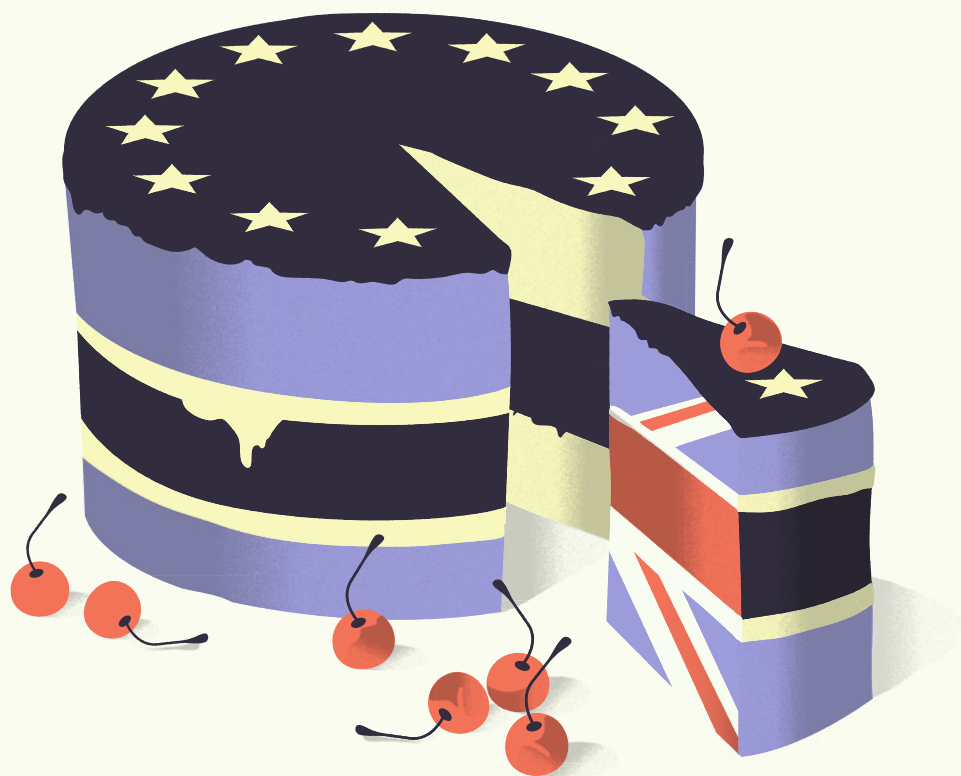
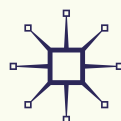


Metaphors of Brexit

No Cherries on the Cake?



Jonathan Charteris-Black



Metaphors of Brexit

Jonathan Charteris-Black

Metaphors of Brexit

No Cherries on the Cake?

palgrave
macmillan

Jonathan Charteris-Black
Faculty of Arts, Creative Industries
and Education
University of the West of England
Bristol, UK

ISBN 978-3-030-28767-2 ISBN 978-3-030-28768-9 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28768-9>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2019

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: Harry J Milburn

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface

For many Brexit is equated with division, contention and discord—yet it can also tell us a great deal about human nature and human morality. For ‘Leavers’ and ‘Remainers’ alike a study of the metaphors of Brexit may contribute to a better understanding of the language and moral thought of British people in the earlier part of the twenty-first century. The outcome of the 2016 Referendum shocked most commentators since economists and other experts had warned against leaving the European Union after 43 years of membership and very few pollsters had predicted that they would. The decision to leave originated in a gut reaction against ‘Brussels’ among a majority rather than, perhaps, in a fully rounded assessment of the national interest.

Yet should we have been so surprised? There is an increasing amount of research that shows that human decisions are often not rational and are made on the basis of moral and emotional judgements rooted in intuition: in ‘heart’ rather than ‘head’. In this book, I explore the insights offered by metaphors, and related aspects of language, into why the case to Leave the European Union proved more convincing to a majority of voters than the case to Remain. I suggest that ‘Leavers’

framed their arguments using symbols, allegories and metaphors that aroused deeper emotional responses and moral judgements.

Drawing on ideas developed in cognitive linguistics, metaphor theory, classical rhetoric and moral psychology this book examines Brexit-related metaphors occurring in press articles, political speeches and Tweets during the period 2016–2018. Although the patterns of metaphor described offer glimpses into British moral codes, I hope they will also contribute to an understanding of moral thought, language and persuasion that is not necessarily limited to a particular time and place.

