Pictorial Metaphors and Narrativity in Coronavirus Discourse

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Introduction

With the outbreak of coronavirus, the world has been swept with a mixture of caution, panic, and humour about the pandemic. Billions around the world expressed their position through online platforms, particularly social media. As typical of the nature of the digital world, this expression has taken different forms, with a prominence of multimodal genres. Internet memes are a prime example of these. As the world watches them spread virally, they pose questions about how they deliver their messages and, in the context of the pandemic, what kinds of messages they aim at. The coronavirus discourse, as might be called, represents an interesting case study to examine the use of memes in public platforms contrastively. The pandemic is an international concern which allows for investigating how it is depicted in different societies and languages. This plethora of memes produced on this topic within a short period of time calls for investigating how the world employs them to frame the crisis and its different participants (including the virus itself). This study attempts to achieve this aim by examining how American and Egyptian meme authors employ pictorial metaphors to deliver their message; hypothesising that their various virus-related messages can end up framing the different participants and casting them in positive or negative lights. This is done using Forceville's (2016) model of multimodal and pictorial metaphors to examine the types of pictorial metaphors used, and Baker's (2006) narrative theory to examine how the metaphors used present particular narratives in the coronavirus discourse. These are applied to selected Egyptian and American memes, highlighting similar and different features, whereby this study attempts to answer the following research questions: How do the selected memes employ pictorial metaphors to deliver their messages? What kinds of narratives are presented through the selected memes

within the coronavirus discourse? Does cultural difference affect the tools employed and narratives presented?

The study, thus, explores the pictorial metaphors and intertextuality employed and the narratives presented in the selected memes, and hypothesises that, regardless of difference of culture, memes are created using the same tools and presenting a similar variety of narratives. This study is based on analysing and comparing Egyptian and American memes. Thus, it is not concerned with official statements of politicians or official announcements by concerned institutions except in terms of examining people's response to them (in the form of memes). It focuses on the role of memes within the Egyptian and American societies, hence, it is not concerned with the blaming game that seems to have taken place between different states at the time. This study follows a mixed approach that basically examines qualitatively how internet memes writers present their narratives and analyses quantitatively the most common tools employed and most prominent aspects of the narrative in each language. Davison defines internet memes as "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (2012, 122). The researcher has selected twenty 20 memes related to the coronavirus pandemic: 10 in Arabic and 10 in English, picked based on their availability during the time of the study (April-May 2020), focusing on memes related to government decisions, precautionary measures, and the economic impact.

The analysis is divided into three stages: analysis of method, analysis of effect, and quantitative analysis. Analysis of method involves analysing how the meme delivers its message, by analysing the pictorial metaphor used in each of them and the role of intertextuality to give the metaphor its power. Analysis of effect examines how these pictorial metaphors and tropes are used to create a narrative about the virus, the government, businessmen, and the people. Finally, the results are classified and quantified, to find out the most common metaphor types and the overall narrative they portray.

1. Metaphors and Narratives

For many centuries, a metaphor was viewed as a rhetorical device used for ornamental purposes to emphasize an idea. In 1980, however, Lakoff and Johnson published their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*, in which they present a different view. They argue through conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) that metaphors are not only a rhetorical device but a cognitive one; an intrinsic part of our thoughts and actions, "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980/2003, 12). They present a plethora of examples showing how

regular concepts are governed by metaphors without which they would be impossible to comprehend. Later, in the 20th century, Zoltán Kövecses elaborated on CMT in several works and developed the interlocking metaphor hierarchies (Kövecses 2017). In 1982, Canadian researcher John M. Kennedy has presented a paper entitled "Metaphors in Pictures," which does not cite Lakoff and Johnson's CMT, but shows how non-visual concepts are conceptualized metaphorically in pictures (for example, loud noises or foul odours are depicted by drawing lines or waves coming out of their source) (Kennedy 1982). In the 20th century, Charles Forceville developed this tenet and authored multiple works (1996, 2008, 2015) examining the phenomenon of pictorial metaphors and how it is used in common works such as advertisements and political cartoons (Kennedy 1982).

A significant body of studies has been conducted based on Forceville's pictorial metaphors typology, mostly to examine the impact of those metaphors on the audience. For example, Pourebrahim (2016) and Namitcheishvili (2019) use this typology to explore the use of pictorial metaphors in the press and in political caricatures. Ghiasian, Vandhosseini, Zandi, and Ahmadkhani (2018) and Chulvi Rodríguez (2018) examine the role of pictorial metaphors in promoting environmental awareness. Several studies focus on advertisements and promotion materials, such as Pamungkas, Sujatna, and Heriyanto (2016). Other studies are more oriented towards how pictorial metaphors are perceived and their effect on the public, such as Martos Fernández's (2017) study on metaphors in social media and Ojha, Gola, and Indurkhya's (2019) comparison between the effect of different types of pictorial metaphors.

Yet, with the spread of social media and digital means of expressing opinion, it is noticed that the public are not only influenced by the metaphors they see, but they also create their own metaphors and spread them. These metaphors, in turn, reflect the narratives that the public endorse. According to Baker (2006), narrative has been studied for years as an optional mode of relating events in a temporal order, which is the view posed most notably by William Labov in 1972. With the development of social and communication theory, other scholars such as Fisher (1987) and White (1987) have argued that a narrative is not an optional mode but rather "*the* principal and inescapable mode by which we experience the world" (Baker 2006, 9). Misia Landau (1997) adds the conclusion that, in this view, a narrative is not exclusive to the oral or any other mode and occurs independently of the genre used (as cited in Baker 2006). It is this latter view that Baker adopts and develops in her narrative theory (2006) and that guides this study.

