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Reclaiming a unified American Narrative:

Lexical, grammatical, and story metaphors in a discussion of polarized identities

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Abstract

As part of an on-going project to apply metaphor analysis to understanding the cultural polarization that has recently obstructed discourse about political and cultural issues in both the United States and Europe, this essay examines the lexical, grammatical, and story metaphors in a recent editorial column, by conservative columnist Ross Douthat, that also focuses on this topic. In a key section of the essay, Douthat uses a blend of complex grammatical and lexical metaphors to highlight the contrast between the traditional American identity narrative of settlement and conquest and a recently emerged liberal counter-narrative, which Douthat epitomizes by quoting former President Obama's repeated insistence that "That's not who we are." Douthat's argument is contextualized by the reproduction of an image with the title "Engraving of a massacre of Indian women and children in Idaho by 19th century white settlers," which strengthens the contrasts and implied ironies embedded in his complex combination of grammatical and lexical metaphors. These relationships are brought into sharp focus through the metaphor-led analysis of the text and its interaction with the image, demonstrating the value of this approach to discourse analysis.

Keywords: metaphor; narrative; American national identity; cultural polarization; Trumpism

1. Introduction

This article continues a project initiated in response to the cultural polarization epitomized by the 2016 US Presidential campaign. In the first article in this series, Ritchie, Feliciano and Sparks (2018) compared the metaphors in Barack Obama's first inaugural address with those in Donald Trump's first inaugural address. We found that Obama emphasized unity, common aspirations and dreams; [p. 243] Trump emphasized polarization, contrasting his supporters, the "*forgotten*

people¹,” with the elites and politicians who inhabit “Washington, D.C.” Obama emphasized the agency of ordinary citizens, and their duty to help solve the problems facing the country; Trump emphasized the victimization and passivity of ordinary citizens, and assigned the agency to effect change to himself. Obama’s speech was grounded in allusions to shared history and culture, dating back through the Civil War to the founding of the nation; Trump looked backward toward an idealized vision of post-World War II prosperity.

Since the election, many people, including historians, political scientists, and editorial commentators from across the political spectrum have striven to make sense of the results, and of the rhetoric (both supporting and opposing Trump) that the election brought to the surface. Only a few of these commentators have directly addressed the issue of cultural polarization itself or attempted to propose a strategy for restoring mutually respectful dialog. A particularly interesting example of such an attempt is a “New York Times” column by conservative columnist Ross Douthat (2017), written shortly after Trump’s inauguration, which addresses the conservative disquiet, both over the rhetoric of Trump and his supporters and over the liberal opposition to “*Trumpism*.” Douthat’s column is important because it contrasts two stories about American identity (“Who Are We?”), and tells interlacing stories about the separate identity stories, how they have diverged in the past 50 years, and how they led to “*Trumpism*.” This column is of particular relevance to the project because of Douthat’s credentials as a social and cultural as well as political conservative who has authored a series of articles on this topic: it is important to this project to analyze both liberal and conservative blueprints for bridging the rhetorical divide. Douthat’s ruminations about ‘the American identity’ are structured through a complex blend of stories, metaphors, metaphorical stories, and grammatical metaphors that also

1. Consistent with my previous writings, I mark lexical metaphors by italics within quotation marks, grammatical metaphors by underlining, and conceptual metaphors in small capital letters.

illustrates the value of incorporating all of these metaphor types into a discourse analysis. This particular article is contextualized by a striking image that illustrates one of the central issues dividing the traditional version of the ‘American narrative’ from the liberal critique and counter-narrative. In this article, I examine Douthat’s blend of metaphor, narrative, and imagery, beginning with the accompanying image.

[p. 244]

2. Metaphor: Context-limited simulation theory (CLST)

Context-Limited Simulation Theory (Ritchie, 2012) blends Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Perceptual Simulation Theory (Barsalou, 2008; Bergen, 2012; Gibbs, 2006), and theories of semantic connections (e.g., Landauer & Dumais, 1997; Kintsch, 2008).

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, a verbal metaphor (“*forgotten* people”) expresses an underlying conceptual metaphor, a relationship in which one (usually more abstract) concept is experienced as another (usually less abstract) concept from a different domain, in this example, something like TO IGNORE OR DEVALUE IS TO FORGET or, more simply, ATTENTION IS MEMORY.

According to Perceptual Simulation Theory, when a metaphorical word or phrase is processed in detail (“*deeply*”), the neural systems associated with the literal meaning of the word or phrase are briefly and weakly activated, experienced as a *simulation* of the vehicle concept (Barsalou, 2008). For example, “*forgotten* people” might activate weak simulations of trying to recall a former acquaintance or, more poignantly, of a couple of waifs standing alone by the roadside. This theory helps to explain what it means, in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, to “experience the topic as the vehicle.” Stories also frequently take the form of metaphors, in which the vehicle story is used to express something about a topic story from an entirely different domain (Ritchie, 2017). Extending the ‘waif’ simulation, “*forgotten* people” might also activate a story about

someone driving away and leaving one or more members of the group at a service station or rest stop, perhaps a story recalled from the comedy “Bread and Tulips” (Soldini, 2000) or a news account of an actual incident, along with simulations of emotions (such as fear and desolation) associated with abandonment.

