

Semiotic Analysis in 1967 Jamdin Buyongs' Political Cartoon

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Abstract: *One of the important themes in cartoon is politic. The function of cartoon as political weapon had been proven since years ago (Muliyadi Mahamood, 1999:26). Honour Daumier, a well-known 19th century cartoonist in France for example, manages to bring down the leader during that time using his cartoon. This is also supported by an American cartoonist, Thomas Nast who produces sharp and cynical political caricature (Donald Saff, 1978:30). Their cynical artwork always managed to question the ability and justice of the government. In addition, these cynical artworks also manage to illustrate the painful life of our society. The strength driven from these artworks is used by the cartoonist to criticise and alarming the society about the real situation around them. Realizing upon this fact, Jamdin Buyong has come forward as a firm and brave cartoonist in highlighting the polemics of our local and international politics in year 1967 and 1968 while working as the Sabah Times editor. Using Jambo as his pseudonym, he has created the caricature of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak, Datu Mustapha and Donald Stephen during the era of Sabah's post-independence. He also sketches the caricature of Sukarno as the president of Indonesia during the confrontation of Indonesia, Ferdinand Marcos during Philippines claim on Sabah, and polemic between USNO, UPKO and Perikatan in Sabah. Jamdin Buyong is making critical statement becomes humour yet sharp and cynical as an eye opener of the society towards the idea of peace. It is hoped that his artwork will benefit our society via message and the content delivered from the description of meaning and visual concept. Indirectly, this study will be able to serve as historical politic and nation documentation which is important as a reference for our future generation.*

Keywords: Cartoon, political issue, history, message and values

1. Introduction

Jamdin Buyong is a figure who contributes a lot to the development of arts, language and culture in Sabah. His talent in writing, research, short story, poem and drama scripts' writing had made him a respectful versatile (Inon Shahrudin Abdul Rahman, 2006:15). However, despite his versatility, his great talent in painting is barely known by today's society. Jamdin Buyong's talent in painting was first taught, developed and encouraged by his cousin's brother, Mohd Yaman Ahmad Mus while studying at Government Primary School Built Hill and Sabah College. His talent has been well developed and finally able to shape the painting world in Sabah and brought it to international level. This is proven when he was recognized worldwide and awarded the Certificate of Merit by Clenbrook School Of Art, Australia in 1961 (Inon Shahrudin Abdul Rahman, 2006:14)

Apart of his great potential in using oil painting, water colour, poster and chalks on canvas or paper within various genres of painting like landscape and abstract painting, Jamdin Buyong also manages to establish his talent in drawing cartoon. His interest was brought to work when he works as a Malay-language editor at the Sabah Times in 1963. He authored and started producing sketches in English and Malay language pages. Circa 1964 – 1968, when he was the chief editor of the Sabah Times press, he is very active in producing editorial cartoons and drawing illustration to embellish the published short stories. For anonymity purposes, Jamdin Buyong uses Jambo as his pseudonym in each of his published editorial cartoon.

2. Purpose of Study (Research Problem)

In contrast with many featured artworks and painting by western and other local painters, the early emergence of cartoon in Sabah has not been taken into account and referred to by researcher and today's society. The development of cartoon in Sabah apparently is not in line with the development of modern art in Malaysia like Muliyadi Mahmood (2001) who has promoting modern art in Malaysia during the pioneer era to pluralist era of 1930 – 1990. In fact, Sabah's sociopolitical developments in 1960, has actually created new approaches to the production of cartoon which requires further study.

3. Study Method (Research Method)

This study is conducted using qualitative method with descriptive historical approach. The selection of this method aims to get a significant and distinctive meaning of concept, sign system, character, symbolism, and symbol and detail definition of something (Berg, 1989). In this study, qualitative approach is used to analyze the content profoundly based on selected classified category which interrelated with each other.

The data are collected from three sources which are primary source, secondary source and oral source(interview). Primary source is the earliest source of information that can be referred to in original form and not yet been defined (Noraini Idris, 2010). The most important primary source in this study is Jamdin Buyongs' editorial cartoon from 1967's Sabah Times. Secondary source is information collected

from newspaper, historical books, journal and dissertation. Oral source (interview) on the other hand, is a medium to really understand the experience and thoughts involved (Patton, 1980). The data collection method used in this study is document analysis and interview. These methods are considered as the most appropriate methods for the purpose of this study as stated by Creswell (2012).

