

The Power of Political Cartoons in Shaping Discourse on the Gaza War

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Abstract:

This research aims to explore the power of political cartoons in shaping discourse on the Gaza War. The study aims to answer several key questions, including how political cartoons employ indirect strategies such as symbolism to convey meanings and messages related to the conflict, what power dynamics and ideologies are represented and conveyed through political cartoons on the Gaza War, and how the linguistic aspect of political cartoons contributes to their persuasive impact in shaping discourse on the conflict. Additionally, the study seeks to apply critical discourse analysis (CDA) to uncover the persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideologies embodied in political cartoons. The methodology of the study is based on Van Dijk's framework of critical discourse analysis, which allows for the analysis of selected data in terms of linguistic, ideological, visual, and contextual levels employed to produce persuasive discourse. The research draws upon both Van Dijk's ideological and visual theory as well as his categories of ideological discourse analysis. The method of analysis is a composition of both approaches. The study holds significant importance due to its potential impact on public opinion, especially in contexts of conflict and sensitive issues like the Gaza War. Additionally, examining cartoons from both Arab and international newspapers allows for a comparative analysis of how different cultural and ideological perspectives are represented and conveyed through visual imagery. The analysis will encompass crucial levels: linguistic, visual, ideological, and contextual. Overall, this research paper aims to provide valuable insights into how political cartoons shape discourse on sensitive geopolitical issues such as the Gaza War through their use of indirect strategies, power dynamics representation, linguistic aspects contributing to their persuasive impact, and application of critical discourse analysis for uncovering persuasive strategies embedded within them.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, ideology, political cartoons, power, symbolism.

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المستخلص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف قوة الكاريكاتير السياسي في تشكيل الخطاب حول حرب غزة. تهدف الدراسة إلى الإجابة على عدة أسئلة رئيسية، بما في ذلك كيفية استخدام الكاريكاتير السياسي لاستراتيجيات غير مباشرة مثل الرمزية لنقل المعاني والرسائل المتعلقة بالصراع، وما هي ديناميكيات القوة والأيدولوجيات التي يتم تمثيلها ونقلها من خلال الرسوم الكاريكاتورية حول حرب غزة، وكيف يمكن للتأثير اللغوي بداخل الرسوم الكاريكاتورية أن تلعب دورا في تشكيل الخطاب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تسعى الدراسة إلى تطبيق مفهوم تحليل الخطاب النقدي (CDA) للكشف عن الاستراتيجيات المقنعة وديناميكيات السلطة والأيدولوجيات المجسدة في الكاريكاتير السياسي. تعتمد منهجية الدراسة على إطار فان دايك لتحليل الخطاب النقدي، والذي يسمح بتحليل الكاريكاتير من حيث المستويات اللغوية والأيدولوجية والبصرية والسياقية المستخدمة لإنتاج خطاب مقنع. يعتمد البحث على نظرية فان دايك الأيدولوجية والبصرية بالإضافة إلى العنصر الأيدولوجي في تحليل الخطاب. وتحظى الدراسة بأهمية كبيرة نظرا لتأثير الكاريكاتير السياسي على الرأي العام، وخاصة في سياقات الصراع والقضايا الشائكة مثل حرب غزة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن تحليل عينات من الرسوم الكاريكاتورية من الصحف العربية والعالمية يسمح بإجراء تحليل مقارن لكيفية تمثيل ونقل وجهات النظر الثقافية والأيدولوجية المختلفة من خلال الصور المرئية. ويشمل التحليل مستويات عديدة ومنها: اللغوية، والبصرية، والأيدولوجية والسياقية. بشكل عام، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم رؤى حول كيف يشكل الكاريكاتير السياسي الخطاب حول القضايا الجيوسياسية الحساسة مثل حرب غزة من خلال استخدامها للاستراتيجيات غير المباشرة، وتمثيل ديناميكيات السلطة، والجوانب اللغوية التي تساهم في تأثيرها المقنع، وذلك من خلال تطبيق نظرية التحليل النقدي للخطاب.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التحليل النقدي للخطاب، الأيدولوجيا، الكاريكاتير السياسي، السلطة، الرمزية.

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1. Background

Political cartoons have long been recognized as a powerful medium for social and political commentary. With their unique combination of visual imagery and concise textual elements, political cartoons can convey messages and meanings in an indirect yet impactful manner. This paper aims to explore the significance of analyzing political cartoons, particularly in the context of the Gaza War, using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and discourses embedded within these visual representations. Political cartoons hold a special place in media and communication studies due to their ability to communicate complex ideas and critique societal issues with brevity and wit. They serve as a form of visual rhetoric, employing symbols, caricatures, and satire to convey political commentary. Analyzing political cartoons is vital as they provide a unique lens through which to examine power relations, ideologies, and social discourses. By deconstructing these cartoons, researchers can uncover the hidden meanings, biases, and subtle messages that may not be apparent in other forms of media. The Gaza War, marked by intense conflict and complex political dynamics, provides a fertile ground for the analysis of political cartoons.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has elicited strong emotions and raised numerous debates on various aspects, such as human rights, international relations, and the role of media. Political cartoons, with their ability to encapsulate and crystallize complex issues, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing discourse, and reflecting the perspectives of different actors involved in the conflict. Critical Discourse Analysis is a theoretical framework that would help to examine how language and other semiotic resources, including visual elements, contribute to power relations and social ideologies. When applied to the analysis of political cartoons, CDA helps uncover the underlying discourses, ideologies, and power dynamics embedded within these visual texts. It also helps to analyze the visual elements, symbols, and textual cues employed in political cartoons to understand the

persuasive strategies, stereotypes, and ideological positions being communicated to the audience.

2. Significance of the Study

The study holds significant importance for several reasons. Firstly, political cartoons have a profound impact on public opinion, especially in contexts of conflict and sensitive issues like the Gaza War. Understanding the persuasive strategies employed in these cartoons can shed light on the ways in which they shape discourse, influence ideologies, and contribute to the formation of public attitudes and beliefs. Secondly, examining cartoons from both Arab and international newspapers allows for a comparative analysis of how different cultural and ideological perspectives are represented and conveyed through visual imagery. Lastly, investigating the linguistic aspect of political cartoons enhances our understanding of how text and visuals work together to create persuasive messages.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold. Firstly, it aims to explore the indirect strategies utilized in political cartoons to convey meanings and messages. Political cartoons often employ satire, humor, symbolism, and caricature to communicate complex ideas indirectly. Investigating these strategies will provide insights into how cartoons use visual rhetoric to engage audiences and convey persuasive messages effectively. Secondly, the study seeks to uncover the power dynamics and ideologies embedded within political cartoons related to the Gaza War. By analyzing the visual and textual elements, the study will examine how political cartoons represent various actors involved in the conflict and the power relations between them. Lastly, the research aims to investigate the linguistic aspect of political cartoons, exploring how language is used to enhance the persuasive impact of visual imagery.

4. Research Questions

To achieve the stated objectives, this study will address the following research questions:

- How do political cartoons employ indirect strategies such as satire, symbolism to convey meanings and messages related to the Gaza War?
- What power dynamics and ideologies are represented and conveyed through political cartoons on the Gaza War, particularly in relation to different actors involved in the conflict?
- How does the linguistic aspect of political cartoons contribute to their persuasive impact in shaping discourse on the Gaza War?

- How can Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) be applied to the analysis of political cartoons to uncover the persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideologies they embody?

By answering these research questions, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of the persuasive power of political cartoons, the role of indirect strategies, the underlying power dynamics and ideologies, and the linguistic features that contribute to their persuasive impact. The findings will provide valuable insights into the ways in which political cartoons shape discourse on the Gaza War, and the potential implications for public opinion and ideological perspectives.

5. Data Collection

The research aims to collect a corpus of eight cartoons focusing on the Gaza War, with four cartoons sourced from international newspapers and four from Arab newspapers. The chosen timeframe for data collection is from November 1st, 2023, to December 1st, 2023. The analysis will encompass three crucial levels: linguistic, ideological, and contextual.

To gather the data, a selection of prominent international newspapers with a wide readership, such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and The Washington Post, will be made. The editorial sections or dedicated cartoon sections of these newspapers will be scanned during the specified timeframe to identify cartoons directly related to the Gaza War. Similarly, renowned Arab newspapers like Al Jazeera, Al-Ahram, Asharq Al-Awsat, and Al-Hayat will be considered, and cartoons addressing the Gaza War will be selected from their editorial and cartoon sections.

The chosen cartoons will meet specific criteria, including direct relevance to the Gaza War, the presence of visual and textual elements suitable for linguistic, ideological, and contextual analysis, and representation of diverse perspectives. The selected cartoons will be recorded along with relevant metadata, such as publication date, newspaper name, and cartoonist's name if available. The collected data will be preserved in its original format and systematically organized for easy access and subsequent analysis.

By following this data collection procedure, the research will compile a corpus of eight political cartoons, evenly distributed between international and Arab newspapers, focusing on the Gaza War. These cartoons will provide a comprehensive dataset for investigating the linguistic, ideological, and contextual dimensions of political cartoons in shaping persuasive discourse on the Gaza War.

6. Methodology

The methodology of the study entitled "The Power of Political Cartoons in Shaping Discourse on the Gaza War" is based on the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as described by Van Dijk's article "Critical Discourse Analysis" (2001). This approach allows for the analysis of selected data in terms of linguistic, ideological, visual, and contextual levels employed to produce persuasive discourse, with a focus on strategies of mental representation. To conduct the critical discourse analysis, key topics and themes discussed in the statements are identified. The language used to discuss these topics and themes is then examined, with particular attention paid to the use of emotive language and framing and contextual dimensions.

This study draws upon both Van Dijk's ideological and visual theory as well as his categories of ideological discourse analysis. The method of analysis is a composition of both approaches. The researcher believes that Van Dijk's theory and his terms of ideological discourse analysis are suitable for analyzing multimodal discourse such as cartoons, as concepts like semantic and mental modal, norm expression, etc., can easily be determined in each selected cartoon.

7. Problem Statement/Hypothesis

The power of political cartoons in shaping discourse on the Gaza War is a topic of significant importance, given their profound impact on public opinion, particularly in contexts of conflict and sensitive issues. However, there is a need to understand the specific strategies employed by political cartoons in conveying meanings and messages related to the Gaza War. Additionally, it is crucial to examine the representation of power dynamics and ideologies in these cartoons, particularly in relation to the different actors involved in the conflict. Furthermore, the linguistic aspect of political cartoons and its contribution to their persuasive impact on shaping discourse on the Gaza War requires in-depth analysis. Lastly, there is a need to explore how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be effectively applied to political cartoons to uncover the persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideologies they embody.

