

**Recursive Visual Intertextuality:  
A Novel Conceptual Blending Analysis of  
Cartoons Glorifying Football Celebrities**

**Amany Youssef Aly Ahmed Youssef**

*Associate Professor*

Helwan University, Egypt

***Abstract***

This study contributes to ongoing research on recursive visual intertextuality (RVI) in cartoons, also known as multimodal recycling, where visual or compositional themes recur in pairs or sets of cartoons resulting in the sharing of a common source frame or *abstract schemata*. Drawing upon Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier, 2005, 2007; Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003; Turner, 2006, 2007, 2020), two novel configurations of integration networks are proposed to capture meaning construction in intertextually linked cartoons. The proposed configurations, namely *collective* and *contrastive* networks, match Abdel-Raheem's (2019a, b) two basic types of multimodal recycling: *same narrative* and *narrative shifting*, respectively. The data comprises five sets of thematically grouped web-published sports cartoons depicting two iconic footballers, namely, Lionel Messi and Mo(hammed) Salah. The study intersects with the discourse of celebrity glorification/worship while revealing creative manipulations of RVI with links to globalized themes of idealization and idolization, endowing the two footballers with supernatural powers or God-like qualities. Compression of time and identity are shown to further contribute to glorification of the two footballers, mitigation of their responsibility for controversial issues/losses, and to negative presentation of their adversaries.

***Keywords:*** visual intertextuality; conceptual blending; integration networks; sports cartoons; discourse of celebrity glorification/worship

التناص البصري التكراري:  
تحليل جديد للمزج المفاهيمي في  
كاريكاتير تمجيد مشاهير كرة القدم

أماني يوسف علي أحمد يوسف  
أستاذ مشارك  
جامعة حلوان، مصر

المستخلص

تساهم هذه الدراسة في مجال البحث في التناص البصري التكراري في رسوم الكاريكاتير، والمعروف أيضاً باسم إعادة التدوير متعدد الوسائط، حيث تتكرر التكوينات المرئية في أزواج أو مجموعات من رسوم الكاريكاتير مما يؤدي إلى تشاركتها في إطار أو مخطط تجريدي موحد. وتستند الدراسة إلى نظرية المزج المفاهيمي (Fauconnier، ٢٠٠٥، ٢٠٠٧؛ Fauconnier & Turner، ١٩٩٦، ١٩٩٨، ٢٠٠٠، ٢٠٠٢، ٢٠٠٣؛ Turner، ٢٠٠٦، ٢٠٠٧، ٢٠٢٠) وتنقد باقتراح تكوينين جديدين لشبكات التكامل المفاهيمي لتصوير عمليات بناء المعنى في رسوم الكاريكاتير التي يربطها التناص البصري. ويتطابق التكوينين المقترحين، والذان سنشير لهما بالشبكات الجماعية والمتناقضة، مع ما إشمته نموذج عبد الرحيم (٢٠١٩ أ، ب) من نوعين أساسيين من إعادة التدوير متعدد الوسائط وهما السرد الموحد والسرد المتحول. تتكون عينة البحث من خمس أزواج من رسوم الكاريكاتير التي يرتبط كل منها بالتناص البصري والمنشورة على شبكة الإنترنت، و تصور عينة البحث اثنين من أفضل لاعبي كرة القدم وأكثرهم شهرة على مستوى العالم، وهما ليونيل ميسي ومحمد صلاح. تتلاقى الدراسة مع خطاب تمجيد/عبادة المشاهير بينما تكشف عن احترافية رسامي الكاريكاتير في توظيف التناص البصري المرتبط بتكوينات مرئية معولمة لإضفاء المثالية على كل من ليونيل ميسي و محمد صلاح وإظهار ولع جماهير الكرة بكل منهما. وقد أظهرت الدراسة أن رسامي الكاريكاتير قد اتبعوا عدة استراتيجيات لمنح لاعبي كرة القدم قوى خارقة للطبيعة أو لرفعهم لمرتبة الآلهة. وقد جاء على رأس هذه الاستراتيجيات ضغط الوقت والهوية اللذان ساهما بشكل فعال في تمجيد لاعبي كرة القدم، وتخفيف مسؤوليتهم عن القضايا/الخسائر المثيرة للجدل، والتصوير السلبي لخصومهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التناص البصري؛ المزج المفاهيمي؛ شبكات التكامل؛ رسوم الكاريكاتير في مجال الرياضة؛ خطاب تمجيد/عبادة المشاهير

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**1. Introduction**

In the current globalized scene of internet publishing, circulation of popularized visual themes has become a common phenomenon in cartoon design. Intertextual ties are hence extended among collections of cartoons that have been created “out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in” (Bazerman 2004, p. 83). Through the lens of Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT; Fauconnier, 2005, 2007; Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003; Turner, 2006, 2007, 2020), the present study investigates the mental operations involved in constructing meaning in five intertextual pairs of cartoons depicting two of the best and most popular contemporary footballers: Lionel Messi, Argentinian forward for Ligue 1 club Paris Saint-Germain and captain of the Argentina national football team; and Mo Salah, Egyptian forward of Premier League Liverpool and Egypt’s national football team (ENT). Discourse generated around the two football stars, including a huge number of cartoons, seems to display manifestations of idealization and idolization, hence intersecting with the discourse of celebrity glorification/worship.

CBT has extensively been applied to visual/multimodal texts like cartoons due to its ability to handle rich visual phenomena that challenged earlier frameworks like Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999). Studies applying CBT to cartoon analysis have mainly focused on editorial and political cartoons (Bergen, 2003; Delibegović Džanić & Omazić, 2011; El Attar, 2017; Mazid, 2008; Najjar 2011; Pavlovic, 2009; Rohrer, 2001, 2004). The present study, however, shifts the focus to sports cartoons, particularly those that display visual intertextuality.

Of the very few attempts at examining visual intertextuality from a cognitive perspective, Abdel-Raheem (2019a, 2019b) focused on instances where “cartoonists frequently recycle pictorial and compositional ideas they have developed earlier” (Abdel-Raheem, 2019a, p. 1). Abdel-Raheem (2019a) identified two basic types of multimodal recycling: *same narrative* and *narrative shifting*. In the former, partial

change in the fillers of the common source domain keeps the collection of cartoons within the same superordinate topic. In the latter, the whole source domain is re-instantiated, shifting the narrative to a new topic. Based on these two types of multimodal recycling, the present study proposes two novel configurations of integration networks, namely *collective* and *contrastive* networks. The proposed configurations capture the mental operations activated in the mind of the viewer when juxtaposing intertextually linked cartoons. The resultant ‘emergent structure(s)’ extend(s) the possible interpretation of each cartoon beyond its intended meaning if examined independently.

## 2. Research Questions

Three research questions guide this study:

1. How can a novel conceptual blending analysis reveal the creative encoding of meaning in intertextual collections of cartoons on the two players, Salah and Messi?
2. How do cartoonists ‘re-accentuate’ elements of a quoted text within multimodal intertextuality to highlight certain cultural aspects and comment on key football events pertaining to each player?
3. How do cartoonists contribute to the discourse of celebrity glorification/worship?

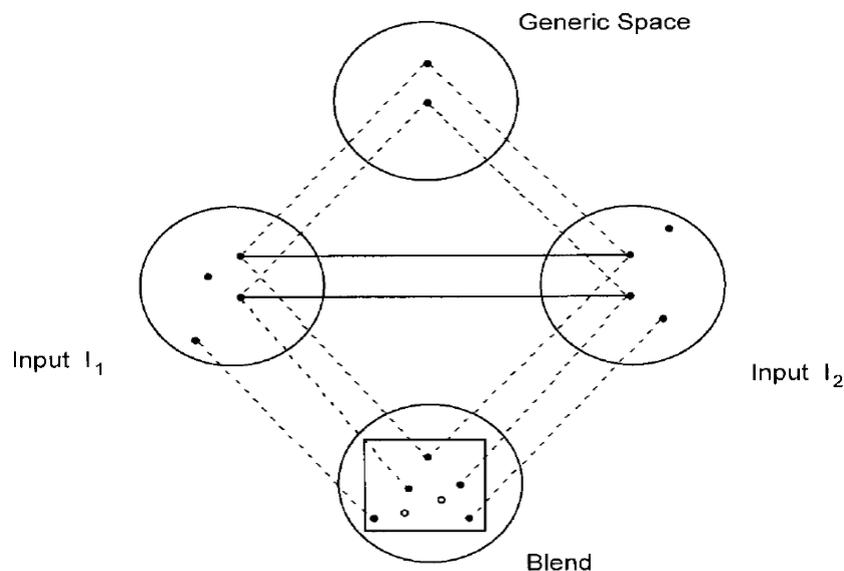
## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT; Fauconnier, 2005, 2007; Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003; Turner, 2006, 2007, 2020) offers a framework for on-line (i.e., during discourse) meaning making through the building of mental representations. Conceptual blending (CB) was proposed by Fauconnier & Turner (1996) as a general mental operation that uses mental spaces as inputs. This mental operation is understood to run “largely behind the scenes” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. v) and to be mainly concerned with the “dynamic aspects of meaning construction and its dependence upon mental spaces and mental space construction as part of its architecture” (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 400). Mental spaces, which are “small conceptual packets” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 102) linked to “‘offline’ conceptual structures stored in long-term memory ... [structured by] ... cognitive models in the form of frames, schemas]” (Hart, 2010, p. 10), merge in “vast networks of conceptual meaning, yielding cognitive products that, at the conscious

level, appear simple” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. v). In blending, “structure from two input spaces is projected to a separate space, the ‘blend.’ The blend inherits partial structure from the input spaces, and has emergent structure of its own” (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, p. 2).

The basic model in Figure 1 represents a conceptual integration network with a minimum of four mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space, the ‘Blend,’ which “inherits partial [selective] structure from the input spaces” (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, p. 113) and “dynamically develops emergent structure” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003, p. 58).



