

Dehumanizing metaphors in UK immigrant debates in press and online media

Andreas Musolff

Some Internet genres, in particular Weblogs and discussion fora, have a dubious reputation for giving voice to strongly polemical discourses or hate-speech. This paper investigates the use of dehumanizing metaphors, specifically *parasite* metaphors, in British debates about immigration. It compares the range of metaphors used in Blogs with that used in online fora and in mainstream newspaper coverage and concludes that despite substantial variation, they can be categorised into four main scenarios, of which one includes dehumanizing metaphors such as depictions of immigrants as *parasites*, *leeches*, or *bloodsuckers*. Whilst this kind of stigmatizing imagery occurs across the three different media genres, the samples also show significant quantitative and qualitative differences: dehumanizing metaphors occur most often and their potential for aggressive argumentation and polemics is exploited in more detail in Blogs than in the fora, and least in the mainstream press. It is then asked what cognitive import this differential usage has in view of a) the discourse histories of such metaphors and b) their most likely present-day semantic motivation. The paper concludes that while it is unlikely that present-day users have detailed knowledge of the etymological and conceptual histories of such metaphors, it is also improbable to assume a wholly “unconscious” or “automatic” use or reception in the respective community of practice, and that instead it is more likely that they are used with a high degree of “deliberateness” and a modicum of discourse-historical awareness.

Keywords: dehumanization, discourse history, immigration, metaphor, scenario

1. Introduction

The use of dehumanizing and stigmatizing metaphors in political polemics and, in particular, in immigration debates has been analysed and commented on in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)-oriented research on many occasions (Böke 1997; Bosmajan 1983; Chilton 2005; Cisneros 2008; Hart 2010, 2011; Hawkins

2001; Hönigspenger 1994; KhosraviNik 2010; Musolff 2012). One of the methodological hallmarks of this research tradition has been a focus on the “production side” of metaphors, i.e., demonstration of their occurrence, frequency and intensity in texts produced by political leaders, journalists, and other commentators. The quantity of text material considered in these studies differs greatly, depending on the focus of the analysis, and the data range from imagery used in a few texts that are deemed to be exemplary of a particular type of discourse to large research corpora of “instantiations” of metaphor use, which have often been assembled electronically from even larger general corpora that can be subjected to statistical analysis. Despite such variation, most of these corpora fulfil one of the fundamental methodological demands of empirical linguistic research, namely the need to document the evidence for the qualitative and quantitative hypotheses and explanations put forward by the researcher (Cameron and Low 1999; Deignan 1999, 2005; Steen 2007). On the other hand, research on how metaphor production is understood by recipients has so far focused mainly on psycholinguistic studies of comprehension speed, comparability and metaphor identification (Cienki 2008; Gibbs 1994, 2007, 2011; Gibbs and Tendahl 2006; Giora 2003; Glucksberg 2001; Steen 2007). Speakers’ self-interpretations, i.e. interpretations of their own intentions when uttering metaphors, are even less researched. In the case of polemical discourse, which may be ethically contentious or lead to legal prosecution (e.g. for libel, insult or incitement to violence), it is unlikely that a speaker would admit to having such intentions. Disclaiming statements by media-savvy politicians that deny xenophobic or racist implications of their utterances have become notorious (Beauzamy 2013; Wodak 2013). On the other hand, debates between metaphor-producers and –recipients about contentious imagery *do* reveal at least the deliberateness of its use and provide a valuable source of information for CDA-research that compares and “triangulates” production and reception data with media studies, social and political science research, and discourse-historical data (Wodak 2001).

The present paper follows this approach by comparing the use of one type of dehumanizing metaphors, i.e. the stigmatisation of immigrants as (social) *parasites* across different genres of immigration debates in Britain, (i.e. the press, and Blogs) and by including readers’ “comments” as far as they are documented in Blog comments and online discussion fora. In this way, we hope to gain a more representative picture than one based solely on studying one genre of metaphor use/production. In addition reception/“comment” data in particular provide evidence on how this use of metaphors is received by readers (as long as we bear in mind that these data too have to be interpreted critically and cannot be taken at face value).