4. Study Analysis

Semiotic according to Charles Sanders Peirce (1819-1914) is an act, influence or collaboration between three subjects which is sign, object (signifier) and interpretation (signified) as shown in the Triangle Meaning theory. This theory explains the question on how meaning is comprehend from the sign used in the artwork. On the other hand, object is the sign that is referred to using signifiers. On the contrary, interpretation (signified) is something existed in someone's mind about signifier of a sign. When all these three elements interact, interpretation (signified) of an art work will took place.

From Figure 1.1 (i), Peirce's Triangle Meaning is explained. The arrows signify the relation between elements with another. Sign is referred as an image or things, found in the object that been study. Interpretation (signified) is a mental concept issued as sign of experience and knowledge one have about sign and signifier.

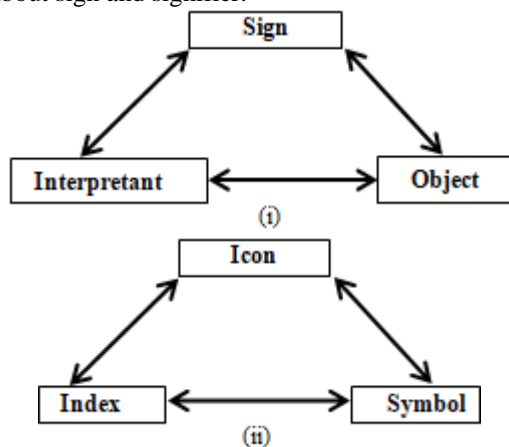


Figure 1.1: Charles Sanders Peirce Triangle Meaning

Peirce also explained that sign always interrelated with their signifiers alike, or having a causal relation with signifier, or because of the existence of conventional relation with the signifier. Based on the object (sign), Peirce divided sign as icon, index and symbol as in Figure 1.1 (ii). Icon is a sign that has a relation between sign, and the signifier has the same nature, physically. In other words, icon is the relation between sign and signifier which looks alike in presenting an artwork. In general, this signifier always can be seen in visual sign such as portraits or maps.

Index is a signifier that shows the existence of holistic nature between sign and signifiers as well as having causal relationship. Besides, it is also one of the signs that directly involved the statement or sign as signifier. For example, the existence of smoke as an index of fire, or a signature as an index of the personality that produces it. Symbol on the other hand shows the nature of sign and signifier that is

connecting based on social agreement. For example, the color of white (sign) is as a symbol of purity and cleanliness.

5. Findings

From Figure 1.2 below, there are three men figure which are the leader of political party- UPKO leads by Donald Stephens, USNO by Datu Mustapha and SCA by Khoo Siak Chiew. Donald Stephen wears Kadazans' attire and wearing 'tanjak'. Datu Mustapha is not wearing any clothes but only shorts and 'songkok' while Khoo Siak Chiew is wearing Chinese attire. All three faces looked gloomy and forlorn. Donald Stephens and Datu Mustapha are looking at Khoo Siak Chiew as if they are asking for sympathy. Khoo Siak Chiew on the other hand is looking at the audience while saving the boat.



Figure 1.2: Kartun Editorial Jamdin Buyong dalam Sabah Times 1967

The process of identifying the icon in this cartoon using Peirce's visual semiotic method is easy to accomplished as it is only involving visual image that are known to the reader. From this political cartoon, Jamdin Buyong is using the icon of three caricature of Sabah leader which dominating the whole story. Researcher has compared these caricatures with the real photos of these leaders using Figure 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5.



Figure 1.3: Character 1 (Donald Stephen)

The character sign of first caricature in Figure 1.3 is referring to signifier as Donald Stephen, having a stout body and a face that looks like the character illustrated. Donald Stephen is portrayed as wearing *tanjak* (Siga) and Kadazan's cultural attire. Jamdin Buyong once again is applying this method while producing the character of the second caricature in Figure 1.4, Datu Mustapha.