**Figure 1: The four-space model (Turner, 2007, p. 379)**

In Figure 1, the emergent structure is schematically represented in the solid square in the blend, yet the emergent structure is created throughout the network (Turner, 2020) in a dynamic manner “deactivating previous connections, reframing previous spaces, and other actions” (Turner, 2007, p. 379). In addition, the emergent structure/meaning is compositional in the sense that it would not be available in any of its constitutive input spaces (process of composition). Background knowledge or discourse context may be necessary to understand the blend (process of completion). The recipient may run the blend by creatively imagining further extensions to the emergent meaning (process of elaboration).

Four (proto) types of integration networks are identified in ascending order of complexity:

- **Simplex networks** are the simplest type with only two input spaces: one consists of elements with no organizing frame while the other is an abstract (compatible) frame with no fillers. Integration of the elements from one mental space into the compatible frame from the

other, which is basically a process of framing, results in a compositional blend with no clashes between the inputs and naturally no competing frames.

- In a **Mirror network**, a common organizing frame is shared by (or, mirrored in) all mental spaces in the network. The blend naturally inherits the common organizing frame, yet in a richer form.
- **Single-scope** networks are analogous to the typical conventional *source-target* metaphors, where each of the two inputs in the network has a distinct frame, yet, asymmetrically, only one of these frames organizes the blend. The framing input is equivalent to the *source domain* while the (focus) input that provides the relevant elements is equivalent to the *target domain*.
- **A Double-scope** involves frame-level blending, where the organizing frame of the blend is the result of central contributions from the distinct frames of the inputs. The contributing frames often clash, leading to challenges to the imagination which create rich and quite creative blends.

Further complexity may be introduced via multiple blends which “allow multiple input spaces, and successive blending in which blends at one level can be inputs at another” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003, p. 61). This is quite common in cartoons, where meaning is densely constructed.

### 3.2 Visual Intertextuality

The term *intertextuality* was first coined by Kristeva in the late 1960s (published in 1980). However, the concept originated in earlier work by Barthes (1977 [1967]) who viewed a text as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (1977, p. 146). For Bakhtin (1981; 1986), any utterance is a “link in the chain of speech communication ... filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances ... presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account” (1986, p. 91). Within this multi-dimensionality of textual space, Kristeva (1986) proposed two intersecting planes with a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text and a vertical axis connecting a text to other earlier or future texts.

Several attempts were made to classify and identify different aspects of this phenomenon. Bakhtin (1986), for example, identified the borrowing of a full text as opposed to that of single words which may directly be borrowed or ‘re-accentuated’ by the borrower. Fairclough (1992) distinguished between manifest intertextuality, where “specific other texts are overtly drawn upon” (p. 117) and constitutive

intertextuality (or, interdiscursivity) where a text aligns with other texts within the same genre. Bazerman (2004) further identified several levels of directness or explicitness of intertextuality with corresponding variable degrees of recoverability of a borrowed text. He argued that greater recoverability was linked to greater ‘intertextual distance’ (or, ‘intertextual reach’) in time, space, or culture that a text travels to establish intertextual relations with a quoted text. As noted in the present Analysis, intertextual distance, especially that which involved travelling back in time, enabled the expression of certain concepts that would otherwise have been unfeasible.

In the visual mode, intertextuality may come in the form of ‘binary juxtaposing’ or ‘visual quoting’ (Werner, 2004). Binary juxtaposing involves the bringing together of two contrasting ideas, values, conditions, or events in a single image. As a result of the contrast, evaluative interpretation is activated. In visual quoting, on the other hand, texts “incorporate borrowed themes, symbols, or compositional elements from famous images” (Werner, 2004, p. 67), producing new meanings as a result of interpreting one text with respect to another. To capture such new meanings and appreciate the subtleties of visual quoting, the viewer must have the necessary background knowledge about the quoted text and how it is incorporated into the context of the quoting text(s).

Visual quoting has further been investigated by Abdel-Raheem (2019a, b) under the term ‘multimodal/visual recycling,’ where a single cartoonist recycled a common schema in a set of cartoons over time. Abdel-Raheem (2019a) identified two basic types of multimodal recycling: *same narrative* and *narrative shifting*. In the former, “one or more slots of the source are refilled or re-instantiated, without leading the viewer to a new ‘macrostructure’ or ‘superordinate topic’” (Abdel-Raheem, 2019a, p. 15). For example, in two cartoons sharing a unifying source frame of Doctor-Patient relationship, the Doctor slot is visually filled by President El-Sisi while the Patient slot is filled by a different element in each cartoon (Abdel-Raheem, 2019a, Fig 1b, p. 6). In one cartoon, the Patient is the Arab world, personified as a man with the globe as his head. In another cartoon, Egypt, personified as a woman wrapped in the Egyptian flag, is the Patient. The two cartoons are included within the same *superordinate topic* since one doctor can naturally have different patients. In narrative shifting recycling, on the other hand, “the whole source is reinstantiated [i.e., if all slots within the source frame were replaced], leading the viewer to a new superordinate ‘macroposition’ or topic” (Abdel-Raheem, 2019a, p. 15). For example, a set of four cartoons (Abdel-Raheem, 2019a, Fig 1c, p. 6) share a common

unifying source frame of Bullfighting with the expected slots of Bull, Matador, Red Cloth, etc. However, by visually filling the Bull vs Matador slots with different fillers, four different situations/topics are constructed: The Treachery Law vs. Essam Sharaf, the then Prime Minister; High School Diploma vs. the Future, personified as a man/dwarf; USA vs. Obama; Third World vs. Uncle Sam. In either type of multimodal recycling, same narrative or narrative shifting, a unifying source frame is required.

### 3.3 The Ideological Square

Whether in conflict with others or just talking about us and/or others, van Dijk (2006) argued that, generally, we tend to “[s]ay positive things about Us” and “negative things about Them” (p. 44). These two tendencies were complemented with their counterparts: “Do not say negative things about Us” and “[d]o not say positive things about Them” (ibid). The four tendencies, which underly positive self-presentation (ingroup favoritism) and negative other-presentation (outgroup derogation), were developed into the following four rules/possibilities:

- Emphasize positive things about Us.
- Emphasize negative things about Them.
- De-emphasize negative things about Us.
- De-emphasize positive things about Them. (ibid)

Together, these four possibilities constitute van Dijk’s *ideological square* which he found to operate in discourse. The square pre-supposes definition of group membership: US (members of the in-group) vs. Them (members of the out-group).

### 3.4 Referential and Predicational Strategies

Wodak and Meyer’s (2009) referential and predicational strategies are two of many other linguistic tools for positive and/or negative presentation. According to Wodak and Meyer (2009), referential strategies are basically strategies of nomination which are used for categorization as in-group or out-group. Predicational strategies involve the use of “evaluative attributions of positive or negative traits and implicit or explicit predicates” (p. 30).

### 3.5 Celebrity/Hero Worship

‘Celebrity/hero worship’ (CW) is “a form of almost obsessional involvement where individuals idolise their favourite celebrity to the

point of ‘worship’” (Brooks, 2018, p. 2), where “healthy admiration becomes a mental illness” (Abdul Kader, 2018, p. 64). CW is the highest of three levels on the ‘Celebrity Attitude Scale’ developed by McCutcheon et al. (2002), where some individuals likely with materialistic values (Green et al., 2014), weak identity structures (McCutcheon & Maltby, 2002), or weak religiosity (Maltby, 2004; Maltby et al., 2002) may become ‘border line pathological’ with intense false feelings of intimacy and closeness toward a celebrity in a parasocial relationship (Brooks, 2018). However, Maltby et al. (2002) note that “many religious people ... [still] ignore the religious teaching that ‘Thou shalt worship no other Gods,’ or fail to connect it to their ‘worship’ of celebrities” (p. 1157). While CW could be quite disturbing to the psychological well-being or even detrimental to both fans and celebrities (Giles, 2000), it is both fostered and manipulated by a full-fledged advertising industry based on celebrity endorsement (Chung & Cho, 2017; Karasiewicz & Kowalczyk, 2014; Malik & Guptha, 2014; Neve, 2020).

#### 4. Review of Literature

##### 4.1 Past Studies Employing CBT

Studies applying Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) to cartoon analysis have focused on political and editorial cartoons (Bergen, 2003; Delibegović Džanić & Omazić, 2011; El Attar, 2017; Mazid, 2008; Najjar, 2011; Pavlovic, 2009; Rohrer, 2001, 2004).

Using an eclectic approach combining conceptual blending (CB), conceptual metaphor, and cultural models, Bergen (2003) analyzed 219 political cartoons that appeared in the week after the attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Bergen found out that certain blends called for the use of CBT. Pavlovic (2009), who analyzed newspaper cartoons related to the Serbian political scene in 2009, also found CBT to provide a systematic way of analyzing cartoons, especially those that contained double-scopes and visual fusion.

Political cartoons were also investigated by Mazid (2008) who used an elaborate theoretical framework combining CBT, Chilton’s (de)legitimation and proximization, visual metaphor, the incongruity theory of humor, as well as van Dijk’s ideological square. He offered a rich *semio-linguistic* analysis of 30 English and Arabic political cartoons constructing George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden in the aftermath of 9/11. Creative conceptual blending between the worlds of religion and politics was observed to create a new space where the former legitimized the latter. Bush used religion to legitimize his hunger for war and

destruction in his *War on Terror*. In addition to one space legitimizing the other, incongruities between the contrastive frames of religion and politics resulted in humorous effects. Incongruity-based humorous effects were also reported by Delibegović Džanić and Omazić (2011) who accounted for meaning construction in selected cartoons representing the political and economic status in Bosnia, Herzegovina, and the United States.

War cartoons, as a subset of political cartoons, were investigated by Rohrer (2004) who studied the visual manifestations of hatred in a collection of historical and contemporary war cartoons. He argued that CB was most suitable for the interpretation of visual phenomena in cartoons and for explaining the ideological purposes underlying them, adding that “topological conformity, metonymic shortening, and compression--can be used to serve an ideological end in order to lie, to exaggerate, or even to expose the truth” (Rohrer, 2004, p. 193). Naghy (2010) summed it up as “[i]deological control through visual modes” (p. 10).