Halliday (1998; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999) has shown that commonplace transformation of a word from one grammatical form to another, as when a noun is used as, or transformed into, a verb (transformed or ‘transcategorized’), can be analyzed as a form of conceptual metaphor, which he calls a *grammatical metaphor* (GM). Mao (2010) provides an example: “these ideas have been subject to widespread criticism².” Here, the verb *to criticize* is transformed from action into an entity, criticism, with object-like properties including able to be *spread*, or distributed in space. This noun is modified by another grammatical metaphor, in which the verb *to spread* is transformed into a quality of *being spread* and blended with the adjective *wide* to form a new adjective that specifies the extent of the criticism. Grammatical metaphors are frequently, as in this example, blended with lexical metaphors (TO BE REPEATED IS TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN SPACE; CRITICISM IS AN OBJECT / SUBSTANCE). In “forgotten people,” *forget* (verb) is transformed to [p. 245] an adjective, so that the act of *forgetting* can be applied as a description of the person(s) who are *forgotten*. Although transcategorizations are sometimes uninteresting, analysis of grammatical metaphors can often illuminate the underlying cognitive processes, social relationships, and cultural assumptions. The interaction of grammatical metaphor with lexical metaphor, as in “forgotten people,” can be particularly illuminating.

A primary objective of this article is to continue exploring (and demonstrating) how metaphor-led discourse analysis, identifying and interpreting various classes of metaphor, can

2. I will designate grammatical metaphors by underlining them.

contribute to exposing themes in spoken and written texts and elucidate how these themes interconnect with each other and with the social, cultural, and historical contexts. I also illustrate how the combination of lexical and grammatical metaphors can enhance and add power and interest to a text.

3. Method

Following a procedure similar to Ritchie and Thomas (2015), the initial analysis was undertaken as part of a research seminar. Each participant initially read through the text independently, then identified metaphors using procedures outlined by Dorst and Kaal (2012): identify words and phrases with the potential to be understood metaphorically, determine the apparent meaning in context, and compare this meaning to the most basic meaning of the word or phrase, according to the Merriam Webster online dictionary. Following discussion of these interpretations by the group as a whole, we identified underlying conceptual metaphors, along with perceptual simulations that might reasonably be activated by the metaphorical word or phrase (Gibbs, 2006; Ritchie, 2010) and identified key metaphorical themes in the text. Due to time limitations, this process was only partially completed in the seminar setting; the author independently completed the remainder of the analysis. As discussed in the previous section, this included identification of grammatical metaphors (Halliday, 1998; Ritchie & Zhu, 2015) and metaphorical stories (Ritchie, 2017). It should also be noted that seminar participants, working in small teams, conducted analyses of other texts related to the polarization project in parallel to analysis of this text. Some of these results will be reported separately (see for example Smith, 2019).

[p. 246]

4. Data and analysis

4.1 The accompanying image: “Enlightened Christian warfare” – or genocide?

The Douthat column is prefaced by a reproduction of an 1868 engraving with the subtitle “Engraving of a massacre of Indian women and children in Idaho by 19th century white settlers,”³ shocking both for the sprawling corpses, with two ambiguous figures engaged in cutting scalps off the bodies, and for the casual demeanor of four white men, leaning on their rifles as they survey the carnage, one with his right foot on a fallen body. The subtitle accompanying Douthat’s column has been altered from the original footnote in Getty Images: “Enlightened Christian warfare in the 19th century. Massacre of Indian women and children in Idaho by white scouts and their red allies. Engraving, 1868.”⁴ However, the accompanying heading on the Getty web-page reads “Whites killing Native American women and children,” and Getty Images’ key words include “Mass Murder.” This may have been intended to suggest an ironic reading of the title in the engraving itself. However, irony was certainly *not* intended in 1868, when Native Americans were regarded as savages, scarcely human, and controlling or extirpating them in order to ‘tame’ the frontier was widely regarded as a Christian duty (Huntington, 2004). Although it is not clear whether Douthat selected the image, or even knew that this particular image would accompany his column (he does not explicitly refer to it), it is apparent from several passages in the essay that he was fully aware of both what the image was originally intended to depict and what it depicts to a more modern sensibility (as per the heading and key word on Getty Images).

4.2 “Who are we?” The structure of the essay

3. Full disclosure: I was raised and educated through secondary school in rural Idaho. However, the story depicted in this illustration was not mentioned in the Idaho History textbooks used at that time.

4. I am indebted to Reviewer #2 for pointing out the discrepancy.

Immediately below the massacre image, Douthat quotes President Obama: “‘That’s not who we are.’ So said President Obama, again and again *throughout* his administration, in speeches urging Americans to *side with* him against the various outrages perpetrated by Republicans.” It is hard not to read “That’s not who we are” as a response to the image and the story it implies, but Douthat sustains the focus on contemporary politics: “And now so say countless liberals, urging their fellow [p. 247] Americans to reject the *exclusionary* policies and *America-first posturing* of President Donald Trump.” The implications of the massacre image are never directly addressed, although the image and its implications overshadow the entire essay. “*Posturing*” combines grammatical with lexical metaphor in a way that ironically discredits Trump’s “*America-first*” claims: *Posture* (noun: position of the body) → *posture* (verb: assume a position of the body), lexical metaphor AN IDEA OR BELIEF IS A PHYSICAL POSITION. Thus, Trump is merely *assuming a position* (and, by implication, not to be taken seriously).

