

Infecting the body politic? Modern and post-modern (ab)use of IMMIGRANTS ARE INVADING PATHOGENS metaphor in American socio-political discourse

Abstract

As an exceptionally rich analogy, the body politic continues to influence contemporary conceptual systems, although quite differently to those of the pre-Enlightenment era. In recent years, the idea of the macroscopic correspondence between the human body and society has been reinterpreted as THE SOCIETY IS A HUMAN BODY metaphor, with Cognitive scholars re-examining previous findings of cultural criticism in terms of CMT and CBT. The rhetorical efficacy of this metaphor stems from the ease of blending its two constituent domains into complex, yet comprehensible wholes; in fact, these domains have coalesced to a degree, as there was a period when every mention of the BODY implied a (sub)conscious commentary on the SOCIETY, and vice versa. An adaptive metaphor, the body politic stands as a touchstone of the political beliefs of those who employ it. In the paper I analyse a particularly pervasive subset of micrometaphors that form a part of the modern body politic analogy, namely, the IMMIGRANTS ARE INVADING PATHOGENS metaphors. I demonstrate how the (post)modern American political discourse employs the analogy of the body politic in order to lay the blame for all social ills on immigrants, likening foreigners to germs, parasites and other pathogens that creep into America.

Keywords: discourse analysis; the body politic; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; medicalised nativism; biopolitics; contagion discourse; American political discourse; immigrants; anthropology of the body; history of medicine and the body; anthropology of health and illness; border studies

1. Introduction

1.1. Pathologising the American body politic: a postmodern approach

Societies in times of change and upheaval can cope with ongoing difficulties in diverse ways. Crisis may be conceptualised as an opportunity for betterment of the society; alternatively, some societies prefer to approach their problems in a less proactive manner, attempting to blame others for their real or imaginary misfortunes. To find an appropriate scapegoat is not very difficult; to place blame convincingly on said scapegoat is more problematic and demands special discursive strategies (Pernick, 2002, p. 862). The discourse of blame is often developed by more traditional, homogenous societies which cherish orthodox social structures, zealously defend their borders against foreign intrusion and are suspicious towards immigrants (Healy, 1999, p. 66; Paprocki, in press).¹ Surprisingly enough, it appears that in the postmodern American society—which is almost entirely composed of immigrants and their descendants—there are groups which employ anti-immigrant discursive practices. In this paper, I demonstrate how the (post)modern American political discourse has been employing the great analogy of the body politic in order to lay the blame for all social ills on immigrants, likening foreigners to germs, parasites and other pathogens that creep into America.

1.2. Cognitive underpinnings of the body politic analogy

The body politic trope is an offshoot of the pervasive Western belief in the macroscopic correspondence between the human body and society (Hale, 1971; Musolff, 2007, p. 25–26). As an exceptionally rich and vibrant analogy, the comparison between the body and society first appeared in the Classical Antiquity, in the works of Plato (f.e. *Republic*, Book 9, section 6, 556e; Musolff, 2010, p. 81). The analogy enjoyed great popularity in pre-modern Europe, when “writers [...] proved themselves extraordinarily deft in establishing connections between the components of bodies natural and politic” (Harris, 1998, p. 1; cf. Musolff, 2010, pp. 81–120); it dwindled to a degree in importance after the Enlightenment, only to resurface in the 19th and 20th century socio-political discourses (Coker, 1910/2001; Park, 1921; Wald, 2002). Today, it continues to influence contemporary conceptual systems, although it has often been creatively reworked in order to depict more accurately the protean contemporary political milieu (Musolff, 2003, 2010; Sarasin, 2008).

In terms of cognitive research, the first scholar who studied the body politic in depth was Andreas Musolff. Applying the findings of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), Musolff studied how the German Nazi exploited the body politic analogy in order to discursively equate Jews with parasites creeping into the body of Germany to subdue it (Hawkins, 2001; Musolff, 2007, 2010, 2012).² In his studies, Musolff pointed out several highly unusual features of THE SOCIETY IS A HUMAN BODY metaphor. The domains of both the BODY and the SOCIETY are simultaneously abstract and concrete, a feature that facilitates two-directional mappings (Musolff, 2010, pp. 139–141)—or, in Stockwell’s terms, promotes domain interanimation (Stockwell, 2002, p. 111; Paprocki, in press). Because they possess very elaborate internal structures, these domains yield easily to diverse types of mappings and can be blended into complex, yet comprehensible wholes (Chilton, 2005, p. 39 as cited in Musolff, 2010, pp. 19–20; cf. Musolff, 2010, pp. 26–28, 139–141; Paprocki, in press). In fact, their conceptual affinity in the Early Modern era was so close that there was a period when every mention of the BODY implied a (sub)conscious commentary on the SOCIETY, and vice versa (Harris, 1998, pp. 19–20). This is not to say that these domains were entirely fused in cognitive terms; however, from the vantage point of discourse analysis, the medical and political discourses were definitely linked with inordinately strong conceptual bonds (Harris, 2004, p. 138).