Addressing intertextuality in political cartoons generated after the torture scandal of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004 was carried out by Najjar (2011). Iconic images of the 2004 incident like the image of the hooded man were argued to live past the originating incident awaiting a ‘devotional’ rather than just a ‘narrative’ reading of the ideologies it triggers in emergent structures. Manipulation of such iconic images by cartoonists created political ‘culture jamming’ while extending the life and intertextual reach of the quoted images.

Editorial cartoons were the focus of a study by El Attar (2017) who investigated the metaphoric blends and the underlying ideological assumptions in five ideologically loaded cartoons which criticized current educational strategies in Egypt. Hidden ideologies of the internet were revealed by Rohrer (2001) who found CBT to be the most suitable framework for the analysis of figurative language and visual blends in cartoons. Inferences invited by visual blends depicted the internet as an INFORMATION HIGHWAY and a CYBERMARKETPLACE.

Sports cartoons, to the best of the author’s knowledge, have not yet been investigated via CBT.

#### 4.2 Past Studies on Celebrity Worship

Socio-cultural studies on the discourse generated around celebrities have focused on the themes, on how the stars were represented, and/or on the amount of coverage of stars’ news. It has been argued, for example, that

celebrity discourse contains frequent religious connotations with celebrities represented as ‘idols’ or ‘icons’ (Alexander, 2010), “elevated to the position of role models and heroes” (Canter & Dot Grau, 2019, p. 1) who feel they “have the right to behave badly” as long as they are famous (Giles, 2000, p. 9). Canter & Dot Grau (2019) reported that British tabloids mainly focused on stories about the private lives of celebrity footballers, which were often told in a negative sentiment. By contrast, the British Press was found to represent footballers primarily as sportsmen, with little infringement on their private lives. “Nevertheless there remains evidence of the celebrity status of footballers, particularly national team players past and present, and the existence of hero worshipping in the broadsheet press and role model scrutiny in tabloid newspapers” (Canter & Dot Grau, 2019, p. 1). Canter & Dot Grau explained that since football was a national sport in Britain, then highlighting its stars, their talents and achievements has become part of patriotism.

From a linguistic perspective, few studies focused on celebrity gossip that aims to promote interest in celebrities and reinforce their stardom in the minds of a mass audience. Breeze (2009), for example, reported that the discourse of celebrity gossip in the British tabloid, *The Sun*, employed several rhetorical and linguistic tools like the creation of identity chains, where the celebrity was referred to several times across a text using different yet co-referential elements. Members of an identity chain usually contained heavy noun phrases like “the self-styled king of pop”, which serve as an “agenda-setting device which collapsed debatable issues into uncontested information bites” (Breeze, 2009, p. 10). Other tools included use of ‘inflationary lexis,’ where, for example, a ‘star’ became a ‘superstar,’ reference to glamorous materialistic items in the daily life of a celebrity, and conversely, reference to the celebrities as being just like us, the readers, within a rhetorical frame of familiarity. Interestingly, an opposing frame of disrespect was also employed to attract attention to a celebrity by tarnishing his/her image. Degaf et al. (2019) observed positive-self and negative-other presentation in celebrity gossip in Indonesian online media through lexical choices and grammatical strategies of passivation, abstraction, categorization, identification, and anonymity.

Ideology in news stories on celebrities’ substance abuse in *The New York Times* was investigated by Austin (2014) who observed that those stories offered an unrealistic view of substance abuse as an individual moral problem, overlooking its grave social and medical implications. In addition, the role of the celebrity was highlighted in the

recovery stories, backgrounding recovery as a personal choice that was achieved by the celebrity with little or no assistance.

To the best of the author's knowledge, how celebrities are depicted in cartoons has not been investigated by any previous study.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Data Selection & Description

The cartoons under study have been selected from a vast pool of stock cartoons collected through googling cartoons on the two football stars, Salah and Messi. Simple search strings like 'cartoons on Mo Salah' (both in English and in Arabic *كاريكاتير محمد صلاح*) and 'cartoons on Messi' have been applied several times over the span of three months (May-July 2022), and the search results have been examined. Recurrent themes have been observed in the cartoons on each player, and across players. For Salah, his international achievements have often been juxtaposed against his troubled relationship with the Egyptian National Team (ENT). For Messi, several cartoons have documented his achievements and/or losses. Common to both players are cartoons depicting them as supermen, as lion kings, and as worshiped kings. Five pairs of cartoons have been collected under the following themes:

**Table 1: Themes of the cartoons under study**

A. Common to both players		Number of cartoons
1	Supermen/Iconic Heroes	2
2	Lion Kings	2
3	Worshiped Kings	2
B. Particular to each player		
4	Salah: ENT vs. Liverpool	2
5	Messi: Agony over Losses	2

Each of the ten cartoons includes a visual representation of either Salah or Messi as a main referent. There have been no restrictions as to whether the cartoons included only the visual mode or combined both visual and verbal modes.

It has been unfeasible to identify the cartoonists of three out of ten cartoons due to the globalized internet publishing as well as the illegibility or absence of some cartoonists' signatures. Complete URLs of all cartoons and recovered information of the remaining seven cartoonists have been included in the figure captions.

## 5.2 Procedure & Tools of Analysis

Since some of the cartoons could be linked to key incidents in football or contained reference to some cultural items, brief contextualization has been offered before analyzing the relevant cartoons. Background information in football has been based on online sports articles.

The cartoons under study have been analyzed qualitatively within the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier, 2005, 2007; Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003; Turner, 2006, 2007, 2020). Instances of visual intertextuality, whether in the form of visual quoting or binary juxtaposing have been integrated in the conceptual blending analysis. Some verbal elements within the studied cartoons have been investigated through Wodak and Meyer's (2009) formulation of referential and predicational strategies. Michael Halliday's (1985/1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004/2014) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) model has been applied once in the analysis. Van Dijk's (2006, 2007, 2011, 2013) ideological square has been resorted to as an explanatory concept for the creative manifestations of positive-self negative-other presentation within the discourse of celebrity glorification/worship.

## 6. Analysis

Cartoons within each of the five pairs under study share a common source frame or *abstract schemata*, hence the name *parallel* cartoons. Observed shared schemata extend intertextual relations through borrowing/quoting themes or visual compositions from famous/globalized texts (Abdel-Raheem's (2019a, b) *multimodal recycling* and Werner's (2004) *visual quoting*, Section 3.2). In Abdel-Raheem's (2019a) examples, however, a single cartoonist would recycle a common schema in a set of cartoons over time, creating a 'single-authored' intertextual collection. Parallel cartoons in the present data have been produced by different cartoonists, often with a considerable time gap. Hence, it remains uncertain whether the observed sharing of a common schema or source frame has in fact been the result of conscious multimodal recycling across cartoonists or the result of accidentally co-picking a common popularized theme.

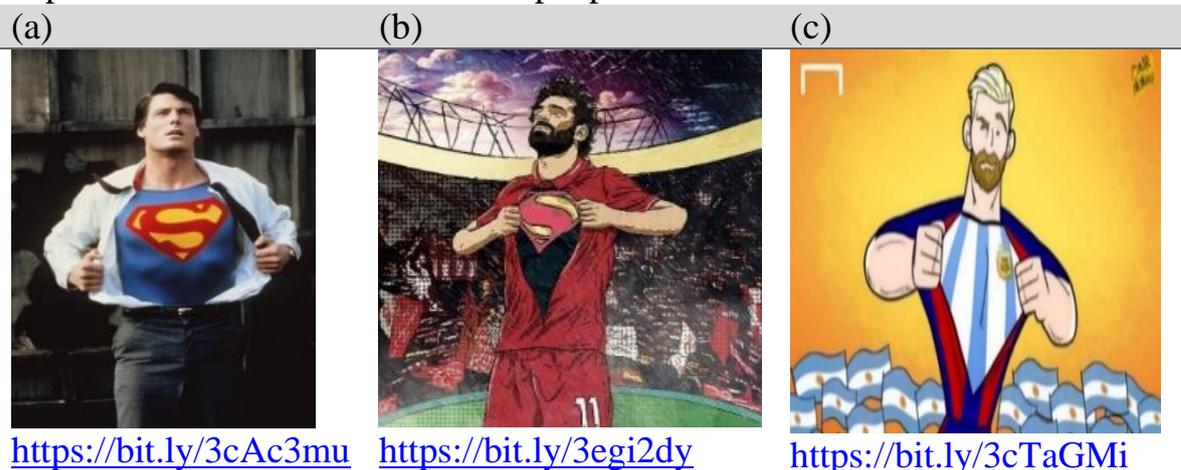
Within a conceptual blending analysis, a novel configuration of integration networks is proposed to allow simultaneous encoding of meaning in pairs of parallel cartoons. Two types of networks are proposed based on Abdel-Raheem's (2019a, b) two basic types of multimodal recycling: *same narrative* and *narrative shifting* (see Section 3.2). For same narrative parallel cartoons, a *collective network* will include all the mental spaces and frames activated in the cartoons and a single collective blended space. For narrative shifting parallel cartoons,

on the other hand, a *contrastive network* will include two contrastive blended spaces to match the shift from one narrative/topic to another within the same schema or theme under examination. The five subsections in the analysis illustrate how the sharing of a common theme would trigger the proposed collective and contrastive integration networks across pairs of intertextually-linked cartoons.

Different manifestations of celebrity glorification/worship have been observed in the present data. Idolizing a player has been achieved through compression of identity with Superman, a rising sun, a new Lion King, a Pharaoh, a worshiped king, (a) God, and with Jesus Christ. This has been realized through visual hybrids, visual fusion, verbal labels, compositional ideas, and most significantly, through (visual) intertextuality. In addition to idolizing a player, cartoonists have exercised negative-other presentation of a player's adversary and have creatively attempted mitigation of another player's responsibility for controversial losses in football and illicit acts like tax fraud.