It is hypothesized that political cartoons employ indirect strategies such as symbolism to convey meanings and messages related to the Gaza War. These strategies serve as effective tools for critiquing dominant narratives, highlighting power imbalances, and challenging ideological perspectives. The linguistic aspect of political cartoons, including the use of emotive language, and framing significantly contributes to their persuasive impact, engaging the audience's cognitive and emotional faculties. It is further hypothesized that the application of

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to political cartoons will reveal the persuasive strategies employed, uncover power dynamics embedded within the cartoons, and shed light on the ideologies they embody. By examining a corpus of eight cartoons sourced from international and Arab newspapers, it is anticipated that this research will provide valuable insights into the persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideologies represented in political cartoons on the Gaza War, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how these cartoons shape discourse and influence public opinion.

8. Defining Political Cartoons

The term "cartoon" originally referred to paper, derived from the Italian word "cartone." It was initially used to describe a preliminary sketch for a large painting or mosaic. According to Gocek (1998:2), citing Press (1981:62), cartoons are pictures that convey the truth, present messages about what should be done, and evoke emotions through artistic techniques and allegorical imagery to influence viewers' feelings about current events.

Harrison (1981:16), in his exploration of historical concepts, states that the word "cartoon" originated from the Italian and French words for "card" and "paper." Originally, a "cartoon" denoted a full-sized preliminary sketch made on paper for a larger artwork. This sketch was then transferred onto a wall, ceiling, or large canvas, where the final artwork was completed. However, with the advent of the printing press, the meaning of "cartoon" evolved. It came to refer to a sketch that could be mass-produced and widely disseminated as an image. Evidence of lampooning and satire, forms of political commentary, can be traced back to ancient times, even as early as the Stone Age. Supporting this notion, Long (1962:55) suggests that "illiterate ancestors used to carve pictures of their enemies on the walls of their caves in an attempt to curse and confuse them." Furthermore, Long (1962:58) highlights that these ancestors were skilled in creating caricatures that satirized the privileged class and their extravagant lifestyles during that era.

Contending the same historical dimension of cartoons, Harrison (1981:71) provides an explanation that the earliest evidence of human communication can be found in the ancient cave drawings of southern Europe. These peculiar figures, resembling cartoons, date back over 30,000 years. Unfortunately, as these drawings predate recorded history, there is no clue as to what the intentions of our early ancestors were. Cartoons often convey humor, which is reflected in the almost synonymous use of the words "comics" and "funnies." However, in contemporary times, comics can also be serious and convey multiple

messages. To simplify the concept of cartoons, Horn (1980:25) argues that drawings that encapsulate complete thoughts can be referred to as "cartoons." Similarly, English cartoonist Sir David Low, as quoted by Harrison (1981:43), views cartoons as "representational or symbolic drawings that make satirical, witty, or humorous points. They may or may not have captions and may consist of more than one panel." Undoubtedly, the term "cartoons" evokes connotations of enjoyment or entertainment. Cartoons are simply drawings that distill primary ideas and then distort them. As Harrison (1981:80) asserts, historically, cartoons serve as both political commentary and humor. Cartoons can be effective in stirring strong emotions rather than just eliciting smiles.

In general, political cartoons often employ humor or irony to highlight deficiencies or hypocrisies within the political system. Some differentiate between editorial cartoons, which are regularly published on the editorial page, and single-panel political cartoons that offer commentary on politics and policies. However, many studies use the terms "political cartoons" and "editorial cartoons" interchangeably. They typically appear on the opinion editorials ("Op Ed") pages of printed newspapers. When discussing the concept of cartoons, it is important to distinguish between cartoons and caricatures. Edwards (1997:9) does not make a clear distinction, as he asserts that "the definition of political (editorial) cartoons as journalistic forms suggests their importance as objects of study from rhetorical or mass media communication perspectives." Similarly, Kenner (1997:3) also does not differentiate between the two terms, explaining that "political cartooning is synonymous with editorial cartooning."

Reviewing the definitions of these two terms, Streicher (1967:31) argues that the distinction between cartoons and caricatures is not very clear. In fact, caricature is inherent in all forms of cartooning. Today, "cartoons" and "caricatures" are used interchangeably. On the other hand, Hoffman (1958:45) notes that the term "caricatures" or "cartoons," as they later became known, originated in Italy in the early sixteenth century, and both terms hold the same meaning in contemporary journalism. Edwards (1997:20) contends that caricatures were the immediate precursors to modern political cartoons, and caricature remains a common element employed by cartoonists. Regarding the distinct features of both terms, the American Heritage Dictionary (1991) differentiates caricatures from cartoons by stating that the former deliberately exaggerates or distorts distinctive features to produce a comic or grotesque effect. Cartoons, on the other hand, are pictorial satires or commentaries on subjects of public interest, usually

accompanied by words or caricatures. Hoffman (1958:48) argues that the word "caricature" or "cartoon," as it later became known, originated in Italy in the early sixteenth century, and both terms hold the same meaning in modern journalism.

Furthermore, Streicher (1967:31) explains that there is a distinction between the two terms as caricatures are not inherently political. Caricatures employ graphically exaggerated representations of a subject to the point of ludicrous scorn, and they are characteristically negative in function. In contrast, political cartoons are value-neutral and may serve elevating functions. However, in the end, Streicher (1967) acknowledges that the differences between the two terms are minimally apparent, and caricatures and cartoons are often used interchangeably.

8.1 Cartoons as Forms of Communication

Cartoons, which are pictorial representations of events concerning people or situations, are basically interpretive pictures that are drawn from symbolism and exaggeration to convey their messages. Harrison (1986:67) elaborates that "cartoons are forms, which do not conform, but rather deform and in doing so, they inform." In this regard, the message in political cartoons is supposed to come quicker than what can be found in written editorials.

To support the previous point, Heitzman (1988:205) says "the cartoons have become welcome reliefs from some ponderous elitists that typify so many editorial pages today." From communicative perspective, the early cartoons were different from the modern ones. The earlier cartoonists used to carve their cartoons on wood blocks to enable reproduction which led to meaningful images. Still, even without the technological advances of today's printing industry, such early cartoons could have more communication impacts on the public than modern cartoons. In his comments on the communicative function of cartoons, Olaofe (1984:46) identifies the communicative intent of the cartoonist as follows:

The primary concern of a cartoonist is to send artistic messages to willing recipients for the purposes of stimulating their aesthetic and spiritual feelings. These messages are sent through verbal and non-verbal media. The verbal means of communication are mostly in words and expressions of people. The non-verbal ones are in form of sketches, visual images and symbols, showing the various actions, reactions, mood and behaviour of the people in a particular community.

Visual representations of an artist's opinions are simple, and they make it possible for an illiterate public to understand important messages. At earlier time, there were no televisions, photographs or

movies available for visual representations, thus leaving cartoons as the only representatives of visual communication. Rigoli (1992:8) contends that "the early political cartoonists had a market of illiterate consumers who used cartoons as ways to become informed of the issues."

The integration of language, visual art and creativity into the production of cartoons enabled the artists to communicate more effectively than they would have been done using only one medium of communication. Therefore, as Olaofe (1986:40) contends, cartoons of persons crying are meant to suggest various moods, actions, behaviours and conditions of life of the people.

Moreover, the ways used by the cartoonists to send messages are expected to have a far-reaching effect on the readers. This effect can be in the form of understanding of one's own environment, expansion and deepening of meaning interpretation. So, the political cartoonist's ultimate purpose is to communicate an opinion to as many people as possible. As for a cartoonist's opinion to be communicated effectively to his audience, Heitzmann (1988:205) identifies three requirements:

- 1- The cartoons must exaggerate their points to create the wit and humor necessary for comic effects.
- 2- The cartoons must have bases in truth, meaning that the characters must be recognizable to the viewer and that the point of the drawing must have a basis in truth even though it may contain a philosophical bias.
- 3- A purpose is necessary because without it, the cartoons are not given any universal performance.

A breakdown in the communication process occurs if any of the three requirements is not met. Political cartoons have some kind of impact through the direct audience feedback. It is equally clear that cartoons are part of a larger body of political discourse that takes place in media outlets. Cartoons are strategic in their purposes and they are oriented toward the expression of a view point. Cartoonists are in the task of making persuasive definitions of events and for audience consumption, rejection and endorsement.

In this vein, Rigoli (1992:9) explains that in order to understand the communicative intention of political cartoons, the most difficult part is to be able to interpret the artist's use of symbolism. Symbols are used to tell larger stories, which allow the reader to have the automatic recognition and meaning. If the symbolism is not clear to the audience, then it will not be possible for people to come to full understanding of what message the cartoonist is trying to convey. Morrison (1969:259) explains this point as saying, "a good cartoon is clear, concise and vigorous."

In short, political cartoons are considered as quick means of communication because they simplify, exaggerate, distill and distort. Cartoons differ from words or photographs or even realistic line drawings. Cartoons, in fact, offer a broad range of choices for communicating information. An understanding of the impact of cartoons rests on understanding how and why they work. In order to understand the political cartoons function in visual discourse, it is important to review the features and characteristics of the political cartoons, which will be discussed in the following sections.

9. Characteristics of Political Cartoons

Political cartoons have long been used by newspapers and magazines as a method of poking fun at political figures and governments. In fact, they are unique combinations of pictorial editorials and creative commentaries, which allow cartoonists to make social commentaries beyond the written word. Akande (2002:11) identifies five unique universal characteristics of political cartoons.

First, unlike other forms of the media, political cartoons employ humor in an attempt to make a political statement. Second, political cartoons provide a current commentary and critique of political events as they provide daily or weekly evaluations of important events, people, and issues. The narrative feature in political cartoons enhances the social criticism. Political cartoonists convey this in a clear, concise, and visually reinforcing manner. Third, political cartoons are considered as a form of diversion.

To support his notion of diversion, Akande (2002:12) contends they are cryptic, using as little written information as possible. The quantity of ink doesn't correlate to the power of the message. Even a total lack of information, as in blank page, can be a powerful message in masquerade the truth. A fourth distinguishing feature of political cartoons is that, they are sometimes amusing, but can simultaneously be emotionally devastating.

Depending on the reader's perspective, cartoons can generate anger and outrage as well as laughs and funny sensations. Expressing and causing such responses is the basic goal of political cartoons because all the devices employed by the cartoonists are directed to that end. Although political cartoons are often perceived as a form of amusement, they are also a powerful medium for political discourse. A fifth feature of political cartoons is that; they act as a means of establishing and evaluating political situations. Political cartoons can also establish political agendas by presenting judgements about politics that may affect a reader's beliefs and attitudes.

Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:35), assert that political cartoons serve as important tools in identifying and perhaps establishing major values in society. Political cartoons make important contributions for setting up the public's and politicians' agendas. In this regard, they are capable of establishing and maintaining issues on the public arena. A fifth characteristic of political cartoons is that, they are communication forces that connect the masses with political leaders.