In the following sections, I build on Musolff’s finds in order to investigate how such mappings have been refashioned to brand incoming immigrants as pathogens seeping into the body politic of America. I begin with a selective historical survey of the body politic analogy, as used in the pre-modern era. First, I describe two dominant medical paradigms of the origin of diseases. The earlier paradigm of Galen ascribed diseases to internal humour imbalance, whereas the later paradigm of Paracelsus imputed maladies to intrusion of external contagion; both paradigms were appropriated by contemporary political discourses. The discourse influenced by Galen advocated co-operation and social harmony; in contrast, the discourse built on Paracelsian thought blamed intruding foreigners and minorities for social ills. Body-society analogies were revived by the 19th

and 20th c. functionalist sociologists such as Émile Durkheim, who began to contemplate how to assimilate noxious social parasites into the body politic again. These sociological assimilation fantasies resonated strongly with a faction of contemporary American society who believed that their nation would become the proverbial melting pot in which masses of immigrants would coalesce into a new, glorious whole. Unfortunately, fears of the other appear to have prevailed: A vocal subset of Americans have been apportioning blame for their misfortunes to foreigners, employing rhetorical strategies, such as scapegoat formulas and metaphor contraction.

Mappings equating foreigners with pathogens were present in American political discourse from its very beginning; for instance, in 1793 Haitians were blamed for yellow fever that ravaged Philadelphia (Eisenberg, 2012; Murphy, 2003). However, their first major peak of popularity was in the 1910s, when immigrants, foreigners and bolshevist radicals were mentally linked to concurrent health scares and subsequently blamed for spreading disease (Eisenberg, 2012). Although they were never truly abandoned after the 1910s, it was from the 1950's onwards that such mappings received renewed impetus in the American political discourse, being especially prominent during the Cold War and the War on Terror. In the final section of this article, I investigate salient features of such mappings and hypothesise why they continue to resonate with modern Americans.

2. The body politic pathologised: the pre-modern search for the origin of social ills

2.1. The Galenic paradigm of internal imbalance versus the proto-microbiological theory and external, „invisible bullets” of contagion

As it has been mentioned before, the body politic analogy was fully verbalised for the first time in Plato's works; nonetheless, its most influential ancient restatement appears in the works of Galen, a 2nd c. Greek physician. According to Galen, humans were made of four elemental humours: blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm; sickness was conceptualised as a result of internal imbalance of the humours, curable if the said balance were to be redressed (Healy, 1995, pp. 38–40; Schoenfeldt, 1999, pp. 4–7). Intellectually dominant from the Classical Antiquity to the 17th century, the Galenic mode of thought was swiftly mapped onto the socio-political discourse of that period. Organs and limbs working together in harmony for the greater good of the body were likened to social strata, cooperating amicably in society. Pre-Modern mappings of the body onto the society were not axiologically neutral and tended to support the social regime in which they were promulgated (Archambault, 1967, p. 22; Hale, 1968, pp. 377–378); for instance, the ever-important head almost universally denoted the reigning ruler (Musolff, 2010, p. 81–83). Illness resulted from a lack of cooperation between social strata: to re-establish cooperation was to quell social unrest (Hale, 1968, pp. 377–378). Hence, in terms of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, ILLNESS was marked with INTERNALITY; HEALTH was compared to SOCIAL COOPERATION and TO HEAL WAS TO RECONCILE WARRING FACTIONS WITHIN. Granted, Galen and his predecessors and followers knew of contagious diseases and they suspected that some contagions—or *miasmas*—may enter the body from the outside, should said body have a weak constitution (Nutton, 1983; Healy, 1995, pp. 40–42); nevertheless, the chief cause of disease was always the humoral imbalance.