### 6.1 Supermen/Iconic Heroes

The graphic design and cartoon in Figure 2(b) and (c), respectively, establish visual and conceptual intertextuality with Superman's iconic move (Figure 2(a)) of ripping his shirt open to reveal superman power suit underneath as a signal of an imminent transformation into an ultimate superhero who then flies to rescue people in distress.

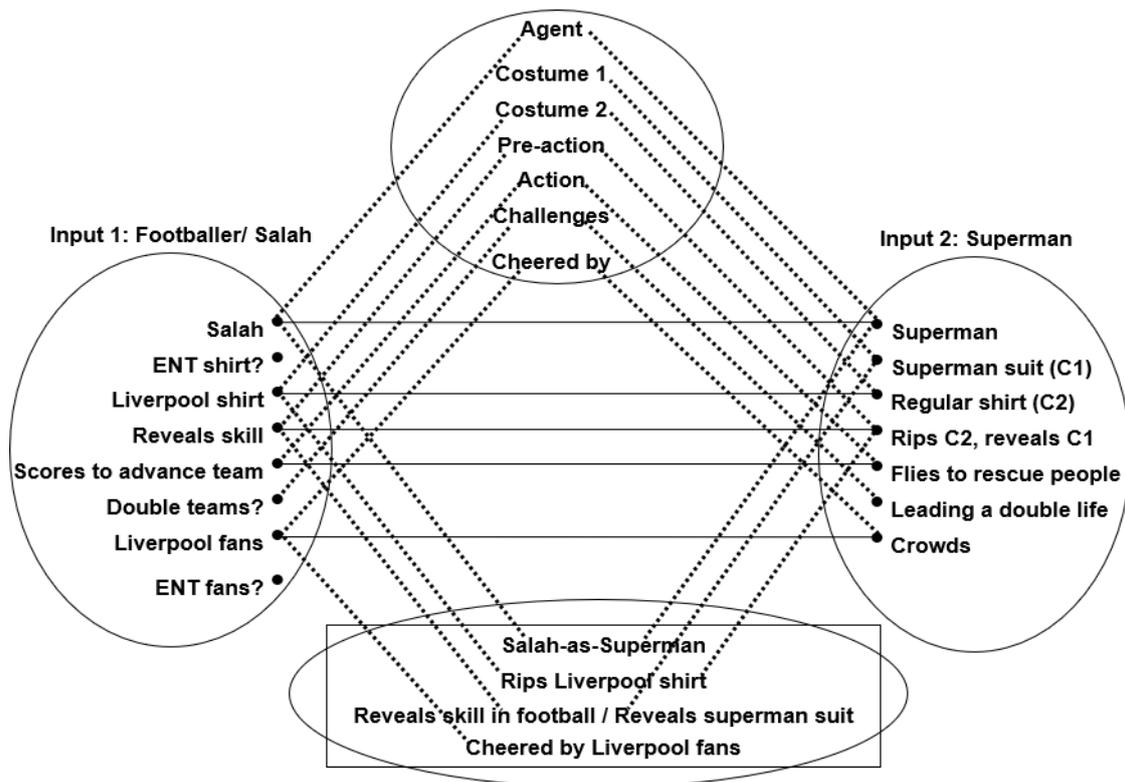


**Figure 2: (a) Actor Christopher Reeve as Superman (1978), (b) Messi as Superman by Jordanian cartoonist Omar Momani, (c) Salah as Superman by Irish cartoonist, Mark White**

Salah's cartoon/graphic design replicates the iconic move on the football field (Figure 2(b)) as he rips off the Liverpool shirt to reveal the

superman inside with Liverpool fans waving flags at the fuzzy background. Messi rips off his Barcelona shirt and reveals the Argentina shirt underneath (Figure 2(c)). At the neutralized background, Argentina flags metonymically representing the fans cheer Messi’s move/transformation.

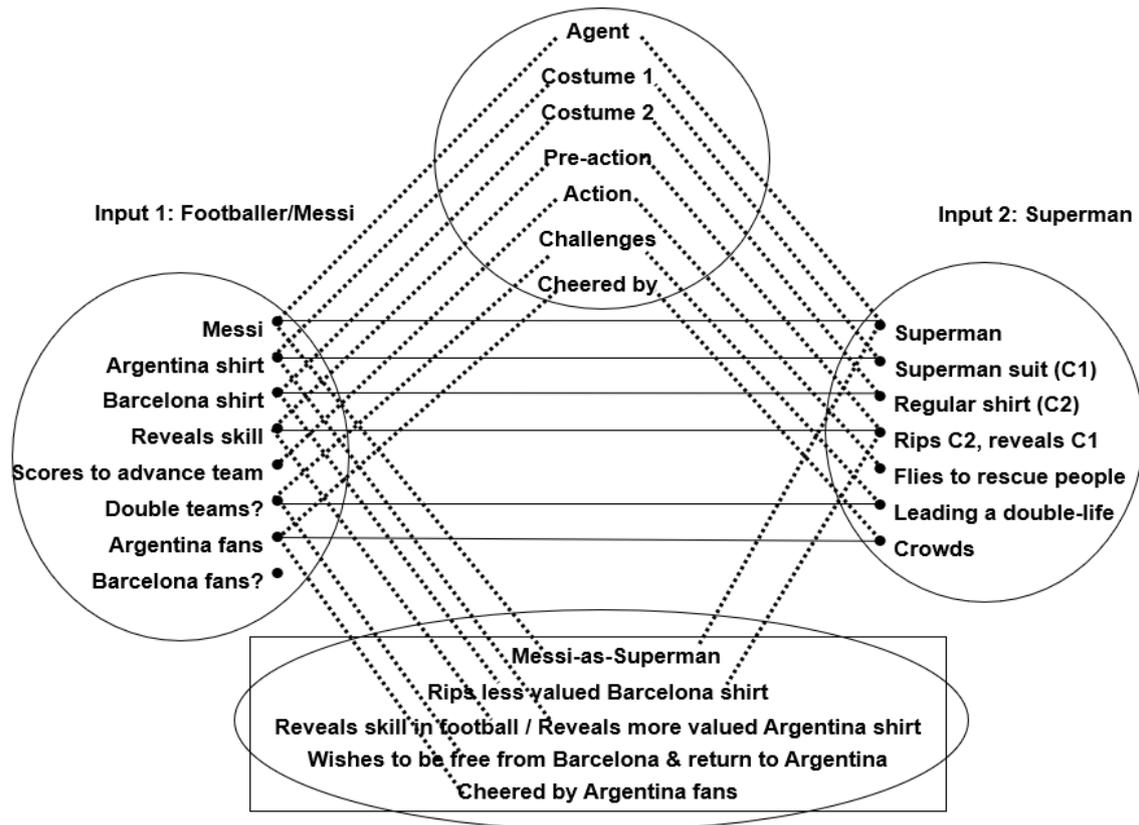
Compression of identity between each player and the Superman character motivates a double-scope network where the two input spaces (Footballer and Superman) equally contribute to the blend (Figures 3 and 4 for Salah and Messi, respectively). In both networks, the two input spaces clash in terms of Action, but cross-space mapping links Salah and Messi with Superman, the ripping of the shirt to reveal inner power with the show of great skill and talent in football, and the cheering Superman crowds with the cheering football fans. The two networks depart in terms of costumes and challenges, leading to two different situations.



**Figure 3: Double-scope network for Salah as Superman**

In terms of costumes, Superman rips open a regular shirt that he wears over Superman’s suit (Figure 2(b)). Hence, from in to out, the latter garment would be Costume 1 (C1) while the former Costume 2 (C2). For Messi (Figure 2(c)), C1 is his native club (Argentina’s) shirt while C2 is his hiring club (Barcelona’s) shirt. Hence, in Figure 4, Messi’s native

club shirt is mapped to Superman’s suit while his hiring club shirt to Superman’s external regular shirt. Hence, through a process of elaboration, higher more positive evaluation of Messi’s native club emerges in the blend.



**Figure 4: Double-scope network for Messi as Superman**

After Superman is freed from the regular shirt, he flies away in his power suit to achieve his goal, namely, to rescue people. Through a process of completion, we know from background knowledge that during the summer of 2020, Messi was stalling renewal of his contract with Barcelona, which raised rumors he might be going back to Argentina (Bakshi, 2020, July 3). However, Messi later admitted he was forced to stay with Barcelona against his wish until January 2021 because of a handsome release clause of 700m euro (£624m) in his contract (Wadood, 2020, September 5). In Figure 4, Messi’s challenging situation with the two teams is mapped to Superman’s challenge of leading a double life as Clark Kent (journalist) and as Superman. The blend additionally recruits the frame of Messi’s wish to be set free from Barcelona and to return to Argentina, his native club.

Juxtaposing the intertextual collection containing Figure 2(b) and Figure 2(c), the Messi-as-Superman representation may enter a dialogue with the Salah-as-Superman representation. While the graphic design featuring Salah ((Figure 2 (b)) makes no reference to his native club, the Egyptian National Team (ENT); however, in analogy with Messi’s representation, we may consider mapping Superman’s suit to Salah’s native club (ENT’s) shirt (Figure 3). In addition, Superman’s dilemma of leading a double life may be mapped to Salah’s performance with the ENT vs. Liverpool (see Section 6.4). However, a hypothetical analogous frame containing higher evaluation of the ENT and Salah’s wish to be freed from Liverpool and return to the ENT contradicts background knowledge of Salah’s conflict with the ENT (see Section 6.4). It follows that Salah’s shirt-ripping move would rather be interpreted just as a display of his extraordinary skill and talent when playing with Liverpool and cheered by Liverpool fans.

At an abstract level, the narrative shift across this intertextual collection activates a contrastive 2-blend double-scope network with two input spaces: Superman and Footballer. Two blended spaces accommodate the narrative shifting from one player to another.