Bristol, UK

Jonathan Charteris-Black

Contents

1	Cherries on the Cake?	1
	Introduction: Metaphor and Brexit	1
	Reasoning Through Humour: “Having Your Cake and Eating It”	2
	Contested Allegories: Sinking Ships and Getting Divorced	7
	Naming Concepts—The ‘Backstop’ and the ‘Emergency Brake’	10
	Purpose and Approach	12
	Critical Metaphor Analysis—Some Concepts	15
	Framing and Frames	16
	Allegory and Myth	18
	Scenario	20
	Script	21
	Keywords	22
	Embodied Simulation	23
	Outline of Chapters	25
	References	29

2	The Lexicon of the Referendum	31
	Brexit Neologisms	32
	Portmanteau Words and Blends: 'Brexit'	33
	Derivation in Group Identities: 'Brexiteer'	
	and 'Remainiac'	37
	Half Rhyme: 'Remoaners'	40
	Compound Words: 'Independence Day'	42
	The Wording of the Ballot Paper	44
	'Stay' or 'Remain'	48
	'Leave'	52
	Moral Thinking	54
	Moral Intuition and Moral Reasoning in Brexit	56
	Moral Foundations and the Righteous Mind	59
	References	63
3	I Love My Country	65
	The Patriotism and the Nation Frame	65
	'Patriotism and the Nation' in the Discourse	
	of Jacob Rees-Mogg	78
	The Distrust and Betrayal Frame	82
	'Distrust and Betrayal' in the Discourse of Jacob Rees-Mogg	92
	Summary	97
	References	101
4	'Take Back Control': Invaded Nation or Sovereign Nation?	103
	Introduction	103
	Two Scenarios in the Referendum Campaign	106
	The War and Invasion Frame and Social Identities	109
	The War and Invasion Frame on Twitter	116
	The 'Sovereign Nation' on Twitter	116
	The 'Invaded Nation' on Twitter	119
	Comparing 'Leave' and 'Remain' Use of the 'Invaded Nation' Scenario	123
	Summary	132
	References	135

5	Conceptual Metaphors: ‘Eurocrats Living in the Brussels Bubble’	137
	Introduction	137
	Containment Metaphors	140
	The ‘Game’ Conceptual Metaphor	151
	Summary	157
	References	159
6	The Metaphors of Boris Johnson	161
	Introduction	161
	Boris’s Journalistic Frames: Constraint and Embodied Simulation	168
	The Allegory of Unjust Entrapment	175
	Boris Johnson’s Political Frames	180
	The Nation-as-Body Frame	186
	Summary	191
	References	196
7	Happy Families and Special Relationships	197
	The Family Frame	197
	Relationship Terms	202
	The ‘European Family’ and the ‘Family of Nations’	206
	‘Friends’	213
	‘Enemies’	219
	‘European Partners’ and ‘European Neighbours’	221
	The Club	224
	Summary	229
	References	232
8	Are Marriages Made in Heaven?	233
	Introduction	233
	The ‘Marriage of Convenience’ Script in the Press	239
	The ‘Marriage of Convenience’ Script on Twitter	246
	The ‘Divorce’ Script in the Press	250
	The ‘Divorce’ Script on Social Media	261
	Summary	264
	References	267

9	Animals: Moral Intuition and Moral Reasoning	269
	Introduction	269
	The Great Chain of Being and the Human-as-Animal Frame	273
	Allegorical Animal Idioms	280
	Allegorical Frame for Deception and Disloyalty	282
	Trojan Horse	283
	Wolf in Sheep's Clothing	285
	'Smell a Rat' and 'Rats Leaving a Sinking Ship'	288
	Reptilian Allegorical Idioms	291
	Allegorical Frame for Disclosure and Non-disclosure	294
	Other Allegorical Frames	296
	The Animal-as-Human Frame: Cat Memes	299
	References	307
10	Metaphors for Brexit	309
	Introduction	309
	Master Metaphors for Brexit in the Press	309
	Reflections on a Master Metaphor for Brexit	316
	Reference	321
	Metaphor Brexicon	323
	References	327
	Index	331

List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Format of the UK referendum ballot paper	47
Fig. 4.1	Transitivity analysis of leave's 'Invaded Nation' scenario	127
Fig. 7.1	Relationships as spatial proximity	206
Fig. 8.1	Binary metaphors, adversarial scripts and their social effects	260

List of Tables

Table 1.1	British national press circulation and affiliation (2016)	14
Table 2.1	Frequency of ‘exit’ neologisms in press headlines 2016–2018	35
Table 2.2	Naming and group identities in press headlines: change in use	39
Table 2.3	‘Remainer’ and ‘Remoaner’ in press headlines: change in use	41
Table 2.4	‘Remoaner’ in pro-Brexit press headlines December 2016 and December 2017	42
Table 2.5	British press 2016–2018: ‘Brexit’ + compound noun in press headlines	43
Table 2.6	‘Remain’ + x in British and American English (0,3)	50
Table 2.7	‘Leave’ + x in the British National Corpus (0,3)	53
Table 2.8	Leave metaphor frames and their moral foundations	61
Table 4.1	Comparison of ‘Invaded Nation’ keywords in referendum week tweets	122
Table 7.1	Relationship metaphors on Twitter: January 2016–December 2018	205
Table 7.2	Relationship metaphors in press headlines: January 2016–December 2018	205

Table 8.1	Frequency of ‘Brexit’ + ‘divorce’ in press headlines 2016–2018	236
Table 8.2	Emotion adjectives describing ‘marriage’ in COCA	241
Table 8.3	Headlines with ‘Brexit’ and ‘adjective + divorce’: January 2016–December 2018	252
Table 8.4	Referendum week ‘divorce tweets’ by affiliation	264
Table 9.1	Allegorical frames of animal idioms	282
Table 9.2	Allegorical idioms for the frame of deception and disloyalty on Twitter: January 2016—December 2018)	283
Table 9.3	Idioms for the frame of disclosure and non-disclosure on Twitter: January 2016–December 2018	294
Table 9.4	Other allegorical idioms on Twitter: January 2016–December 2018	296
Table 9.5	Pro-Remain #CatsAgainst Brexit	303



1

Cherries on the Cake?