The humoral paradigm reigned supreme until the 16th century, when two physicians—Paracelsus and Girolamo Fracastoro—almost at the same time proposed a theory according to which diseases originated outside the body (Harris, 2004, 141–142; Healy, 1995, pp. 268–269; Nutton, 1983, pp. 21–22; Pagel, 1958, pp. 134–140). According to Paracelsus and Fracastoro, bodies infected by some types of diseases produced little particles of contagion (*seminaria / homunculi*), which floated in the air, entered other bodies via various orifices and pores, attached themselves to certain humours and caused symptoms of the illnesses that produced them (Harris, 2004, 141–142; Nutton, 1983, pp. 21–22); thus, the proto-microbiological theory of disease was born. Correspondingly, the political discourse of Early Modern Europe underwent a paradigm shift: Social unrest was thought to be caused by actions of malicious foreigners, immigrants and non-normative minorities—such as Jews, heretics or witches—who had infiltrated the borders of the body politic and were destroying it from within (Harris, 1998, pp. 15, 316–318, 2004, p. 142). The new paradigm facilitated the development of a new blame apportioning schema: From that time on, “the attribution of social disease to foreign bodies was [...] often part of a concerted attempt to displace popular perception of the causes of social illness from [...] powerful internal agents to exotic, easily vilified bogeymen” (Harris, 2004, p. 142). Accordingly, a crop of entirely new micro-metaphors emerged in later political treatises. As the nascent proto-microbiological discourse conceptualised the DISEASE as an EXTERNAL AGENT, the concomitant political discourse equated FOREIGNERS with PARTICLES OF CONTAGION, which seep through the BORDERS—or ORIFICES—of the body politic to feed on its humours and cause diseases.

However, at this point it should be firmly stressed that what has been termed a paradigm shift was not a sudden, irreversible abandonment of one mode of thinking and a wholehearted adoption of another. The proto-microbiological theory was built on the premises of Galenism and its followers were unable to completely transcend humoralism (Nutton, 1983); in fact, “versions of the humoral paradigm of disease continued to hold sway in the medical establishment until the mid-seventeenth century” (Harris, 2004, p. 142). Granted, the theory of the external origin of contagions appeared to be much more influential among politicians than among physicians (Harris, 1998, pp. 19–75, 2004, p. 142). However, inasmuch as some pre-Modern rhetoricians and writers may have wanted to appropriate the Paracelsian paradigm in order to pin the blame for social ills on certain undesirables, they could not completely eradicate the Galenic plea for internal co-operation that still reverberated in the minds of their contemporaries.³ Harris perceptively observed that one should not “homogenize uses of the metaphor from any one ‘era,’ in the process flattening out important ideological and political differences in its various applications” (1998, p. 147). Particular reiterations of the body politic analogy have repeatedly fallen in and out of favour, their respective popularity or lack thereof heavily dependent “on a constellation of historically specific circumstances” (Pernick, 2002, p. 863). What is more, there is always “the possibility of more than one [paradigm of knowledge] existing at any one historical moment” (Harris, 1998, p. 147).

2.2. Pathology or a natural deviation? Functionalist sociology and the ambivalence of contagion.

It should be noted that in the Early Modern period, the very notion of pathogen was marked with a degree of axiological ambivalence. Contagions were conceptualised as agents having the potential to do both harm and good: For instance, Paracelsus claimed that the presence of a noxious agent could stimulate vital powers of an organism to the point of it becoming stronger than it had been before (as cited in Harris, 1998, p. 52). For Paracelsus, the starting point may have been the inherent ambiguity present in the Ancient Greek word *pharmakon*: Originally, it could denote either A MEDICINAL DRUG OR A POISON (Harris, 1998, pp. 51–52).⁴ This ambivalence inspired the physician to develop the iatrochemical theory of homeopathy, according to which an application of small amounts of poison could have a medicinal or prophylactic effect (Harris, 1998, pp. 14, 49–52). Subsequently, theories of Paracelsus were creatively reformulated by scholars working in the nascent field of sociology.

At the turn of the twentieth century, functionalist sociologists such as Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) or David Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) began to consciously employ “biological models of society, in large part to legitimise their work as ‘scientific,’ but also to explain the ways in which the various components of a social ‘organism’ function to maintain its integrity” (Harris, 1998, p. 4).⁵ Their model assumed that societies—as organisms—strive to preserve homeostatic equilibrium; should a social deviation arise, it would be overcome, eventually making the social organism even fitter (Harris, 2004, p. 144–146). Of particular importance to this study is Durkheim’s inconsistent use of organic metaphors. Inspired by theories of Paracelsus, Fracastoro and finally, of Louis Pasteur and other microbiologists (Harris, 2004, p. 147), Durkheim fleetingly compared the criminal element in the society to a parasite, “a foreign, unassimilable body introduced into the bosom of society” (1895/1982, p. 102). Nevertheless, he immediately retracted his words, explicitly stating—in true spirit of Galen—that no part of the body politic is truly abnormal, foreign or without use (Harris, 2004, p. 147). Durkheim’s withdrawal betrays his conceptual wavering between two aetiologies of social disease—his unwillingness to claim that social pathology is inherently negative. This ambivalence towards social pathology mirrors to a degree Paracelsian ambivalence towards poisons. Both could be beneficial to the system if tightly controlled and present only in minor quantities (Harris, 1998, pp. 4–8, 12–14). Admittedly, Durkheim’s argument lacks internal coherence due to his inability to fully follow either Paracelsian or Galenic aetiology of social pathology. Despite this shortcoming, his social model gained in popularity; its driving force was Durkheim’s ultra-pragmatic conviction that social poisons and pathologies—or foreigners—may be exploited for the greater good of the body politic (Harris, 2004, p. 146).