In his discussion of how a cartoon's message is conveyed, Carrol (1983:7) determines the two key components of political cartoons in conveying the cartoons' message: contrast and pacing. Contrast refers to the actual line thickness and shading which comprise the cartoonist's drawing technique. Pacing refers to the timelines of the cartoons and how familiar the cartoons are to the readers. In other words, timeliness is crucially important to political cartoons because the observer's interpretation of the cartoons depends primarily on his or her familiarity with the issues involved. Carrol (1983:7) explains that:

The more current or timely the cartoons theme, the more likely the observer is to be familiar with the issue involved. The issue must occupy a prominent position in the media in order for the observer to have the best possible chance of comprehending the cartoonist's intended meaning.

By the same token, Press (1981:62) observes that there are three basic elements of political cartoons. One is the picture of reality that artists present to us as the essence of truth. Such cartoons show us what is happening in any society. A second is a message which is sometimes implied. A third is through artistic technique and allegorical imagery. In this element, the artist creates a mood that expresses feelings and senses over what is happening.

Current events, according to Press (1981:63), are used as window dressing to establish the validity of the cartoonist's assumptions about how life should be lived. Therefore, a cartoonist viewing student riots on campus in the late sixties could portray trashing of campus property as a result of the repressive and foolish rules established to stifle college youth.

Another cartoonist might see the same event as the outgrowth of permissiveness in family-rearing practices. On the other hand, Sullivan (1987:8) focuses on the quality and features of the cartoons. He considers cartoons as "narratives of a sort" and a "modern version of a morality play," emphasizing the story-telling aspect. Political cartoons, in spite of their typical formats as simple and framed images, or truncated series of images, tell stories, and they are anecdotal. If the

cartoons function anecdotally, we must see an encompassing process, which constitutes a narrative.

Bostdorf (1987:262) likens this process to "an incomplete film that relies on our prior knowledge and our imagination to complete the story." These ideas on the narrative form and function of political cartoons are related to their general rhetorical function in the sense that they tap into shared realities with the audience. Because narrative may be one structural element by which cartoons create, political cartoons become a sort of factual novel.

9.1. Features of Political Cartoons

The impact of features of political cartoons on the readers was the focus of many researchers. Sullivan (1983:7) confirms that "the treatment of political cartoons as fictions suggest that the drawings may function as an archetypal example, giving us pretended insight." Readers must be able to make connections between the timely subject at hand and any literary or cultural allusion by which the cartoonists explain the situation figuratively. Thus, the reader is given an active role in interpreting the implicit message of the cartoonist. Edwards (1993:26-27) affirms how cartoons function rhetorically as follows:

The cartoon's power lies in its intentionally persuasive nature as a form of satiric commentary, and in its use of myth to appeal to its audience and invite meaning. Although historically the cartoon's primary function has been seen as debunking, it also serves such rhetorical functions as framing, condensing and agenda setting according to communication scholars.

Many features of political cartoons attract the attention of communication experts. As Olaofe (1986:46) puts it, "perhaps the most glaring feature of all of them is simplicity. They are hand-drawn sketches containing short sentences and captions in simple." Such sketches are devoid of abstractions, and they are naturalistic in outlook. The drawings are made of simple illustrative lines with shading. In this vein, Olaofe (1984:46) asserts the following:

Every cartoon is a distinct narration of an episode through seemingly ugly-looking sketches often punctuated with brief statements, which may be in the form of conversations, dialogues, monologues, or notes. The language combines simplicity of expression with wittiness, sarcasm and concrete images drawn from the local surrounding.

The cartoonists, in their use of language, do not commit themselves to the rules of grammar and lexicography, and are not compelled by the rules of sentence and paragraph formation. Olaofe (1984:46) explains that cartoonists generally do not stick to any rules of grammar. But

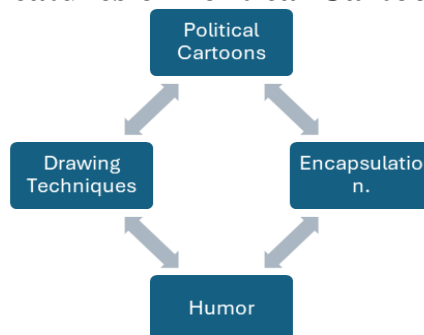
despite this non-conformity, the message communicated via visual symbols and words is clear. It must be pointed out that the simplicity of the work of the art exhibited in cartoons doesn't suggest simplicity of ideas and meaning interpretation.

Though cartoons are simple artistic mediums, cartoonists are able to convey complex ideas that are capable of a multiplicity of meaning interpretations. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:200) argue that political cartoons are based on four major areas; political commonplaces, literary or cultural allusions, personal character traits, and situational themes. They (1981:200) define political commonplaces as "topics available to any cartoonist working in a modern nation state such as the state of the economy, the political process, or the electoral framework." Cartoons which bear themes of literary or cultural allusions require the observer to be familiar with the literary figure or event depicted in order to comprehend the cartoonist's intended meaning.

In addition, cartoons that are based on personal character traits might exaggerate or emphasize the personal features of the characters. Situational themes refer to idiosyncratic events which occur during the course of the events and have little meaning outside the timeframe in which they occur. A strong message or viewpoint is ineffective without an engaging method of presentation. Style is essential in any good cartoon. In this context, when we discuss the style of political cartoons, we should focus on the mode of expressions as distinct from the ideas presented. In this vein, Kenner (1987:37) presents three basic features for political cartoons which are:

- 1- Humor.
- 2- Drawing techniques.
- 3-Encapsulation.

Features of Political Cartoons



The first feature, humor, is considered the fundamental feature of cartooning. The depiction of someone or something requires a humorous or a clever way that transmits the viewpoint of the cartoonist. To show

the function of humor, Oliphant (1982:6) notes that "Nothing is better than humor as a vehicle for political thought. If the humor becomes an end in itself and the pacing is not varied according to the demands of the day, the message is horribly weakened." Typically, political cartoons are broadly humorous in ways that may be unacceptable in other forms of political commentary or reporting. Although Gombrich (1969) cautions against stressing humor as the central element in cartoons, humor does play a unique and central role in the way political cartoons communicate ideas.

The second feature, drawing technique, confirms that a good message or viewpoint summed up in a humorous manner will be lost if the visual impact lacks style and clarity. Many cartoonists have stylized devices which they use to keep the audience interested, and to make certain that people understand the cartoons' meaning. Some cartoonists, as explained by Kenner (1987:40), "use captions and text to make their meaning clear, while others prefer a totally visual impact."

The third feature, encapsulation, is also considered an essential element in political cartoons. Kenner (1987:40) argues that most cartoonists agree that cartoons are very time bound. They have about six to eight seconds to get a reader's attention, before the reader moves on to another section of the paper. Because of this temporal nature, cartoonists must be direct, clear and concise. They must encapsulate their ideas into a very simple form. In this regard, Kenner (1984:42) asserts the following:

Political cartoons provide synecdochic images and the images sum up the issues for the reader in just a few seconds. This moment of enlightenment unpacks layers of meaning for the reader with its emotional impact. Political cartoons provide powerful statements which may stay with reader long after editorials are forgotten.

The essential parts of good political cartoons are strong messages and engaging styles. Together, these parts identify what seem to be the most important concerns for the cartoonists. Olafe (1984:46) elaborates on another significant feature of cartoons, which is creativity. He considers every cartoon is to a symbol of creativity. Such creativity is involved in the production of cartoons that can be viewed at different levels.

Artistically, the cartoonists are constantly involved in creating images and relating these images to events in their environment. They are expected to present their images in simple forms, but such images shouldn't be so simple as to be misread by intelligent minds. To be able to attain this artistic goal, they need a high sense of creativity.

Linguistically, the cartoonists are able to utilize words and expressions to describe particular incidents.

The cartoonists are also able to use their senses of imaginations to reverse the order of things, and make these things that are normally unimpressive, rather impressive. Humor and satire are also important features that run through the cartoons. Many people want to read cartoons because of the humorous way their episodes are presented. Worcester (1940:37) explains that a distinction between humor and satire is necessary for the analysis of political cartoons.

Humor differs from satire in intent, as the purpose of humor is to entertain, while satire is designed to persuade. Satire is defined as "biting wit, irony, or sarcasm used to express vice or folly" (Webster, 1974:617). Bloom (1979:32) views irony as "witty intent contrary to the literal meaning of the words employed." Considering which one is more functional than the other, Carrol (1983:10) views that satire describes the political cartoons better than humor because cartoonists attempt to make statements of some social events through use of sarcasm.

The degree of meaning in the cartoons is the characteristic which allows it to be described more accurately by satire than humor. Perhaps, humor functions most often in cartoons as a vehicle for expressing the cartoonists' persuasive messages. According to Schutz (1977:31), the function of humor in political messages is the release of tension it provides. When people internalize aggression, it sometimes surfaces as humorous expression. He elaborates that because political humor is often a reaction to the greatest concentration of power in society, it is considered as a safe release for aggressiveness against superior force.

Justifying the usage of humor in political cartoons, Schutz (1977:8) explains that because government is the authoritative institution that enforces society's taboos, we use political humor against it to vent our resultant frustrations in a form that allows us some release for the suppressed urges. Carrol (1983:33) argues that cartooning provides a release value for these feelings by allowing the people to laugh at some dangerous or depressing issue or one filled with tension or hostility. The cartoonists have license to provide commentaries that are socially unacceptable in other forms.

Highlighting the function of visual satire in political cartoons, Lamb (2004:49) explains that visual satire differs from written satire in its use of depiction or the deliberate distortion of a particular individual's features for purposes of mockery. Some cartoonists argue that political cartoons, like all satirical works, have always been weapons that can be offensive because they attack and attempt to offend. The British essayist

Gilbert Highet (1962:18) claims that "most satiric writing contains cruel and dirty words."

This feature is particularly valid for cartoons since cartoons tend to be excessive. In order to ensure their effectiveness, they must be joking, ironic, satirical and subversive. Cartoons don't kill, but they do make carnage of their prey. The subject matter of satire is often aimed at the duplicity and corruption of religious, social, educational, political institutions and their rituals. However, for the cartoonists, affirming the existence of aggression is not readily apparent. This kind of aggression is identified by Akande (2002:32) as follows:

This aggression is transformed into a social and artistic expression that satisfies people's need for play and humor. Since political cartoons are not read for moral instruction or directions like editorials, they offer readers the pleasure of superiority and a safe release of aggression. Although the essential quality is entertainment, it must please the reader by imagination and richness.

Political cartoons, like other verbal and graphic devices, have a preoccupation with truth and reality; thereby, they exploit the ability of irony to expose, ridicule and otherwise attack indirectly, profoundly and artfully. Political cartoons often make the best use of subtle satire. The main idea of satire in cartooning, according to Akande (2002:21), is to prod people into an awareness of truth, reminding people that what they hear from the government is only partially true.