Figure 1.4: Character 2 (Datu Mustapha)

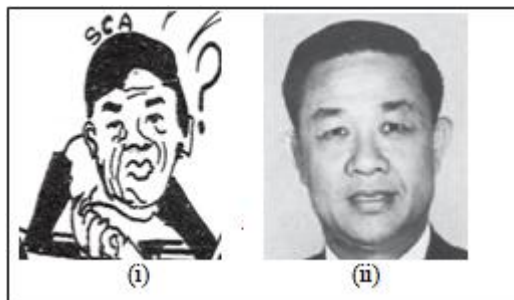


Figure 1.5: Character 3 (Khoo Siak Chiew)

The third caricature in Figure 1.5 is Khoo Siak Chiew. One of the elements that are easy to identify is the sketches of Datu Mustapha's nose which is quite pointing and the thick eyebrow of Khoo Siak Chiew. This characteristic is being exaggerated like the sketches of Datu Mustapha's body which portrayed as too skinny. However, these elements make it easier for the reader to identify the character involved. The characteristic of a caricature which represent the personal quality of someone using exaggerated sketches intended to bring out the effect of lust and taunting (Shahnon Ahmad, 2006:48). All the three iconic signifiers are produce by Jamdin Buyong with moderate sketches but manage to elicit the signified interpretation of each character well.

The second signifier that fortifies the fact about the character of the three cartoons is the index used by Jamdin Buyong. The writing of "UPKO" on the above side of the first caricatures hand relates the character to the signifier of a *United Pasok-Moogun Kadazan Organisation* (UPKO) Party which leads by Donald Stephens. Datu Mustapha's signifier is reinforced by index "USNO" on the head of second caricature. This index relates the character of Datu Mustapha's caricature as the leader of *United Sabah National Organization* (USNO). The third character on the other side has "SCA" written on top of the head, relating the index of Khoo Siak Chiew as the leader of *Sabah Chinese Association* (SCA) that represented by the Sabahan Chinese.

In communication world, clothes are one of the *objectics* in communicational object that can guide (signifier) to describe about someone (Abdullah Hassan and Ainon Mohd, 2001:110). This proves that there is a close relation between sign and index which can be a guideline to evaluate someone from what he wears. This type of index is also used in the character of Jamdin Buyong's caricature like *tanjak* and *songkok* (sign) which signified Datu Mustapha as an Islamic leader (Adib Vincent Tung Abdullah, 2003). The character of Donald Stephens caricature is sketched wearing Kadazan attire and *tanjak* that also known as *siga* which is a type of

head decoration made of *dastar* cloth weaved by Kadazan society in Sabah (<http://ww1.kosmo.com.my/>). This signified caricature's character of Kadazan's leader is indeed has a relation via index in Peirce's semiotic visual.

Based on the index of the sketching – mouth closed with the tip of the lips curved downward – all three expressions of these leaders look gloomy, in denial and not happy with the situation happened (Charles Aubert, 2003:68). The character of Khoo Siak Chiew caricature is seen bending to the front, looking at the audience while sawing boat. Donald Stephens and Datu Mustapha are seen sitting on the boat while paddling. This paddling action is significantly related to index that involved causal relation, like the boat been paddled forward symbolizing the struggle that need to be perpetuate.

Using Peirce visual semiotic analysis, there are many signs used by Jamdin Buyong in this cartoon apart from UPKO, USNO and SCA. The number "12", "3", "2", and "14" written on the boat, are signs that indicate the index of total chair won by political party in 1967's Sabah Election. The result of this election showed that USNO had won 14 chairs, UPKO won 12 chairs, SCA won three chairs, *Perikatan* won two chairs, and the opposition, one chair (Sabah Times, 18 April 1967).

The next sign is Donald Stephens' dialogue that says "*Kalau saya teruskan kita sama-sama lemas!!*". This is an index to show that if UPKO continues to dispute in their party, all other party such as UPKO, USNO and SCA will be affected badly. Meanwhile, Datu Mustapha as USNO leader is seen saying "*Kalau tak ikut saya, jangan potong!*". This is an index showing that if they do not want to take side with USNO, they should not take any action to destruct the party.

The equipment and background used by Jamdin Buyong in this cartoon are saw, boat, paddle and the sea. The saw is the sign of an object used to cut something. This act of sawing will definitely dividing the boat into two and flooded by water before getting drowned. This causal relation is once again showing the relation between sign and index signifier via Peirce semiotic visual. In contrast with icon which is more realistic or index that is having causal relation, symbol is using sign that is rather complicated to define. Signifier in symbol needs to be explained using different understanding from the perspective of belief, religion, and culture. The symbols found in this political cartoon are the boat and the sea.



Figure 1.6: Symbol Sign of Boat and Sea
Source: Ismail Ahmad (1999)

These visual images of the boat and the sea have its own significant meaning as they are Jamdin Buyong's inspiration in producing cartoon. The sea is like a life – with its breeze that carried out peace and the beauty of life. It can also bring along the wave that can evoke challenge and misery in life (Ahmad Rashidi Hasan, 2006:75).