2. Data and methodology

The data for this analysis consist of three samples: a press sample, a sample of three online discussion fora that are maintained on the BBC under their popular “Have your say” website (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/have_your_say/) and 40 Internet weblogs (Blogs) with readers’ comments, as far as these have been kept accessible by the Blog managers (Comments on online fora and Blogs that were removed by the website managers are thus excluded from the analysis.).

The following table gives an overview over the range and size of the whole corpus (NB: word counts for Blogs have been established through conversion into word documents, which exclude extra website material to a greater or lesser extent; their word count is therefore not as exact as that for the other media).

Table 1.

Media	Newspaper and magazine articles (2003–2013)	<i>Have your say</i> Online fora (April–June 2010)	Blogs (accessed December 2013)
Titles/key words	<i>Daily Express, Daily Mail, Financial Times, Guardian, Independent, Observer, Scotsman, Spectator, Sun, Telegraph, Times.</i>	(1) Should politicians be talking about immigration? (2) How should immigration be tackled? (3) Are immigration rules fair?	40 websites, searched on WWW by key words: <i>immigration, parasites, UK</i>
No. of items	138 articles	2473 postings (566, 881, and 1026 for the respective for a; with altogether 81 postings removed by BBC online forum management)	40 websites
No. of words	100.756	333.518	89.950

The first sample consists of press articles that have appeared in mainstream UK media, which have been sampled from the online sites of the respective newspapers or magazines; however, they have appeared also in print. This sample does not contain any readers’ comments, even if the respective media operate comment sites attached to the online versions. The *Have Your Say* sample, on the other hand, consists exclusively (with the obvious exception of the forum theme question) of comments by members of the public who participate in the forum debates. As is evident from the increase in comments from 566 to 1026 between the first and

the third forum debate on immigration-related topics within three months, these fora attracted a fast growing audience. This rise in interest has also of course to do with the fact that in May 2010 a general election took place in Britain, in which the competing parties highlighted immigration control as one of their main vote-winning strategies. The third sample, i.e. Blogs, was collected by a Google search for keywords, with the specific goal of finding websites that contained *parasite*-metaphors in texts relating to immigration. The three samples are so different in elicitation procedure, respective time frame and size that they cannot be regarded as balanced, let alone validated in a statistical sense. They are solely intended to provide a heuristic basis for the comparative analysis of different media and, in particular, for relating press discourse as produced by journalists (and, via the press, also by politicians) to readers' reactions to and, in the case of comments, 'uptake' of metaphors.

The methodology to be employed is that of corpus-based metaphor analysis (Deignan 1999; Musolff 2004; Zinken 2007; Zinken, Nerlich, and Hellsten 2008; Zinken and Musolff 2009), specifically "scenario analysis" as applied to political metaphors (Musolff 2006; Semino 2008, 220–222). The category of *scenario* serves as an analytical construction to capture clusters of conceptually related metaphor formulations in a corpus, which add up to mini-narratives, with default participants, action schemas, outcomes, and attached 'standard' evaluations/stances. In actual text corpora, scenarios can be (and are) linguistically 'realised' also by non-metaphorical lexis (e.g. by a literal paraphrase in the target terminology). In some cases a formulation may contain both metaphorical and non-metaphorical lexis such as the statement, "Sham marriages are a 'massive loophole' in Britain's border controls and amount to a 'golden ticket' into the country for immigrants [...]" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 23 January 2014). Its main scenario aspects are that of a CONTAINER and of MOVEMENT, which frame both its source domain (*loophole*, *golden ticket*) and target domain terminology (*border control*, *into the country*...).