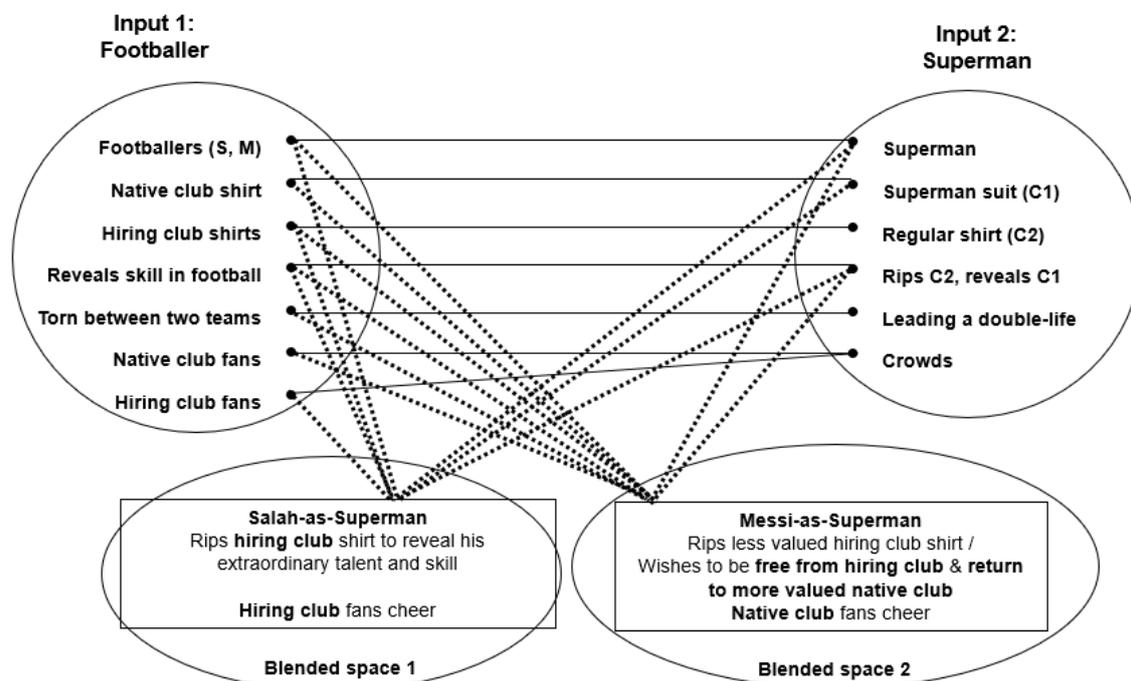


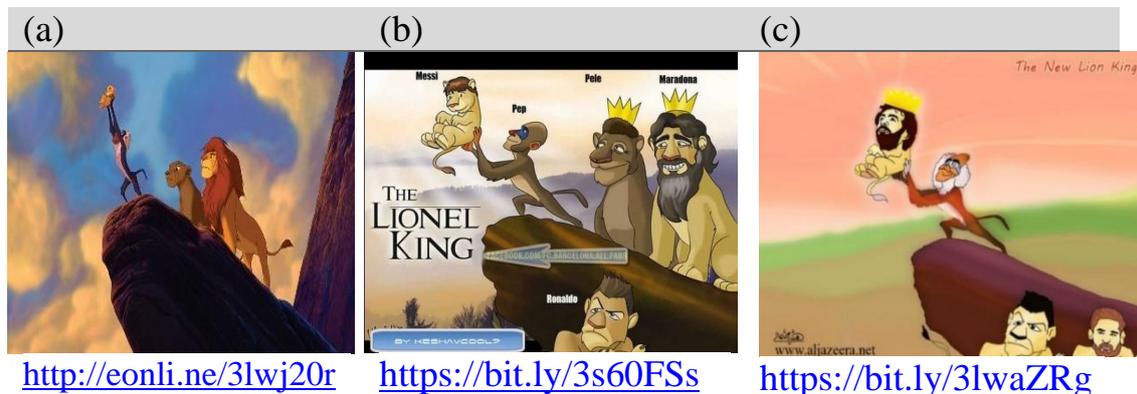
Figure 5: Contrastive 2-blend double-scope network – Footballer as Superman

Comparing the resulting two representations in the blended spaces in Figure 5, it can be concluded that the intertextual Messi’s representation as Superman is richer in the sense that it borrowed several aspects of the

quoted text and offered a deep commentary on Messi's situation with contract renewal in the summer of 2020. Salah's representation, on the other hand, just copied the move with the surface meaning of a display of extraordinary talent and skill. Based on background knowledge of Salah's conflict with the ENT (see Section 6.4), the cartoonist could have depicted Salah ripping the ENT shirt to reveal the Liverpool shirt underneath.

## 6.2 Lion Kings

In the 'Circle of Life' scene from Disney's 1994 animation picture, *The Lion King*, Rafiki lifts the new royal baby Simba into the air for all the kingdom to see and welcome, with Simba's parents looking on (Figure 6(a)). Through visual quoting, the scene is re-enacted in a counter-factual scenario in the 2012 cartoon in Figure 6(b), with Messi as Simba, Pep as Rafiki, and Pele and Maradona as Simba's royal parents, Mufasa and Sarabi. An addition is Ronaldo as Scar, the main antagonistic character in the movie.

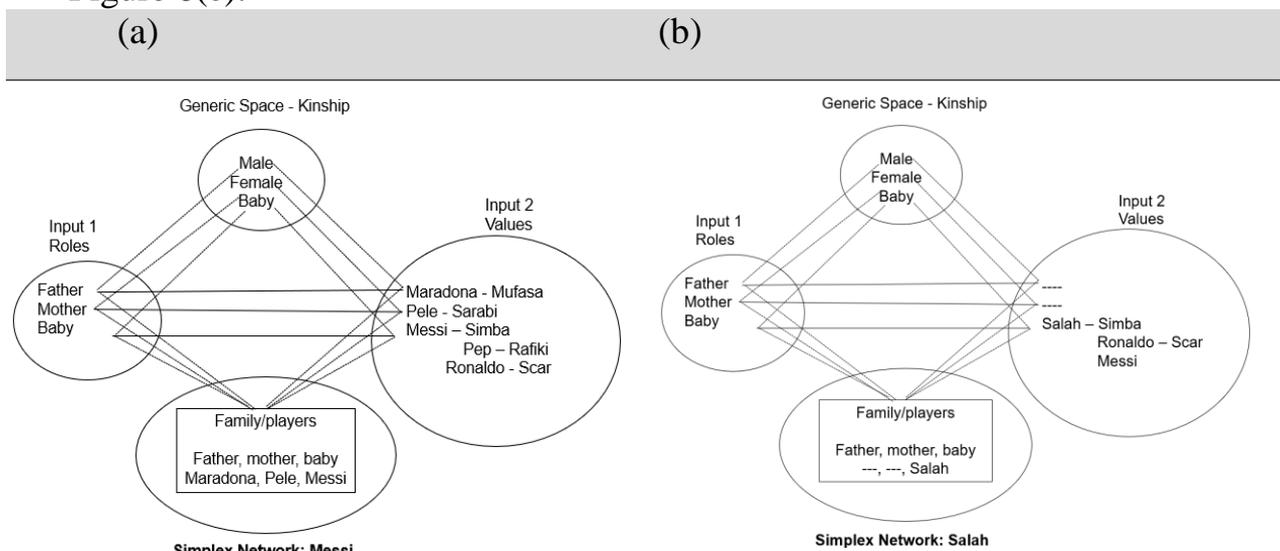


**Figure 6: (a) Original “Circle of Life” scene, (b) Messi as baby Simba (cartoonist unidentified), (c) Salah as baby Simba by Syrian cartoonist, Haytham Alshamaly**

In addition to visual fusion with animal bodies in Figure 6 (b), the cartoonist replicates the positioning and body postures of characters and uses verbal labels to secure the matching between the animated characters and the relevant players. A play on words in the caption overlapping the image transforms the title of the movie, *The Lion King*, into *The Lionel King* to match Messi's first name. In Figure 6(c), no labelling is needed; a visual hybrid shows Salah combining both human and non-human characteristics with his crowned human head on baby Simba's body. Two

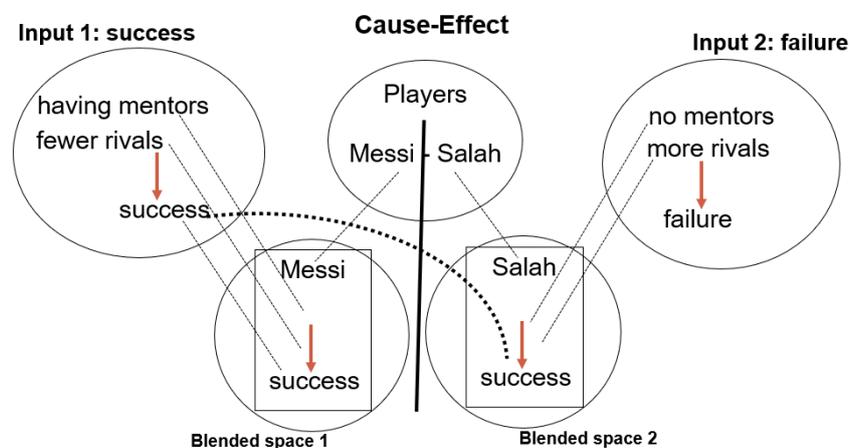
competitors/opponents to Salah, Ronaldo and Messi, appear in Figure 6(c) (while only one in Figure 6 (b) for Messi). Ronaldo is visually mapped to Scar while Messi appears in his regular human form, as an added non-homogenous entity. Missing from Figure 6(c) are the royal parents, Mufasa and Sarabi. Title of movie transforms into *The New Lion King*. The crown on Salah's head shines with sun rays emanating from all of Salah's body, visually mapping him to a shining/rising sun, activating a single-scope network analogous to a conventional metaphor, namely, SALAH IS A SHINING/RISING SUN.