The opening allusion to the liberal “not who we are” identity is followed by a more detailed account and critique of the liberal ‘American identity’ story, beginning in paragraph 2: “The problem with this rhetorical *line* is that it *implicitly undercuts* itself.” “*Undercuts*” initially implies a river or stream eroding the bank underneath a building; adding “*itself*” implies that the structure – or perhaps a machine such as a mechanical shovel – is digging out the ground on which it is situated; this metaphor is repeated in a different form in the next paragraph as “this *self-undermining flaw*.” Both metaphors imply a STRUCTURE / STABILITY metaphor; the second version combines it with a grammatical metaphor, transforming the composite adjective + verb to an adjective that modifies, and thus assigns (self-destructive) agency to “*flaw*,” a metaphor implying the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS A STRUCTURE / CONTRADICTION IS INSTABILITY. Thus, the liberal argument is *unstable* because it is self-contradictory.

Paragraph 2 continues with the observation that, given the level of support for Trump, “*something* besides the *pieties* of *cosmopolitan* liberalism is very much a *part of* who we are.” The sense of irony or sarcasm conveyed by “*America-first posturing* of President Donald Trump” in the first paragraph is matched by the sarcasm implicit, in the second paragraph, in “*pieties*”: (*pious*, an adjective meaning ‘devoutly worshipful’ transformed to *piety*, a noun meaning ‘quality of being religious,’ then metonymically extended to *piety*, a noun meaning ‘unthinking acceptance of a belief or view’), consistent with a conceptual metaphor politics is sacred / moral (cf. Lakoff, 1996). Intentionally or not, this sarcasm toward both Trump and his critics potentially distracts from the connection between the Idaho massacre image and the “*something*” that is “very much a *part of* who we are.” (The intention may have been to achieve a kind of rhetorical balance by applying equally sarcastic metaphors to both sides.)

The third paragraph ends with the criticism of liberals who, “in *seeking* to *reject* Trump’s chauvinist *vision*, ... *end up* excluding too much of what a *unifying* counternarrative would *require*.” Presumably part of what is required is somehow resolving the moral ambiguities that saturate the Idaho massacre engraving and by extension the histories of recently discredited leaders like Presidents Jefferson, Jackson, and Wilson (mentioned toward the end of the essay). The atrocities [p. 248] committed by the “heroic settlers” in the engraving, and the atrocities associated with so many of those who are still regarded as national heroes and leaders, are “very much a *part of* who we are” (IDENTITY IS AN OBJECT), and consistent with Huntington’s (2004) analysis. This interpretation is invited by the juxtaposition of image and text, but it is nowhere directly stated.

The second section of Douthat’s column summarizes a more inclusive ‘national story’ that was shared by liberalism and conservatism until the 1960s. This is the story associated with

the bravery of the settlers in the face of an often harsh wilderness and fierce attacks by Native Americans and outlaw Whites (as chronicled in so many Western movies), a story also associated with the philosophy, wisdom, and statesmanship of Washington, Jefferson and Wilson, and with the bold military leadership of Washington and Jackson – and of so many who fought the Civil War on both sides. Then Douhat provides a story about how liberals came to correct and then to reject the ‘older narrative,’ as information about the less savory actions of these historic figures was brought to light (this revisionist narrative is also apparent in many Hollywood westerns, beginning as early as the 1950s and 60s), even as the conservative version of the national story became “steadily more *exclusionary*.” (The liberal narrative *excludes* themes important to conservatives; the conservative narrative *excludes* ethnic and religious minorities.) The final short section challenges any leader who “wants to *bury Trumpism* (as opposed to just beating Trump)” to “*reach for*” a unifying story “about who we are and were, not just what we’re not.”

“*Bury Trumpism*” implies objectifying or personifying, metaphorically representing the set of ideas and beliefs associated with Trump and his followers as a physical entity, an object or person that can (unlike abstract ideas and beliefs) be *buried*, disposed of *below ground* (WEAK/ DEAD IS DOWN) and *out of sight* (KNOWN IS VISIBLE); if the metaphor is understood as personification, POPULIST IDEOLOGY IS TRUMP, there is also a potential implication of *killing* the personified ideology. Again, the quality of this ‘unifying story’ must somehow include the implications of the Idaho massacre image that leads off the column.

These broad stories (liberal, conservative, and the preceding composite story, all in the shadow of the massacre image and its implied story) are interwoven, along with briefer stories and story metaphors, into a larger story about the struggle over the ‘American identity,’ and tied

together with a set of thematically related metaphors. Most of these fit into three conceptual categories, OBJECT (e.g., from paragraph 2 “*something* besides the *pieties* of cosmopolitan liberalism is very much a *part of* who we are”; from paragraph 3 “This ... *flaw makes* the trope a useful way to *grasp* the dilemmas”), SPACE (e.g., from paragraph 1, “So said President Obama... *throughout* his administration, in speeches urging Americans to *side with* him”), and STRUCTURE (e.g., from paragraph 2, “it implicitly *undercuts* itself”; [p. 249] from paragraph 3, “this *self-undermining flaw*”; from paragraph 6, “crisis of the *house divided*”).

