

# Remediation and Translation in Egyptian Digital Caricatures

## Abstract

In the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, academic interest in Egyptian visual culture has moved beyond the contemporary arts scene sponsored by the state (see, e.g., Winegar 2006) into the streets of Cairo, where graffiti artists have become prolific producers of revolutionary imagery (see, e.g., Abaza 2016). This shifting interest has tended to ignore a separate yet equally significant trend in digital visual culture: the explosion of what I call “digital caricatures,” a genre of memes designed to provide political or social criticism by way of references to commercial films, television, songs, advertising, news items, and everyday life. Without being recognizable under any official or unofficial definition of “art” in Egypt, these digital caricatures are a widespread online visual genre with distinctive local characteristics, and they are among the last remaining spaces where satirical criticism against the government can flourish in public.

This paper highlights the formal characteristics of this visual genre, with specific attention to its “remediation” of older media forms (cf. Bolter & Grusin 2000). While exploiting some technical possibilities opened by new digital technologies and social media, these caricatures are not uniquely digital inventions, because they recycle traditional media content to make their political or social points with a comedic twist. The content cannibalized in this way is not always Egyptian, but it can originate in non-Egyptian films, songs, TV shows, or online meme culture. In this context, the play of remediation entails a vernacular cultural translation, which seeks to “Egyptianize” foreign visual content by presenting “Egypt” in a (usually unfavourable) comparison to the rest of the world. This paper examines these cross-cultural translations with reference to a Facebook page specializing in such content: *Tammat al-Targama (The translation’s been completed)*.

## References

- Abaza, Mona. (2016). ‘The Field of Graffiti and Street Art in Post-January 2011 Egypt’ IN Jeffrey Ian Ross (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*. London: Routledge
- Bolter, Jay David & Richard Grusin. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Winegar, Jessica. (2006). *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt*. Stanford: Stanford University Press