Scenarios are not directly comparable to "metaphor fields" or "domains", which denote large semantic and encyclopaedic areas of knowledge; rather, as framing devices, they combine snippets of encyclopaedic knowledge to arrive at a default conclusion or evaluation that is based on common sense experience, e.g., that it is "good to become healthy again after an illness", or that "in a family all members should show solidarity to each other", or that on "a ship someone has to be in command to guarantee everybody's safety". These conclusions are applied to the target notion, e.g. a state that needs to "recover from a crisis", or "have more cohesion" or "have a firm leadership". Such default conclusions or outcomes are not logically binding but they are assumed or taken for granted under normal circumstances — any deviation from them is understood as an exceptional, "marked" case. This scenario-based approach has the advantage to account for a range of lexical

variation and collocation patterns in a corpus sample, which otherwise have to be laboriously summarised under “domains”. The scenarios that are identified here are not assumed on the basis of some grand conceptual architecture and then imposed in a top-down procedure to the data; rather, they are based on the corpus evidence itself. Scenario-analysis can thus serve to explore the range of metaphors in a relatively wide data collection and to investigate specific scenario aspects or formulations in detail.

3. Analysis

3.1 Overview of general metaphor scenarios relating to immigration in British public discourse

In the case of the British immigration debate, the press and online forum samples show a high degree of consistency in the use of a limited set of standard scenarios that are used time and again. They account for more than 90% of all ideologically relevant metaphors in the corpus; many of them have been analysed and commented on in research literature on (im)migration discourse (Böke 1997; Charteris-Black 2006; Cisneros 2008; Hönigsberger 1991; Jung, Niehr and Böke 2000; KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2012; Musolff 2011), which may be taken as evidence that they have been established for a long time. They can be summarised as follows (*italicised items are lexemes or phrases that reoccur with high frequency*):

1. The SPACE-CONTAINER scenario: the nation(-state) is conceptualised as a *container* with distinct *boundaries*, which distinguish those *on the outside* from those *inside*: immigrants are *outsiders* that want to *come/move into the container*. The *container* has *doors* or other openings that can be *closed*, *open* or *half-open* and it is seen as having a *limited capacity* to include people; if too many immigrants come in, this increases the *pressure* inside to *bursting point* and necessitates the erection of new *barriers*.
2. The MOVEMENT scenario (specific to immigrants as PARTICIPANTS): the most famous (or rather infamous) scenario version is that of a *flood*, *tide* or *wave* that *pours/rushes* into the container. It fits into the wider concept complex of a *mass movement*, which is also indicated by verbs such as *flock*, *pass through*, *overwhelm*. However, there are also instances of single immigrants being pictured as *swimming over*, which is most probably motivated by Britain being an island

3. The ACTION scenario, which is specific to CONTAINER-insiders as PARTICIPANTS: the latter fall into two distinct groups: on the one hand, those politicians and social groupings who are viewed as (and mostly condemned for) *inviting, letting, allowing, bringing* immigrants into the country, and on the other side those who try to *send them home, round them up, chuck or kick them out* or at least *limit, target, and control* immigration. Even the lexical pair of *importing* and *exporting* is used. In this scenario, “ordinary” insider-citizens are depicted as victims of an unwanted change in their living circumstances; one popular formula is the construction *when I/you walk down the street and see*, which always precedes a negative evaluation of immigrants as having changed a familiar living environment for the worse. A further sub-scenario is that of VIOLENT ACTION, as indicated by terms such as *backlash, combustible issue, dangerous game, invasion, rivers of blood, start a revolution, storm troopers, time bomb, weapon*, which portrays immigration as a wilful violation of the INSIDERS’ rights and their predicted response to this perceived aggression. The *rivers of blood* phrase alludes to the conservative politician Enoch Powell’s speech of 20 April 1968 (Charteris-Black 2011, 27–28). In press articles, this speech is referred to only as an exemplary case of dangerous xenophobic rhetoric; the online commentaries and Blogs sample include both positive and negative evaluations.
4. The EFFECT scenario has three sub-scenarios: MIX, GAIN, and SCROUNGE. The first one is most strongly represented in the online commentaries and in tabloid anti-immigrant press articles, referring as it does to an alleged blending of cultures that makes them interchangeable or even *submerges, dominates* or *subjugates* the traditional British culture, i.e. the effect that insiders recognize when they “go out in the street” (see above). This sub-scenario includes colorful formulations such as the supposed vision of *Coronation Street* (a TV soap opera set in a “typical” terraced street, supposedly in the Manchester area) having been *moved to Pakistan*; it is particularly frequently used in debates about the pros and cons of “multiculturalism”. The GAIN sub-scenario is confined to the quality press and small sections of the fora that report and comment on debates about those immigrants that *benefit UK Plc*, i.e., those who are among the *best and brightest* of their respective home countries and may provide an *economic benefit* to Britain. It is mostly used in arguments made by centre-left leaning journalists and public figures in defence of continued emigration of certain specialised groups (e.g., foreign students, skilled workers, business people). The last sub-scenario, which is of particular interest here, is that of the IMMIGRANT-AS-SCROUNGER who *sucks, drains or bleeds the country dry, aims for freebies and lives off or sponges from Britain*, thus exploiting it as a *treasure island*. Its references to immigrants range from relatively moderate