The matched animated characters against the relevant players (via compression of identity) constitute input to further selective role-to-value mappings in two simplex networks of kinship relations that emerge as illustrated in Figure 7(a) and (b). Through the process of completion, we know from background knowledge that Messi has often been compared to both ancestral iconic footballers, Maradona and Pele. Through elaboration, we perceive them as his mentors, and we see Messi as a continuation of a dynasty in football (Figure 7(a)). In attempting to construct a comparable simplex network for Salah in Figure 7(b), (likely intentional) gaps are observed in the values of the roles of father and mother. Through a process of elaboration emerges the meaning that Salah has not been supported by any iconic mentors in football. Rather, Salah's "road to success has been a bumpy one, hurdling many obstacles ... Salah emerged ..., perhaps that defines the steel and grit of the player. He has seen the fall, but has risen and how!" (Ash, 2020, July 25). Unmapped in both simplex networks of kinship terms in Figure 7 are the competitors/opponents: Ronaldo in Figure 6(b) and Ronaldo and Messi in Figure 6(c).



**Figure 7: Simplex networks (a) for Messi's and (b) Salah's cartoons**

Looking contrastively across the two cartoons in Figure 6, the unifying theme is the Circle of Life Scene. Yet, the fillers supplied in the slots of the compositional pattern of this scene are different in each cartoon as per the two networks in Figure 7, leading to two different situations/narratives. As members of a common intertextual collection, the two cartoons represent a narrative shift according to Abdel-Raheem’s (2019a) classification. It is proposed that viewers who happen to examine both cartoons at the same time may decode the meaning through a contrastive network with two (instead of one) blended spaces, one for each situation/player as in Figure 8.



**Figure 8: Contrastive 2-blend mirror network**

Organized by the vital relation of cause-effect (Turner, 2007), the two input spaces in Figure 8 correspond to two contrastive situations. Input 1 gives an expected effect (success) to the cause (having mentors and fewer rivals) and Input 2 also gives an expected effect (failure) to the cause (having no mentors and more rivals). Cause-effect uniformity is extended to the blended space including Messi. On the other hand, the blended space including Salah presents a counter-factual situation where the result (success) is unexpectedly mapped to the causes of failure. We infer that Salah has worked against all odds to achieve success; Salah must have been equipped with talent, determination, and hard work. Otherwise, he would not have succeeded. While both players have been glorified as emerging stars/kings, Salah’s depiction by an Arab cartoonist (Figure 6(c)) intensifies such glorification.

### 6.3 Worshipped Kings

The cartoons in Figure 9(a) and (b) recycle one theme, namely characterizing the players as worshiped kings, with some adaptations to each player. In Figure 9(a), Salah is characterized as an Egyptian King/Pharaoh, as a king of Rome, and as a footballer. The Egyptian King input space is triggered by the nomination label 'EGYPTIAN KING' and non-verbally through the visual hybrid with Salah's head on the Sphinx body (powerful lion's body) and the body posture of the team members analogous to the worshipping subordinates in an ancient Egyptian temple. A Pharaoh was considered a God-King in Ancient Egypt (Diak, 2018, October 28). Travelling back in time to extend an intertextual relation with Pharaonic Egypt enables mapping of the act of 'worship,' which is irrelevant in present time Egypt. Activation of the Roman king mental space is through the triple crown of Rome with papal bulls. Notably, Salah played for the Italian club Roma from 2015 to 2017. Finally, the footballer mental space is triggered through duplicating Salah in present time Liverpool uniform; the similarly dressed team members; and the verbal elements *Mo Salah!* as endearingly cheered by his fans and the then *35 Goals*, an indication of his (then) achievements. Duplicating Salah's image creates an identity chain with two (visual) elements referring to the same person, which has been argued to be characteristic of the rhetoric of glamour and a tool of textual cohesion (Breeze, 2009; see Section 4.2). However, in Figure 9(a), royal glamour is hedged by what seems like an acrobatic tower. The miniaturized duplicate of Salah extends his hands to balance out his body atop the magnified head of Salah/Sphinx.



Figure 9: (a) Salah as The Egyptian King, (b) Messi as King

Intertextual distance is also manipulated in Figure 9(b) where Messi appears with an archaic Spanish crown. Kings in ancient Europe were worshiped as local Gods (Pollard, 1998, September 19). The verbal

element **GOD SAVE THE KING** is an archaic phrase that was found in the earliest English translations of the Bible and later became part of the British national anthem (Fuller-Maitland, 1916; Watts, 1852). In Figure 9(b), the salient magnified **GOD** positioned next to Messi's head suggests that Messi is, counterfactually, (referred to as) God.

Both verbal and visual elements in the cartoons in Figure 9 activate a contrastive complex integration network with three input spaces activating the three inherently clashing frames of GOD vs. King vs. Footballer (Figure 10). Most significantly, while God as well as kings in Pharaonic Egypt and ancient Europe are worshiped, a footballer is not, at least not in the real sense. The king and his subordinates have a relationship different from that between a footballer and his fans. In addition, a monarch/king is usually native to the country he reigns while professional footballers are not necessarily native to the countries of the clubs they play for.

Compression of king-God-footballer identities is relevant for both players. Narrative shifting from one player to another is accommodated by two blended spaces (Figure 10). The frame of worship is recruited in both blends. Messi's blend has balanced mappings from the King and Footballer input spaces. Salah's blend has more mappings from the Footballer space than from the King space. Through a process of elaboration, we infer that Salah is a worshiped and loved football star in his home country, Egypt, and in his club's country, (then) Rome. Salah is appreciated by his team members and cheered on and loved by his fans. Messi, on the other hand, is a worshiped and glorified football star in his club country.

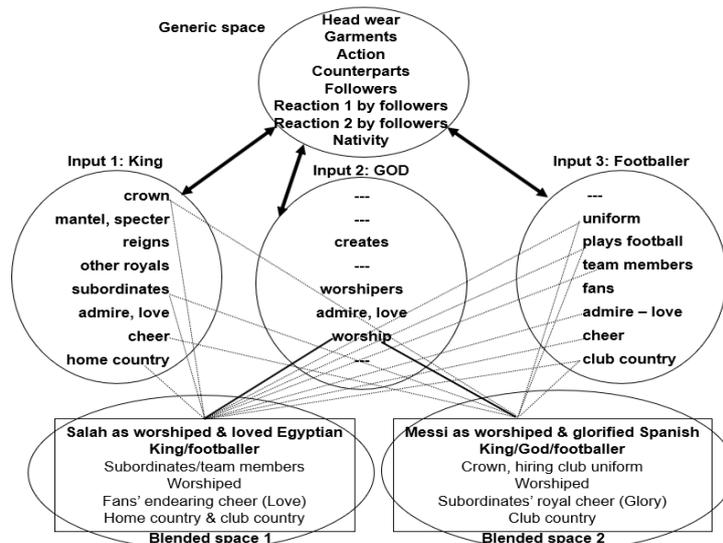
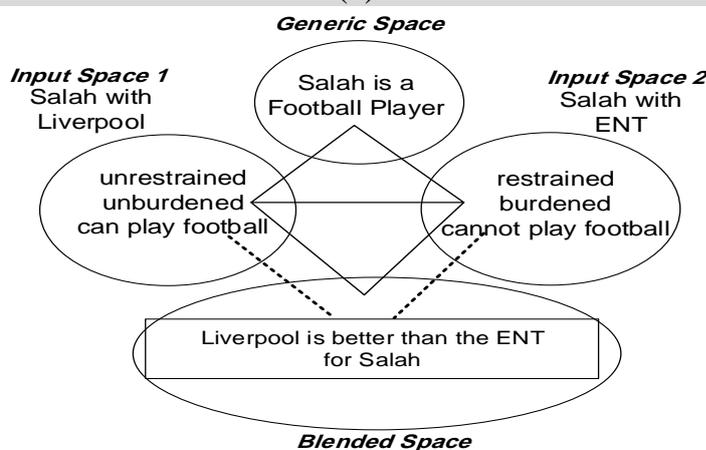
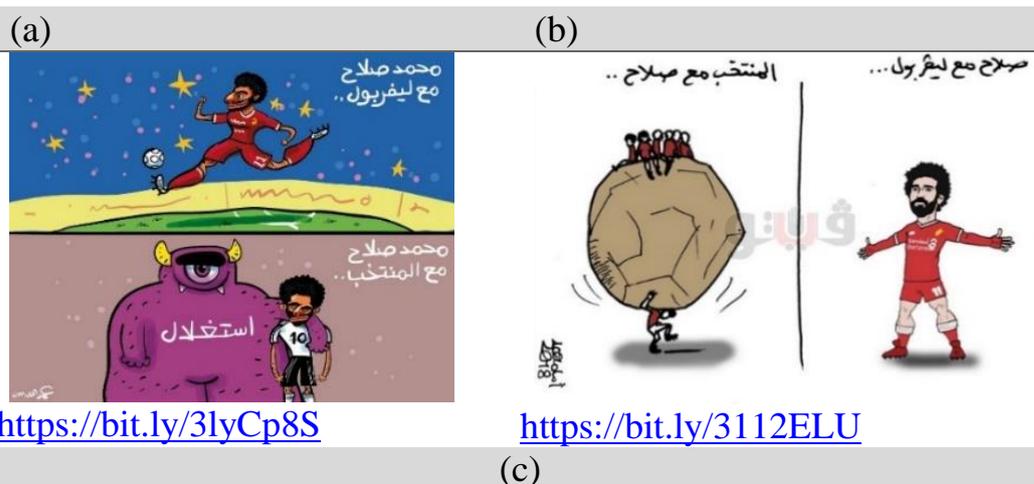


Figure 10: Contrastive 2-blend complex network

Note further that the cheer for Messi, *GOD SAVE THE KING* (Figure 9(b)), is a formal royal cheer, perhaps glorifying rather than loving. By contrast, Salah’s fan cheer *Mo Salah!* (Figure 9(a)) indicates endearment and love.