Besides, Islamic thinkers also use sea as a manifest to symbolize life. It reflects as if this life is like a sailing journey. This is mentioned by Syeikh Abdul Qadir Jailani who advises us to always be very careful with the wave of world development as it can be destructive – drowning people in it (Manakib Syeikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani, 2003:44).

The boat on the other hand, symbolizes life metaphor (Azman Ismail, 1999). The journey of the boat is seen as the route of life where one needs to always find ways in order to overcome any obstacles coming in our way (Ahmad Rashidi Hassan, 2006:74). The boat also signifies a journey (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 1999:175). The sign of the boat in this cartoon refers to the political journey of Perikatan party after the election is over. The situation illustrated raised a question to the reader whether the future of this party will survive or not.

When analyzing these signifiers: icon, index and symbol in Peirce semiotic theory, researcher has compared and making adjustment on the election happened. The result of the interpretation using triangle meaning will produce signified meaning of the studied cartoon. Document like illustration and excerpt from Sabah Times on 28 and 29 April 1967, Ismail Yusoff (1997) and other secondary sources are collected to reinforce the analyzing process.

This cartoon signified Donald Stephens and Datu Mustapha sitting on a boat while paddling with their body facing forward. The boat and paddle functioned as a medium to bring them to their destination. The saw is on the contrary is an important tool to divide the boat into two which will cause them to drown. This signifies the dispute and disunity in the party. Meanwhile the river at the background signifies the journey of their political carrier.

In the 1967's election, UPKO decided to compete on their own even though they are still bounded to Perikatan. This decision been made due to the feeling of unsatisfied towards the number of chair allocated. Therefore, they are finally competing against each other in many areas in a competition called 'Friend Contest' (Tilman 1979:497 in Ismail Yusoff, 1997:88). This resulting on the winning of 14 seats by USNO, 12 seats by UPKO, 3 seats by SCA, 2 seats by Perikatan, and one seat by the opposition party. This result has leaved a great impact on their crumbled relationship. UPKO refused to join the Perikatan cabinet but instead, choose to be with the opposition. Things are getting serious when some of the members of the legislative assembly from UPKO joined USNO and become the Ministry in the cabinet (Ismail Yusof, 1997:88).

Datu Mustapha as the leader and chairman of Perikatan Sabah had facing Donald Stephens in a meeting to discuss the distribution of the seats. Datu Mustapha desperately

needs to find support from another component party, SCA to keep on supporting them. However, inspite of having 'Friend Contest', Perikatan Sabah remains unite. Besides, in this election, there is no substantial opposition.

In Sabah Times, dated 28 April 1967 which is a day after the election, an article entitled "*Lupakan Sengketa Lalu*" had been published. UPKO and USNO were advised to make peace for the sake of society and to solve their polemics. This article has clarify that there are few political observer who advised them that this is the time for them to unite in the name of Perikatan Sabah so that they can avoid misunderstanding that happened in the election campaign. They are also supporting Donald Stephen's statement to forget the polemics and not to take it personally (Sabah Times, 28 April 1967).

6. Conclusion

Jamdin Buyong has contributes a lot of his thoughts and recommendations through his creative artworks bravely (Inon Shahrudin Abdul Rahman, 2006:1). This is because his editorial cartoon was cynical towards political figure and situation on that time. However, he is still using his own style with the readers.

This study has proven that this visual cartoon is not only playing their role as a neither decoration nor filler in the newspaper but has its own purpose. This editorial cartoon serves as valuable historical document because it manages to explain and elaborate current political issue at the moment.

This kind of artwork which published based on the manifestation of thoughts of its painter to highlight their stand, belief or philosophy of life. It is indeed true that the personality of the people which developing ones race can be clearly portrayed through art (Redza Piyadasa, 2000:15). Therefore, editorial cartoon published in local newspaper in Sabah plays vital role in developing political issue in the country to educate their ready to be more aware with the sensitivity of social as well as being patriotic in handling threat in Sabah. This is indirectly prove that cartoon painting has leave a great impact to the development of politic and nationality in Sabah, making historical value more precious.

It is hope that by this study, the younger generation and scholars will treasure this art material as a resourceful document and a guideline in delivering meaning and detail interpretation of the subject and image used.

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