Political cartoonists' apparent decisions to use satire to criticise their own government during the time of political turmoil could hardly be made with impunity in a country where the press may be heavily censored. The use of political cartoons as satire lies in their graphic merits and freshness of perspectives. When any reader interprets cartoons, he or she must take the whole picture plus any word or caption into consideration.

Commenting on the perceptual mechanism for the observer, Maier (1932:70) explains that political cartoons must be viewed as a whole rather than so many parts. With this label, Carl (1970:39) calls cartoons "ink blots of editorial pages." He argues that readers derive meaning from cartoons through selective perceptions, and the blot analogy. From this perspective, the meaning is relative to the individual.

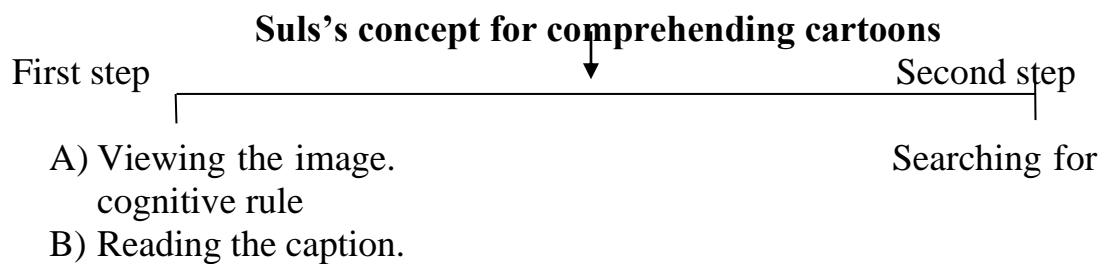
According to Carl (1970:40), cartoons are complicated communication channels. Even when the readers don't understand cartoons, they try to guess any meaning from them. Although the meanings derived from the cartoons might not enable the observers to understand the cartoons entirely, some degrees of meanings are clear for

the readers. In understanding the communicative intent of the cartoonists, a three-step process occurs when readers view cartoons:

- 1- Looking at the images.
- 2- Reading the captions (if one is present).
- 3- Supplying a missing third step from their psychological sets to complete the thought process.

When the three steps are done, cartoons are interpreted. In studying cartoons' interpretation, researchers have focused on these three aspects of interpreting cartoons. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:219) argue that the shared meaning between the editorial cartoonists and the readers is a result of the "juxtaposition of the visual elements on the page, and the interpretation of that juxtaposition on the mind of the reader."

Commenting on this point, Harrison (1981:44) describes these visual elements as incongruous parts that are suddenly decoded by the observer. Jacobsen (1982:2) agrees with that view and focuses on the reader's involvement in the interpretation process. He explains (1982:2) that "by telling only part of the story, the cartoon forces the observer to take part, to supply the missing section." Suls (1972:82) also claims that there are two processes characterizing the cognitive activities required to comprehend and appreciate cartoons. In the first step, the observer views the image and reads the caption. If any observer finds the caption irrelevant or incongruous to the image, then secondly, he or she searches for a cognitive rule to bring order to the incongruous parts.



Suls (1972:82) defines a cognitive rule as "a logical proposition, a definition or a fact of experience." Suls's definition of a cognitive rule and application of it to the process of cartoon interpretation provide evidence that cognitive rules supply a helpful step in decoding the meaning. Some researchers who study the interpretation process suggest factors which influence the reader's perception. Jacobian (1982:22) mentions age, sex and marital status as factors influencing perception.

Carl (1970:35) suggests that some elements such as the ability to perceive details, ethnic background, environment, psychological set, knowledge of current events and history, ability to see analogies, and

knowledge of allegories may influence a cartoon's meaning. Many researchers apply varied approaches in order to describe the nature of cartoon interpretation and the factors that influence cartoon interpretation.

In his questionnaire, Carl (1970:40) surveyed cartoons' observers in several U.S cities, asking observers for their interpretations of political cartoons. Then, he compared those responses to the cartoonists' intended meanings. Residents of New York and Pennsylvania reported little agreement between the cartoonist's intended meaning and the observer's interpretation of that meaning.

Carl (1970:42) found that 70 percent of the respondents interpreted the cartoons differently from the interpretations the cartoonists had intended. He found that "only about 15 percent were in agreement". He concluded that editorial cartoons were seldom interpreted by observers as cartoonists intended for them to be interpreted. Generally, editorial cartoons, since they are always produced under similar conditions, for similar purposes and appear in similar situations, may be understood as a class or category of discursive images or speaking.

There is a consistency about the form, function and occurrence of political cartoons that raises certain expectations in the minds of readers and unites cartoons as rhetorical expressions. Political cartoons possess rhetorical qualities, particularly in their display and dissemination of symbolic forms, which inevitably have social value and effect. Cartoons are rhetorically in a reciprocal relationship with the audience. Cartoonists use references to create imagery fictions, or illusions that function as allusions. In that direction, cartoons are drawn based upon social knowledge that allows readers to understand the created references and pushes the reader to think about the function of political cartoons in visual political discourse.

9.2. Function of Political Cartoons in Visual Discourse

Cartoons are designed to persuade, provoke, cajole, and entertain the viewer, primarily through the use of visual analogy and exaggeration. Cartoons work by simplifying and exaggerating selected features of an event in order to ridicule and satirize it. Political cartoons operate as frames for the organization of social knowledge insofar as they make use of various rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and depictions which purport to capture the essence of an issue or event graphically. Gamson and Stuart (1992:60) note that cartoons "offer a number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame of any issue." In this vein, Greenberg (2002:183) elaborates on the relationship between the political cartoons and framing in visual discourse as follows:

Cartoons help to render infinite amounts of detail into practical frameworks that are relevant and appropriate to social actors understanding the everyday world. In this sense, political cartoons channel the discursive possibilities for making sense of social phenomena; they legitimate and thus facilitate the grounds upon which some things can be said and others implied.

The visual image, its caption and the accompanying label sometimes provide clues to the preferred meanings and types of outcomes or consequences that the artist feels may legitimately result from an activity, issue, or event. Edy (1999:73) explains that the temporal dimension of visual discourse is of sociological importance. This is because cartoons provide a lens through which an implied version of accounts of social phenomena has repercussions for how societies relate to their own histories. The claims constructed in political cartoons are illustrative of whether a society will see itself as a collective or mosaic of different groups, whether a society will see the past as relevant to the needs of the present and future. Thus, political cartoons, according to Purvis and Hunt (1993:475), not only grasp the way in which visual discourse conveys social experience, but cartoons also help constitute the subjectivities and identities of social subjects, their relations, and the field in which they exist. Definitely, this is not to say that political cartoons casually affect how individuals and groups will define themselves in moments of stability or crisis. However, they are considered as both informative and persuasive. Cartoons render normative judgments about social issues by employing a variety of journalistic conventions, such as figures of speech, metaphors, and irony.

As Savarese (2000:365) notes, persuasive techniques such as the aforementioned are used either "deliberately or unwittingly to convince the public of a certain point of view without being explicit." To define clearly the connection between the political cartoons' function and visual discourse, one has to review Thompson's statement that discourse analysis should involve "a synthetic construction, a creative projection of a possible meaning" (2003:133).

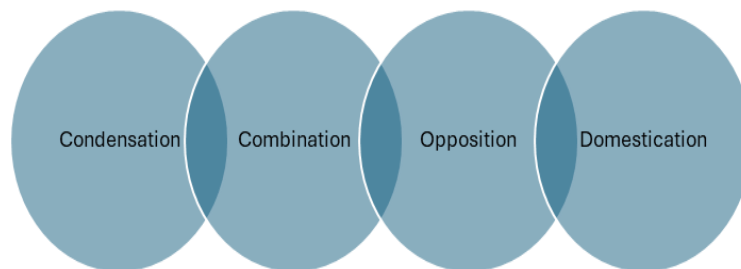
In their agreement with the previous discussion, Purvis and Hunt (1993:484) state that "the discursive practices through which subjects are constituted may or may not necessarily have ideological effects."

Thus, visual discourse does not reveal how newsreaders will actually interpret the content nor does it provide clues to the range of possible readings that the reader may construct. On the other hand, Morris (1993: 198-99) affirms that cartoons capture the endless binary oppositions that organize social representations about the world and

provide a cognitive map for understanding everyday life. Morris (1993: 199-203) also argues that four rhetorical devices will affect the content, intended meanings and negotiated meanings of political cartoons. These four devices are;

- 1- Condensation.
- 2- Combination.
- 3- Opposition.
- 4- Domestication.

Four Rhetorical Devices of Political Cartoons

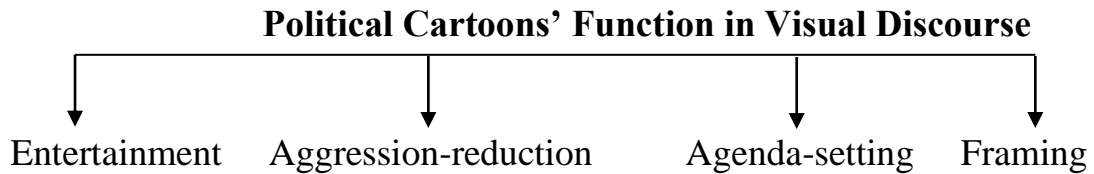


Morris (1993:199) clearly defines each element and its role in the discourse of political cartoons. First, condensation involves the compression of disconnected or complexly related events to a common, singular frame. Second, combination involves the construction and organization of various elements or ideas from different domains with numerous and perhaps conflicting meanings. Third, opposition is a process whereby the complexity of a problem or event is reduced to a binary struggle. Finally, domestication occurs when distant events remote from the everyday experiences of the reader are translated into concrete happenings that can be experienced as close and familiar situations. In addition to the devices which are used in political cartoons, DeSousa and Medhurst (1984:84) add three basic elements to explain the cultural significance of cartoons:

- A) Psychoanalytic B) Sociological C) Rhetorical

According to DeSousa and Medhurst (1982:82), the psychoanalytic approach contends that symbolism is the heartbeat of any cartoon. Any kind of comic forms helps in obtaining the reduction of aggression. The sociological element moves outside of the mind and motives of comic inventions to stress the social structure that limits or enhances a cartoon. To support their argument, DeSousa and Medhurst (1982:85) show that "caricature is a way of catching at a glance the meaning of an event, a person in the news, or a pictorial summary of a current power constellation." From a sociological perspective, showing

the interrelationship of people, events and power relations is the primary function of political cartooning. If this is the cultural significance of cartoons, DeSousa and Medhurst (1982) identify four major functions of cartoons in discourse: entertainment, aggression reduction, agenda setting, and framing.