depictions as *welfare-tourists* (since 2013 also, *NHS-tourists*) to their dehumanizing stigmatization as *leeches*, *bloodsuckers* and *parasites*, which will be analysed in detail in the following section.

3.2 Immigrants as “parasites”

A closer view at the stigmatization of (im)migrants as *parasites* reveals a differentiated picture of the immigration debate in Britain, which in part relativizes the above-given overview. As part of the SCROUNGE sub-scenario, *parasite* imagery does indeed occur across all the genres of press articles, blogs and online fora but its frequency, collocation patterns and argumentative contexts are markedly different. The press sample, even though it includes strongly anti-immigration texts from tabloids and broadsheets has only one single text (out of 12 altogether) in which *parasite* is used in an assertive sense to denote immigrants, and even this is a qualified statement that distinguishes “beneficial” from “non-beneficial” immigrants, accusing as it does the Conservative-Liberal government of “letting in parasites, [but] turning away entrepreneurs” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 25/03/2013). The article gives no unambiguous indication of exactly who the *parasite* immigrants are supposed to be. All other articles in the press sample quote *parasite* imagery (or allege to quote it) as used by xenophobes, e.g. “The attempt of the far right to present the citizens of these countries as parasites [...] is as absurd as it is repellent” (*The Scotsman*, 04/01/2014); “The government is telling us that the coming Romanians and Bulgarians are ill-educated, parasitic benefit tourists. These people deserve better” (*The Guardian*, 05/02/2013); “people like me: non-EU immigrants [...] are all viewed as grasping parasites” (*The Spectator*, 27/04/2013). In the mainstream press, *parasite* imagery is evidently too ideologically loaded to be used uncritically; instead, they report and quote it as being employed by the xenophobic part of the political spectrum in Britain. There appear to be only a few press texts that could serve as models for readers to “learn” the use of *parasite* imagery from, even though the SCROUNGE scenario of the UK being exploited by immigrants is represented in about 20% of all articles.

The percentage of texts invoking the SCROUNGE scenario is even smaller in the online-forum sample, where this scenario is present in just 251, i.e. about 10% of all 2473 postings. In 90% of all these occurrences, however, the scenario is used in an assertive-aggressive way to depict immigrants as scroungers, in some cases in elaborate, sarcastic versions. This use of the SCROUNGE scenario overlaps in many cases with the INSIDER-ACTION scenario, so that radical measures against *sponging* illegal immigrants are advocated, e.g. using the army to “round up imigrants [*sic*]

who are not working & deport them immediately” (BBC, HYS-1, 29/04/2010).¹ As regards the use of dehumanizing lexemes such as *parasites*, *leeches*, or *sucking blood/life out of [the host society]*, the picture becomes more complicated: in the first place they appear to be rare in general, amounting as they do to just 15 instances in the sample; of these 50% are directly targeted at immigrants, e.g. in postings such as the following:

[...] the willy nilly entry into this country of immigrants who come to do harm or to simply suck a living out of hard working middle income earners?? (BBC, HYS-1, 30/04/2010).

If they haven't been detected for ten years then they are either living via the proceeds of crime or tax dodging. And that makes them parasites and criminals (BBC, HYS-2, 30/04/2010).

[...] the sort of immigrants who Labour has been busy encouraging are precisely the sort whose existence guarantees that quality, skilled immigrants don't consider the UK a worthy destination. These dregs naturally become potential Labour "clients" of lazy spongers and parasites, almost guaranteed to vote for the party who will keep feeding them benefits (BBC, HYS-3, 09/06/2010).