Since Baker's primary focus has been 'renarration in translation,' most studies based on her theory tackle translated texts. Such studies often examine how conflicts and different participants thereof are framed and reframed in texts and translations, such as Pormouzeh (2014), who analyses narrativity in Iran's news in Western media; Qin (2020), who examines how China is reframed in translation of the South China Sea dispute; and Hijjo (2018), who discusses the portrayal of ISIS in Arabic editorials and their translations. After the outbreak of the pandemic, Jaber (2020) calls attention to narratives within the pandemic as he compares public narratives in relevant English texts and their Arabic translation. Yet the global outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has created a new reality so that it has become an essential part not only of official statements and news, but also of people's daily communication. It can be argued that it has thus developed its own discourse and, in turn, its own narratives. The present study does not examine translated texts but examines contrastively the narratives found in two different societies (Egyptian and American). It builds on previous studies of pictorial metaphors and narratives to examine this emerging discourse through analysing internet memes as a modern medium of expression.

2. Theoretical Framework: Metaphor Typology and Narrative Theory

As the study examines the types of metaphors delivered visually in internet memes, and the narrative models they create, this study relies on the frameworks of multimodal and pictorial metaphor topology, and narrative theory as explained in the following.

2.1. Charles Forceville's Multimodal and Pictorial Metaphor Typology

Charles Forceville is an associate professor of media studies who works mainly on multimodality in metaphors. In his article "Pictorial and Multimodal Metaphor" (2016), he presents a typology of pictorial metaphors, where he explains that a metaphor is an element that 'imposes an identity relation between two "things" that are conventionally (or in a given context) considered as belonging to different categories" (2016, 243). A metaphor takes place between a source domain and a target domain, as they both "evoke a network of features and connotations" (243). He points out basic features of metaphors including that they have to be construed, whereby sometimes the target domain is found through cues outside the text, while at other times the domains have to be labelled by the analyst if they are not expressed verbally. After construing the metaphor, the analyst maps the feature(s) in the source domain with the target domain (244).

In non-verbal or multimodal communication, this mapping presents a challenge for the analyst. Similarity in monomodal metaphors is cued by resemblance which can take many forms, whereas in multimodal metaphors it is cued by either co-referentiality or co-occurrence (244). Co-referentiality is identified where the same reference is used with both the source and the target domains (for example, the picture of a smiling Orang-Utang with the words 'Mona Lisa' next to it, implying that ORANG-UTANG IS MONALISA). Co-occurrence is when the target item is depicted as the source item is cued by elements of the source that frequently occur together (244).

Forceville presents five types of multimodal metaphors:

1. Contextual metaphors: metaphors that are cued by the context in which an element appears.
2. Hybrid metaphors: metaphors in which target and source items are physically integrated.
3. Simile: the target item is compared to the source item, shedding light on the features they share by, for example, presenting them in the same form, or using the same artistic features used in their depiction.
4. Verbo-pictorial metaphor: when a visual element is presented alongside a verbal one, one of which represents the target and the other the source. Forceville suggests that (in his example) the verbal element is the source and the visual is the target, but it can be argued that in the case of internet memes it is the other way round.
5. Integrated metaphor/Product metaphor: metaphors that are three-dimensional; they resemble hybrid metaphors except that they actually exist in the real tangible world. (245-249)

Forceville distinguishes between intradiegetic and extradiegetic source domains in multimodal metaphors. This distinction depends on "the degree of salience with which a source is cued" (250). If the cue is part of the fabric of the target, that is a natural part of the context or the sequence of events, such as comparing the character in a film to an item used in the setting, it is intradiegetic; if not, it is extradiegetic, where the producer intends to direct the addressee to construe a metaphor here (250, 251). Another important point that Forceville calls attention to is the role of the genre in guiding the addressee's expectations and hence their interpretation of the metaphor (251, 252). He also comments that this model applies only to metaphors, but studies in other visual tropes are still limited. Thus, he implicitly calls for exploring the potentials of visual figurative language (253, 254). These will be covered on case-by-case basis throughout the analysis.

2.2. Mona Baker's Narrative Theory

In her book, *Translation and Conflict* (2006) and, later on, her article "Translation as Renarration" (2014), Mona Baker presents her view of narrativity. Although her ultimate aim is applying it to translation, she creates a solid synthesis of other models of narrativity that can be applied to other disciplines as well. According to Baker, narrative is not merely a method of relating past events, but it is as Fisher defines it, "the context for interpreting and assessing all communication" (1987, 193). Baker elaborates her point about narrative stating that "[n]arratives in this view are public and personal 'stories' that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour" (2006, 19). She argues that it is narratives that allow us to make sense of the world, and reality is always filtered through a narrative (157, 159). Besides, Baker's narrativity assumes that narratives do not only present reality, but also "participate in configuring that reality" (159).