3. Modern American containment discourse

3.1. Four paradigms of ethnic adaptation

What eventually became the United States of America began as a string of British colonies on the eastern coast; nonetheless, the majority of contemporary Americans trace

their descent from countless immigrants from non-English-speaking countries, who have been coming to the United States ever since the nation's nascence. The society which started to emerge had its share of problems, as immigrants of different extractions and faiths had to rapidly learn how to live together. Should these "ethnic divisions [break] down [...] over time, or [should] they remain fixed and impermeable" (McDonald, 2007, p. 49)? How should WASP Americans react to a sudden influx of foreigners into their borders and what was the Anglo-Saxon vision of the future of the American society?

Jason McDonald concluded that, having to face the questions above, American social engineers of the late 19th / early 20th century devised four great visions of what America should become in terms of ethnic diversity; every grand vision was in turn rephrased in terms of several explanatory metaphors which compared the American society to certain objects (2007, pp. 49–50). The school of assimilationism (1.) claimed that ethnic divides would disappear in the future, but could not agree whether immigrants (a) should attempt to produce an entirely novel culture or (b) should be forced to conform to the Anglo-Saxon model (2007, p. 50). The first subset of assimilationists likened AMERICA to A MELTING POT (McDonald, 2007, p. 51), in which "the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics" (Turner, 1920/1962, p. 23). Popularised by Isaac Zangwill's drama *The Melting Pot* (1909), this idealistic model was soon derided as unsustainable: Apparently, the American establishment wanted immigrants not only to lose their former culture, but also to conform to theirs (McDonald, 2007, pp. 50–55). Thus, one might say that THE MELTING POT of Zangwill was transformed into A PICKLING JAR, in which all IMMIGRANTS-VEGETABLES, no matter what their original taste, were meant to slowly acquire the uniform taste of the AMERICAN PICKLE. In turn, the pluralist school of thought (2) claimed that ethnic differences should be preserved (a), likening THE UNITED STATES to A SALAD BOWL or A MOSAIC, in which particular ethnicities retain their differences, but enjoy equal rights (McDonald, 2007, p. 55). However, pluralist strategies also had their darker side. The noble goal of preserving ethnic distinctiveness was often realised through ethnic/racial segregation and through prioritising of certain white cultures over the 'non-standard' ones (b); thus, it appears that certain ethnic ingredients in the American salad were deemed more palatable than other, less savoury ones (McDonald, 2007, 58–61). Today, it is known that "the use of such metaphors [...] clouds more than it clarifies our understanding" of such a complex and multifaceted process as ethnic adaptation (Buenker & Ratner, 1992, p. 3); nonetheless, metaphors—especially of contagion—continue to appear in the socio-political discourse.

3.2. Failure of the melting pot fantasy and infection scares (19th c. – 1950s)

The contagion metaphor was reintroduced into the ethnic adaptation discourse through the terminological and conceptual debt the emergent science of sociology had incurred to bacteriology. Functionalist sociologists in America, wishing to present their findings in a more 'scientific' manner, consciously began to appropriate microbiological terminology (Wald, 2002, pp. 654–655). For example,

in anthropology, culture meant ‘a particular form or type of intellectual development.’ In bacteriology, it meant the “development of microorganisms, especially bacteria, in specially prepared media.” Culture now could mean either a group of people with a particular way of doing things or a crop of contagious germs. (Pernick, 2002, p. 862)