**6.4 Salah: ENT vs. Liverpool**

Troubled history between Salah and the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) over exploitation of his image rights (Abdel Megeed, 2018, August 29) and over 2018 World Cup Russia disruption (Michaelson, 2018, August 28) amounted to the EFA threatening legal action against Salah’s agent (*EGYPTIAN STREETS*, 2018, August 28), to EFA’s not voting for Salah in *The Best* 2019 FIFA award (Hoskin, 2019, September 24), and to Salah’s considering quitting the Egyptian national team (ENT) (Sinnott & Hajihosseini, 2018, June 24). Interestingly, Egyptians sided with Salah, their football idol, against EFA and the ENT (El-Ghobashy, 2018, August 29) and so did two Egyptian cartoonists as shown in Figure 11(a) and (b).



**Figure 11: (a) and (b) by Egyptian cartoonists, Omar and Osama Omar (c) Collective 1-blend mirror network**

The two cartoons in Figure 11 share the common theme of contrasting Salah's performance *with Liverpool* on the one hand with his performance *with the ENT* on the other. This contrast/duality is emphasized through binary juxtaposition (Werner, 2004; see Section 3.2) by horizontally (Figure 11(a)) or vertically (Figure 11(b)) splitting each cartoon into two sections/frames, reflecting the two states. On an abstract level, unity of the narrative activates a collective 1-blend mirror network (Figure 11**Figure II**(c)), where we infer that Salah is in an excellent position with Liverpool but decapacitated with the ENT.

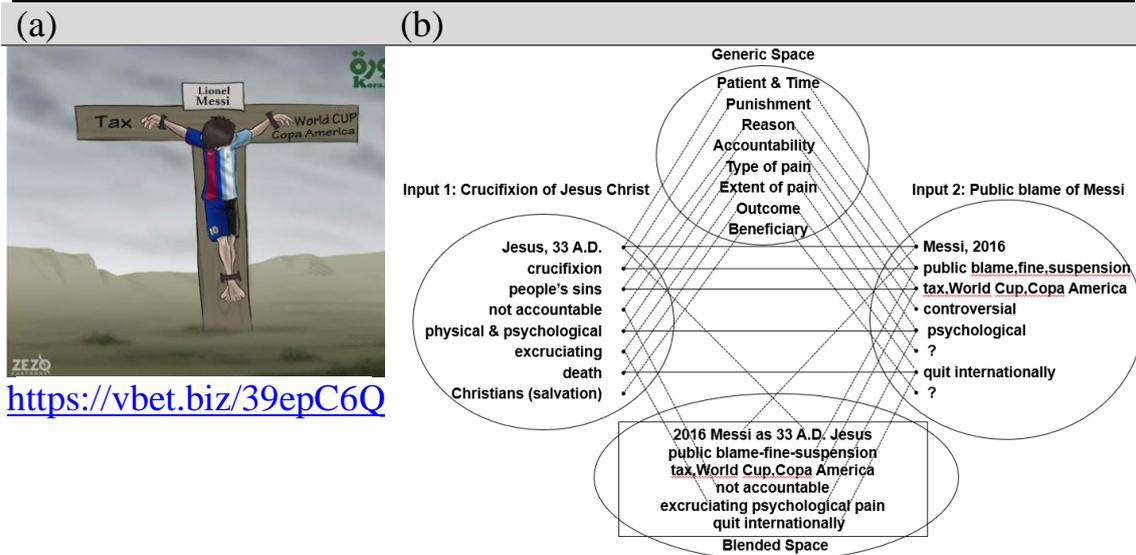
Negative-other presentation of Salah's adversary is evident in Figure 11(a) and (b). In the former, the ENT is depicted as a one-eyed purple monster with a thick eyebrow and pointy horns, humorously extending an intertextual relation with the monsters' frame from children's fairytales. The monster carries the negative referential label *استغلال* 'manipulation' and holds Salah captive. This representation monsterizes and mocks the ENT, and at the same time, endows Salah with childlike innocence. In Figure 11(b), ENT team members mount a huge rock that Salah carries on his shoulders with great difficulty. Two single-scopes analogous to the conceptual metaphors NATIONAL TEAM IS A MONSTER and NATIONAL TEAM IS A BURDEN are activated.

An interesting detail is observed in the verbal elements in Figure 11(b). In Hallidayan systemic functional grammar terms, *صلاح مع ليفربول* ... 'Salah with Liverpool ...' promotes *Salah* textually to an initial thematic position and perhaps ideationally to an active participant role. In ... *المنتخب مع صلاح* 'ENT with Salah ...', on the other hand, *Salah* is no longer Theme; Salah is rather demoted ideationally as circumstance and interpersonally as an adjunct.

### 6.5 Messi: Agony over Losses

The two cartoons in this section (Figure 12(a) and Figure 13(b)) represent creative attempts to evoke sympathy for Messi's psychological pain after major losses and mitigate his responsibility for such losses.

The cartoon in Figure 12(a) travels back in time to 33 A.D. and visually reenacts the Roman crucifixion scene, where, according to the Christian faith, Jesus Christ was crucified and died for *people's sins* (Holy Bible, King James Version, I Corinthians 15:1-3). The compositional pattern of the cartoon, where Messi replaces Jesus Christ on the cross, activates compression of identity between Messi and Jesus.

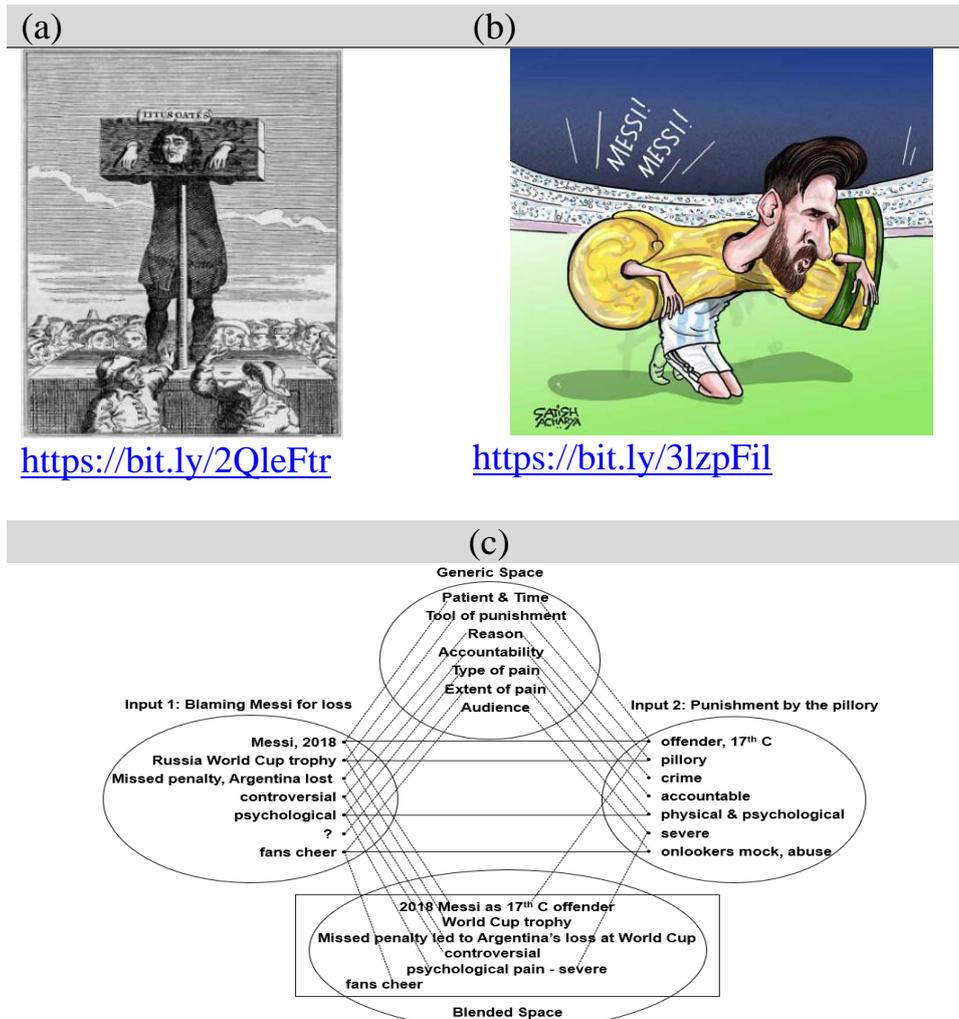


**Figure 12: (a) Cartoon by Emirati cartoonist, Abdel-Azeez Al-Zaidy (2016, July 7), (b) double-scope network**

In Figure 12(a), the crucifixion scene with a salient cross and the desert setting trigger the first mental space (Crucifixion of Jesus Christ). The second mental space (Public blame of Messi) is activated by Messi’s image and name plaque on the cross, as well as Messi’s disappointing losses (*Tax* (Note the euphemistic deletion of *fraud* or *evasion* after *Tax* for mitigation of the offense), *World Cup*, and *Copa America*) recorded on the horizontal crossbar. A double-scope network is activated with the two input spaces belonging to two competing frames as illustrated in Figure 12(b). The two frames clash in terms of time, patient undergoing the action, type and reason for punishment, accountability, type and extent of inflicted pain, outcome of punishment, and beneficiary. Time compression between the 33 A.D. crucifixion and the 2016 blame-triggering incidents (*The Guardian*, 2016, July 6) enriches the clashing of frames. Messi’s vertically split football uniform between Barcelona and Argentina reflects his being divided at the time between re-signing with Barcelona or quitting internationally (Recall an analogous divide in Figure 2(a), Section 6.1). Cross-mapping between the different inputs constructs Messi as Jesus (resulting in glorification), compares what Messi has endured (public blame, fine, suspension) with crucifixion (hence, intensifying his punishment), equates Messi’s losses with sins of other people (hence, mitigating his responsibility for them), and parallels his quitting internationally to death (i.e., the end of his career in football). The blend inherits the glorification of Messi, the intensification of his pain, the mitigation of his responsibility, and the lingering outcome of his quitting internationally. Through processes of composition, completion,

and elaboration, the emergent structure is generated. In the emergent structure, we infer that ‘the greatest player of all time,’ Messi, has been blamed unfairly and has experienced severe pain due to public blame and humiliation. Furthermore, we may predict that if Messi were to quit internationally, this would mark the end of his career (death).

