

**Pictorial Framing in Moral Politics: A
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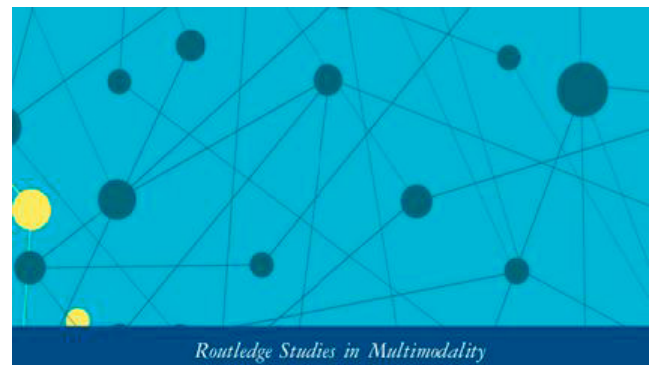
Charles Forceville
University of Amsterdam

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Charles Forceville, University of Amsterdam, P.O. Box 19268, 1000 GG Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: c.j.forceville@uva.nl

Lakoff and Johnson's dictum that 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (1980, p. 5, emphasis in original) graciously captures a few of this trope's most important characteristics. The convenient vagueness of the word 'thing' allows for a wide range of phenomena to be metaphorizable; the choice of verbs favours a dynamic conceptualization of the trope; and the definition covers multimodal manifestations no less than purely verbal ones.

Over the past years, another characteristic of metaphorizing is beginning to be more conspicuously discussed: metaphors embody strong emotional and evaluative dimensions. Particularly more or less novel or 'creative' metaphors (Black, 1979) make this clear. 'Football is war' (attributed to Dutch football coach Rinus Michels); 'marriage is a zero-sum game' (Black, 1979); and 'The Qu'oran is *Mein Kampf*' (Dutch extreme right-wing politician Geert Wilders – see Forceville and Van de Laar in press) emphatically suggest that the moral judgments accruing to their source domains are to be co-mapped onto the target domain (see e.g., Charteris-Black, 2004; Musolff, 2016). Put differently, the metaphors adopted provide an ethical perspective through which football, marriage, and the Qu'oran are framed.

Ahmed Abdel-Raheem makes this the core issue of *Pictorial Framing in Moral Politics*. I should acknowledge straightaway that I have been in regular e-mail contact



**PICTORIAL FRAMING IN
MORAL POLITICS**

A CORPUS-BASED EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Ahmed Abdel-Raheem



with the author for quite a few years and that he liberally quotes my work, mostly positively. So while I like to think that my appreciation for his work is rooted in the fact that we are fellow travellers in the young field of visual and multimodal metaphor studies, I cannot claim that I am unbiased.

The broader model within which the author analyses cartoons and op-ed illustrations is frame semantics and conceptual metaphor theory, as theorized by Fillmore (e.g., Fillmore, 1985), Lakoff (e.g., Lakoff, 1993, 2014; see also Wehling, 2013, 2018), combined with insights from blending theory (e.g., Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) and relevance theory (e.g., Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2012). The most important goal of the book is ‘to develop a theory of pictorial frames that is new, although grounded in familiar principles in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and moral psychology, among others,’ and ‘to show how the theory can be applied in the analysis of specific images’ (p. 2).

Abdel-Raheem begins by discussing several dimensions of ‘pictorial framing.’ To stand a chance of being accepted, frames need first of all to be *available* to a given person (or group of persons): self-evidently one needs to know and recognize things and persons to interpret anything. Secondly, the frame must be *accessible*: it is one thing to have the appropriate knowledge and beliefs; it is another to *evoke* the pertinent frame at the moment one is confronted by, for instance, a political cartoon. Thirdly, the frame must be *morally relevant*. In practice this means that the perspective offered should be in line with what the person thinks and believes, or at least not deviate too much from these ideas. And finally, the issue is whether addressees actually will *apply* the frame, thereby letting themselves be influenced by the moral implications of the frame.

Although political cartoons and op-ed illustrations have obvious similarities, Abdel-Raheem distinguishes between the two. The crucial difference is that whereas ‘illustrations are always subservient to the copy, and they are not captioned’ (p. 32) – ‘the copy’ in this case being the op-ed texts within which the illustrations are embedded – cartoons are autonomous visuals, usually accompanied by captions. The cartoonist thus is responsible for the entire contents. In both cases the result may be a visual or multimodal metaphor.

The author devotes an interesting paragraph to ‘visual recycling’: prominent visual elements from earlier images are copied, enabling recognition of the original scenario (Musolff, 2016), but these are combined with crucial visual and / or verbal differences pertaining to a new political situation. This is often theorized, as Abdel-Raheem points out, in terms of cultural memes (see also Dominguez, 2015a, 2015b). Clearly, in political cartoons the relation between word and image is crucial, a situation the author roots in Barthes’ (1986 [1964]) distinction between text ‘anchoring’ and ‘relaying’ images – old concepts that have not lost their usefulness (cf. Bateman, 2014). Chapter 3 ends with a section in which the author reports fragments of interviews he conducted with six makers of op-ed illustrations. This yields noteworthy insights in creators’ views on the differences between these latter and cartoons (which they also often produce), reflections on the process of creating them, as well as on the negotiations between newspaper editors and illustrators about the latter’s work.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the analysis of 90 editorial cartoons published between 2013 and 2016 in two Egyptian state newspapers, *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Akhbar*. But before embarking on this, the author reflects on principles informing these analyses, which he proposes to collect under the label MCA, which stands for ‘moral-cognitive approach.’ The overall principle adopted is relevance theory. Given my own appreciation of its importance (Forceville, 1996, 2005, 2014, in prep.; Forceville & Clark, 2014), this of course can only make me happy. Relevance theory provides a framework to help answer crucial questions such as which persons and events are referred to visually and/or verbally, and how?; what value(s) are invoked?; which contextual information is cued?; what argument can be teased out of visuals and/or verbal information?; what is the intended audience? (p. 66). But relevance theory must be complemented and fleshed out by procedures developed in metaphor theory and blending theory. The moral frame dimension is inspired by Lakoff’s strict-parent versus nurturant-parent belief systems. The former favours the conservative idea that individuals have a strong responsibility to solve their own problems and to take care of themselves; the latter favours the liberal idea that people must show empathy for, and solidarity with, others.