10. Agenda Setting and Political Cartoons

Among the functions of the political cartoons in discourse, agenda setting and framing are central instruments for political cartoons. The theory of agenda-setting postulates that mass media tell the public what to think about. In other words, the dissemination of information to the public mentally orders and organizes society's agenda of topics and issues. In this way, Khang (2002:17) explains the concept of agenda-setting by the following:

The theory of agenda-setting describes mass media as society's gate keeper of information. The media determine which items of information hold significance for society. In doing so, media dictate what exists as newsworthy and what does not. Furthermore, the mass media assign weights of relative importance to the items it deems newsworthy through the emphasis placed upon each item of information, such as front page, coverage, color photograph, etc.

On the other hand, McCombs and Shaw (1972:180) contend that the issues presented by the media are strongly correlated with the public's own issue interests. Therefore, agenda-setting theory focuses on the cognitive, indirect effects of mass media. This theory has led mass communications' researchers to study how media news coverage affects an issue's salience, rather than on the media's direct effects on the audience members' attitudes and behavior. The agenda-setting function of political cartoons is related to its independence of timeliness for much of its impact. Although political cartoons may speak to universal audiences with timeless messages, most political cartoons are rooted in today's headlines. It is precisely the cartoon's dependence on the political present makes it an important index to the major issues of the day. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:202) contend that political cartoons are considered important tools in the formation of public opinion on various salient issues.

Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:2003) also suggest that political cartoons can contribute to agenda-setting generally through providing readers with some sense of the most significant issues, events, or topics. They emphasize that to be a part of the public agenda in any political event, the politician tries to attract the major cartoonists because they are supposedly sensitive reflectors of society's most important issue. Therefore, agenda-setting as a concept is not restricted to the relationship between the salience of topics for the media and the audience. This concept can encompass the saliency of various elements, such as topics, issues, and persons that are reported in the media.

11. Framing and Political Cartoons

Framing theory, according to Khang (2002:19), suggests that the media place a frame of reference around the audience thought process. A media frame is the central organizing idea for news content as it supplies context and suggests how an event should be interpreted. Rose (2001:11) affirms the description of frames as they are "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world."

Hence, framing is concerned with the ways which communicators combine to understand the meaning by using the verbal and visual symbolic resources. Van Dijk (1985) suggests that the way news is framed in the mass media is a result of the social and professional routines of journalists. In this direction, both Pan and Kosick (1993:69) identify four types of structural dimensions of visual and verbal news discourse that influence the formation of frames:

1. Syntactic structures or patterns in the arrangement of words and phrases.
2. Script structures, referring to the general news coverage of an event as well as the intention to communicate news and events to the audience.
3. Thematic structures, reflecting the tendency of journalists to impose a casual theme on their news stories, either in the form of explicit statements, or by linking observations to the direct quote of sources.
4. Rhetorical structures, referring to the stylistic ways created by journalists in relation to their implicit ideas.

DeSousa (1984:205) argues that cartoons serve as frames for readers to comprehend complex issues and events. These frames condense multiple interconnected themes, ideas, and motivations into a single comprehensible image. Given that cartoonists typically have only one frame to work with, it is crucial for them to efficiently utilize forms within that frame in order to achieve their desired objectives. Simultaneously, cartoonists must establish a concrete understanding with the reader.

DeSousa (1984:205) demonstrates that in order to fulfill this purpose, political cartoonists must employ imagery that is both compelling and powerful. They often draw upon potent symbols within political and cultural contexts. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:93) argue that by simplifying complex issues or events into metaphorical forms, political cartoons can provide readers with an appealing illusion of understanding, which can serve as a foundation for comprehending thoughts or events.

12. Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Inventions

As they are not bound by the same norms of conventional media, political cartoons provide an important perspective from which to examine political events. Political cartoons' communicative functions (agenda-setting and framing) are based on four main rhetorical devices to achieve their purposes. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:205) define four types of such rhetorical devices;

- Political commonplaces.
- Cultural allusions.
- Personal character traits.
- Situational themes.

Political commonplaces are those topics available to any cartoonist working within a modern society. Such topics include the state of the economy, the defense of the nation, foreign relations, the political process and the electoral framework, (such as campaigning, voting and special interests). Both Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:205) maintain that these rhetorical inventions constitute the core of political cartoons in the sense that one can't create cartoons on a regular basis without some awareness of these predictable themes.

A second source of cartoon image-making is the cultural allusion. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:210) explain that this allusion may include any fictive or mythical character, and any narrative or form, whether drawn from legend, folklore, literature, or the electronic media. In each instance, the meaning of the image comes not only from the political commonplaces, but it also employs the interaction of the commonplace with an allusion which provides the audience an orientation for understanding of an issue. To decode a cartoon, one must be familiar with the literary or cultural sources to which it refers. Thus, to decode a cartoon in harmony with the cartoonist's intent requires familiarity with the fictive or cultural form to which it refers. It is the realm of cultural allusions that facilitates cartoons as framing devices. In other words, cartoons help provide the orientation with which an event has to be understood. In this vein, Edwards (1993:21) suggests that the political

image possesses overt rhetorical qualities and cultural allusions as he observes the followings:

One way in which the political cartoon functions rhetorically is through its reciprocal relationship with the audience. Cartoonists use intermediary references to create imaginary fictions, or illusions that function as allusions. In doing so, cartoonists depend on social knowledge, so the reader will understand the reference.

Khang (2002:24) clarifies the third type of rhetorical invention, that of character traits. Such traits as intelligence, honesty, age, morality, charisma, and leadership can be transformed into a combination of imagery and caption. Each trait must exist to some extent in the popular consciousness or graphic tradition before it can be amplified and drawn by the artist. In his comments on the fourth type of rhetorical invention, Khang (2002:25) contends that "idiosyncratic and transient situations which appear unexpectedly constitute a fourth source of rhetorical invention in political cartoons." Such events may have an immediate impact and contain a timely message, but they have little effect beyond their context. In most cases, cartoonists usually tap into familiar images and symbols, so meaning will not be obscured.

Whether the cartoonist successfully communicates the intended message by drawing recognizable representations of characters or depicting recognizable situations and references, a cartoonist's work must translate and configure the meaning to the reader. Political cartoons, then, may be seen as rhetorically powerful in two ways. First, they provide messages that employ references designed to appeal to the audience understanding and experience. Second, cartoons may be seen as intentionally effective messages designed to provide persuasive definitions for an audience. Werner (2003:87) discusses the question of what a rhetorical image implies in the following;

The question of what an image says is dependent upon the visual language of how it is said. Meaning is not a simple reflection of the artist's intentions; a correct interpretation is rarely just a matter of divining what the artist wanted to say. Meaning is produced and corrected through visual language and has to be read. Only as viewers are able to enter the discourse's language can they interpret and critique the image.

Werner (2003:90) considers that it would be a poor argument to claim that the message conveyed by a cartoon is based on the literal reading or the surface content (i.e. the explicit, factual, or denotative meanings). At this level, the viewer may recognize the signs in the image such as the signified objects, people, place, or event portrayed in the

image. A better interpretation of the visual language would allow the viewer to move to the suggested meanings, as the reader recognizes the use of rhetorical devices to suggest meaning. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:205) discuss the basic graphic form (contrast and commentary) that cartoonists use in enhancing their rhetorical function. The basic form of rhetorical disposition employed by the political cartoonist is the contrast which expresses differences between new and old ideas. Unlike the speaker or the writer who develops ideas sequentially in time or space, the political cartoonist must convey the message at a single glance. According to Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:206), the most communicative political cartoons can be understood at a look. Generally, cartoonists provide their ideas within the confines of a single frame. To convey successfully the intended meaning to the reader, the cartoonist must build into the frame one or more basic contrasts to clarify the meaning. Such contrasts could be between visual forms, images and texts, or two or more verbal texts. In addition to contrast as the major dispositional form, there is also another minor form of rhetorical technique that is commentary.

Commentary occurs when the artist simply gives the reader a perception of "truth" without bothering to inform the reader about the clash or tension from which this truth has emerged. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) argue that such commentary is clearly an expected and safe form of disposition because it offers a popularly accepted image and requires only that readers recognize the congruence between what is said and what is imagined. Many scholars focus on the feature of commentary in political cartoons to document or examine the general political and historical change. Such cartoons have become interesting historical documents which shed light on the perceptions and passions of a particular period. In this vein, Harrison (1981:122) says "cartoons have been collected to spotlight a particular historical event, such as World War I, World War II, or the Kennedy assassination."

In general, since they always are produced for similar purposes, and appear in similar situations, political cartoons may be understood as a category of discursive images or speaking pictures. The consistency in the form and function of political cartoons raises certain expectations in the minds of readers and expands the function of political cartoons as rhetorical tools. However, it is important to mention that political cartoons also have power in visual discourse. How the cartoonist employs this power and how the audience is affected by the inherent power of the image is the focus of the following part.

13. The Power of Political Cartoons

Many scholars argue that the unique and inherent power of the image distinguishes it from more traditional verbal expressions. Gombrich (1984:193) claims visual images have some kind of inherent impact as they push viewers to think deeply about events or topics. That means that the impact of a visual image may be more lasting than its verbal counterparts and that its power lies in its ease of interpretation. Olafe (1986:48) agrees with Gombrich's argument about the power of cartoons as he observes the following:

The creative power of the cartoons lies not only in the ability to gather a collection of visual data or records of events, but in the ability to convey the desired message in a simple, yet poignant manner, without allowing the rules of grammar, stylistic appropriations and semantic exactness to rob them of the meaning of the message.

Nowadays, the use of cartoons has become a valuable way to convey information in any society. Cartoons also make the actions and reactions of people subject to critical evaluation. More than that, cartoons offer readers emotional relaxation and aesthetic satisfaction. In addition, political cartoons make a point about a political issue or event. They can be found in any daily newspaper, on the editorial pages, in news magazines, and on the political websites. Somers (1998:10) points out political cartoons can be very funny, particularly if the context of the event is understood. The main purpose is not to entertain the reader, but to convince him or her of the truth of the event. A good political cartoon makes recipients think about current events, but it also tries to sway their minds on an issue without realizing how they did it. In this vein, Gocek (1998:2) explains that political cartoon has emerged as a very significant social medium because of the multiplicity of meanings and forms embedded within; it contains both a visual and a textual message on political events presented through cultural symbols as interpreted by the caricaturist.

The strong impact of political cartoons derives from its significant appeal to the intellect, conscience and emotion. In his agreement with Gocek's argument, Chaplain (1994:1) affirms that political cartoons "represent the cartoonist's interpretation of larger societal practices and forces through the use of textual and visual codes." Chaplain (1994:3) proposes that the process of decoding any cartoon introduces more aspects of meaning as the audiences find in it their own rendition of the world around them. In this track, Speedling (2004:14) asserts that "while political cartoons may not alter the power relationships in a given political structure, they do play an important symbolic role in

maintaining them." She explains how such a type of cartoons can explain the interrelationship of people and power. Such relationship between cartoons and power was the main focus of DeSousa & Medhurst (1982:84) as they affirm the power of political cartoons as the following: The power of the political cartoon lies not in the specific artist's intent or success at fostering change but in the degree to which, and the manner by which, the cartoonist taps the collective consciousness of reader and thereby reaffirms cultural values and individual interpretation of those values. The cartoon generally functions not as a change agent but as a statement of consensus, an invitation to remember cultural values and beliefs and, by implication, to participate in their maintenance.