Introduction: Metaphor and Brexit

In some pubs the word 'Brexit' is treated as a swear word and you have to buy a round of drinks every time the word is mentioned because of its potential to initiate conflict. The topic invites positions to be taken, makes people angry and turns them away from reason. Some are annoyed by the very word 'Brexit' itself: the media driven blend of 'Britain' and 'exit' to produce the simple, croaked, bi-syllabic sound conceals a reality that leaving the European Union is the most complex international negotiation on which the United Kingdom has ever embarked. The word 'exit' is found in public building such as a cinema or a hotel and implies there is a simple choice between being 'in' or 'out' of something but the reality is different. Metaphors have dominated thought about 'Brexit' in the deliberations of politicians and media discussions and they have influenced the private reflections of individuals. Supporters of Leave found evidence of 'collaborators', 'saboteurs' or 'traitors' who were committing 'treason' while the Remain 'side' referred to their opponents as 'wolves in sheep's clothing'. But in their urge to persuade, advocates of both sides commonly forgot that these were metaphors at all, so that political

positions ended up in a linguistic maze—few even understood the meaning of the endlessly repeated ‘Backstop’—a maze without an ‘exit’. Is it any wonder that ‘Brexit’ became a taboo word?

In this book I illustrate how metaphor was ‘weaponised’ in discussions surrounding Britain’s decision to leave the European Union and how it contributed to the tone of the Brexit debate. Sometimes this tone has been savage with medieval words such as ‘betrayal’ and ‘traitor’ becoming everyday vocabulary. But once we look under the surface we find that understanding the metaphors of the Brexit debate provides rich insight into the profoundly moral outlooks that influenced both those who sought to leave the European Union and those who wished to remain in it. Members of the public, opinion formers and politicians relied on metaphor as a way of framing political issues and creating persuasive stories and allegories. Understanding these better helps us to understand not only what divided the two sides but also what both sides held in common: a belief and desire that they could improve their country.

In this opening chapter I illustrate *how* metaphors influenced the Brexit debate in various ways. When Boris Johnson claimed “My policy on cake is pro having it and pro eating it” he was combining moral reasoning with humour. When political cartoonists represented Britain or the European Union as the ‘titanic’ they were contesting allegories in which the same symbols expressed opposing perspectives. When Theresa May insisted on her ‘red lines’ she was using a familiar idiom to mean: ‘I am not prepared to negotiate on these issues’—strong language that was not reflected in the strength of her political position. In the second half of the chapter I introduce various linguistic and psychological concepts that contribute to an understanding of the pervasive and persuasive role of metaphor in the discourse of Brexit.

Reasoning Through Humour: “Having Your Cake and Eating It”

When asked in an interview in April 2019 about being accused of wanting ‘to have his cake and eat it’ Boris Johnson said: “Well, I still am. Let’s not beat about the bush here. My policy on cake is still pro having

it and pro eating it.”¹ This metaphor expressed an argument that on withdrawing from the European Union Britain would still be able to retain many of the benefits that it had enjoyed as a member. But its morality was contested through different interpretations of the metaphor. Belgian MEP Philippe Lamberts told Theresa May: “I think it will be interesting to see how things develop but *you cannot have your cake and eat it*”.² In the following month an eagle-eyed reporter photographed a handwritten note, carried by Julia Dockerill, an aide to the Tory vice-chair Mark Field stating: “What’s the model? *Have your cake and eat it*”. To pro-Europeans this implied that the UK wanted to retain all the main benefits that came from being a member of the European Union (henceforth the EU). It sought to restrict EU immigration and leave the Single Market, while ensuring that frictionless trade with the EU would continue after Brexit: but this appeared to the EU negotiators as wanting to ‘have it both ways’.³ The idiomatic proverb therefore pointed to a moral dilemma that was familiar to other Europeans; in French the proverb took the form: “Wanting to have the butter and the money from the butter, and the milkmaid’s ass”, suggesting that the moral dilemma was not an especially British one.