The most striking examples take the form of complex grammatical metaphors, a few of which have already been described. Underscoring the implications of the Idaho massacre image, Douthat goes on to contrast the idealized liberal “universalist” narrative of inclusion and multiculturalism with a “particularist,” “non-universalist” narrative of conquest, settlement, and “*melting-pot*” assimilation. “*Melting-pot*,” although it has been used so often that it might be considered to be lexicalized, is an interesting example of a complex blend of lexical and grammatical metaphor – implying a metaphorical story as well. (That it is far from being a ‘dead’ metaphor is attested by its frequent contrastive pairing with an alternative metaphor for acculturation, in which the mixture of cultures is expressed as a *salad bowl* or *fruit salad* – to which Douthat does not refer.) The grammatical metaphor transcategorizes the verb *melt* into an adjective *melting*, which usually implies the act of becoming melted, but is combined with a noun to produce a compound noun referring both to ‘a place in which substances are melted’ (U.S. multi-ethnic culture) and ‘the substances that are melted’ (the various national and ethnic cultures brought together in the U.S.). In the context of an industrial economy the phrase implies a metal foundry where different metals (different cultures) are heated, blended, and combined into a new metal such as brass, or bronze, or steel that has qualities different from and superior to

any of the constituent metals. Douthat intersperses this discussion with a narrative about how the two versions of the ‘American story’ began to diverge in the post-1960s era, culminating in a speculation about the necessity – and difficulty – of developing a new, unifying narrative.

4.3 The core of the argument.

The core of Douthat’s argument appears in paragraphs 4–6, where he contrasts the emerging idealized liberal narrative of inclusion and multi-culturalism with a more traditional narrative, using a series of phrases that blend conceptual metaphors with complex grammatical metaphors. The liberal narrative is “*cosmopolitan*” and “*universalist*.” *Cosmos* is a synonym of *universe*; *politian* derives from Greek *polis*, city-state; having to do with citizenship. Both words are grammatical metaphors in which a noun is transformed to an adjective; *universal* is further transformed to a different adjective (*applying to* transformed to *favoring*). These grammatical transformations allow the concept of the entire physical universe to be understood metaphorically as the entire population with its cultural and political activities, as a characterization of *narrative*: it is a narrative about *everyone* (in contrast to “*particularist*,” discussed below, which is limited to *particular* people). [p. 250]

The liberal narrative also defines the United States as a “a *propositional* nation bound together by ideas”: *propose* (verb), ‘set forth something to be done,’ is transformed to *proposition* (noun), ‘putting forth’ or ‘advocating,’ then to the adjective form, implying that the essence of the nation is the actions it proposes or advocates – by implication its *ideas*, “rather than any specific cultural traditions — a nation of immigrants *drawn to Ellis Island* ...” Here “*Ellis Island*” stands as a metonym for immigration in general, a story metaphor invoking the long series of immigrations (primarily from Europe, given the east coast location of Ellis Island)

and for the *attractive* qualities of the American Dream: AMERICA IS A MAGNET; IMMIGRANTS ARE IRON FILINGS. The nation is also “a nation of minorities *claiming* rights *too long* denied”: RIGHTS ARE OBJECTS; TIME IS SPACE. This also implies a story about the long (and continuing) struggle for equality that matches and supplements the series of implied immigration stories. This contrast is particularly important in the light of Trump’s repeated attacks on previous U.S. immigration policy.

Finally, the liberal narrative is “exclusionary” inasmuch as it *excludes* or *omits* central parts of the traditional American narrative. “Exclusionary” blends OBJECT and CONTAINER metaphors (elements of the traditional story are objects *excluded* from the ‘container’ of the liberal narrative; this OBJECT / CONTAINER metaphor is blended with a grammatical metaphor – the verb, *exclude*, is transformed to a noun, *exclusion*, then to an adjective *exclusionary*. The concept of EXCLUSION is further emphasized by a series of ‘not-x’ constructions (not-Anglo-Saxon, not-European... not-white, not-male, not-heterosexual). These can also be analyzed as a form of grammatical metaphor, in which ‘not-x’ does not necessarily *exclude* ‘Anglo-Saxon, European, white, male, and heterosexual’ from our national identity, but does deny that these are the its primary or central features – and locates the central features of American identity elsewhere, in some other, unspecified, qualities or attributes.

What the liberal narrative excludes are the “more particularist understandings of Americanism,” which are part of “the *real* American past.” (The *inclusive* “*universalist*” narrative *excludes* the *exclusive* “*particularist*” narrative – an ironic reversal Douthat may have intended but does not emphasize.) The grammatical transformation of *particle* (noun, EVENTS ARE SMALL OBJECTS) to *particular* (adjective) to *particularist* (adjective) characterizes a

traditional understanding of America as a focus on very specific events (and perhaps persons involved in those events), rather than focusing on broad (*universalist*) themes.

In contrast to the *universalist* liberal narrative of ideals, immigrants, and universal tolerance, the "*particularist*" narrative is about "*founders*" who "*built a new order atop specifically European intellectual traditions*": NATION IS A STRUCTURE; TRADITION IS A FOUNDATION. It is also about immigrants who "*joined a [p. 251] settler culture, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, that demanded assimilation to its norms. [PERSONIFICATION] Our crisis of the house divided was a Christian civil war*" (STRUCTURE; OBJECT). "Our great national *drama* was a westward *expansion* that conquered a native population rather than coexisting with it." With "conquered... rather than coexisting" Douthat alludes for the first time to the story implied by the introductory image – but without directly acknowledging the murderous implications of "rather than coexisting" that the image illustrates, and in the context of a THEATER metaphor that further diminishes its impact. "*Demanded assimilation*" implies a contrast with the multi-cultural view that encourages immigrants (and minorities) to preserve and celebrate their own unique cultures (sometimes dismissively labelled 'identity politics'), and potentially activates schemas associated with conservative complaints about immigrants who fail to learn to speak English, and about the practice of translating road signs and public documents into other languages to accommodate non-English speaking immigrants.