Speedling (2004:17) describes political cartoons as a lens through which to view and interpret political history, even to educate people in current political events. She even emphasizes that the power of such political cartoons in shaping the political social reality, in other words, to frame dialogue and define issues. One can understand that political cartoons frame phenomena by situating the problem in question within the context of everyday life and exploiting universal values as a means of persuading readers to identify with an image and its intended message. Generally, political cartoons can be found in a wide range of roles, from their treatment of political leaders and national icons to foreign enemies. They are considered as the most extreme form of expression found in newspapers as they are not bounded by norms of journalistic objectivity. As such, they are historically considered as a source of satirical critique of the political status quo. Additionally, political cartoons, past and present, still serve as a unique record of the particular events, attitudes and narrative during a moment in political history.

Morrison (1969:252) suggests that political cartoons are one form of opinion that has been clearly identified as "just opinion." Morrison (1969:253) argues that there is more to the cartoonist than the obvious pictorial representations appearing in print. The cartoonist is "a graphic communicator, not a harmless jester, providing editorial page fillers, but an effective opinion" (P: 252). To support the powerful sense of cartoonists, Brookhiser (1989:30) explains that "political cartoonists shape our public imagery and perhaps even our political thought." It is the political cartoonist's job to bring forth to the public criticism and commentary on issues that are relevant at the time. He must be predictive in his work. He must anticipate the public response to issues and personalities and articulate the same for his consumers. Morrison (1969:259-260) contends the powerful aspect of cartoons as saying, "the

cartoon is immediately comprehensible, while the written editorials suffer from restraints of language, argumentation and qualification."

On the other hand, Carl (1968:533) confirms that cartoons are more effective than a strong editorial. He conducted a study to assess people's interpretation of cartoons. At the end, Carl (1968:533) concluded it is an uncertain assumption that cartoons are more easily understood than the written word. To show how cartoons have power, Pieper and Clear (1995:62) suggest that cartoons play a special role in the editorial content of a daily newspaper. Rather than providing simple entertainment, they provide strong social and political commentary.

Scholars delving into political cartoons as communication tools have extensively explored their effectiveness in editorial persuasion. Firstly, cartoons possess an inherent ability to distill complex issues into readily digestible formats for the audience. Harrison (1981:79) observes that their greatest power lies in "simplifying and crystallizing the complex events of the day". He further underscores their advantage of achieving clarity through both simplification and exaggeration. Similarly, Medhurst and DeSousa (1981:220) propose that political cartoons are specifically designed to "convey an opinion visually and in a form by which complex events can be interpreted with a single glance." This facilitates easy comprehension and recall for readers.

Secondly, cartoons offer editorializing opportunities beyond the scope of traditional newspapers, bound by notions of objectivity. Many experts view them as "fascinating journalistic anachronisms" for their ability to subvert objectivity and fairness through irreverence and biting humor. In this vein, according to Williams (1997:10) "unfairness, subjectivity, and distortion of facts" often become tools for cartoonists to unearth a "truth that is greater than the sum of the facts." They constitute "safe havens for expressing opinions and making accusations," a stark contrast to the fact-based, non-inflammatory nature of news reports. Williams (1997) positions them as "a form of journalistic commentary designed to influence readers," akin to editorials and opinion pieces. Echoing this sentiment, Khang (2002:12) emphasizes their rhetorical power, stating:

The rhetorical strength of cartoons as a form of communication is derived from the fact that cartoons employ a visual mode of communication even though text might accompany an image for purpose of clarification. While language is deemed to be a more advanced mode of communication because of its ability to make explicit propositions which are vital to making arguments, visual modes of communication

possess unique attributes that are said to be rhetorically more persuasive than language.

Furthermore, political cartoons can convey subtle cues that evade other media formats. Williams (1997:11) reinforces this notion, suggesting that they serve as "messages expressing opinions about the news, rather than factually reporting the news."

In talking about the visual images and their role in the visual discourse to be persuasive communicative tools, Messaris (1997:13) suggests some qualities of visual images. He considers the powerful tools of these images:

- 1- The iconicity; analogical quality or likeness.
- 2- The nature of implicitness.

Political cartoons have two key features to exert persuasive power: iconicity and implicitness. Iconicity, as defined by Messaris (1997:9), denotes a resemblance or analogy between an image and its subject, facilitating a real-world experience in the viewer's mind. This inherent link to perceived reality imbues images with a naturalness and believability exceeding that of words. Messaris further argues (1997:15) that viewers often overlook form and style, focusing primarily on content. This creates an opportunity for subtle manipulation, utilizing form to evoke specific meanings and reactions. Khang (200:14) reinforces this notion, highlighting the potent persuasive influence of visual imagery due to its ability to generate concrete simulations of reality through iconicity.

Visual communication inherently lacks the explicitness of verbal language. Unlike sentences with clear grammatical structures, images don't readily reveal their connections to each other (Messaris, 1997:11). This implicitness, as Messaris (1997:11) explains, has significant implications for persuasion. Viewers must rely more heavily on intuition and contextual cues to decipher implied meanings, leading to a higher degree of mental engagement. This very ambiguity, according to scholars, makes visual imagery a potent tool for articulating ideology.

The combined impact of iconicity and implicitness makes political cartoons powerful persuaders. These features allow them to convey ideas and perpetuate notions beyond the reach of mere words. Fischer (1996:40) further emphasizes the role of exaggeration and distortion, tools crucial to a cartoon's effectiveness. However, to retain honesty, these distortions must remain somewhat grounded in factual reality. Viewers are often less aware of visual framing than its textual counterpart, further amplifying the impact of political cartoons. Messages that might face resistance if expressed verbally can be more

readily accepted when presented visually. Therefore, political cartoons emerge as potent vehicles for conveying political messages, influencing and persuading their audiences.

14. Data Analysis

The data analysis section of this research will focus on examining a corpus of eight political cartoons centered around the Gaza War. The cartoons will be sourced from both international and Arab newspapers, with four cartoons selected from each category. The data collection timeframe spans from November 1st, 2023, to December 1st, 2023. The analysis will encompass three crucial levels: linguistic, ideological, and contextual.

To gather the data, prominent international newspapers with a wide readership, such as The New York Times, The Guardian, and The Washington Post, will be considered. The editorial sections or dedicated cartoon sections of these newspapers will be scanned during the specified timeframe to identify cartoons directly related to the Gaza War. Similarly, renowned Arab newspapers like Al-Ahram, Asharq Al-Awsat, and Al-Hayat will be included, and cartoons addressing the Gaza War will be selected from their editorial and cartoon sections. The chosen cartoons will meet specific criteria, including direct relevance to the Gaza War, the presence of visual and textual elements suitable for linguistic, ideological, visual and contextual analysis, and representation of diverse perspectives. Relevant metadata, such as publication date, newspaper name will be mentioned alongside the selected cartoons.

A) International Cartoons

Fig (1)



Cartoon published by The Guardian, Nov 10th, 2023.

Linguistic Level

The cartoon utilizes three main texts. The soldier on the Israeli tank says, "We won," while the Hamas fighter holding a rifle says the same. The old lady, in a larger and red font, exclaims, "We lost." The text is straightforward and emphasizes the contrasting perspectives of victory and defeat. The font used for the soldier and Hamas fighter is regular, indicating their statements are equal in importance. However, the old lady's text is larger and red, drawing attention to her despair and highlighting her sense of loss.

Visual Level

The visual elements play a crucial role in conveying the message of the cartoon. The soldier standing on top of an Israeli tank represents Israel's military power and dominance. The Hamas fighter holding a rifle symbolizes Palestinian resistance and determination. The old lady crying with tears represents innocent civilians caught in the crossfire and suffering from loss and grief. Her dead son lying on her legs emphasizes the human cost of war. The demolished house with the name "Gaza" written on it serves as a powerful visual symbol for destruction and devastation caused by conflict. It highlights how Gaza has been heavily affected by violence and serves as a representation of Palestinian suffering.

Ideological Level

The cartoon presents contrasting ideologies held by different parties involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The soldier's statement, "We won," reflects Israel's perspective that they have achieved victory or accomplished their goals through military might. On the other hand, the Hamas fighter's statement, "We won," reflects their belief that they have achieved success through resistance against occupation. The old lady's statement, "We lost," represents innocent civilians who are often overlooked in discussions about victory or defeat but bear significant consequences of war. This highlights how conflicts impact ordinary people who suffer loss, grief, displacement, and destruction.

The cartoon implies that both sides claim victory despite evident human suffering. It suggests that such claims may be self-centered or disconnected from reality. By highlighting an innocent civilian's perspective (the old lady), it challenges these claims. The power dynamics between Israel (represented by the soldier) and Hamas (represented by the fighter) are evident through their presence on tanks and rifles respectively. This reflects their military strength but also suggests an imbalance of power against civilians caught in between.

Contextual Level

To fully understand this cartoon, it is essential to consider its broader context—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This conflict has been marked by cycles of violence, political disputes, territorial claims, and human rights concerns. The cartoon depicts a specific moment within this context where both sides claim victory while innocent civilians suffer losses. It reflects how conflicting narratives emerge from different perspectives within this complex and deeply rooted conflict. Overall, this cartoon provides a critical commentary on war's devastating impact on innocent lives while highlighting conflicting narratives surrounding victory and loss in an ongoing conflict.

Fig (2)



Cartoon published by New York Times, Nov 19th, 2023.

The cartoon depicts an Israeli tank with two soldiers standing above it, claiming that the tunnels have been destroyed. In contrast, there are two men representing the United Nations (UN) who state that not only have the tunnels been destroyed but also all bridges to peace.

Linguistic Analysis

The cartoon includes several pieces of text. The banner in front of the tank reads "Gaza," indicating that the bombing is taking place in Gaza. The Israeli Prime Minister is shown saying "Tunnels Destroyed," which suggests that the Israeli military action is aimed at destroying tunnels used by Palestinian militants. The UN officials are depicted saying "All the Bridges to Peace, Too," implying that the ongoing conflict is hindering any progress towards peace. The font used for the text is clear and legible, making it easy to read and understand the messages conveyed.