Baker classifies narratives on the basis of the typology of narratives presented by Somers (1992, 1997) and Somers and Gibson (1994), which she elaborates on (as cited in Baker 2006). Accordingly, narratives are classified accordingly into the following types:

- Personal narratives: narratives individuals tell about themselves and their experience in the world.
- Public narratives: narratives circulated more broadly among a group of people, which might be as small as a family or as large as the whole world.
- Conceptual or disciplinary narratives: narratives elaborated on within scholarly and scientific settings to account for a relevant object of study.
- Metanarratives: narratives that have spread and thrived until they crossed geographical and temporal boundaries, have become shared among people in different locations and points of time, and therefore tend to be taken for granted. (Baker 2014, 161-162)

Baker highlights here the interplay between personal and public narratives. On the one hand, personal narratives are constrained by public narratives, and derive their symbols and formulations from public narratives in order to be understandable. On the other hand, personal narratives have the ability to support or undermine public narratives (162-164).

Baker, further, lists eight features of narratives, derived from the Somers model, as well as from the Somers and Gibson model, and Bruner's model. The most relevant of these to the present study are the following:

1. Selective appropriation: selecting which elements to include in the narrative, which to leave out, which to emphasize, which downplay, etc. as per the point of view of the narrator (Baker 2014, 167).
2. Temporality: the way a narrative is arranged temporally and spatially as it adds meaning to the narrative (167-168).
3. Relationality: the notion that elements of a narrative are shaped by it and also make it up. They are its "building blocks", and if they are transferred to another narrative they will not function in the same way (168).
4. Causal emplotment: the most important feature of narrativity. It refers to how narrators create links between elements of the narrative, such as cause, effect, praise, blame, etc. (168, 169).
5. Genericness: how the genre in which the narrative is presented participates in shaping the narrative (170).
6. Particularity: a narrative has characters and events which make sense when they are embedded within "a familiar story type" (170).
7. Narrative accrual: how different stories are linked together to form a larger narrative (170, 171).

This study attempts to examine these narrative features in the data and their applicability to internet memes. Werner Wolf related narrativity to the media and visual arts, stating the following:

> Although the most typical realisation of 'narrative' as a fundamental cognitive macro-frame is probably verbal stories, narrative is basically medium independent or 'transmedial' […]. It consequently does not come as a surprise that narrativity as the defining quality of narrative has been attributed to a number of media and genres, verbal and otherwise, and also to the visual arts. (Wolf 2005, 431)

In the light of this statement, this study therefore examines pictorial metaphors involved in the data, and then attempts to infer the narrative portrayed throughout the selected memes.

3. Analysing Egyptian and American Covid-Related Memes

This section presents the analysis of the selected memes, categorised into Egyptian and American, then further categorised according to the assumed aim of the meme author. Each meme is explained, providing its context and an elaboration on both the source and target domain, mapped and classified in

accordance with Forceville's typology (2006), and interpreted in the light of Baker's narrative theory (2006).

3.1. Arabic (Egyptian) Internet Memes

Several memes are intended to criticize people's reckless behaviour towards the pandemic, and some of these include criticism of the government, often in terms of how it should have expected this and taken the necessary measures to control people's behaviour. For example, figure 1 is a verbo-pictorial metaphor that employs intertextuality as well. Werner (2004) defines intertextuality in visual texts as follows:

> the cartoonist's borrowing or quoting from prior visual or written texts, and […] the viewer's interpreting of the cartoon in the light of (i.e., through, against) those other texts. […] This echoing of themes, quotations, symbols, storylines, or compositional elements from older images and famous written texts may create visual metaphors that encourage layered meanings in novel or ironic ways. (3)

In Figure 1, the meme "borrows" a shot from the movie *Saheb Sahbo*. In the original film, a character decides to style his grandmother's hair and ends up burning it. The same scene is pictured here except that the subtext says (After we've laid a bet on the people's awareness [of the coronavirus, its risks, and the measures that should be taken to avoid it], what do they do? (Frame 1), they have [Ramadan] breakfast parties together and drink *subia* from the same cup (Frame 2). The metaphor conveyed here is THE SITUATION NOW IS THE DISASTER IN THE MOVIE. It criticizes people's behaviours as well as the government's decision to ease lockdown measures, which did not take into consideration that the people will not be careful. The narrative presented reflects

Figure 1. *Saheb Sahbo*. 2020. www.facebook.com/ niqabat.alttafihin/p osts/3118342914893 657

selective appropriation by foregrounding people's wrong behaviour amid the crisis. It also hints at the government's wrong decision by reiterating the Prime Minister's words "نراهن على وعي المصريين" [We are relying on the Egyptians people's awareness] in the subtext. Although criticism of the government's decision is less explicit, it shows through the feature of causal emplotment, as

the meme author implies that it is the decision of the government that has allowed the people to act in such a manner.

Figure 2 similarly criticizes people's behaviours after the government's decision to reduce lockdown hours. It presents a hybrid and verbo-pictorial metaphor. The meme intertextually presents a famous scene from the Egyptian film, *Afwah wa Araneb*, to invoke the character's expression of feeling fed-up, except that the main character, Ne'ma, is replaced by the Minister of Health, Hala Zayed, and the subtext shows she is bemoaning the decision to reduce the lockdown and rely on people's awareness. The metaphor conveyed is HALA ZAYED'S FRUSTRATION AT THE PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT IS NE'MA'S FRUSTRATION AT HER FAMILY. Through selective appropriation, this meme focuses on Zayed who appears frustrated because

Figure 2. *Afwah wa Araneb.* 2020. https://www.facebook.com/ED777K/photos/a.100526024656173/277778893597551/?type=3

of the increasing number of cases. Again, in terms of causal emplotment, it attributes the increasing number of cases to the people's reckless behaviour, as well as the government's decision to rely on them by repeating the Prime Minister's words.