Consistent with "our great national *drama*," Douthat points out that, "as late as the 1960s, liberalism as well as conservatism identified with these *particularisms*, and with a national narrative that honored and included them." The Civil Rights (and anti-war) movements "assumed a Christian moral consensus. Liberal intellectuals *linked* the New Deal and the Great Society to Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Pop-culture *utopians projected* 'Wagon

Train' into the future as 'Star Trek.'" And, one might add, pop-culture allegorists subsequently projected John Wayne classics like "Red River," with its theme of father-son conflict, into a futuristic 'different galaxy' as "Star Wars" – also with a theme of father-son conflict.

This once unitary "national story" began to unravel into increasingly divergent, and eventually mutually intolerant, stories when, "for a variety of reasons — a necessary *reckoning* with white *supremacism*" (MORAL ACCOUNTING; POWER IS UP / adj → noun → noun transformation), "a new and diverse *wave* of immigration, the *pull* of a more *globalist* ethos" (MAGNET; HUMANITY IS THE WORLD / noun → adj → noun → adj), "the *waning* of institutional religion" (OBJECT) "— that mid-century story *stopped making* as much sense" (OBJECT). "*In its place emerged* a left-wing narrative" (OBJECT) "that *stands in judgment*" (PERSON) "on the racist-misogynist-*robber baron* past..." Here, the 'left-wing' multi-culturalist narrative of an inclusive and racially tolerant nation is personified in a LAW metaphor, combined with a conventional metaphor for exploitative late 19th and early 20th century industrialists combined with a conventional metaphor for industrialists who are not held to account for their actions (*robber barons* = 'criminal' + 'hereditary nobility') and grammatically transformed to an adjective characterizing an entire era.

This description of the left-wing (historical revisionist) narrative is followed by a reprise of the 'older narrative' which, for many Americans (presumably [p. 252] including Trump supporters) "still *feels* like the real history. They still *see* themselves more as settlers than as immigrants, identifying with the Pilgrims and the Founders, with Lewis and Clark and Davy Crockett and Laura Ingalls Wilder." "*Settlers*" seems to imply an empty or nearly-empty land (dismissing the millions of native Americans already present) in contrast to "*immigrants*," which implies entry into an existing, fully-formed society. (Huntington (2004) distinguishes between

‘settlers,’ who come as a group, bringing a coherent culture of their own and ‘immigrants,’ who come individually and adapt to the existing culture.) This implicit contrast is reinforced by the identification with the earliest Anglo-Americans (contrasting with ‘immigrants,’ who came well *after* the nation was founded and the national identity narrative fully in place) and with the explorers who ‘*opened the wilderness.*’ This passage continues, “they still *embrace the Iliadic mythos* that *grew up around* the Civil War, prefer the *melting pot* to multiculturalism.” “*Iliadic mythos*” activates a complex schema associated with classical Greece, which figured prominently in early 19th century thinking; apologists for the Confederacy characterized Southern society as a modern continuation of Athenian democracy (which was also built partly on slavery) and Civil War generals as the modern equivalent of the demi-god Heroes who fought the Trojan War. “*Melting pot*” is a conventional metaphor, implying that the cultural beliefs and practices of all citizens ‘melt into one substance,’ in contrast to the ideal of ‘multi-culturalism,’ in which a variety of cultures exist in parallel to each other.

The next paragraph marks a turning point in the argument, beginning with an explanation of Trump’s “*ascent*” as “an attempt to restore their story to *pre-eminence*. It’s a restoration attempt that can’t succeed, because the country has changed too much, and because that national narrative required correction.” Although Douthat does not directly address it, Trump’s campaign slogan, “*make America great again,*” which has been lampooned as implying “*make America white again,*” might also be understood as a plea to ‘make the conventional American identity narrative great (and *central*) again,’ that is, to honor the conventional ‘*settler*’ story as an unqualified *heroic* story, unstained by accounts of cowardly attacks on unarmed women and children (as depicted in the Idaho massacre image). Alluding again to the implications of the opening image, Douthat acknowledges that the conventional “national narrative required

correction. The *myth of the 'Lost Cause' had to die*, the reality of racial wrongs required more acknowledgment, the Judeo-Christian *center* had to *make room* for a larger plurality of faiths.” The PERSONIFICATION of *myth* as something alive, thus capable of death, emphasizes the emotional and even familial attachment to a romantic and classicist view of the Civil War. The metaphors, Judeo-Christian *center* and *make room* preserve the idea (strongly emphasized by Huntington, 2004) that the American national identity is fundamentally Judeo-Christian (Huntington omits [p. 253] the ‘Judeo’ part) but at the same time implies that the religious *space* can (and must) be expanded.

The tragic and heroic implications of “*Illiad*ic” and “*Lost Cause*” frame the ‘Old South’ as the direct heir of the Classical Tradition and the Civil War as a noble struggle to defend neo-Athenian democracy against tyranny. This framing, still preferred by apologists for the Confederacy, Douthat insists must be de-emphasized, and the war *reframed* as a rebellion against the U.S. constitutional government by men who had taken an oath to defend it, a rebellion explicitly justified in support of human slavery. (Here Douthat links to another, earlier essay (June 24, 2015) critical of the conflation of Civil War nostalgia with other, nobler aspects of Southern culture such as its literature, music, cuisine, and hospitality.)

