britain’s opt-out, a month-long spat between France and Britain in 2012 after UK media and politicians had massively attacked the French government’s reform plans (“the time-bomb at the heart of Europe”, *Daily Mail*, 16.11.2012) and Brexit.

In this second, body-based frame, the *heart of Europe* slogan also evoked the ‘master frames’ of the NATION-AS-BODY and NATION-AS-PERSON, which have for centuries been established in Western political history and philosophy and entrenched in vocabulary (cf. terms such as *head of state, head of government, organ of a party* etc.) and are still pervasive in political discourse, especially in defensive conceptualisations of perceived ‘Others’ as *illnesses, parasites* or *alien bodies* that endanger the respective nation’s own *body politic* (Musolff 2010, Wodak 2015). When viewed in this concept-historical context, the mapping EU-AS A BODY is unconventional, for the target concept, EUROPEAN UNION, represents of course a multi-national entity.<sup>9</sup> Such a conceptualisation does not

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. *Financial Times*, 22.02.2016: “Britain and Europe: The UK’s four tumultuous decades of membership have fueled controversy and featured huge change”; 27.04.2016: “The City of London can survive and thrive after Brexit”; *The Daily Telegraph*, 09.03.2016: “How a Brexit could save Europe from

itself”; *The Independent*, 22.06.2016: “No wonder we’re on the brink of Brexit – our politicians have never made the case for Europe”.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview over conceptualizations of Europe’s collective identity see Krzyżanowski 2010.

fit the nation-focus of the traditional ONE NATION STATE – ONE BODY mapping and is of course wholly incompatible with mappings of Britain itself as a self-reliant nation body/person; the latter, are, however, still highly popular in British public discourse including Brexit-related rhetoric, e.g. as used by the former Prime Minister Cameron (Wodak 2016). From a British-nationalistic and/or euro-sceptical viewpoint, the concept of the EU-AS A BODY makes little sense except that of a *sick* or *dying body*, and the denunciations of that *body's heart* as being *sick, dying, hard, cold, rotten, missing*, which we find in euro-sceptical discourse, fit this frame perfectly.

Most (i.e. more than two thirds) of the references to the *Britain at the heart of Europe* slogan in the latter two decades still echo explicitly or implicitly the preceding positive uses by Major and Blair in the ‘honeymoon phases’ of their terms of office. The contrasting depiction of *Europe's heart* as physically dysfunctional serves to criticise and ridicule those preceding users as naïve, mistaken or deliberately misleading and thus undermine their status as trustworthy speakers, as in the following example:

After a long period of cautious equivocation, the prime minister had, in [Blair's] own words, “shifted up a gear” in his ambition to lodge Britain at its rightful place in the heart of Europe. And then, abruptly, the heart of Europe got sick. (*The Economist*, 18.03.1999)

Such uses served as attacks on the public “face” of the respective preceding speakers as a) having failed in delivering on their promise (i.e., *to put Britain at the heart of Europe*) and/or b) still failing to acknowledge the changed political reality (which is assumed to correspond to the notion of a *sick/dying heart*). Thus, when hearing or reading the slogan *Britain at the heart of Europe* during the years leading up to Brexit, the public could expect it to be ridiculed and negated. Since Brexit, the slogan has reappeared a few times but, when used affirmatively, then only in the abstract HEART-AS-CENTRE frame. There is so far little evidence of any enthusiastic uptake, which may be due to its lack of any vivid scenario-structure or the political weakness of the anti-Brexit campaign or both.

The above-sketched discourse-history of the slogan *Britain at the heart of Europe* as a repeated frame-change not only provides insights into its semantic and pragmatic development but also concerns the role of ‘facts and figures’ in the UK-EU relationship, which were highly contested during and after the Brexit campaign.<sup>10</sup> In the context of vivid metaphorical depictions of the EU's *sick/dying/rotten heart* and *body*, the continued provision of financial support for the EU by the UK (in the heart-as-organ frame: *of nourishment*) appeared as a complete

waste of the nation's resources; at the same time, any further ‘in-fluence’ from the EU on the UK, be it through immigration or through political control from Brussels seemed like risking infection from a doomed organism (to which one should keep “a healthy distance”, in the *Daily Telegraph's* words, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14.07.2015). Hence, EU-defenders' corrections of exaggerated figures of alleged British financial contributions to the EU or of mass immigration from the EU into Britain made little impact during the 2016 Brexit campaign (Jackson et al. 2016). If the EU's *heart* (and the whole EU-*body*) was *sick* or even *dying*, the question of whether the exact amount of the UK's weekly financial support for the EU was £350 million (as claimed by the pro-Brexit campaigners) or less (as claimed by their opponents) was of minor importance – any significant amount appeared as a waste of resources. Similarly, any amount of immigration from the EU, whether small or large, was *unhealthy* and increased the danger of the British nation's own state-*body* being *infected* by a multinational *corpse*. Thus, in addition to highlighting an emphatically negative evaluation of the EU's state of health, the HEART-AS-ORGAN frame also undermined the counter-arguments. As the referendum result demonstrated, such factual counter-proofs appeared irrelevant to large sections of voters (if they were noticed at all). In this sense, the story of the *Britain at the heart of Europe* slogan can serve as an exemplary warning corroborating Lakoff's and Wehlings's appeal to concentrate on intelligent and imaginative framing rather than trying to argue solely or mainly on the basis of atomistic facts.