Introduction of new microbiological paradigms in sociology roughly coincided with a sudden influx of immigrants in the United States (Wald, 2002; Eisenberg, 2012); accordingly, functionalists endeavoured to describe interactions between immigrants and Americans in terms of microbiology (Wald, 2002; Eisenberg, 2012). Arguably, one of the most salient examples of such metaphorisation may be found in the works of Robert E. Park (1864–1944). One of the founding fathers of the Chicago School of sociology, Park advocated conformist-assimilation schemes, studying how immigrants did or did not conform to the Anglo-Saxon model (Morawska, 1994, p. 77; Wald, 2002, pp. 664–666; McDonald, 2007, p. 51). The Chicago School scholars adhered to the view that assimilation was essentially a two-way lane: Americans could Americanise foreigners, yet foreigners could also foreignise Americans (Wald, 2002, p. 666).⁶ Park paraphrased this process in microbiological terms. Immigrants could infect Americans with their CULTURAL CONTAGION, but then again, a stay in America could infect foreigners with COMMUNICABLE AMERICANISM (Wald, 2002, pp. 664–664). Park’s organic metaphor resembled Durkheim’s stance in that it blurred to a degree the body-pathogen divide. Both AMERICAN and FOREIGN CULTURES were likened to BACTERIAL CULTURES which would colonise each other’s Petri dishes. However, the assimilationist belief in Anglo-Saxon cultural supremacy resurfaced in Park’s axiologically biased terminology: FOREIGNERS were branded as A CONTAGION, whereas AMERICANS received no such label.

Despite Park’s attempts at theorising away the divide between Americans and foreigners, the majority of Anglo-Saxon population in the late 19th and early 20th century distrusted immigrants and conceptually linked them with epidemics of more and less exotic diseases that periodically ravaged the American body politic. The conceptual link was fostered by physical proximity of alleged carriers: Exotic diseases, previously safely sequestered in the tropical regions, were thought to creep into America via the bodies of entering immigrants, who settled in microbiologically tainted Third World spaces of ghettos (Craddock, 2008, p. 192). The emergent American nexus of xenophobia and mysophobia was eventually fossilised in a form of ‘medicalised nativism’, the conviction that the language of contagious disease can and should be used to defend anti-immigrant practices (Kraut, 1995, p. 3; Wald, Tomes & Lynch, 2002, p. 619). The immigration peak lasting from the 1880s to the 1920s was concomitant with several major health scares that were discursively connected with immigrant communities (Humphreys, 2002, pp. 852–853). THE JEWS were accused of spreading TYPHUS in 1892; in turn, ITALIANS were associated with the POLIO cases in New York City in 1916 (Humphreys, 2002, pp. 852–853). THE CHINESE community was particularly stigmatised for—purportedly—being A VECTOR OF TRANSMISSION OF SMALLPOX in 1868, 1876, 1881 and 1887 and for spreading BUBONIC PLAGUE in 1900 and 1904 (Craddock, 1995; Humphreys, 2002, pp. 849, 852; Keil & Ali, 2008, p. 160–161; Kraut, 1995, p. 4). Gradually, the metaphor stating that FOREIGNERS ARE VECTORS OF TRANSMISSION OF PATHOGENS underwent what I term *metaphor*

contraction: With prolonged use, it was easier and easier to drop the middle of the phrase and simply state that FOREIGNERS ARE PATHOGENS.⁷

3.3. Post-modern American containment discourse (1950s – current)

3.3.1. Cold War and the Soviet contagion

Mappings between foreigners and pathogens did not disappear from the American social discourse after the 1920s.⁸ Nonetheless, it was only in the 1950s, during the Cold War, that these metaphors regained widespread popularity, the popularity which would only be overshadowed by an upsurge of viral metaphors during the War on Terror (Mayer & Weingart, 2012, p. 143). The Cold War discourse was characterised by rampant abuse of immunology metaphors which demonised the Soviets as polluters of American food, water and minds (Ross, 1989, pp. 45–47). The worst of these three was the mental pollution of communism, which America had to contain. CONTAINMENT is a medical term that had been first used in a political context by an American politician George F. Kennan in his 1947 article, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (Harris, 2004, 139–140). In medicine, “TO CONTAIN A DISEASE IS TO PREVENT ITS ENTRY INTO THE BODY, or TO DIMINISH ITS EFFECTS ONCE IT HAS INVADED” (Harris, 2004, pp. 139–140). It was the second part of that definition that particularly resonated with the anti-Soviet activists; the Soviet menace might have already surreptitiously entered America and the nation should pull together so that the pathogens would not be able to subdue the United States (Kennan, 1947). “WORLD COMMUNISM [was] a malignant PARASITE, which [fed] only on DISEASED TISSUE” (Kennan, 1947); thus, America had to preserve its ideological HEALTH—virtues of freedom and democracy—in order to eradicate the contagion from within. As Harris eloquently observed, “Containment of an external threat thus shaded into, even as it concealed, containment of elements within the body politic” (2004, p. 140).