The Idaho massacre image placed at the beginning of the column makes it clear that the ‘settler story’ includes brutal murder of women and children by white settlers who assume a nonchalant pose afterward (consistent with Huntington’s claim that they regarded their acts as moral and justified by their Christian faith), just as the history of Jim Crow lynching and anti-negro riots cannot be edited out of the story of the “*Lost Cause*” and post-Reconstruction era defense of racial supremacy. “But *so far* we haven’t *found a way* to correct the story while honoring its *full sweep* — including all the white-male-Protestant-European protagonists to

whom, for all their sins, we *owe so much* of our *inheritance*.” This is the essence of the conundrum posed by the Idaho massacre image, along with the recent focus on the ownership and abuse of slaves by Washington, Jefferson, and other ‘founding fathers,’ the blatant racism of Woodrow Wilson, and Andrew Jackson’s brutal destruction of a thriving Cherokee community and the subsequent ‘*trail of tears*’ relocation of the survivors to a remote wilderness (in disregard of a Supreme Court decision in their favor). All of this is an integral part of the national ‘*inheritance*,’ and must somehow be acknowledged – but, Douthat implies, acknowledged in a way that allows us still to celebrate (and profit from) that inheritance.

Following a paragraph detailing how the liberal and conservative / traditional stories continue to diverge, Douthat ponders whether a “*unifying* story” is even possible. “Maybe the *gap between* a heroic founders-and-settlers narrative and the truth about what befell blacks and Indians and others cannot be adequately *bridged*.” The LOCATION IN SPACE/ BRIDGE metaphor is conventional, but the implications are significant here: a *bridge* connects (rather than blending) two locations that remain separate. The other truths have been told and continue to be told in addition to the national narrative, in books, movies, and more recently in monuments like the National Memorial for Peace and Justice that recently opened in Montgomery, Alabama (the first capital of the Confederacy), a graphic reminder of the long Southern reign of terror. Reflecting (and negating) [p. 254] the “*Illiadic*” glorification of the ‘conquest and settlement’ story, which present a heroic glorification of the traditional story, these counter-narratives (as represented by the Idaho massacre image) typically emphasize the callous brutality of White Male protagonists.

4.4 Grammatical metaphors and ironic contrasts

The complex blend of grammatical and lexical metaphors in the central part of the column creates a set of oppositions and contrasts with ironic overtones crucial to it. “Globalist,” “cosmopolitan” and “universalist” (as well as the opposite, “non-universalist”) anchor the topic (America’s identity narrative) not only in space but in an all-inclusive container. However, “non-universalist” restricts the identity narrative to a smaller and specific “*location in space*.” “Particularist” and “particularisms” imply that identity narratives are ‘*objects*.’ “Exclusionary” connects these objects to the specific locality implied by “non-universalist.” The Idaho massacre image identifies the particulars, the objects (persons and stories) that are included and those that are excluded in the “non-universalist” identity narrative – and implicitly refutes the “globalist,” “cosmopolitan” and “universalist” identity narrative.

“Propositional” characterizes the American identity as abstract, separate from the ‘*space / time*’ implied by the other metaphorical constructions. However, “*bound together*” implies that elements of the nation are objects and contrasts the ephemeral ‘bonds’ of ideas with those of cultural traditions. Thus, in characterizing the liberal counter to Trump’s “exclusionary” narrative in terms of “a propositional nation *bound together* by ideas rather than any specific cultural traditions,” Douthat seems to contrast the abstract “universalist” ideals of the liberal opposition with something more specific, with objects located in space / time. But cultural traditions, however specific, are also ideas; as such, they exist only in memory, in discourse, and in the monuments, movies, television programs, and other cultural artifacts which, as recent controversies have shown (and Douthat’s argument reiterates), are themselves subject to contested readings.

“Illiadic” combines metaphor, conceptual metaphor, and metonym to create a dense distillation of the Confederate ‘Lost Cause’ myth. The noun “Illiad,” the name of an epic poem

about a prolonged war in which the city-state of Troy heroically resisted Greek besiegers, only to be defeated through deception, is transcategorized into an adjective, imputing some or all of the qualities of the poem to the Confederacy, the 'Old South.' By metonymic extension, the heroic qualities of Troy, Aeneas in particular, are imputed to the soldiers of the Confederacy, and the deceptive ruse through which Troy was defeated is imputed to the eventual victory of the Union forces. However, as a metaphor "*Illiadic*" also imputes the [p. 255] qualities of the Greek civilization that produced Homer to the Old South. The framing stories and myths packed into this complex blend are all part of what Douthat calls on the *New South* to reject and reframe.

5. Discussion

5.1 Reconciling the polarities?

The question posed by Douthat amounts to this: how can a single narrative about conquest and settlement that included systematic physical violence and cultural suppression encompass both perspectives, that of the conquerors and that of the conquered? Douthat calls for "a story about who we are and were, not just what we're not, that the people who still believe in yesterday's American story can recognize as their own." But "yesterday's American story," the story of "who we were," is the White Christian male conqueror's story (Huntington, 2004). The *Wagon Train* and *Little House on the Prairie* stories cannot exclude the story told by the Idaho massacre image. The 'glorious myth' of 'the Lost Cause' cannot be divorced from the brutality of slavery, the 'peculiar institution' it was fought to preserve or from the subsequent long century of racial lynch-mob violence. How can the callous brutality of the White male Christian leaders who conquered and settled the continent and fought the Civil War be seamlessly blended into a story about their vision and their heroic accomplishments?