The moral contest was reasoned through other ‘food’ metaphors, such as when a German political thinker, Ulrike Guérot, wrote on *Politico*:

Yes, we indulged you while you were part of the European Union. We gave you your rebate. We allowed you to sit on the sidelines of Schengen and the euro. But those days are over, now that you’ve decided to go. It’s time for you to stop acting *like a spoiled child* and accept that you can’t have everything both ways - departure from the EU but membership in programmes like Galileo and Erasmus; an Irish border that’s both closed but somehow open; access to the single market without its most important conditions; the freedom of movement and no oversight by the European Court of Justice; *your pick of the European cherry tree, without bothering to water the soil or tend to its branches*.⁴

Here after likening Britain to a ‘spoilt child’, she introduced the idea that Britain was ‘cherry picking’ by wanting to select only beneficial aspects of EU membership. She extends the cherry tree metaphor

to take into account the necessary preconditions for growing the ‘European cherry tree’. In this regard she was framing the EU as an essentially productive enterprise nurtured with love and care. These two different metaphors—‘having cake’ and ‘cherry picking’—offer the similar moral argument that choosing *only* pleasurable actions while avoiding the painful ones is morally naive. The metaphors allude to each other and create an intertextual relationship precisely because they share the same moral reasoning: they accuse the person who is ‘cherry picking’ or trying to ‘have their cake and eat it’ of being selfish by putting their own interests before those of others. They are both usually indicative of an EU perspective on the British position on Brexit, as shown in the ‘Metaphor Brexicon’ at the end of this book.

Like many fixed expressions taken from popular culture it is often their traditional sense that may be played with for rhetorical effect. The meaning of the proverb is not clear because it would seem quite logical to ‘have your cake and eat it’—until we realise that the phrase was originally in reverse order: “Wolde ye bothe eate your cake, and haue your cake?”⁵ This meant that you could no longer have your cake *after* you have eaten it because there would no longer be any cake left to eat. Normally speakers accuse *others* of ‘cherry picking’ or ‘wanting to have their cake and eat it’ but sometimes if they were being self-ironic they could represent *their own* actions and positions in this way. Boris Johnson is the most notable political exponent of the art of metaphor and his image is constructed partly through humour and embodied forms of persuasion. He reversed the moral judgement implied in the idiom with his version: “My policy on cake is pro having it and pro eating it” and this worked well because food is a topic that he has a reputation for exploiting humourously. He rejected the bias implied by the original proverb by expressing it in terms of rational self interest: it is quite logical to want to possess cake and to eat it. His version of the proverb came to symbolise a defiant and unyielding position associated with supporters of a so-called ‘hard’ Brexit.

The ‘cake’ metaphor was taken further by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, who, while speaking at the annual conference of the Christian Democrats Economic Council, quoted the economist and finance minister Ludwig Erhard, that:

...a compromise is the art of dividing a cake in such a way that everyone believes he has the biggest piece.⁶

Hammond went on to argue that there is “some applicability to the Brexit negotiations, although I try to discourage talk of ‘cake’ amongst my colleagues” and went on to say that he was hopeful that “we can maximise the size of the cake and each enjoy a bigger piece”. Indirectly, Hammond was arguing for a much ‘softer’ type of Brexit than the ‘hard’ one proposed by Boris Johnson. Both speakers were using ‘cake’ metaphors to outline political positions by finding the right tone for different audiences and Hammond was alluding to Johnson, but he wanted to alter the moral argument from that implied by Johnson. He shifted the reasoning with the idea that a division of the cake that appears fair keeps everyone happy and implied that both the EU and the UK would benefit from a negotiated settlement.

The cake metaphor became so well established that it created a new word to describe a morally ambiguous position: ‘cakeism’—the word was first used in the press by the strongly pro-Remain Guardian:

Not so the foreign secretary, whose doctrine of *cakeism* (having baked goods and eating them) is familiar from his Brexit prospectus.⁷

Often the new word was accompanied by brief explanation indicating its origin:

The approach has become known as “*cakeism*” over claims the Government is trying to “have its cake and eat it”.⁸

In the three-year period covered by this book ‘cakeism’ was used 63 times in the British press, of which 7 were in headlines. The word even developed an adjective ‘cakeist’:

May’s *cakeist approach* to Brexit (as in, having it and eating it) is beginning to find its limits. Yet it still appears that May believes, or needs to appear to believe, that it is possible *to have most of the cake* - even though the EU27 have *already taken a bite*.⁹

Realising the argumentative potential of the metaphor, after the Salzburg meeting of Theresa May with EU negotiators, Donald Tusk posted on Instagram a picture of showing himself and May looking at a tray of small cakes with the ironic caption:

A piece of cake, perhaps? Sorry, no cherries.

Here Tusk blended the two food metaphors discussed above—‘having cakes’ and ‘picking cherries’ with a third one a ‘piece of cake’; when something is very easy to do it can be referred to as a ‘piece of cake’. Tusk’s post was intended ironically as negotiating the Brexit agreement was not in the least ‘easy’. It caused a mixed response on social media—some finding it ‘savage’, others ‘brilliant’—depending on their political stance. Theresa May reacted with an official statement demanding that Britain be treated with respect: the cake without cherries post had caused sufficient hurt to elicit a frosty and formal response. Some tweets were more humorous:

It is very unfair of the #EU to keep talking about cherry picking when we are about to run out of agricultural workers.¹⁰

Others followed by mixing food metaphors; the strong Brexiteer John Redwood posted on Twitter:

It’s because the EU is no bowl of cherries many of us wish to go. There are no cherries to pick. Now we pay for our own cake & for other countries’ cake too. I look forward to paying just for our own cake, making more of it at home. Then we can have better cake & more prosperity.¹¹

Redwood was elaborating and mixing the metaphors to develop an argument about finance and the British net contribution to the EU budget. Others also sought to entertain the Twittersphere through humorous elaboration of the metaphor:

Leavers were never realistic about the Irish border, citizens rights or trade. Now the UK is being held hostage by the DUP. The Tories will be eating #Brexiteer humble pie rather than having their cake and eating it.¹²

Such tweets illustrate how metaphor combined humour with moral reasoning. Although I have argued that the primary role of ‘cake’ metaphors was moral reasoning, it is equally clear that the media echoed the metaphor for its entertainment value. For example, between January 2016 and December 2018, there were 1237 press articles that had ‘Brexit’ in their title and both ‘eat’ and ‘cake’ in the text. As well as adding vigour and humour to lighten the cut and thrust of conventional political debate, metaphor has the potential for activating visual imagery—either humorous posts on social media, or political cartoons. In this respect metaphors are integral to the negotiation of power relationships between competing agents—and the side that wins the argument employs moral reasoning most effectively by finding the best metaphor. Also essential to winning the argument is the telling of stories, and this often required an allegory, a sort of cautionary tale, in which the moral reasoning was favourable to the speaker’s argument—let’s see how this works.

Contested Allegories: Sinking Ships and Getting Divorced

When speaking to students in Luxembourg University on the amount the UK would have to pay for leaving the EU, its President, Jean-Claude Juncker, described a scenario: “If you are sitting in the bar and you are ordering 28 beers and then suddenly some of your colleagues [are leaving without] paying, that is not feasible. They have to pay. They have to pay”; the metaphor raises an ethical issue by drawing attention to what constitutes right action in a situation that would be familiar to his student audience: buying a round of drinks. It framed the ethical question by two different scenarios: one where the customer leaves without paying and the other where he pays. But because the audience understood that he was really cautioning Britain about their financial obligations on withdrawal from the EU it became an allegory that evoked laughter from the students suggesting that they had understood its hidden meaning and it became widely circulated. However, a critic might have observed that 28 is an unusually large round,

particularly if some of these had not even been in the bar when the round was first offered. Because the meaning of an allegory is oblique it can be contested.

In another allegory, or cautionary tale, Leavers referred to the EU as a 'sinking ship'. The sinking ship symbol engages audiences by arousing fear and activating memories of the Titanic. Allegories invite symbols and soon the Titanic became a symbol for self-inflicted disaster. In this allegory a huge, prestigious ship struck an iceberg forcing the crew to abandon ship. Those who could, climbed on to one of the very few lifeboats, but most were abandoned to their fate in a cold and lonely ocean. It is a cautionary tale about hubris with two distinct roles: one for the Titanic and one for the heroic lifeboat; but the identity of the victim depended on how each side used the allegory. Before the referendum supporters of Leave gave the EU the role of the sinking ship and Britain the role of the lifeboat. A sense of immanent disaster was stimulated by the rise of right wing populism in Europe, and in this version of the allegory leaving the EU was the final opportunity to escape before disaster struck. Nigel Farage observed that: "Europe is in one hell of a mess – thank goodness we got onto a lifeboat off the Titanic and I can't think of a better time for us to have done it".¹³ Remain supporters generally avoided the Titanic allegory. However, when the House of Commons voted against withdrawing without a deal in March 2019 a senior European negotiator described is as 'The Titanic voting for the iceberg to get out of the way'.¹⁴ The roles had become reversed: Britain was no longer symbolised by the lifeboat but by the Titanic: the Titanic was a contested image through which each side cautioned the other about the dangers of hubris. It was the metaphors, political allegories and contested symbolism that communicated a moral vision of Britain's political situation in the world.

A number of tweets were accompanied by some form of image of a sinking ship—capsized at 45 degrees. Some included the phrase 'Abandon Ship'—yet there was still just time to disembark. This reminds us that metaphor encourages visual images that have long been used by cartoonists to frame political situations by drawing on the stereotypical associations of nations, politicians or other actors and entities.

A cartoon published by the British European Revue in 1915 represents Germany as an eagle about to pounce on France depicted as a female wearing revolutionary colours while Austria, dressed as a clown, clings on desperately onto the German eagle. Heroic Britain—a large powerful John Bull like character—wraps his sleeves up and, clutching a sabre, prepares to stride across the channel to sort out the mess, with the Empire, represented by small figures, in support. By contrast, a French cartoon map of Europe drawn by Paul Hadol in 1870 shows a brave France fending off Prussia while Britain is depicted as an old crotchety granny facing towards the Atlantic and walking away with its back towards Europe. Clearly, these two cartoons framed Britain's relationship with Europe in two contrasting cautionary tales offering moral comment. Some satirical cartoons of this period depict Russia as a large octopus with its tentacles spreading across Europe and strangling its neighbours. Satirical images symbolising the European nations engaged audiences by offering contested moral visions.