Figure 3 presents a hybrid metaphor that merges a picture of coronavirus with Mitwalli's (Majid Al-Kidwani's) shot in *A'skar fi AlMu'askar* when he goes to visit his friend on his wedding night. The metaphor conveys CORONAVIRUS IS ONE OF THE CONGRATULATING GUESTS. It is meant to criticize that the doctors celebrating "Dr. Fatma's" birthday at the quarantine hospital do not adhere to social distancing protocols and do not seem to be taking any measures to avoid infection. It also employs intertextuality as the scene from *A'skar fi AlMu'askar* is invoked to portray an undesirable guest. Selective appropriation here shifts attention to the behaviour of

Figure 3. *A'skar.* 2021. https://tinyurl.com/2p8k6p99

doctors at the quarantine, though it presents how they act as people rather than as healthcare workers; and the feature of causal emplotment shows that doctors are blamed for their reckless behaviour towards the virus.

The meme in Figure 4 presents a complicated verbo-pictorial metaphor that relies heavily on intertextuality. It presents a scene from *Al-Naẓer* where

Insherah (the lady) complains of feeling unwell, so Atef offers to get her lemon tea, but she thanks him and says she has just had *koshari* (an Egyptian dish that has absolutely no use to her condition and should not be compared to lemon tea). In this meme, Atef offers her alcohol and face mask (items that can actually help fend off coronavirus) but she thanks him because she has just had *shalawlaw* (a herbal food). The metaphor thereby is SHALAWLAW IS KOSHARI, as absurd as it sounds. The elements of the meme are only understood in relation to a wider narrative of the pandemic (relationality), as a rumour had spread on Egyptian pages that some people claim *shalawlaw* has therapeutic uses against coronavirus. This meme mocks this untenable rumour by comparing the usefulness of

Figure 4. *Al-Naẓer*. **2020.** www.facebook.com/p hoto/?fbid=116186284 4145208&set=a.11220 2485777921

shalawlaw to corona patients to the usefulness of *koshari* to Insherah. The elements of the narrative (*shalawlaw* and people who believe in its power) are imbued with stupidity and uselessness as a result of linking them to the movie. The meme's focus here is clearly criticizing the people, as it selects for its topic a rumour spreading among people, to reflect the ignorance of a group of them (selective appropriation).

Figure 5 presents another complicated pictorial metaphor that relies on intertextuality. Intertextually, it visually quotes a scene from the Egyptian series *Ra'fat El-Haggan* where El-Haggan is an Egyptian spy who merges among Israeli officials prior to the October War. In the original scene, El-Haggan is talking to Ephraim and telling him a secret, and Ephraim promises to keep it, yet in fact Ephraim does not plan to keep it and El-Haggan knows that and had planned for this to happen. Contextually, the meme is created and has spread after the government had announced that the lockdown hours would be reduced in Ramadan to start at 9 (2 hours after *Maghrib*), thereby allowing the people to move freely at the time of *Iftar*. The meme features (1) a hybrid metaphor as it merges El-Haggan's face with a picture of coronavirus, implying CORONAVIRUS IS RA'FAT EL-HAGGAN; (2) visual

Figure 5. *Ra'fat El-Haggan*. **2020.** www.facebook.com/ Ex.officialls/photos/a .244547409472477/9 53912565202621/

intertextuality, implying THE PEOPLE IS EPHRAIM; and (3) a verbo-pictorial metaphor implying THE NEW GOVERNMENT DECISION IS RA'FAT EL-

HAGGAN'S INFORMATION. The meme implicitly equates the coronavirus with the government, as if it is the one making the decision. This reflects the author's mockery of the belief that the behaviour of the virus depends on the government's decisions (causal emplotment). The meme's author ironically assumes that, since the government has made that decision, then the virus is allowing the people to meet at *Iftar*, and that it will not harm them, provided that they leave right after they finish eating. Intertextuality here, however, the meme implies that this is a deceptive sense of security and should not be followed; comparing it to Ra'fat El-Haggan's false information to Ephraim. In terms of relationality, each element – the actors, the coronavirus picture, and the subtext – derives its meaning from the overall narrative which sets the government in charge of the people's behaviour in the pandemic.

Figure 6, however, directs the criticism wholly to the government. It is a verbo-pictorial metaphor that also relies on intertextuality. It visually quotes a scene from *La Tarago' La Istislam*, where "Ms. Ashgan" is interpreting for a foreign expert, and she is depicted as a terrible interpreter who keeps making up her own inferences about what he says changing most of his statements. The metaphor thus reflects: EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT IS MS. ASHGAN, THE WHO IS THE FOREIGN EXPERT, and THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO WHO'S INSTRUCTIONS IS MISS ASHGAN'S TRANSLATION OF THE FOREIGN EXPERT'S

Figure 6. *La Tarago'*. **2021. https://tinyurl.com/2p 83ks9k**

INSTRUCTIONS. According to Forceville (2016), a verbo-pictorial metaphor usually presents the target visually and cues the source verbally. Yet, here it is the other way around. The metaphor relies on people's knowledge of the movie and cues the source visually, and uses verbal cues (text boxes) to point out the target. The narrative endorsed here foregrounds the role of the government and criticizing the decision made by the government regarding relaxing the restrictions (selective appropriation). The narrative presents the government as responsible (the cause), people's irresponsible behaviour is only implied (the effect) along with the spread of the virus.