Editorial columnist Wesley Morris (2018), immediately after Bill Cosby was found guilty on three counts of sexual assault, pondered a question about another, arguably related, diverging narrative – “#MeToo” vs. “gender equality.” After describing Cosby’s long status (through his television portrayal of the fictional Cliff Huxtable) as a role model for young African-American males, Morris writes that the guilty verdict “can’t undo what he once did for me, which was to make me believe in myself... I don’t want to lose that belief, just the man who ennobled me to possess it in the first place.” Morris closes with the observation that “We’re in a moment of cleaving terrible people from their great work. It’s a luxury conundrum, one that feels like a mockery of tremendous human suffering. With Mr. Cosby, though, these are questions worth seriously considering. How do I, at least, cleave this man from the man he seduced me into becoming?”

The question Morris asks about Bill Cosby might be asked by admirers of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Woodrow Wilson. It might be asked by admirers of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and the White Christian scouts depicted in the Idaho Massacre image – and by admirers of Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, and even Richard Nixon. It seems impossible to blend such moral [p. 256] opposites with respect to the recent flood of revelations about the sex crimes (and other violations) of contemporary cultural figures, and it seems equally impossible to blend our horrified reaction to the genocidal crimes of historical figures, still regarded by many as heroes, with a due respect and appreciation for the democratic institutions and economic vitality these men and women created and bequeathed to us. Douthat insists that it is necessary: “any leader who wants to *bury Trumpism* (as opposed to just beating Trump) would need to *reach for* one — for a story about who we are and were, not just what we’re not, that the people who still believe in yesterday’s American story can recognize as their own.”

President Obama tried to do just this in several of his own speeches. In his early campaign speech, “A More Perfect Union,” he identified the compromise that included slavery in the Constitution as America’s “*original sin*,” and he built the speech around parallel stories of working class Blacks and working class Whites, their attempts to achieve financial security and their frustrations (Ritchie, 2018). In his First Inaugural Address he called in detail on foundational stories of the American Revolution and the Civil War (Ritchie, Feliciano & Sparks, 2018) and celebrated these stories as the basis for national renewal. However, in the face of unrelenting partisan opposition to his policies, Obama frequently lapsed into accusatory and polarizing rhetoric, as in his 2013 speech on climate change at Georgetown University when he contrasted contemporary Republican opposition with earlier Republican cooperation, implying venal hypocrisy on the part of his opponents (Ritchie & Thomas, 2015) and implicitly separating *their* story from that of himself and his liberal supporters.

Douthat does not directly address the tangled moral issues involved in the synthesis he calls for. Consider the virulently negative responses to Donald Trump’s controversial comments on the Charlottesville protests and counter-protests: “I think there is blame on both sides. You look at both sides. I think there is blame on both sides. You had some very bad people in that group. You also had some very fine people on both sides.” Would this have been less objectionable if Trump had inserted “otherwise” – “You also had some *otherwise* very fine people...”? Is it possible that a person who joins a protest march under Nazi flags could be judged an “otherwise fine” person? Is it possible to qualify the Idaho massacre image in that way – “There were some *otherwise* fine people participating in that genocidal rampage”? Is it morally possible to move past the image of the man standing with one foot nonchalantly resting on the corpse of a recently murdered woman and recognize something heroic or at least

honorable about the labor he invested in building a home in the wilderness? This seems to be a necessary part of what Douthat calls for; the conundrum is how to achieve it.

The ‘settlers’ story about “who we were” is arguably a White Protestant myth (Huntington, 2004). There is also a Native American story, and there is an ex-slave [p. 257] story – and a Chinese railroad worker and New Mexico / California Latino story and a LGBTQ story, and these stories are logically inseparable from the traditional story – but they have not, to date, had much part in it. These stories have been told – recently by non-white and non-male movie makers and authors – but the telling has largely been accusatory, more in confrontation with, than addition to, the traditional story. The conundrum is how to integrate them without totally devaluing the traditional ‘heroic settler’ story. This may be the primary reason why Obama failed to achieve his unifying goals – he focused on parallel positive stories, barely touching on the darker shadows that are so graphically explicit in the Idaho massacre image (and in the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, with its combination of symbolic and graphically literal images of racial torture and lynching, that was recently opened in Montgomery Alabama), leaving the wounds they represent to fester.

The other stories, the stories of women, native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, sexual minorities, and others previously omitted from the traditional narrative of national identity have, over the past half century, increasingly emerged into mainstream American culture, in books, movies, television, monuments, and many other forms. At the same time, the character flaws, hypocrisy, bigotry, sexual exploitation, and downright cruelty of American ‘heroes,’ past and contemporary, have been exposed and called out – in Douthat’s words, they are “*in the dock*,” before the tribunal of history. So, the “otherwise...” question seems to take in an ever-widening circle of “*fallen heroes*.” Douthat’s essay focuses on

the same rhetorical contrasts identified by Ritchie, Feliciano, and Sparks (2018), including unity vs. polarization, ‘political correctness’ vs. ‘telling it like it is,’ an open and shared cultural and political history vs. a sense of ‘aspirational nostalgia.’ In this essay, Douthat leads us to the edge but addresses only the conventional narrative, the narrative cherished by Trump supporters. Even the Idaho massacre image brings in the dark side of ethnic cleansing and murder as an implied moral judgment against the ‘settlers and conquerors’ and, by implication, against those who continue to honor them as heroic.