The remaining 50% of instances, however, include critical thematisations of such uses within the context of arguments defending the right of immigrants and promoting counter-usage, so to speak, which applies the *parasite/scrounger* image to "indigenous" UK benefit receivers to whom the immigrants are compared favourably, as in these quotations:

Let's tackle the real problems of a lazy bunch of parasites feeding of the life blood of our hard working people, who consider benefits to be a God given right and work to be beneath them and stop bashing the hard working immigrants, just because they are fulfilling a vital place in our farms and factories (BBC, HYS-1, 29/04/2010).

[...] there are far more work-shy benefit scrounging and criminal indigenous Brits [than immigrants] who suck the life out of the public services. (BBC, HYS-3, 10/06/2010).

Like the press, such online comments ascribe either explicitly or implicitly the discriminating use of *parasite* imagery against immigrants to xenophobic parts of the British public and the political establishment. Unlike the press, however, the

1. Quotations from the online fora have been anonymized and are identified here only by reference to the respective *Have Your Say*-sample (numbering 1–3) and the date of the posting. Omissions are indicated by “[...]” and all special notations, highlighting, typographic and other errors in the postings have been preserved.

commentators' critical perception of allegedly typical xenophobic users of such imagery does not seem to frighten them off using such metaphors themselves against different target-groups (see above: "benefit scrounging and criminal indigenous Brits").

In the Blog sample, on the other hand (which is of course statistically incomparable to the other samples due to its pre-determined 100% rate of *parasite* text occurrences), we encounter a different calibre of polemical use of *parasite* imagery altogether. All Blogs start with strong assertions of *parasite*-status of immigrants, often in headlines such as "Foreign Immigrants are Parasites",² "Muselmanic Welfare Parasites Cost Britain £13+ BILLION A YEAR!",³ "Britain: Muslim immigrants are the chief parasites".⁴ These assertions are then followed up in the great majority (more than 80%) of cases by emphatic endorsements and reinforcements in the main text body of the Blog and its further comments, which detail the *parasites'* effect in graphic detail and combine this with racist (in one case, anti-Semitic) hate speech:

Parasitic Immigrants arrive here with their begging bowls out, to milk our hard won welfare & housing system. IDI Amin was not a nice guy but he had his country at heart, when he slung out its milking immigrants⁵

So Whitey, do you really feel like being the butt of the joke in the country your ancestors built? [...] National humiliation from a bunch of mud parasites sent here by the JEW to destroy your genetic right to exist? *Am I making a mountain out of a molehill?* Nope. I'm highlighting the sort of stuff which will continue to flood the mainstream Jew TV propaganda machine, until we virtually cease to exist.⁶

The irony of the situation is inescapable: their [= the immigrants'] parasitical behavior obliges governments, through taxpayers, to subsidize their adopted country's own destruction.⁷

2. <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/>. (last accessed 15/12/2013)

3. <http://sheikyermami.com/muselmanic-welfare-parasites-cost-britain-13-billion-a-year/> (last accessed 15/12/2013)

4. <http://jonjayray.wordpress.com/2007/10/03/britain-muslim-immigrants-are-the-chief-parasites/> (last accessed 15/12/2013)

5. Comment posted to <http://www.weeklygripe.co.uk/a294.asp> on 14/11/2012 (last accessed 15/12/2013)

6. Posted to <http://expeltheparasite.com> (n.d) (last accessed 15/12/2013)

7. Posted to <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20120624051236AAds2v0>, (n.d) (last accessed 15/12/2013)

Eight Blogs also contain comments that are critical of the main anti-immigration thrust but these are apologetic, arguing details about exaggerated statistics, the economic benefit that a 'good' minority of immigrants bring to Britain and issues of Human Right legislation. They do not, however, tackle the issue of stigmatizing and dehumanizing imagery critically in the way the press and online fora users do. The exclusively anti-immigration comments, on the other hand, openly insult opponents and their main targets, describing them not only as criminals and scroungers but elaborating on the bio-imagery by using collocations and cognates of *parasite* terminology such as *leeches*, *locusts*, *rats*, *vermin*, *plague*, *germs*, *contamination* and denouncing them as being both metaphorically and literally *dirty*. They also include detailed analogies between the destructive effect that parasitical organisms (i.e., bio-parasites) have on their host organisms and the allegedly similar impact of immigration on their host societies.