The meme in figure 7 conveys the same idea though in a simpler manner as it relies on the visible contradiction in the picture rather than on intertextuality. It uses a verbo-pictorial metaphor, set against a popular meme template which depicts the upper half of a penguin going right and the lower part going left. The metaphor simply is THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION ARE TWO HALVES OF A PENGUIN MOVING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS. Hence, it also criticizes the government's decision to reduce lockdown hours despite the increasing number of cases, by invoking this famous meme, which is often used to

Figure 7. Awkward Penguin. Facebook. 2020.

imply someone making a decision that is contrary to common sense. This meme supports the same narrative which foregrounds the government's illogical decision (selective appropriation). It blames the government for predicted further increases in number (causal emplotment). Besides, it may be argued that since this picture has become so common on the internet, it presents "a familiar story type" that people expect, where one person makes illogical actions in relation to the circumstances, and others are baffled by them. The meme, thus, puts the fact of increasing numbers (the circumstances) and the government's decision (the illogical action) in the proper roles that are expected from the characters of that story type.

Figure 8 presents another meme that criticizes the government's decision. It presents a hybrid and contextual metaphor and also makes use of intertextuality. It features in the background the hall of the Prime Ministry, but in the place of the prime minister, the character of Sultan in *Ḡhabi Menno Fih* is integrated in the meme. The meme presents a hybrid and contextual metaphor that implies THE PRIME MINISTER IS SULTAN, i.e. making stupid statements. The narrative selects the government for its object, and also uses relationality, as the face of Sultan derives its meaning from the overall narrative which criticizes the government's decision, and at the same time adds meaning to it.

Figure 8. Sultan. 2020. www.facebook.com/10 9036140534793/photos/ a.109048987200175/26 2244951880577/

At the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak in Egypt, the government took several measures to prevent the outbreak, and repeatedly advised people to stay at home, which harmed several businesses economically. Several business owners, including the one featured in figure 9, called for resuming work to save their businesses. After the news of this demand was spread, a meme was created criticizing him. Figure 9 presents a hybrid and a verbo-pictorial metaphor that relies on visual intertextuality. In place of Sabbour's face, the meme author puts the face of Henry Waternoose from *Monsters, inc.* (or rather its Arabic version, Helmy Abu 'Enkabout in *Sherket ElMor'ebeen ElMahdouda*). In the movie, Waternoose presents the businessowner who has low morals, and only cares about his company. The meme invokes one of his most notable quotes in the movie, "I'll kidnap a thousand children before I let this company die! And I'll silence anyone who gets in my way!". The hybrid metaphor thus shows HUSSEIN SABBOUR IS HENRY WATERNOOSE. The verbal element, however, is also key, as it is the cue that shows this is Hussein Sabbour rather than the rest of his body. The intertextuality of the meme links Sabbour's declaration that people should go back to work and it is better for a few to die than for the state to go bankrupt to Waternoose's famous quote in the movie. The author thus criticizes businessmen who put profit and economic stability above people's safety by creating a hybrid version of Sabbour-Waternoose, and maintains Sabbour's declaration (the Target) while relying on people's memory to cue the source quote. In terms of narrativity, this meme reflects the feature of selective appropriation, as it picks for its object businessmen, criticizing and blaming them, rather than the government or the people. Relationality shows also as the face of Waternoose derives its meaning from the context of the pictorial narrative and the overall narrative of the pandemic. It also presents a stock story type (particularity) in which Sabbour is depicted as the typical evil rich man.

Figure 9. Henry Waternoose. 2020. Facebook.

Apart from criticizing the government, some memes direct their criticism to the Ministry of Health in particular. An example of these is Figure 10, which is, arguably, also a hybrid metaphor as the icon of the ministry of health (MOH) is attached to the character playing Muhammad Ali in *AlHarb Al'alamiyya Altalta*, stating that THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IS MUHAMMAD ALI OF *ALHARB AL'ALAMIYYA ALTALTA*. The metaphor also employs intertextuality as the character of Muhammad Ali is presented as refusing to listen to reason (the character of Ahmad Orabi). The dialogue originally is Orabi trying to dissuade Muhammad Ali from an action but Muhammad Ali cuts his lines short. Here, Orabi in the first frame is someone suspecting he might have contracted coronavirus, but the MOH's

Figure 10. Orabi. Facebook. 2020.

protocol insists on waiting until symptoms show. The person dies in frame 3, and the MOH blames him for requesting hospital care at a late stage. The person's brother requests a test (frame 5) lest he has contracted the virus too, but again the MOH refuses to admit him until symptoms show.

Narrativity of the metaphor shows in selective appropriation as attention is directed to the MOH protocol rather than, for example, people's behaviour or government decisions, and causally the meme suggests that people die from the coronavirus because the MOH insists on following a protocol that does not allow for early discovery of the infection. The feature of temporality also shows here, as the spatial arrangement of the meme projects that death comes after the MOH refuses to test someone.