Britain's withdrawal from the EU was commonly referred to as a 'divorce' and there was talk from the start of the financial obligations that Britain had incurred as a result of its historic commitments; these were framed as a 'divorce' bill. There were no less than 1108 newspapers articles in the period January 2016 to December 2018 that included the words 'Brexit' and 'Divorce' in their headlines. Around half of these included reference to a 'divorce bill'. Given that over 4 in 10 marriages in the UK end in divorce, framing Brexit as a 'divorce' was a way of engaging readers by drawing on a familiar scenario with allegorical potential. The allegory had different scenarios: for many British people membership of the EU had always been a 'marriage of convenience', and for many Europeans the UK was always a difficult marriage partner. Marriage metaphors in which the relationships between nation states are conceptualised as if they were relationships between individual people have *always* been an attractive rhetorical strategy for contesting allegorical scenarios. This is because they are the most familiar arena for working out how moral beliefs, interpersonal relationships and behaviours cumulatively tie society together.

Naming Concepts—The ‘Backstop’ and the ‘Emergency Brake’

Metaphor also offers a language for simplifying complex political concepts: reference to the ‘backstop’ and ‘red lines’ came to be shorthand terms for very complex political positions. ‘A backstop’ is a thing that is placed at the rear of something to form a barrier behind it. The ‘backstop’ served as a crucial concept in the debates between the UK and EU governments because both sides wanted to avoid there being an actual physical border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Although neither side wanted a land border there would need to be a means of monitoring trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland if they were no longer in the same Customs Union. Both the UK and the EU sought to avoid a so-called ‘hard’ barrier—customs posts with systematic checking of vehicles and people crossing between the north and south of Ireland. The ‘backstop’ became shorthand for the requirement for the UK to remain within a Customs Union until a solution was found to this Irish border problem.

The ‘backstop’ was a fallback position for dealing with the trade across the border and meant that if there were no agreement by the end of the transition period (December 2020) then the whole of Britain would remain in the Customs Union—which would restrict its ability to trade outside the EU. The British plan to monitor traffic across the border using either technology or by collecting tariffs on behalf of the EU was unlikely to be accepted by the EU, while the EU preference for the whole island of Ireland to come within the single market and customs union was felt to challenge the integrity and jurisdiction of the UK government—which depended on the Democratic Unionist Party—and so challenged one of Theresa May’s so-called, ‘red lines’. Because of the fear of there not being an agreement concerning the border the EU negotiators insisted the UK sign up to a legally binding ‘backstop’ clause. The very length and detail of this explanation shows why a word like ‘backstop’ was necessary!

The ‘backstop’ metaphor is rather different from some of the metaphors that I have discussed above because it was a metaphor that has a specific legal meaning of remaining in a Customs Union. It

therefore summarised and simplified a legal and regulatory concept. The primary sense of ‘backstop’ is spatial, in sports such as baseball and rounders ‘backstop’ refers to a fielding position located behind the batter where the fielder should stop the ball in the event of the batter missing it. But in the withdrawal negotiations it referred to abstract financial arrangements concerning the collection of import duties, which makes it a metaphor. The similarity with the ‘cherry picking’ and ‘having cake’ metaphors is that ‘backstop’ serves as shorthand by encapsulating complex political positions succinctly; but it is different because, although it concerns a moral issue, it does not have offer a moral argument. Any reference to a political concept also needs to be intelligible, at least to politicians—and although not precise—at least unambiguous. When negotiating parties can use the same linguistic terms with a similar, if not necessarily identical, interpretation they need to rely on metaphor as it offers a sufficiently loose but well understood concept. However nobody I asked could offer me a clear explanation of what ‘backstop’ meant—so, while intelligible to politicians, it was not so for the general public; for this reason many news reports followed mention of the ‘backstop’ with a lengthy paraphrase!

There is no doubt that concern about immigration was a major issue regarding support for Brexit. Britain had been one of only three states to grant immediate free movement citizens from Eastern Europe states that joined the EU in 2004. Between May 2004 and September 2009, 1.5 million workers migrated from the new EU member states to the UK, although around half of these returned home. On announcing a referendum David Cameron sought to renegotiate the conditions surrounding one of the so-called ‘four freedoms’ of EU membership: the right of workers to move anywhere within the EU. He was offered what became known as an ‘emergency brake’ which was an arrangement by which the EU deal would allow any member country to limit access to in-work benefits for new EU immigrants for up to 7 years with the agreement of the European Parliament. The official name of the arrangement was ‘an alert and safeguard’ mechanism; this had a highly technocratic ring to it and so it became known in the media as an ‘emergency brake’. An emergency brake is a brake (on a car or train)

that can be used for stopping in the event of failure of the main brakes. The reason why the metaphor was probably so attractive was because it acknowledged that immigration to the EU had reached a crisis point: there was some form of emergency. This implied a moral duty to undertake action. This metaphor shows how technical language has to be translated by metaphor into language that is intelligible because of its implied moral meaning.