4. Conclusions

The results of our comparison of *parasite* imagery in three media genres in the British public debate on immigration clearly show that such imagery is indeed used as part of a narrative-argumentative scenario of social groups scrounging from the nation, who supposedly deserve ethical condemnation and necessitate social and political counter-measures. The results do *not*, however, show a uniform pattern of usage; instead they are differentiated across genres and argumentative contexts. Only the "Blogosphere" appears to exhibit a relatively consistent xenophobic and polemic bias insofar as the *parasite* metaphor is used together with further "disgusting and dangerous organisms" terminology to dehumanize immigrants and denounce them as not being part of the 'proper' national society. However, in the online fora, and to an even greater extent in the press, such usage is explicitly criticised and ascribed to a section of the political spectrum that the respective journalists and commentators argue against, even when they employ the SCROUNGE scenario in general. *Parasite* imagery is never neutral and it also seems to be never "naïve" in the sense of non-reflective use. Whoever is employing this metaphor or its semantic "relatives" (*bloodsucker*, *leech*, etc.) is doing so in the knowledge of its strongly polemical, insulting, and defamatory bias. The online fora in particular show that even those who criticise its usage against immigrants often do not miss the chance to "turn the tables" by denouncing other groups as *parasites*.

This finding contributes to a growing body of evidence that, *pace* the cognitive insistence on the "unconscious", "automatic" or "non-deliberate" understanding of

metaphors,⁸ at least the use and interpretation of imagery in political discourse has to be considered highly deliberate. Furthermore, prominent metaphors that are deemed to be particularly offensive in the relevant community of practice, such as the xenophobic/racist use of *parasite* imagery, are usually not only employed deliberately but also reflectively, i.e. with a socio-historically informed, meta-communicative knowledge of their typical register (here, insulting and polemical hate speech) and also of their precedents in historical racist discourses (Musolff 2010, 2012, 2014). It is disingenuous to assume that the users and recipients of such imagery produce or interpret them automatically; however, it is in some cases difficult to pinpoint the degree of awareness in the users' minds. Nevertheless, *parasite* imagery is one of the clearer cases. In Britain, for instance, legal actions have been brought (in a few cases, even successfully) against its use in racist calumny,⁹ and the evidence from online fora discussed above demonstrates that it is not just "critical" journalists but also many members of the public who explicitly highlight and denounce its defamatory communicative function. Even though present-day usage of *parasite* imagery may not be as strongly associated with Nazi-jargon in Britain as it is in Germany and Austria, its closeness to racist hate speech is familiar to the online commentators (and is most probably eschewed by the majority among them for this very reason).

Still, it is important to specify as accurately as possible which particular version of *parasite* imagery should be considered as dehumanizing and potentially socially dangerous, for there are significant differences even among its xenophobic applications. In the immigration debate data, *parasite* imagery always occurs as part of the SCROUNGE scenario, and *scrounger* and *sponger* are among the synonyms that dictionaries give for *parasite* in its social meaning.¹⁰ The cognitive approach assumes that the default metaphorization trajectory would go from a concrete source to an abstract target concept (Lakoff 1993), which in our case means that the target notion of "socio-parasites" is derived or "mapped" from the notion of 'bio-parasites' (Chilton 2005; Hawkins 2001). Curiously, the etymological and lexical history of the term *parasite* points towards a diachronic antecedence of socio- vis-à-vis bio-parasites: the latter were only gradually identified and terminologised (as characterising whole species) in the 17–18th centuries, whereas talk of individual *scrounging* socio-"parasites" antedates them by at least

8. See, for instance Gibbs 2011a; Lakoff 1993, 2008; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; for detailed discussion see Gibbs 2011b, Müller 2011, Musolff 2011, Steen 2011.