3.3.2. War on Terror and the re-emergence of contagion discourse

It was in the 1980s and in the 1990s that the language of foreign contagion had begun to gain renewed impetus in the American discourse (Mayer, 2007; Sarasin 2008). However, what truly made it resonate with many Americans was the World Trade Center attack. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, TERRORISTS began to be likened in the press to exotic, “lethal VIRUSES” that “rode the flow of the world’s AERIAL CIRCULATORY SYSTEM” (Harris, 2004, p. 143; Hertzberg, 2001). Similar viral metaphors followed. In his speech to the US Congress, Tony Blair called TERRORISM “a new and deadly VIRUS” which thrived in a mixed MEDIUM of “POVERTY, dictatorial REGIMES, and fundamentalist ISLAM” (BBC, 2003; Sarasin 2008). In 2005, Stares and Yacoubian published their “Terrorism as Virus” article in *The Washington Post*, in which they painstakingly reimagined WORLD TERRORISM as an infectious, ideological VIRUS that SPREAD through “mosques, madrassas, prisons, the Internet, satellite TV” and other VECTORS OF TRANSMISSION; their article made a covert plea to give the government more power so that it could CONTAIN this dangerous ISLAMIC CONTAGION more effectively (Stares & Yacoubian 2005).

The viral metaphor was arguably most completely developed in a speech “The Bush Administration’s Response to September 11—and Beyond” by one Richard N. Haass, a representative of the U.S. Department of State, which was made on October 15, 2001 (Mayer 2007, p. 5). Haass reiterates the point others have made. TERRORISM IS A VIRUS which can SPREAD and INFECT THE BODY of AMERICA, a virus against the invasion of which PROPHYLACTIC MEASURES have to be taken and which, once identified, has to be EXPELLED from the body politic (Haass, 2001; Mayer, 2007, p. 5; Mayer & Weingart 2012, p. 143–144). What distinguishes his speech is the conceptual blurring of the divide between THE OPPRESSED BODY and THE NOXIOUS VIRUS (Mayer, 2007, p. 5; Mayer & Weingart, 2012, p. 143–144). Haass admits that terrorism has been A LATENT VIRUS that has “[found] A SUPPORTIVE HOST” in American society. Some of the terrorists were immigrants who had lived, as dormant viruses, in the American suburbs, had studied at American universities and participated in simple pleasures of American life—and, suddenly, they TURNED VIRULENT and attacked the body which hosted them (Haass, 2001).

Three remarks can be made about the post-WTC use of viral metaphors. First, it should be stressed that virus talk is often employed by those lobbying to give more power to the American government so that it could more easily detect and expel certain undesirables from the body politic. Obviously, the greater the power given, the greater the potential for its abuse; oftentimes, the use of such metaphors legitimises “totalitarian social policy, which tends to ‘obliterate individual human rights in the name of public health’” of the body politic (Eisenberg, 2012). Secondly, Haass and other viral talk exponents tend to alternately personalise and depersonalise the terrorist threat. Some IMMIGRANTS are either VECTORS OF TRANSMISSION of TERRORISM VIRUS or are simply equated with VIRUSES (Mayer, 2007, p. 5–6) —in the post-WTC terrorist paranoia, non-inflammatory language is not a priority and metaphor contraction can run rampant. Thirdly, by admitting the presence of viruses within America, Haass confuses the clear-cut dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ (Mayer, 2007, p. 5; Mayer & Weingart, 2012, p. 143–144): It becomes possible to conceive of a nightmarish anti-assimilation scenario according to which groups of immigrants, previously thought to have been safely absorbed, food-like, into the American body politic, would decide to rebel and strike against the American *corpus politicum*. In other words, what once nourished America may have very well been a foodstuff laced with latent pathogens.

An interesting fact is that the post-modern American food security discourse does display a preoccupation with microbiological purity of imported, exotic foodstuffs (King, 2008, pp. 203–204). The most ambivalent and symbolically charged foodstuff appears to be animal meat, simultaneously A NOURISHING MEAL and a piece of DEAD FLESH (Probyn 1999; Robbins, 1999). If it is highlighted that “75 percent of all emerging diseases of the past two decades”—diseases most often ‘exotic’ in nature—are zoonotic in origin, then it is not difficult to imagine why imported meat of exotic animal species could be suspected of harbouring pathogens (Jackson, 2008, p. 286). In

this respect, the pervasive metaphor stating that YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT is of particular significance: If one eats exotic, potentially microbiologically unsafe species of animals, then one becomes exoticised, foreignised and pathologised. Again, it is immigrants who bear the brunt of such mappings. In the wake of the SARS epidemic in 2003, people of CHINESE extraction were once again stigmatised as VECTORS OF DISEASE due to their practice of occasionally eating wild civet cats slaughtered in supposedly unhygienic wet markets (Keil & Ali, 2008). Thus, FOREIGNERS who eat EXOTIC, UNSAFE FOOD might be associated with FOOD-BORNE CONTAGIONS themselves.