To his credit, Douthat continues to wrestle with these issues; it has been a recurrent theme in his writing since even before Trump’s election. After the analysis on which this article is based was completed, Douthat published a follow-up column titled “Delusions of Kanye” (May 12, 2018) in which he characterized liberal responses to Kanye West’s pro-Trump political statements as “*hysterical*” and exhibiting a “*stifling sweatbox quality*,” then excoriated rightwing “excitement” about the incident as a demonstration of “the *depth* of right-wing *cluelessness* on race.” In the recent column he serves up a series of challenges to conservative thinkers and politicians that help to fill the void in the “Who are We” column (analyzed in this paper). He challenges conservatives opposed to [p. 258] attempting to solve racism through legislation to “think harder about how to honor the particularities of the African-American experience.” He asks conservatives opposed to removing Confederate statues “What more capacious retellings of history, with black heroes instead of sentimentalized Confederates, are you willing to endorse?” In response to recent exaggerated charges of ‘urban’ voter fraud, he suggests, “if you want people to consider joining your coalition, act like you want to compete for their vote, not just discourage them from voting.”

Since the 2016 election, several normally conservative and conservative-leaning commentators (e.g., David Brooks and George Will) have been engaged in a similar soul-searching about the implications of the Trump phenomenon for the conservative world-view. These writings are much more interesting than the liberal commentary, both theoretically and culturally, in large part because the task they undertake requires a balancing act (preserving what is morally and intellectually honest about the conservative agenda while examining what might be dishonest and corrupt) that has not been as fully required of the liberal side. The column examined in this article is particularly interesting both because of the questions it raises about narrative and because of the astute use of a combination of metaphorical devices to highlight the contrasts and contradictions that are the focus of the essay.

5.2 Implications for metaphor theory and analysis

Halliday (1998) claims that grammatical transcategorizations (grammatical metaphors) are a form of conceptual metaphor, in that they represent, and lead the reader to experience, one concept as an entirely different concept. When the verb, *exclude*, 'to deny access to,' is transcategorized into *exclusion*, the action of denying access is re-presented as an *object*, a thing or state of being that exists in the world and can enter into causal relations with other things or states of being. Further transcategorization into the adjective *exclusionary* re-presents the action of denying access into an attribute or quality of something. As used in Douthat's column, '*exclusion*' is both metaphorical and literal. Racists would prefer to exclude non-Whites from actual places, a literal meaning of the term, and *exclusionary* policies are policies that lead to keeping non-Whites from entering these actual places. Racists would also prefer to '*exclude*' non-Whites from participation in political and civic life, abstract concepts that are, by

implication, re-presented as physical ‘*places*,’ and “*exclusionary*” re-presents policies that keep non-Whites from voting or attending public meetings as policies that keep them from being present in the metaphorical ‘*space*’ of political and civic life (often, by preventing them from being physically present in the literal *space* of a voting booth or public meeting-place). [p. 259]

The noun *posture* refers to a condition of one’s presence in space, specifically to a particular position of the body (and metonymically to a person’s habitual position, as in the phrase “good posture”). When it is transcategorized into a verb, *to posture*, the action of moving one’s body into a particular position (a verb) is experienced as a disposition of the body in space. As a metaphor vehicle, blended with a conceptual metaphor in which an idea or belief is experienced as a physical position in space, it yields a compound metaphor ‘*to posture*,’ expressing the act of expressing a belief as temporary and by implication insincere. The further transcategorization into a (different) noun, “*posturing*,” attributes this same quality of insincerity to the ideas themselves (or to the person expressing the ideas).

As discussed in the preceding, these and other blends of grammatical and lexical metaphor figure prominently in the column, particularly in the central part where the key arguments are laid out. Metaphor analysis, considering both grammatical and conceptual metaphors and their interactions with each other and with the broader historical and cultural context, contributes both to understanding the structure of the column and to expanding our understanding of the range of potential interpretations it affords.

6. Conclusion

The ‘polarities’ project, of which this study is part, was conceived as a means to understand better the breakdown of public discourse in the United States by analyzing the pattern of

figurative language, metaphors and metaphorical stories in particular, that are used by supporters of opposing views on a variety of controversial issues. In the editorial column analyzed in this study, Ross Douthat addresses, from the perspective of a political and cultural conservative, the portion of the polarized discourse issue that has to do with a national identity and with the historical narrative through which that identity is established and celebrated. The assumption is that civic discourse, the combination of mutual comprehension and compromise that makes democratic institutions possible, relies on some form of a shared ‘national narrative,’ a shared understanding of past events and how they contribute to present realities.

Douthat claims that liberals and conservatives once had an agreed understanding of the nation’s history, with the implication that political struggles, as late as the 1960s, were about how to carry forward the illustrious history of our nation. According to Douthat’s telling, the national narrative came to be contested in the aftermath of the anti-discrimination and anti-war upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, so that it split apart into two separate and competing narratives. The populist rebellion that led to the election of Donald Trump was, then, at least partly [p. 260] motivated by a reaction to the attacks on the traditional ‘heroic settlers’ narrative and a wish to “make America great again” by restoring the traditional narrative to its former central place in the national identity. Douthat provides an excellent analysis of the fragmentation of a previously unitary national identity narrative (although members of many under-represented minorities might challenge whether the national narrative ever was actually unitary). He makes a persuasive call for a new, more inclusive narrative, but ends on a somewhat pessimistic note about the possibility of such a narrative.

One of the objectives of this project is to illustrate and expand the use of discourse analysis, centered around metaphors including metaphorical stories and grammatical metaphors,

for enhancing our understanding of the discourse surrounding controversial issues – such as those addressed in this and previous essays in this series. In the text analyzed in this study, the combination of grammatical metaphors with lexical metaphors is particularly important, in that it permitted the source, columnist Ross Douthat, to create a densely interconnected series of ironic oppositions that strengthen the core of his argument.

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