#### 4. Conclusion

Political metaphors such as the *heart of Europe* provide platforms for introducing plausible frames for assessing and interpreting the facts that the public refers to in order to form their opinions on political issues. It is not the side with ‘the most’ or ‘best’ facts that wins but the one that provides the most plausible, i.e. seemingly intuitively reliable scenarios. In the case of *Britain at the heart of Europe*, the slogan's originally positive slant as an optimistic promise was successfully reversed by euro-sceptical campaigners who resuscitated its bodily source domain to introduce a range of *illness-, death- and failure-*related versions, none of which were matched by pro-EU voices. In fact, the latter produced no variation at all on the slogan, which thus remained (at best) an abstract appeal to *be close/move closer to Europe's centre* and

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. *The Daily Telegraph*, 03.06.2016: “‘It's Project Lies!’ Michael Gove takes on the audience – and the experts”; *The Guardian*, 10.06.2016: “Why Vote Leave's £350m weekly EU cost claim is wrong;” *The Independent*, 27.06.2016: “Brexit: Vote Leave wipes NHS £350m claim and rest of its website after EU

referendum”; *The Guardian*, 23.05.2016: “David Cameron suggests defense minister is lying over Turkey joining EU”; *The Daily Telegraph*, 11.08.2016: “Britain could be up to £70billion worse off if it leaves the Single Market after Brexit, IFS warns”.

became a routine quotation that was available for anyone to pun on.

Something similar seems to have happened to other metaphor frames in British public discourse during and since the Brexit campaign. For instance, Brexit was valorised not just as *stopping to waste nourishment on a dying body with a dead heart* but also as the *liberation from a trap, a straitjacket* or an *escape from a Nazi-“superstate”* (*Daily Express*, 30.07.2016; *Financial Times*, 24.06.2016; *Daily Telegraph*, 14.05.2016), as well as a *divorce from a failed marriage* to a partner who was *in bad shape, tired and sterile* (*Daily Express*, 13.11.2015; *The Economist*, 17.10.2015; *Financial Times*, 26.02.2016, 22.07.2016; *The Guardian*, 22.04.2016, 08.08.2016), or as a *crusade* and a *beacon of hope* (*Daily Express* 13.11.2015; *Daily Mail* 30.06.2016). Compared with this wealth of ‘positive’ Brexit-framing the few counter-frames that did more than quote ‘facts and figures’, e.g. *Brexit as a reckless gamble* or as a *journey with unknown outcome*, were mainly warnings of an uncertain outcome rather than suggesting attractive alternative solutions. The referendum outcome in favour of Brexit was, to say the least, not seriously put in question by them.

What, then, are the chances to combat one-sided framing that leads to potentially fateful political decisions? Complaints about “lies” or about wrong, exaggerated or misleading representations of “facts” are, as we have seen, futile if they assume that the political public is chiefly interested in receiving ever more facts. Neglecting the framing power of metaphorical framing is not a sign of ‘honesty’ but instead of arrogance or naivety about the need to convince voters through the use of rhetorical means. Only the argumentative and entertaining appeal of figurative framing makes political “facts” pragmatically meaningful so that the recipients can build up an affective and evaluative appraisal that leads to attitudinal and practical conclusions. This calls for the innovative construction of counter-frames to ‘make sense’ of reliable information. But obviously any random launching of new metaphors or slogans is not sufficient to achieve a lasting reframing effect. They may well be regarded as the desperate rhetorical tricks of a former political establishment that has run out of concepts and arguments – a reaction that has become a stock accusation of “populist” parties in recent years (Osborne and Roberts 2017; Rabin Havt et al. 2016; Wodak 2015). One of Lakoff’s lessons for reframing is therefore to engage with the opponents’ (in his case US Conservatives’) established frame system (family morality) and counter it with ‘matching’ scenarios that disprove the inferences they want to draw by offering alternative, ideally more plausible and appealing, narratives and outcome (in the US case: NURTURANT FAMILY models instead of STRICT FATHER ones). Such a move implies a *partial* acceptance

of the main master metaphor frame (NATION AS FAMILY) but not as a concession to the political adversary; rather as a recognition that the public is already familiar with the frame and has heard ‘one side of the story’ – to counter it, the best strategy is to engage with their expectation and tell ‘the other side’, thus creating a scenario with the power to reframe. Applied to the Brexit debate, this could mean that pro-EU campaigners have to show that and how a *multinational* political body can function and can be of benefit to all its member-nations. This is by no means an easy task: the NATION-BODY/-PERSON mapping is deeply entrenched and linked to a patriotic-nationalist stance that is popular in its own right. But if reframing is to be possible at all, its proponents have to tell stories and make arguments that disprove also those popular traditions. A famous literary model for such a reframing is the “fable of the belly”, which dates back to ancient Aesopian traditions, which were taken up by the master-story tellers such as Livy and Shakespeare and Marx (Patterson 1991; Stanovsky 2009). It tells of a rebellion of the other body organs against the belly’s apparent greed in taking all the food. The belly is thus framed as the culprit for the rebellion. In several historical versions, however, this framing is countered by the belly answering its critics by pointing out that it not just takes but also distributes the food so that they all benefit, which is analogically applied to the state and society and used to legitimise the privileges of established elites (aristocracy, monarchy, etc.). Karl Marx, however, reframed the argument completely as an attack against the dismemberment of workers’ identities in capitalist economy through hyper specialisation (Marx 1990: 481–482). Perhaps framing theory and practice in political discourse can learn a thing or two from him?

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