To add to the main points of this section, three other remarks may be made. First, the effectiveness of foreign contagion metaphors stems from their natural appeal. Such metaphors “draw heavily on—and gain tremendous authority from” the language of natural sciences they exploit and, by doing so, they attain the air of being less arbitrary and more objective (Mayer & Weingart, 2012, p. 139–140). Secondly, such metaphors tend to depersonalise terrorists: Suddenly, the counter-terrorism pursues not human beings who happen to be terrorists but rather the impersonal germ of terrorism (Mayer & Weingart 2012). Thirdly, in the increasingly fragmented world where issues are rarely black and white rampant abuse of such inflammatory metaphors causes the discourse to “collapse into an uncontrollable dynamics in which good and evil constantly switch roles. Counter-terror is, in other words, perceived as terror and thus provokes (counter-)counter-terror and so on” (Mayer & Weingart, 2012, p. 150). What results is a string of nations passing blame from one to another. In the late 19th century, Germans accused Eastern European Jews of spreading typhus (Weindling, 2000). In 1917, Americans claimed Germans attempted to sell them soap laced with typhus and tetanus germs (Eisenberg, 2012). In 2014, the former President of Iran Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani declared that “the Western-backed terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq” was a virus that would mutate and strike against those who spread it in the first place—that is, Americans. Due to the interanimation of their constituent domains, contagion metaphors can undergo rapid domain reversals—as a result, the oppressor and the victim become simple labels, to be switched at leisure.⁹

4. Metaphors of social pathology: a scapegoat formula

What has been presented above is what may be called ‘a history’ of a metaphor, a very selective survey of cases when immigrants have been compared to invading pathogens in the modern American political discourse. At this point one should attempt to answer how these mappings function as a group in conceptual systems of contemporary Americans. I believe that these mappings are more than simply a cluster of related metaphors, linked together by family resemblances. In fact, the analysed examples belong to an ever-growing series of formulaic analogues—similar yet separate metaphors which share a common design, but are realised differently in different socio-political contexts. What links them together is what I call a *scapegoat formula*, a fill-in-the-blanks metaphor that has ‘A FOREIGN ETHNIC GROUP’ for a target domain and ‘A NOXIOUS PATHOGEN’ for a source domain (see Fig. 1). By substituting appropriate ethnic groups and appropriate, currently salient infectious diseases, we produce mappings such as ISLAMIC TERRORISTS

ARE VIRUSES, SOVIETS ARE PATHOGENS or THE CHINESE ARE (VECTORS OF) SMALLPOX. The last example demonstrates that such conceptual mappings are particularly pervasive when ethnic groups are blamed for transmitting certain types of diseases; in such cases, foreigner-pathogen metaphors may indeed arise from metaphor contraction. Consequently, in every quoted instance of contagion talk in Fig. 1, a part which might be omitted by contraction was placed in parentheses for clarity.

5. Conclusion: why does America fear the foreign contagion?

At the end of this analysis it would be advisable to ponder why the people of the United States feared and continue to fear foreigners in spite of the fact that immigrants have been a part of America since its beginning. An intriguing hypothesis has been put forward by Stephen Greenblatt (1981) and subsequently reformulated by Jonathan Gil Harris (2004). Americans as a nation have no single ethnic origin. Moreover, they do not even have a single ancestral land, as the land they live in was forcefully wrestled from Native Americans. These conditions caused a degree of spatial and cultural uprootedness. If Park's microbiological terminology is accepted, it may be stated that arriving Europeans infected Native Americans—literally and figuratively—with previously unknown diseases and with their culture (Davis, 2002, Greenblatt, 1989; Harris, 2004). Having subdued Native Americans, the emergent nation of the United States chose to accept and assimilate masses of immigrants, in the process exposing itself to infection by foreign cultures. Fearing the fate of their Native predecessors, Americans began to monitor their borders and screen incoming immigrants (Harris, 2004). The prevailing assumption was that the Anglo-Saxon cultural model had to be preserved or otherwise other ethnicities would foreignise Americans with their cultural contagion (Wald, 2002). Every forceful intrusion of unwholesome, sickened foreigners would reawaken fears of microbiological subjugation, anxieties of dissolution, nightmare scenarios in which America collapsed into the same unordered hodgepodge of cultures and ethnic groups it arose from (Davis, 2002; Harris 2004; Wald, 2002). Metaphors likening immigrants and foreigners to germs and diseases are thus only one of the many socio-political techniques that serve to strengthen the conservative conceptual division between 'us' and 'them', between the American civilization of freedom and the barbaric rest of the world. In times of growing tensions, it may be expected that such metaphors will continue to appear. One can only hope that future analyses of American political discourse will continue to expose the political agenda behind these seemingly innocuous mappings.