3.2. English (American) Internet Memes

Shifting to memes in the circles of the American society, it can be noted that they share some similarities and differences with the Egyptian ones. As the case with Egyptian memes, several American ones are created to criticize the government. Ironically, some of them criticize the government's calls for staying at home, and others criticize it for wanting to end the lockdown. Figure 11, for example, presents a verbo-pictorial metaphor that presents a line stating the fact that the government has ordered people to stay at home yet the people need income to pay for their needs, and depicts a

Figure 11. Confused Lady Doing Maths. 2020.

woman confused by a complicated maths problem. The metaphor, hence, implies FOLLOWING THE GOVERNMENT'S INSTRUCTIONS IS SOLVING A COMPLICATED MATHS PROBLEM. It criticizes the government's orders saying they are unrealistic, or at least that they do not take into consideration the dilemma the people will face. The narrative in play here chooses to direct focus on the conundrum of abiding by the lockdown without income (selective appropriation). It projects that if the people abide by the government's directive, they will not be able to pay rent, and hence will not be able to stay at home (causal emplotment). The overall coronavirus narrative gives meaning to the elements of this meme (e.g. instruction to stay at home), and the elements change the overall narrative: the people are not the reckless mob failing to abide by the government instructions; they are forced to work in order to survive despite the pandemic (relationality).

Figure 12 reproduces the same narrative. It presents a verbo-pictorial metaphor that relies on visual intertextuality. The meme states at the top a headline of the government's decision to pay each person a one-time check of $1,200, then below it features Lucille Bluth from *Arrested Development*. In the original scene, Lucille guesses a banana costs $10 which she estimates is a small price. The show was aired in the 90s when a banana was no more than $0.25, thus her statement shows she is so detached from reality. In the meme, however, Lucille's banana is replaced by rent: "how much could rent cost? Ten dollars?" The meme metaphor thus implies THE GOVERNMENT IS LUCILLE BLUTH [INVERTED], as instead of guessing a high price it guesses a low one. The joke still applies as the author projects Lucille's detachment from reality on the government.

Figure 12. Lucille Bluth. 2020. www.reddit.com/r/WhitePeopleTwitter/comments/fps0s8/56maybe_7/

As mentioned above, this meme reproduces the narrative that picks the government as the object of criticism, foregrounding its actions and its role living through the pandemic (selective appropriation). The author implies that the government is to blame for people failing to abide by the instructions and staying at home (causal emplotment). On the other hand, several memes were produced to criticize the government's plan to end the lockdown and reopen America. Figure 13

Figure 13. **Fox News. 2020. twitter.com/crewcrew/status/1249783032912936960**

shows a shot of the original piece of news, announcing that Trump has formed a council to consider reopening America to avoid a new Depression. The news was met with great criticism, especially that the council turned out to include Trump's daughter and son-in-law. Two memes are discussed here that criticize the council. Both of them present a context metaphor, as they maintain the background of the news program and the headlines, but replace the members of the council with other characters.

The meme in figure 14 replaces Trump's council members with movie and animation characters who are known for their wealth and/or their selfishness (e.g. the Disney character Scoorge McDuck and Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby*). The hybrid pictorial metaphor thus uses intertextuality to state COUNCIL MEMBERS ARE SCOURGE MCDUCK, MONOPOLY MAN, MONTGOMERY BURNS, RICHIE RICH, HEATHER CHANDLER, ARTHUR SLUGWORTH, AND JAY GATSBY. This implies that members of the council are the selfish rich who do not care about people's lives as much as they care about having their businesses back. The narrative presented here selects to foreground the predicted personal features of the council members (selective appropriation). The chosen characters fit a familiar story type where rich people are selfish and rule the world in accordance with what is best for their businesses (particularity).

Figure 14. **Council Members. 2020. www.ebaumsworld.com/pictures/council-to-reopen-america-memes-that-are-giving-us-life/86247121**

In figure 15, the council members are replaced by the funeral dancers who are shown in a viral video dancing with a coffin (Ilevbare 2020). Thus, the metaphor is COUNCIL MEMBERS ARE FUNERAL DANCERS. The meme author implies that the members of the council are playing with death. The narrative shown here shifts focus to the outcome of forming this council (selective appropriation), and it suggests that reopening America will lead to more cases and more deaths (causal emplotment).

Figure 15. **Funeral Dancers. Reddit. 2020.**

The meme in figure 16 also criticizes the government's decision but in a more pessimistic manner. It is a verbo-pictorial metaphor comparing the pandemic to a trolleycar that cannot be stopped, and the government has to choose whether to let it crush the people or the economy *first*. The government chooses to sacrifice the people first. It is a pictorial analogy in which CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IS TROLLEY, GOVERNMENT IS EMPLOYEE IN CHARGE OF DIRECTING THE TROLLEY, and PEOPLE AND ECONOMY ARE VICTIMS. The narrative in this meme relates the picture of the man pulling the handle in the direction of the people to the overall narrative where the government is making decisions to end the lockdown and get people back to their offices (relationality). The meme puts the

Figure 16. **The Trolley Problem.** **2020.** www.admethics.com/the-new-coronavirus-pandemic-cannot-be-

government in charge of the decision, yet it also shows that the final outcome would be the same (causal emplotment).