Abdel-Raheem concentrates on four ‘frame systems’ (which are similar to ‘Idealized Cognitive Models’ – see for instance Kövecses, 2010, p. 173 *et passim*) that, he claims, pervade Egyptian media when America’s political relations are at stake: with ISIS; with the Muslim Brotherhood; with Israel; and with the Middle East. In table 4.1 on p. 71 he presents the metaphors found in the 90 cartoons, and the frequency with which they could be said

to pertain to the four ‘frame systems’ described. He discusses a few Egyptian cartoons that all portray the US as some kind of villain. Depictions often tap into universal metaphors, but may also cue cultural specific ones, such as *killing someone/ending their career is cutting their hair or beard* (p. 77).

In Chapter 5 the author analyses moral dimensions in the ‘journey’ frame, as found in about 1,000 illustrated op-ed articles on the Eurozone crisis in the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* between 1 January 2010 and 30 June 2012. These newspapers were chosen as representative reliable Western news sources. The ‘journey’ metaphor can be formulated a ‘purposive activity is self-propelled movement toward a destination’ (e.g., Johnson, 1987), and lends itself very well to visualization in cartoons (see also Forceville & Van de Laar, in press). Unsurprisingly, given that the target domain relates to the Eurozone’s stalling economy, the ‘vehicle’ used on the metaphorical journey (whether a cart, a lifeboat, a plane, a snail, or the bull into which Zeus transforms himself to seduce ‘Europa’) faces serious difficulties in attempting to make progress. Examining the illustrations, the author comments on some pertinent regularities. For one thing, while the written op-ed in which the illustration is embedded may nuance the interpretation of the visual metaphor, the illustration usually provides the article’s key idea in simplified form. For another, the ‘journey’ metaphor is frequently complemented by other metaphors (such as ‘nation is person’). And correct interpretation of the illustration in addition requires substantial cultural background knowledge (cf. Forceville, 2017).

The next (50+ page) chapter continues the focus on op-ed illustrations in English-language media pertaining to the Eurozone crisis. Abdel-Raheem detects a privileged moral frame in them: they undermine the Euro and thereby fuel rather than abate the crisis. He argues that people who have not yet decided between the Lakoffian nurturant and strict belief systems – the so-called ‘biconceptuals’ – are influenced toward endorsing the latter (p. 111). He goes on to examine illustrations that represent the various “frames,” such as the *firefighting* frame, the *fiscal cliff* frame, the *tying-Europe-together* frame, and the *catastrophe* frame. Metaphors drawing on these frames are discussed, as are image schemas on which these metaphors in turn depend. The analyses are insightful and thorough, although sometimes perhaps overly detailed.

The final full chapter puts the idea of the impact of cartoons on viewers’ moral frames to the test. The author first let the experiments’ US participants (n=648) respond to lists with political statements in order to be able to characterize them as strict-parent thinkers, nurturant-parent thinkers, or biconceptuals. Subsequently he exposed them to two varieties of the same illustration, one favouring the strict, the other the nurturant angle. The results confirm the author’s hypotheses:

strict-father and nurturant-parent framings of political issues can exert a causal effect on people’s attitudes. Specifically, the attitudes of both biconceptuals and strict-fathers, but not of nurturant-parents [...], were affected by the pictorial framings in terms of the two moralities (p. 183).

Abdel-Raheem concludes by sketching future avenues for research: investigating moving images; testing the long-term (rather than short-term) impact of discourses on people’s moral frames; paying more attention to intertextuality; and further exploring the role played by background knowledge and beliefs (that is, addressees’ cognitive environment) on the moral interpretation of messages.

The novelty and appeal of this cognitivist-oriented monograph resides in several aspects. In the first place Abdel-Raheem analyses not verbal metaphors but visual and multimodal ones, thereby making a significant contribution to this young branch of metaphor studies. Secondly, whereas his familiarity with Western culture enables him to analyse British and American visuals, as a native from Egypt he also brings in a rare, and refreshing, Arabic perspective on political issues. Thirdly, his data do not only cover political cartoons (cf. El Refaie, 2003, 2009; Schilperoord & Maes, 2009; Teng, 2009; Bounegru & Forceville, 2011; Dominguez, 2015a, 2015b; Forceville & Van de Laar, in press), but also the hitherto untheorized genre of op-ed illustrations, and thus he corroborates the importance of “genre” as meaning-steering factor. Fourthly, he complements his own analyses with experimental research, which in the realm of visual and multimodal tropes is hitherto scarce (but cf. Pérez-Sobrino, 2017). Like Pérez-Sobrino, the author moreover is no dogmatic follower of a single model. Whereas conceptual metaphor theory constitutes the basis of his work, he is not shy to draw on relevance theory, blending theory, and semiotics wherever this is pertinent. His monograph thus exemplifies the kind of problem-oriented (rather than model-oriented) approach that will enormously benefit visual and multimodality studies, and indeed humanities studies more generally.

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