9. See Musolff 2014 for detailed discussion of such prosecutions.

10. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, vol. 2, 2096, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 880.

one hundred years in English, e.g. in English Renaissance dramas (e.g. in William Shakespeare's and Ben Jonson's works), and by full two millennia in the languages it was borrowed from, i.e. Latin and Ancient Greek (Gullestad 2012; Serres 2007, 3–25; Zimmer 2001, 1–22). The Renaissance “parasite” was a sponging courtier or cleric or servant who ‘earned’ his keep not by honest work but through flattery and servility, and he was the (conceptual) descendant of a stock figure of ancient comedy, i.e. the *parasitus* (Latin) or *parasitos* (Greek) as the hanger-on of rich people (Damon 1998).

We thus have not one but two historical antecedents for *parasite* metaphors in today's usage: a) the ancient but (given the continued presence of Shakespeare's work in the British public) still comprehensible and usable figure of the lazy scrounger, a contemptible and ludicrous but ultimately only annoying figure and b) the (popular) science version of a bio-parasite, which not only damages its host by reducing its resources but can destroy it (e.g. by way of complete resource-consumption, or by injuring it or infecting it with fatal diseases). Both these versions fit the SCRUNGE scenario as identified in our corpus; so at this point we have to consider the metaphor's collocations and argumentative contexts in order to arrive at a sufficiently fine-grained analysis. In our corpus, collocations with biological terminology (*leeches* etc., see above) and explicit analogies between bio- and socio-parasites occur almost exclusively in the Blogs.¹¹ It is these uses that can most plausibly be said to be “dehumanizing”, rather than the ‘simple’ *scrounger/sponger* ones, which may be critical or dismissive of their referents but seem to focus on the *parasites*' alleged laziness and on resource-reduction for the host rather than on a necessarily destructive effect.

We have thus arrived at a highly differentiated result regarding the analysis of dehumanizing imagery: not only is its dehumanizing import dependent on the context of its use — which may be regarded as a pragmatic truism — but, more specifically, on its exploitation (or lack of it) of the source scenario's outcome versions. The default outcome of the bio-parasite scenario is the destruction of its host, whereas that of the (traditional) socio-parasite is damage to, but not annihilation, of the host. This conceptual-cum-argumentative difference in the use of the *parasite* metaphor coincides with its historical precedents and discourse-traditions: racist and other strongly discriminatory denunciations of alleged

11. There is one online forum occurrence of a ‘bio-’ to ‘socio-parasite’ analogy and its argument is rather abstract: “backward looking Muslims [...] pose a serious long term danger to the cohesion of our society. [...] As such their relationship to our society is more parasitical than symbiotic” (BBC, HYS-2, 01/05/2010). By contrast, several Blog comments focus on the (supposedly ‘funny’ aspect that “all parasites are suicidal” (because they destroy themselves by destroying the host, a ‘conclusion’ that can be found in Hitler's anti-Semitic version of the parasite metaphor in *Mein Kampf* (Hitler 1933, 334).

(socio-)parasites in history, such as those by Nazis and Stalinists, highlighted and instrumentalized their supposedly scientifically proven destructiveness in order to justify their extermination/annihilation as a form of social hygiene/therapy. This “topos” can be traced back to the end of the 18th century, which was the earliest point that bio-parasite concepts served as source input for new analogical mappings onto society. Those who use such metaphors today may, for obvious reasons of self-exculpation, disclaim the tradition they stand in, but their conclusions from the metaphor scenarios they use speaks for themselves.

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Author's address

Andreas Musolff
School of Language and Communication Studies
University of East Anglia,
Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK,
a.musolff@uea.ac.uk

About the author

Andreas Musolff is Professor of Intercultural Communication at the University of East Anglia in Norwich (UK). He has published on the History of Political Discourse, Metaphor Theory and the History of Pragmatics. His monographs include *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust* (2010), *Metaphor and Political Discourse* (2004), *Mirror Images of Europe* (2000) and *War against the Public: The Language of Terrorism* (1996, in German), and he has co-edited further volumes on political discourse in Europe as well as articles and book chapters on metaphor theory.