Visual Analysis

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On the symbolic level, the Israeli tank represents military power and dominance, indicating Israel's control over the situation. The soldiers standing above it further emphasize their authority. The Israeli tank represents military power and aggression. It is positioned in a way that suggests it is targeting Palestinian houses, symbolizing the destruction caused by the conflict. The smokes and black fogs further emphasize the violence and chaos resulting from the firing. Another symbolic gesture is the representation of UN: The two men representing the UN are depicted as powerless compared to the tank and soldiers. This visual representation suggests a power imbalance between Israel and international organizations like the UN. The cartoon frames the scene with a focus on key elements such as the tank, Prime Minister, UN officials, and banner. This framing directs attention to these specific aspects of the cartoon's message.

Ideological Level

The cartoon appears to criticize Israel's military actions in Gaza by depicting them as indiscriminate attacks on civilian homes. It also suggests that these actions are not conducive to achieving peace, as indicated by the UN officials' statement about bridges being destroyed. The positioning of characters in the cartoon reflects power dynamics. The Israeli Prime Minister is shown with his back turned towards Palestinian houses being fired upon, indicating a lack of concern or empathy for their plight. Meanwhile, he faces towards the UN officials, potentially suggesting an attempt to manipulate or control international perceptions of Israel's actions.

Contextual Analysis

The cartoon reflects an ongoing conflict involving Israel and Gaza. It highlights Israel's military actions (destroying tunnels) while simultaneously criticizing their impact on peace efforts. By portraying the UN representatives as ineffective or unable to prevent destruction, this cartoon may be critiquing international organizations' ability to bring about meaningful change or maintain peace in conflict zones.

Fig (3)



Cartoon published by Washington Post, Nov 22nd, 2023.

Linguistic Level

The word "Gaza" written in red color represents bloodshed and violence. The font used may be bold and prominent to draw attention to the word "Gaza." The juxtaposition of the text with the image emphasizes the connection between the depicted scene and the location.

Visual Level

The symbolism in this cartoon is clear when it comes to toddler sitting on rubbles as it represents innocence and vulnerability, highlighting how children are affected by conflicts. Pampers with no Clothes: Symbolizes the lack of protection and vulnerability of innocent civilians. When it comes to rockets falling, it represents ongoing attacks on Gaza, with one rocket holding the Israeli flag symbolizing Israeli aggression, while the other rocket shaped like a microphone represents biased Western media coverage. Torn Palestinian Flag symbolizes the destruction of Palestinian identity and national aspirations. The rubbles in black with red tip of rocket: black symbolizes destruction, while the red tip signifies bloodshed and violence. When it comes to framing, the central focus is on the toddler sitting on rubbles, drawing attention to their vulnerability. The rockets falling from above create a sense of imminent danger. The torn Palestinian flag raises awareness about the destruction caused by conflict.

Ideological Level

The underlying assumptions are that; the cartoon highlights the suffering of innocent Palestinians, particularly children, as victims of conflict. It suggests that Western media coverage is biased or influenced by external factors, possibly favoring Israel over Palestine. When it comes to the power dynamics, the cartoon portrays an imbalance of power between Israel (represented by its flag) and Palestine (represented by a torn flag). It suggests that Western media has a significant influence on public opinion regarding conflicts in Gaza. The cartoon highlights power dynamics by depicting the child as defenseless and the rockets as symbols of aggression and oppression. The Israeli flag on one rocket and the depiction of Western media as the other rocket suggest a perceived alignment between these entities and their influence over the situation in Gaza. This portrayal implies that the child and the Palestinian people are victims of external forces that hold more power.

Contextual Level

This cartoon refers to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically focusing on Gaza as a site of intense violence and suffering. It reflects concerns about media bias in reporting conflicts involving Israel and Palestine. Overall, this cartoon aims to convey a powerful

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message about the impact of violence on innocent civilians in Gaza. It criticizes both Israeli aggression (represented by one rocket) and biased Western media coverage (represented by another rocket shaped like a microphone). By highlighting these issues through symbolism, framing, underlying assumptions, biases, and power dynamics, it seeks to raise awareness about the plight faced by Palestinians in Gaza.

Fig (4)



Cartoon published by Guardian, Nov 29th, 2023.

Linguistic Level

The cartoon features two verbal elements. The tank is labeled "Israel," representing the Israeli military, and the demolished house is labeled "Gaza," symbolizing the Palestinian territory. The soldier inside the tank is depicted saying, "We will allow civilians to evacuate," and the resident from the house responds with, "To Where?!" This dialogue highlights the plight of Palestinian civilians and their limited options for safety and refuge. The juxtaposition of the text and image reinforces the contrast between the powerful Israeli tank and the vulnerable Palestinian house. It emphasizes the power dynamics and the impact of military actions on civilian populations. The resident's response, "To Where?!" challenges the effectiveness or feasibility of evacuation in this situation.

Visual Level

The visual elements in the cartoon carry symbolic meaning. The Israeli tank represents military power and aggression, while the demolished Palestinian house on the edge of the mountain symbolizes the destruction and displacement faced by Palestinians. The tank firing at the house symbolizes the ongoing conflict and military operations in the region.

The framing of the cartoon, with the tank and the house as central elements, draws attention to the power dynamics and the impact on civilian lives. The placement of the house on the edge of the mountain highlights the vulnerability of the Palestinian population, as they are subjected to military attacks even in their own homes.

Ideological Level

Underlying Assumptions and Biases: The cartoon appears to present a perspective critical of Israeli military actions. It assumes that Israeli military operations result in the destruction of Palestinian homes and the displacement of civilians. The dialogue between the soldier and the resident highlights the perceived inadequacy of evacuation efforts and raises questions about the options available to Palestinians in the face of military attacks. The cartoon depicts a power imbalance between Israel and Palestine, with the Israeli tank representing military might and the demolished house symbolizing Palestinian vulnerability. The dialogue between the soldier and the resident underscores this power dynamic, with the resident's response expressing the challenges faced by Palestinian civilians in finding safe spaces amidst conflict.

This cartoon utilizes various levels of analysis to convey its message regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On a linguistic level, text placement emphasizes key elements while dialogue provides contrasting perspectives. Visually, symbolism through imagery highlights power dynamics between Israel's military might and Gaza's destruction. Ideologically, biases are evident through assumptions about power imbalances favoring Israel over Palestine. Finally, understanding this cartoon requires considering its contextual backdrop - an ongoing conflict marked by complex historical factors affecting both parties involved.

B) Arab Cartoons

Fig (1)



Cartoon published by Al Hayat, Nov 8th, 2023.

Linguistic Level

The cartoon features various textual elements. On the podium, the phrase "المجتمع الدولي" (International Community) is written, highlighting the subject matter of the cartoon. The Arabic word "أوكرانيا" (Ukraine) is spoken by the person representing the UN. This linguistic choice emphasizes the focus on Ukraine's situation. Additionally, the name "فلسطين" (Palestine) is written on the banner, drawing attention to the Palestinian context.

Visual Level

The central figure standing on the podium represents the UN, shedding tears while mentioning Ukraine. The tears symbolize sorrow or empathy for the situation in Ukraine. The microphones surrounding the UN figure represent the mass media, signifying their attention and focus on the UN's statement. The Ukrainian flag held in the UN figure's right hand further reinforces their association with Ukraine.

On the left side, the banner displaying the name "فلسطين" (Palestine) highlights the Palestinian context. Behind the banner, a young man's lifeless body represents a Palestinian who has been killed. The presence of an Israeli soldier directing towards the body symbolizes an oppressive power dynamic and the role of the Israeli military in the conflict. The Palestinian flag covering the body emphasizes the Palestinian identity and mourning.

Ideological Level

The cartoon reflects a particular perspective that criticizes the international community's focus on Ukraine while seemingly disregarding the plight of Palestinians. Through the portrayal of the UN figure shedding tears for Ukraine, the cartoon implies that the international community prioritizes some conflicts over others, possibly suggesting a bias or selective attention. The presence of the Israeli soldier directing towards the Palestinian body implies an asymmetrical power dynamic and the use of force in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This portrayal suggests the dominance and control exerted by the Israeli military, highlighting the power imbalances and potential injustices within this context.

Contextual Level

The cartoon must be interpreted within the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the international community's involvement in global conflicts. It reflects a specific viewpoint that critiques the perceived lack of attention or support for the Palestinian cause compared to other conflicts, such as the situation in Ukraine. The cartoonist's intention is to raise awareness about the differential

treatment of various conflicts and the power dynamics at play. Overall, this cartoon utilizes linguistic elements, visual symbolism, and ideological perspectives to convey a message about the representation of Ukraine, Palestine, and power dynamics within the international community. It highlights underlying assumptions, biases, and the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Fig (2)



Cartoon published by Asharq Al-Awsat, Nov 8th, 2023.

Linguistic Level

The cartoon features a textual element in the form of a speech bubble attributed to the French President Macron. He is depicted saying in Arabic with an Egyptian dialect, "فلسطين لا... متقولش فلسطين" (Palestine No, Don't say Palestine). This linguistic choice highlights the specific message that the cartoon intends to convey. The use of Arabic in the speech bubble suggests a direct communication with the target audience of Arab-speaking viewers.

Visual Level

The central figures in the cartoon are the French President Macron and a protestor holding the Palestinian flag. Macron is depicted chasing the protestor, indicating his active opposition to the expression of Palestinian solidarity. Macron's angry facial expression and the handcuff in his right hand symbolize his aggressive response and the potential suppression of dissenting voices. The Palestinian flag held by the protestor represents the Palestinian cause and the desire for self-determination.

Ideological Level

The cartoon reflects a specific ideological perspective that critiques the French government, personified by Macron, for suppressing or discouraging support for the Palestinian cause. Macron's statement,

"Palestine No, Don't say Palestine," implies a desire to control or silence the protesters' voices and prevent them from expressing solidarity with Palestine. The cartoonist's underlying assumption is that there is a disconnect between Macron's rhetoric and the rights of Palestinians, suggesting a bias or inconsistency in his stance. The portrayal of Macron, the French President, chasing the protestor wielding the Palestinian flag symbolizes a power dynamic. Macron, as a representative of the state, holds authority and influence. The protestor, on the other hand, represents a marginalized or dissenting voice. The use of a handcuff in Macron's hand suggests an imbalance of power, indicating a potential threat or coercion towards those who express support for Palestine.

Contextual Level

The cartoon must be understood within the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, political discourse surrounding Palestine, and the role of international actors. It reflects a particular viewpoint that criticizes the French government's stance on the Palestinian issue. The cartoonist's intention may be to highlight perceived inconsistencies or biases in Macron's position and to shed light on the power dynamics at play in silencing or suppressing support for Palestine. Overall, this cartoon employs linguistic elements, visual symbolism, and ideological perspectives to convey a message about French President Macron's opposition to the expression of support for Palestine. It suggests underlying assumptions and biases and portrays power dynamics within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and political discourse.

Fig (3)



Cartoon published by Al Hayat, Nov 15th, 2023.

This analysis aims to examine a political cartoon featuring the US President pushing a pram with a character resembling the Israeli Prime

Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. The cartoon conveys a message about American support for Israel, highlighting power dynamics and underlying assumptions. The analysis will be conducted on four levels: linguistic, visual, ideological, and contextual.