The setting/background in the other cartoon (Figure 13(b)) is a football field. Messi kneels down, collapsing under the heavy weight of the magnified trophy/pillory with a defeated look on his tired face. The trophy signifies the reason for the blame (Argentina’s loss at 2018 Russia World Cup) and the structure of the pillory extends an intertextual relation with an ancient (‘globalized’) American tool for punishment by public humiliation and possibly physical abuse by the overlooking public in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

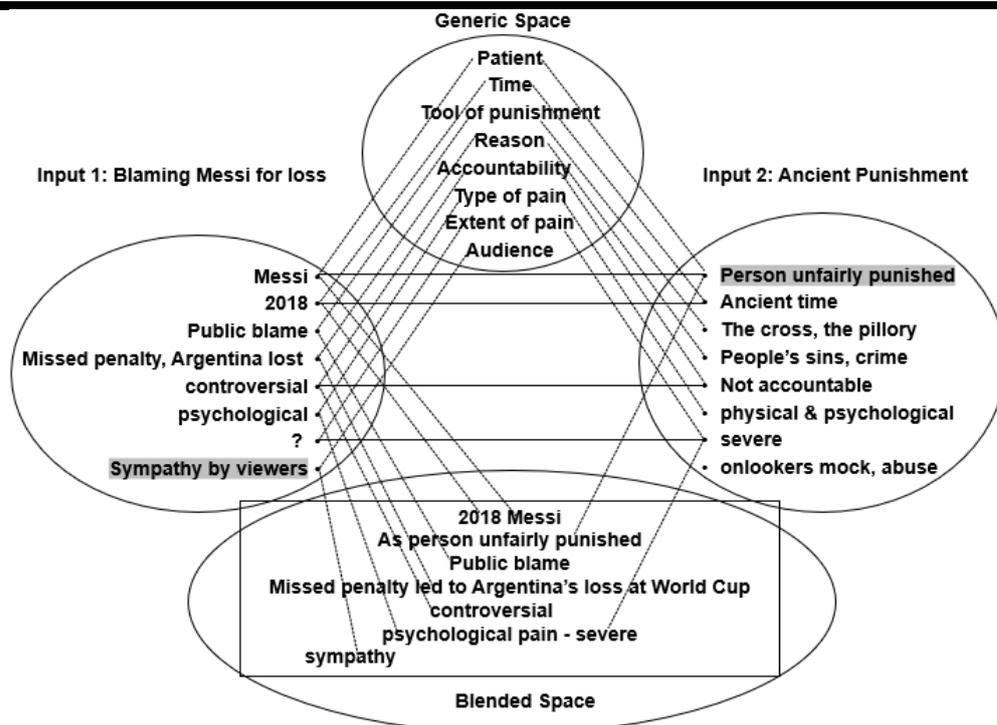


**Figure 13: (a) 17th Century pillory, (b) Cartoon by Indian cartoonist Satish Acharya (2018, July 7), (c) double-scope network**

A double-scope network is triggered with two competing frames: blaming Messi for loss and punishment by the pillory. As illustrated in Figure 13(c), the frames clash in terms of time, patient undergoing the action, tool of punishment, reason for punishment, accountability, type and extent of pain, as well as the reaction of audience witnessing the punishment/blame. Compression of identity between Messi and a 17<sup>th</sup> C offender is problematic. An offender was normally put in the 17<sup>th</sup> C pillory after being found guilty. By contrast, Messi's accountability for Argentina's loss at 2018 Russia World Cup. Despite public comments about his poor performance then, Argentina manager Jorge Sampaoli shifted the blame to Argentina team-mates (Simpson, 2018, June 22) while others to the coach (Hamm, 2018, June 22). Nonetheless, the cartoonist has added several cheers by supportive fan audience (*Messi! Messi!*) to indicate that Messi is acquitted of any responsibility, at least by his fans. Further to the clashing of frames, missing a penalty and losing in football are not crimes. Time compression between the 17<sup>th</sup> century pillory and the 2018 blame-triggering incident enriches the clashing of frames. So does the visual fusion between the cause for the blame (i.e., World Cup trophy) and the effect of the blame (punishment by the pillory). In the emergent structure from the blend, we infer that while Messi is supported by his fan audience, he has suffered enormous psychological pain because of humiliating public blame.

The effect of public blame on Messi is further understood through the clash between the two frames in terms of Messi's posture. In the pillory, the offender is erected on a post (Figure 13(a)). In the cartoon (Figure 13(b)), Messi is down on his knees with a sad face. Hence, this cartoon further activates a single-scope network analogous to the orientational metaphor SAD IS DOWN. A similar analysis can be extended to Messi's bent down head in Figure 12(a).

The two cartoons (Figure 12(a) and Figure 13(b)) share the same narrative in terms of visual composition, the theme of an ancient tool for punishment, the psychological pain that Messi must have endured as a result of public blame for losses, and mitigation of Messi's responsibility. A collective integration network as in Figure 14 would be activated.



**Figure 14: A collective 1-blend complex network**

The collective network in Figure 14 **Figure 14** sums up the two double scopes in Figure 12(b) and Figure 13(c). Both double scopes enter as inputs of the more complex collective network (Fauconnier, 2001, p. 5). This may be viewed as a case of ‘successive blending’ (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003; see Section 3.1). Shaded entities in Input spaces 1 and 2 correspond to elements in the emergent structure of the double scopes in Figure 13(c) and Figure 12(b), respectively.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

Several threads have intertwined while analyzing the sample of ten sports cartoons featuring the two football stars, Lionel Messi and Mo(hammed) Salah. Cartoonists have manipulated (mainly visual) intertextuality and compression of identity in creating rich conceptual blends where the two players were idolized and glorified (at times to the point of worship), their adversaries negatively presented, and their responsibility for losses mitigated. Quoted texts, like the ‘Circle of Life’ scene from *The Lion King*, were creatively ‘re-accentuated’ (to use Bakhtin’s (1986) term, see Section 3.2) by the cartoonists. For example, rivals were added to the rising lion kings for intensified challenge and the royal parents were removed for Salah to intensify the meaning of a self-made rising star (Section 6.2). In addition, elements from the quoted texts were selectively

integrated into the cartoons. For example, only Superman's gesture and his uniform (in part) were visible (Section 6.1). Furthermore, intertextuality invited mockery that contributed to the negative presentation of others as in depicting Egypt's national team (in the context of conflict with Salah) as a one-eyed purple monster from the frame of children's fairy tales (Section 6.4). Moreover, intertextual distance (following Bazerman (2004), in section 3.2), where cartoonists travelled back in time or from culture to culture to extend an intertextual relation, hedged, yet enabled, the depiction of Salah as a 'worshiped' Egyptian Pharaoh (with an extended identity chain) and of Messi as God (Section 6.3) and as Jesus Christ (Section 6.5). Religious connotations as well as depiction of celebrities as heroes and idols were reported as characteristic of the discourse of celebrity worship (Section 3.5). Admiration turning to worship, and fans to fanatics, were reported in the Press for both Salah (e.g., *Enterprise*, 2018, March 20) and Messi (e.g., Kessler, 2018, July 25). Both players, however, seemed to dissociate themselves from this alarming turn of emotions. Salah has kept a modest aura around himself as a devout Muslim. Messi publicly stated that "he doesn't like being called 'God' by fans" (Lawless, 2019, October 11).

The study proposed a novel configuration of integration networks to capture the working of conceptual blending in a phenomenon akin to multimodal recycling, where pairs of *parallel* cartoons by different cartoonists displayed common themes or source frames. The novel networks, namely *collective* and *contrastive* networks, allowed simultaneous encoding of pairs of parallel cartoons of the same narrative and narrative shifting types leading to single or double blended spaces, respectively. Collective and contrastive networks captured an intertextual repertoire among cartoons within a common intertextual collection. When one cartoon would be juxtaposed against another intertextually linked cartoon, a collective or a contrastive blend would be triggered in the viewer. The respective 'emergent structure(s)' extended the possible interpretation of each cartoon beyond its intended meaning if examined independently.

The proposed configurations preserved the well-established types of integration networks: simplex, mirror, single-scope, double-scope, and more complex conceptual integration networks with multiple input spaces. With regard to blending processes, the most commonly observed in the present data was completion. Background information on football events was often needed to complete the blend and make inferences. Multimodal recycling is, in fact, an area that is in need of further research.

Celebrity glorification/worship was manifested in the cartoons under study as a phenomenon that transcended the particular cultures and surfaced as part of a globalized culture. The themes employed in glorifying the players or mitigating their responsibility for any losses were almost predominantly related to a globalized Western culture. Lion king, superman, Disney's purple one-eyed monster, and the 17<sup>th</sup> Century pillory are examples. The crucifixion scene set up by an Emirati cartoonist with a Muslim name clearly catered to the Christian interpretation to equate Messi to Jesus Christ. Depicting Salah as a worshiped Egyptian Pharaoh glorified his ethnic origin and, at the same time, hedged and enabled an otherwise currently unacceptable concept of worship via intertextual distance. Both players were glorified by cartoonists from different cultures, defying an in-group vs. out-group dichotomy. Salah was glorified by Irish, Egyptian, and Syrian cartoonists while Messi was glorified by Jordanian, Emirati, and Indian cartoonists.

The target audience of sports cartoons are mainly the fans who are likely to be emotionally charged to celebrate manifestations of idolization and glorification of their players, empathize with them in the event of loss, and digest inflated misrepresentation of their players' adversaries. In addition, the fans are expected to have updated knowledge of the game and the current happenings thereof to be able to interpret the cartoons and position themselves in relation to a cartoonist's commentary on any relevant football event.

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