As this crisis has taken place during the rule of one of America's most controversial presidents, the ensuing problems are often attributed to him. Figure 17 is an example of memes that put Donald Trump at the centre of the crisis. It is a hybrid, verbo-pictorial metaphor that involves irony. Trump is depicted dressed as a Saint, with proper background effects. In the text above the picture, he is referred to as Saint Donald, but the subtext reveals the irony as it explicitly states he is "Patron Saint of the poorly educated and the perpetually misinformed". The meme refers to the

Figure 17. Saint Donald. 2020. www.facebook.com/impeachdt/photos/

misinformed comments he has repeatedly made about the virus and methods of fighting it. Of all the parties involved in the coronavirus narrative, this meme, which is created by a page called *Impeach Trump,* focuses on Trump (selective appropriation). It makes use of spatial arrangement by stating Saint Donald at the top, implying that it is glorifying Trump, then at the bottom text it clarifies that the authors are mocking him.
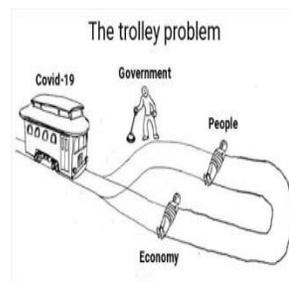
Just like their Egyptian counterparts, several memes criticize the American people's behaviour during the pandemic, though not in the exact same way. Figure 18 presents a verbo-pictorial metaphor and irony. The line at the top stipulates one of the basic measures people should follow to prevent the spread of the virus: avoiding mass gatherings. Then, it's followed by a note that reads "Grocery stores 10 minutes later" and a shot from *The Simpsons* show, featuring a large number of people piling up together. The metaphor is PEOPLE AT THE GROCERY STORES ARE THE CROWD IN THE SIMPSONS. Intertextuality is not a key element here as much as irony. The author criticizes the people as the government orders them to stay at home and avoid mass gatherings, but instead they run to gather their needs from stores and end up forming mass gatherings there.

Figure 18. The Simpsons. 2020. www.facebook.com/funnyrooscomedy/photos/a.1216868931738219/2830533530371743

The meme in Figure 19 also shows a meme criticizing people, particularly those who set out protests calling for ending the lockdown. The upper half of the meme shows a picture of these people, including one of them holding a sign that says "Give me Liberty or Give me Death," and the lower half depicts Jordan Peele, a comic who features in *Key and Peele* stand-up comedy show, except that he has a nametag that reads "Mr. Corona Virus" and pictures of viruses surrounding him, and the subtext reads "don't mind if I do." The invocation says that the people's actions are part of coronavirus's [bitter] joke. Thus, the author uses visual intertextuality as well as the hybrid and verbo-pictorial metaphor implying ASKING TO END THE QUARANTINE IS ASKING CORONAVIRUS TO KILL YOU. This narrative in both memes directs attention to the people rather than the government (selective appropriation), particularly their state of unreasonable panic about lacking some essentials and their negligence of the dangers of the virus. The authors imply that people's faulty priorities and behaviour (neglecting the government's instructions and insisting on ending the lockdown) will lead to the spread of the virus and, ultimately, their death (causal emplotment).

Figure 19. Mr. Corona. 2020. me.me/i/i%E2%80%99ve-spent-waaay-too-much-time-making-this-03fe0c9f42fb4caf91ad

In figure 20, the meme presents a visual simile, stating TOILET PAPER IS A PAYMENT METHOD. One of the items that people were keen to stock up on is toilet paper, leading to its shortage in the country. The author implicitly criticizes people's behaviour as they responded to the pandemic and lockdown news by buying absurd amounts of toilet paper leading to its shortage. S/he suggests that it will soon have the same value of money. Again, this meme directs attention to people's behaviours (selective appropriation) and they are implicitly set as responsible for this crisis and the author ironically predicts what it will lead to in the future (causal emplotment). The meme itself does not mention people at all, but it derives its meaning from the overall narrative, which is made up of a myriad of photos, headlines, and videos of people stocking up on and fighting over toilet paper.

Figure 20. Toilet Paper. 2020. **en.dopl3r.com/memes/dank/how-do-you-wish-to-pay-visa-mastercard/947835**

The meme in figure 21 criticizes the behaviour of the rich during, and perhaps before, the pandemic. It presents a verbo-pictorial metaphor that employs intertextuality. This scene is from *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*. This scene features a cowboy who had been convicted and sentenced to death by hanging in a prior scene, but was rescued at last moment. When he is sentenced again to the same penalty, he is sarcastic rather than scared, and looks at another convict standing next to him who is weeping and utters these famous questioning words "First time?" The metaphor here implies THE POOR DURING CORONA OUTBREAK ARE THE EXPERIENCED COWBOY; THE RICH ARE THE FIRST TIME CONVICT. The scene is projected, through the text above it, to the poor and the rich. During the virus outbreak, the rich panic because this is the first time for them to handle lack of essentials, but the poor, who are struggling to get by throughout their life, are more confident. The narrative here selects for its object a critical view of the people, and particularly the rich (selective appropriation). It is based on two story types: the experienced doing better than the inexperienced; and the rich doing injustice to the poor and receiving retribution (particularity). It implicitly criticizes the rich for spending their whole lives in
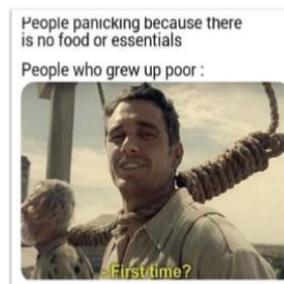
Figure 21. First Time? 2020. knowyourmeme.com/memes/james-franco-first-time

luxury without experiencing the hardships of poverty or feeling for the poor.