Linguistic Level

The cartoon contains a textual element in the form of a speech bubble attributed to the US President. He is depicted saying in Arabic, "بيبي يعمل إاللي هوا عايزه" (BB can do whatever he wants). This linguistic choice emphasizes the message the cartoon aims to convey. The use of Arabic in the speech bubble suggests a direct communication with the target audience of Arabic-speaking viewers.

Visual Level

The pram symbolizes control or influence over another entity, representing how the US President guides or manipulates Israeli policies. Placing Netanyahu in the pram portrays him as dependent on American support or being led by American interests. This symbolism suggests an unequal power dynamic between the two nations. The US President is depicted pushing the pram, indicating the idea that the American character is responsible for guiding and supporting the Israeli Prime Minister's actions. The positioning of the hat covering the US President's eyes symbolizes a lack of awareness or deliberate ignorance of the consequences of their actions. This implies that the US President is blindly supporting and enabling the Israeli Prime Minister's policies.

On another note, the positioning of characters within the frame is significant. Placing the American President behind the pram suggests that he is leading from behind and may lack awareness of where he is pushing it. This framing implies that American foreign policy towards Israel lacks direction or purposeful decision-making.

Ideological Level

The cartoon reflects a specific ideological perspective that criticizes the US government's unwavering support for Israel and its policies. The statement, "BB can do whatever he wants," suggests that the US President allows the Israeli Prime Minister to act without accountability or repercussions. This implies an assumption of a one-sided, unconditional support for Israel, regardless of the consequences or impact on other parties involved.

The cartoon implies that Israel has significant influence over American foreign policy decisions due to their close relationship. It assumes that this influence allows Israel to act without consequences ("BB can do whatever he wants"). This assumption may reflect criticism of perceived bias in US-Israel relations. The cartoon highlights power dynamics

between the two countries. By depicting Netanyahu as being pushed by the US President, it suggests that Israel relies heavily on American support and guidance. This portrayal reinforces notions of America's dominant role in shaping Middle Eastern politics.

The portrayal of the US President pushing the pram with the Israeli Prime Minister inside symbolizes a power dynamic. The US President, representing the American government, is depicted as the dominant figure who has control over the actions and decisions of the Israeli Prime Minister. The visual positioning of the US President's hat covering his eyes suggests a lack of critical judgment or awareness, indicating a power dynamic that allows the Israeli Prime Minister to act without oversight.

Contextual Level

The context surrounding this cartoon includes ongoing discussions about US-Israel relations and their impact on regional dynamics. It reflects debates regarding America's level of support for Israel's policies and actions, particularly among Arab audiences who might interpret this cartoon differently than Western viewers.

Overall, this cartoon employs linguistic elements, visual symbolism, and ideological perspectives to convey a message about the perceived US support for Israel and its policies. It suggests underlying assumptions and biases, highlighting power dynamics and the potential lack of critical judgment in the relationship. The cartoon should be analyzed within the context of US-Israel relations and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This political cartoon utilizes linguistic elements such as text placement and font choice to convey its message effectively. Symbolism through visual elements like framing and imagery helps depict power dynamics between America and Israel while highlighting underlying assumptions about their relationship. Understanding these levels of analysis provides insight into how this cartoon communicates its intended message about American support for Israeli policies within a specific ideological context.

Fig (4)



Cartoon published by Al-Ahram, Nov 25th, 2023.

The cartoon under analysis portrays a young Palestinian standing on the ruins of his home, wearing a T-shirt with the phrase "Gaza in our heart" written in Arabic. Additionally, an Israeli rocket shaped like a ferocious shark, adorned with the Israeli flag and David Star, is launched towards the Palestinian. The cartoon also includes the phrase "Gaza Children are the heroes" in Arabic. This analysis will examine the cartoon on four levels: linguistic, visual, ideological, and contextual.

Linguistic Level

The cartoon contains two phrases in Arabic. The first one on the young Palestinian's T-shirt says, "Gaza in our heart" (غزة في القلب). This phrase represents the emotional attachment and solidarity towards Gaza. The second phrase in the cartoon says, "Gaza Children are the heroes" (أطفال غزة هم الأبطال), emphasizing the bravery and resilience of the children in Gaza. The phrases written on the T-shirt and within the cartoon play a crucial role in conveying its message. The phrase "Gaza in our heart" emphasizes the emotional connection Palestinians have to their homeland. The second phrase, "Gaza Children are the heroes," highlights their resilience and bravery. By placing these phrases on a young Palestinian's T-shirt within the context of destruction caused by an Israeli rocket, it reinforces the idea that Palestinians remain steadfast despite adversity.

Visual Level

The use of symbolism is evident throughout this cartoon. The young Palestinian standing on rubble represents resilience and determination amidst destruction. The shark-shaped rocket symbolizes aggression and danger associated with Israeli military actions. The framing of this cartoon focuses primarily on two main elements - the young Palestinian and the rocket. By centering these elements, it accentuates their significance within the context of conflict.

The visual elements in the cartoon carry symbolic meaning. The young Palestinian standing on the rubble of his demolished home represents the suffering and displacement experienced by Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. The T-shirt with the Palestinian flag symbolizes national identity and resistance. The Israeli rocket depicted as a ferocious shark with the Star of David and Israeli flag represents the military aggression and power dynamics between Israel and Palestine. The framing of the cartoon focuses on the young Palestinian, highlighting his resilience and determination despite the destruction around him. By placing him in the center of the frame, the cartoon draws attention to his experience and the message of solidarity with Gaza. The framing also

emphasizes the contrast between the young Palestinian and the Israeli rocket, highlighting the power imbalance between the two sides.

Ideological Level

This cartoon reflects several underlying assumptions and biases. Firstly, it suggests that Palestinians are victims of Israeli aggression by depicting a destroyed home and an incoming rocket targeting an innocent child. Secondly, it portrays Palestinians as resilient heroes who maintain their spirit despite adversity. The cartoon reflects the perspective of the artist, who appears to be sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The underlying assumption is that the Palestinians, particularly the children in Gaza, are the victims in the conflict and deserve support and recognition. The cartoon portrays the Israeli rocket as an aggressive and predatory force, reflecting a negative portrayal of Israel's military actions.

The power dynamics between Israel and Palestine are highlighted through visual representation. The Israeli rocket being launched towards a defenseless Palestinian child signifies Israel's military superiority over Palestine. The cartoon depicts the power dynamics between Israel and Palestine, with the young Palestinian standing resiliently against the Israeli rocket. It suggests that despite the overwhelming military power of Israel, the Palestinian people, especially the children, are the true heroes. This portrayal challenges the dominant narrative of power and victimhood in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Contextual Level

The cartoon's context lies within the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It reflects broader narratives surrounding this conflict by emphasizing themes such as displacement, destruction, resistance, heroism, and power imbalances between Israel and Palestine. The cartoon captures the emotional impact of the conflict and the solidarity felt by many towards the Palestinian people.

This CDA analysis demonstrates how various levels contribute to understanding this political cartoon depicting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Linguistically, text placement emphasizes emotional connections to Gaza while visually symbolizing aggression through a shark-shaped rocket. Ideologically, assumptions about victimhood and heroism are reinforced while highlighting power dynamics between Israel and Palestine. Lastly, understanding this cartoon requires contextual knowledge of ongoing conflicts in Gaza Strip.

15. Conclusion

Political cartoons effectively utilize indirect strategies such as symbolism to convey meanings and messages related to the Gaza War.

Satire serves as a potent tool for critiquing and challenging dominant narratives, while symbolism condenses complex ideas into visually striking metaphors. These strategies engage the audience's cognitive and emotional faculties, encouraging critical thinking and stimulating discussions regarding the conflict. By employing these indirect strategies, political cartoons become a powerful medium for commenting on and influencing public opinion on the Gaza War.

Power dynamics and ideologies are prominent in political cartoons on the Gaza War, particularly concerning the different actors involved in the conflict. Through critical analysis, this study has revealed the representation and conveyance of power imbalances, ideological perspectives, and the exposure of hypocrisy perpetuated by those in authority. Political cartoons challenge dominant narratives, highlight injustice, and provide alternative perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities underlying the conflict. By shedding light on these dynamics, political cartoons play a crucial role in shaping discourse and influencing public opinion on the Gaza War. The linguistic aspect of political cartoons significantly contributes to their persuasive impact. The combination of text and visuals creates a multi-layered experience for the audience, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the cartoons. Textual elements within the cartoons provide additional context, clarification, and reinforcement of the intended message. The interplay between text and image facilitates a profound understanding of the cartoonists' intended message and fosters a nuanced interpretation by the audience.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as a valuable framework for analyzing political cartoons and uncovering their persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideologies. By applying CDA, this research has provided insights into the discursive structures, implicit meanings, and assumptions present within political cartoons. CDA allows for a deeper examination of symbols, and linguistic dimensions, highlighting the social, political, and cultural contexts that shape interpretations of the cartoons. Through CDA, this study has underscored the significance of political cartoons as agents of persuasion, enabling the identification and analysis of the persuasive strategies employed in shaping discourse on the Gaza War.

This research on the power of political cartoons in shaping discourse on the Gaza War holds substantial importance for several reasons. Firstly, political cartoons possess a profound impact on public opinion, particularly in contexts of conflict and sensitive issues like the Gaza War. Understanding the persuasive strategies employed in these

cartoons sheds light on how they shape discourse, influence ideologies, and contribute to the formation of public attitudes and beliefs. Secondly, the examination of cartoons from both Arab and international newspapers enables a comparative analysis of how different cultural and ideological perspectives are represented and conveyed through visual imagery. This comparative approach enhances our understanding of the diversity of viewpoints surrounding the Gaza War and provides insights into the broader geopolitical context. Lastly, investigating the linguistic aspect of political cartoons enhances our understanding of how text and visuals work together synergistically to create persuasive messages, enriching our comprehension of the mechanisms behind their persuasive impact.

In short, this research paper is an attempt to contribute to the understanding of the power of political cartoons. Through their employment of indirect strategies, representation of power dynamics and ideologies, linguistic aspects, and the application of CDA, political cartoons have been demonstrated as influential agents in conveying complex messages, challenging dominant narratives, and influencing public opinion. By analyzing a corpus of selected cartoons sourced from international and Arab newspapers, this research has provided valuable insights into the persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideological underpinnings embedded within political cartoons. The findings of this study emphasize the significance of critically analyzing political cartoons as drivers of change, promoting critical thinking, and facilitating informed discussions about complex conflicts such as the Gaza War. As society continues to navigate the evolving media landscape, recognizing and appreciating the power of political cartoons is crucial for fostering dialogue, promoting understanding, and engaging in meaningful conversations that contribute to the resolution of conflicts.

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