Purpose and Approach

The purpose of this book is to explain how, why, and with what effect, metaphor was employed by the two sides in the Brexit debate. This purpose is part of Critical Metaphor Analysis¹⁵—an approach that explores how metaphors are used to create rival, contested views of the world, ideologies. Given the complexity, seriousness and emotion surrounding the question of EU membership—and its very high political stakes—it is hardly surprising that metaphors have coloured the discourse. Whether in official statements of political position, press articles, social media posts or in the more formal arguments developed in debating chambers, metaphors were used in the telling of moral stories that resonated with audiences. This is because they echoed the essentially popular language of so-called ‘ordinary’ people many of whom are not experts and are not well versed in the discourse of trade agreements or international law. Not only do metaphors serve up ‘palatable’ ideas that seek out their own audiences on social media, they are ways of bringing moral issues into the domain of popular experience. Drawing on the proverbs and idioms to which people respond translates professional registers into a language that is more familiar for average people: the eating of cakes, the picking of cherries and emergency brakes.

My method was to identify, analyse and compare metaphors relating to Brexit from three data sources. Wherever I found a metaphor in one of the sources I hunted around to see if it also occurred in one of the others. From this process I was able to identify patterns of metaphor common to all three sources and identify the underlying meaning frames that are presented in this book. The sources were:

1. **Social Media** I read many of the postings from Twitter during the period 1st January 2016–31st December 2018 using the following hashtags: #Brexit, #VoteLeave and #VoteRemain—and all of the postings with these hashtags in the week prior to the UK Referendum (June 16th–June 23rd 2016). The personal nature of Twitter, entering into the privacy of the home, enhanced its potential as a source of personal and cognitive insight. A study of metaphors on Twitter provides a snapshot view into the social cognition of voters. During the Referendum campaign the use of marketing experts by politically interested groups has demonstrated that Twitter and other social media platforms were available for propaganda purposes.
2. **Political Communication** I read the scripted text versions of many speeches and all press articles authored by politicians with a focus on Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg. For Boris Johnson I assembled 40,000 words of his speeches and 82,000 words of his press articles and for Jacob Rees-Mogg I assembled 16,300 words of speeches and 46,000 words of his press articles. In both cases these were taken from the 3-year period 2016 to 2018 (inclusive). As well as reading these language samples, identification of metaphor was assisted by electronic techniques such as the creation of wordlists and keyword lists. For this purpose I used a sample corpus of 500,000 words of texts authored by British politicians.
3. **Press Media** I examined all newspapers during the period January 2016 to December 2018, using the Nexis database. Because of the volume of data it was necessary to take a qualitative analysis of a representative sample of texts with balanced attention to the views of both sides in the campaign. I searched for articles with ‘Brexit’ in the headline field. This allowed me to confirm and find further examples of the frames, metaphors, allegories and scenarios that I had identified in the other two data sources as well to identify new metaphors. The press were divided over their position during the referendum and Table 1.1 summarises their positions and approximate readership in 2018.

The number of newspaper types were evenly divided between the two referendum ‘sides’, however, once circulation is taken into account,

Table 1.1 British national press circulation and affiliation (2016)^a

Pro-Remain		Pro-Leave	
<i>The Mail on Sunday</i>	1,388,059	<i>The Sun</i>	1,787,096
<i>The Daily Mirror</i>	809,147	<i>Daily Mail</i>	1,589,471
<i>The Sunday Mirror</i>	749,061	<i>The Sun on Sunday</i>	1,487,301
<i>The Times</i>	404,155	<i>The Sunday Times</i>	770,370
<i>The Sunday People</i>	279,837	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	472,033
<i>The i</i>	271,859	<i>Daily Star</i>	470,369
<i>The Financial Times</i>	198,237	<i>Daily Express</i>	408,700
<i>The Observer</i>	183,210	<i>The Sunday Express</i>	369,666
<i>The Guardian</i>	164,163	<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	355,044
<i>The Independent</i>	55,193	<i>The Daily Star Sunday</i>	299,146
Total	4,502,921		8,009,196

^ahttps://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspapers_in_the_United_Kingdom_by_circulation (The figures are based on the Audit Bureau of Circulation)

the readership of newspapers advocating leaving the EU was approximately twice that of newspapers advocating remaining in the EU. The 3 newspapers with the highest circulation—*The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun on Sunday*—all supported Brexit. Though this is an over-simplification as many newspapers published opinion articles on both sides of the debate, it gives a general idea of press bias. When ranked in terms of their editorial positioning the three most pro-Leave newspapers were *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mail* and *the Sun*, while the three most pro-Remain newspapers were *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mirror*; the most neutral were *The i* and *The Times*. A report by the University of Loughborough Centre for Research in Communication and Culture of the content of articles summarised the position as follows:

Our analysis reveals five national newspapers are backing REMAIN and five, including *The Sun*, are backing LEAVE. But if you factor in the strength of papers' endorsements and the size of their circulation, LEAVE has an 82% to 18% advantage over REMAIN.¹⁶

This survey only included the daily press, which explains the total of 10 newspapers whereas my overview of circulation includes additional Sunday papers taking the total number of papers to 20. Overall, both

in terms of the strengths of the endorsements, as well as the circulation numbers, the British media presented a pro-Brexit position.¹⁷

By identifying the frames, metaphors, allegories and scenarios of each side in the debate I hope to demonstrate how political opinions are contested through metaphor and how metaphors provide the raw material for both political manipulation and moral communication. Awareness of the relationship between metaphors, cognitive frames and political intentions by the general public should reduce vulnerability to external sources of manipulation—something which has been of growing concern since the Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed the selling of personal data for the purposes of propaganda and political marketing.