4. Discussion: Pictorial Metaphors, Intertextuality, and Narrativity

As per the first research question, this study has explored pictorial metaphor as a recurring tool in internet memes. The analysis shows that meme authors make heavy use of pictorial metaphors to deliver their message. In most of the memes cited in the study, more than a single type of metaphor appears. For example, the meme in figure 17 relies both on the hybrid metaphor of Trump dressed up as a Saint, and the verbo-pictorial metaphor as he is given the title of 'Patron Saint of the poorly educated and the perpetually misinformed.' The same applies to figure 8, which uses both a hybrid and contextual metaphors. Thus, meme authors often blend several types of metaphors to enrich the meme and deliver its message.

Results of the analysis also show that the most common type of metaphor used in internet memes, both Egyptian and American ones, is the verbo-pictorial metaphor, used in 50% of the memes. It is often merged with a hybrid metaphor, which is the second most common type. Context metaphors have been found in only two of the memes analysed, and a simile has been found once. A possible argument, though, is that all examples of intertextuality in these memes are, in a way, context metaphors. For example, in

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figures 1, 4, and 12, the scene depicted acts as the context that all viewers recognize, and the verbal cue added is the target of the pictorial metaphor. This view would include the aspect of intertextuality within Forceville's typology. Another key tool for the operation of the metaphor in these memes has been visual intertextuality. The authors rely on the popularity of these movie scenes and use them as the source domain to describe or criticize a real issue.

Although humour is not the primary concern of the paper, it is apparent most memes aim at creating humour through their metaphors (all except for the memes in figures 9 and 16), and a common system can be detected in the analysed memes. In most of them, the text and the picture act as the main part of a joke and the punch line. Consider, for example, the meme of *La Tarago' La Istislam*, (figure 6) the pictures along with the tags showing who is analogous to who represent the main part of the joke, and the final subtext represents the punch line. In the meme of *The Simpsons* (figure 19), it is the other way around, as the text represents the main part of the joke, and the picture is the punch line. The very fact that meme authors compare elements of their reality to elements
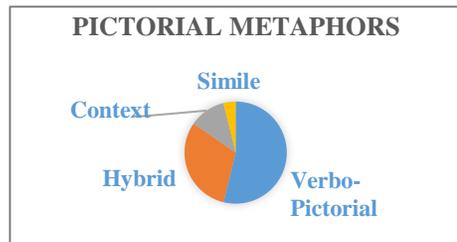
of their humorous culture implies their dissatisfaction with the way the pandemic is handled.

As for the second question, the analysis confirms the hypothesis offered based on Baker's narrative theory (2006) that internet memes present a complicated form of narrativity, as the meme authors create a narrative using pictorial metaphors and intertextuality. Each meme has its own narrative, yet, as Baker has pointed out, one of the main features of narratives is narrative accrual. The narrative in each meme adds to a larger narrative. The Egyptian memes cited here create a larger narrative, where the government unreasonably moves towards ending the lockdown, business owners want people to get back to work so that their businesses thrive, the people behave irresponsibly towards the pandemic, and the protocol used by the MOH does not prevent deaths.

The narrative presented in the American memes shows a conundrum where the government's instructions are illogical, and the people do not comply; the government and the people want to end the lockdown, but it will only lead to more deaths; the government is failing and the people are not acting reasonably. In both narratives, there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the government and the people, though for different reasons. The attitude shown towards business owners is quite similar, though. Intertextuality is also a tool used in the operation of the narratives in memes. It can be argued that, considering their popularity, these movie scenes act as the familiar story type in their respective narrative (particularity). The authors make use of these story types to assign roles to real people and institutions and cast their actions in a specific light.

Setting the data contrastively, the study answers the third question, as it can be seen that the noted features of internet memes are not culture-specific. The table below shows the different types of pictorial metaphors used in each set of memes, the frequency of employing humour and intertextuality, and the overriding narratives.

	Pictorial Metaphors		Humour	Intertextuality	Narrative	
Egyptian memes	Verbo-pictorial	6	9	9	Criticizing people	4
	Hybrid	6			Criticizing the government/MOH	6
	Context	1			Criticizing businessowners	1
	Simile	0				
American memes	Verbo-pictorial	7	9	6	Criticizing people	4
	Hybrid:	2			Criticizing the government/Trump	6

	Context	2			Criticizing businessowners	0
	Simile	1				

This table shows great similarities between the use of memes in both sets, except that Egyptian ones rely far more on intertextuality than the American ones do. Other differences pertain to specific occurrences that took place in each setting, as the case of criticizing businessowners in Egyptian memes and criticizing Trump in American memes. Thus, while metaphors are mostly cultural by nature, the way they operate in the memes in both cultures remains similar.

Conclusion

This study concludes that pictorial metaphors play a major role in many internet memes, as exemplified in the cited coronavirus-related memes, and a single meme can use more than one type of metaphor. The most common type is verb-pictorial metaphors, followed by hybrid metaphors. The metaphors in most of these memes rely on visual intertextuality to deliver their effect. The element of humour is evident in most memes, so that pictures and texts interact to create the joke. All of these elements weave the narratives intended by the meme authors, and the narratives created in Egyptian and American memes share some similarities, particularly the attitude towards the people and government.

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