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Scapegoat formula – American realisations			Year of use
A FOREIGN ETHNIC GROUP	IS	A NOXIOUS PATHOGEN	X
HAITIANS	ARE	(CARRIERS OF) YELLOW FEVER	1793
THE CHINESE	ARE	(CARRIERS OF) SMALLPOX	1868, 1876, 1881, 1887
JEWS	ARE	(CARRIERS OF) TYPHUS	1892
THE CHINESE	ARE	(CARRIERS OF) THE BUBONIC PLAGUE	1900, 1904
ITALIANS	ARE	(CARRIERS OF) POLIO	1916
GERMANS	ARE	(SELLERS OF SOAP LACED WITH) TYPHUS AND TETANUS	1917
IMMIGRANTS	ARE	A SOCIAL CONTAGION	1920s
GERMANS, ITALIANS AND JAPANESE	ARE	VERMINOUS INSECTS	1940s
SOVIETS	ARE	PATHOGENS	1950s
COMMUNISTS	ARE	MALIGNANT PARASITES	1950s
TERRORISTS	ARE	LETHAL VIRUSES	2001
TERRORISM	IS	A NEW AND DEADLY VIRUS	2003
THE CHINESE	ARE	(VECTORS OF TRANSMISSION OF) SARS	2003
WORLD TERRORISM	IS	AN IDEOLOGICAL VIRUS	2005

Fig. 1 – The list of American realisations of the scapegoat formula

¹ See Douglas (1966) for an insightful account on types of cultures that are prone to developing the border paranoia.

² For an earlier analysis of the Nazi policy of likening Jews to parasites, see Bein (1964). Jews had been blamed for spreading diseases even before WW1: Weindling (2000) demonstrates how late 19th/ early 20th century German medical authorities accused Eastern European Jews of spreading typhus.

³ Some later writers of sociopolitical commentaries have been quite reluctant to accept the premises of proto-microbiological paradigms; for instance, a Scottish-English poet named Phineas Fletcher (1582–1650) still largely subscribed to the Galenic vision of a balanced society characterized by “communal accord and social reciprocity” (Bayer, 2002, p. 250).

⁴ A direct result of that mode of thinking is the belief in the curative power of homeopathy. Harris convincingly demonstrates that at least since the third century BC, European pharmacists and physicians blurred the division between the poison and the antidote. The proof of this former conceptual fuzziness may be discerned in the similarity of the English words *potion* and *poison*. See Harris (1998), pp. 51–52.

⁵ For instances of organic society analogies in works of these sociologists, see Radcliffe-Brown’s essay “On the Concept of Function in Social Science” (1935) and Durkheim’s *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982), especially p. 86.

⁶ See Park and Burgess’ *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), p. 735.

⁷ See Wald (2002), p. 665. Immigrants were not the only group that had been linked to the spread of infectious diseases. Between 1900 and 1920, American political discourse conceptually linked the spread of Bolshevik ideology to several health scares of that period. The resultant approach was that radicals, foreigners and leftists could and would implant diseases into the American body politic. During the First World War, it was Germany which began to be associated with noxious pathogens. For instance, it was announced by American authorities in 1917 that Germans attempted to sell typhus- and tetanus-contaminated soap to American customers: ironically enough, detergent could become a vector of disease. For an excellent and thorough account of pre-WW2 cases of Americans associating radicals and foreigners with diseases, see Eisenberg (2012).

⁸ During the war, Germans, Italians and the Japanese were regularly likened by the American press to lice and cockroaches which have to be extirpated with insecticides (Russell, 1996). Ironically enough, Hitler also compared Jews to repulsive insects; moreover, plans of Jewish extermination were eerily similar to vermin extinction schemes, with Zyklon B being first used as a pesticide (Musolff, 2010, pp. 12–13).

⁹ The phenomenon of reversible contagion metaphors was noted by Jonathan Xavier Inda (2000), who observed that such mappings were prone to what he called ‘chiastic reversals’: each side of the conflict will claim to be the oppressed victim, locking themselves in a tug-of-war blame game, unwinnable and ever-escalating. See Inda (2000), Paprocki (in press).