The referendum offered the perfect opportunity for identity formation by providing a framework for side-taking as ‘them’ and ‘us’ tribes formed around the ‘in’ and ‘out’ sides of the Referendum debate. Metaphors contribute to public debate since the metaphors of one group may be contested in a number of different ways: for example, by reversing the same metaphor, by adapting an existing metaphor, or by introducing an alternative metaphor frame. Metaphors become ideological when they express a set of beliefs and values that are shared by a particular social group and contribute to a worldview that unites and defines this group. Ideology is ‘the basis of the social representation shared by members of a group’.¹⁸ In the case of the UK referendum two different ideologies emerged: one of a global world based on interdependence and internationalism and the other of a world of separate national states with competing interests. But before seeing how this happened let’s consider some linguistic essential concepts for understanding what is going on: a warning the next section explores the theory and if you are not a linguist you may prefer to go directly to Chapter 2—and then refer back to this section as necessary.

Critical Metaphor Analysis—Some Concepts

In this section I explain how Critical Metaphor Analysis¹⁹ relies on a set of linguistic concepts that allows us to identify how language exerts a subtle influence over thought and opinion, and which eventually creates

myths and ideologies: whole ways of viewing the world. I would like to explain a set of terms that are crucial in this book including frames, allegories, scenarios and scripts and indicate how these all contribute to the approach that I have named ‘Critical Metaphor Analysis’.

Framing and Frames

I would like to emphasise that to ‘frame’ something is an action, a verb that creates subjective representations. When something is continually represented in the same way so that it becomes the established way of thinking about something it creates a frame, a noun: a socially shared perspective on something. The action of framing repeatedly creates frames that then form ideologies—socially shared representations. ‘Framing’ means drawing attention to, or raising awareness of, selective aspects of a particular entity or situation thereby introducing some form of cognitive bias. Entman offers a fuller definition of framing as:

...select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.²⁰

In political contexts framing represents a social situation as problematic, conveys a moral perspective and offers arguments for solutions to that problem. For example, studies by Thibodeau and Broditsky (2011,²¹ 2015²²) conducted empirical research into a fictional city that was undergoing a crime wave. When crime was framed by using ‘beast’ metaphors, participants in their experiment, advocated that the ‘beast’ should be captured and controlled, but when it was framed by ‘virus’ metaphors, the same participants thought that the ‘virus’ should be diagnosed and treated. Though it seems that nowadays it is rather more likely that a threatening virus might break out than a beast might go on a rampage—most researchers agree that the frames activated by metaphor influence interpretation (though they differ in how they do this) and can influence the way that people think and act in

the world. It is important to note two things: first the metaphors that activate the frames have to be introduced early on in a text and second that these metaphors do not act alone: frames are *not* activated by mentions of just *single* nouns like ‘beast’ or ‘virus’ but when these are followed up by related metaphors such as “in good shape” and “no obvious vulnerabilities”.

Frames are not triggered by metaphors that come screaming at you in the face. They are encrypted in patterns of extended metaphors that narrate allegories and scenarios. Nor are metaphors the *only* way of framing: sometimes frames are created by the assumptions they make: for example the phrases ‘Take back Control’ (Vote Leave 2016 Campaign) and ‘Make America Great Again’ (Trump 2016 Candidacy Campaign) both implied that in the past the British people had been in ‘control’, and now no longer were in control, and that America had been ‘great’ but no longer was. The use of ‘back’ and ‘again’ framed the historical status of these nations; framing historically implied that at an unspecified time in the past the nation was succeeding more than at present, so they framed a situation in terms of nostalgia for the past through the hidden logic of what linguists call ‘implicature’. Both phrases were systematically repeated so that they became the slogans of their respective campaigns. Trump also repeated phrases such as ‘crooked Hillary’, ‘The Queen of Corruption’ and ‘drain the swamp’ to frame his opponent as dishonest.²³ We are not sure that voters really thought Hillary Clinton should be ‘locked up’, as Trump urged, but the frame created an element of doubt in some people’s minds about her trustworthiness. This frame was then developed with claims about deleted emails from her home email server. Metaphor, repetition and, claims (true or false) provide the frames that form the basis of what were essentially moral arguments.

Over time the action of framing produces a result, a frame i.e. a noun (also known as a schema) that is a perspective that arises when things are constantly described in the same way. A frame arises from past experience on which participants rely when understanding situations. It is a conceptual structure derived from previous representations that allows us to understand a present situation better and serves as a filter for future interpretation of similar situations. Burgers et al. (2016,