

# Visualizing some Iraqi Politicians' Corruption in Political Cartoons: A Cognitive Semiotic Study

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**Running Title:** *Visualizing Corruption in Political Cartoons*

**Abstract:** *This study investigates the role of political cartoons as a tool that used not only to create fun or to make the others laugh, but to criticize, visualize and expose the politicians' corruption. The study tries to fill the gaps in the representation of political cartoons in Iraq, and how these simple drawings can make affect on people and hold a huge message. This study aims to: Highlighting the role of political cartoons in Iraq, which expose the corruption. Characterizing the cognitive aspects in semiotics. Illustrating how political cartoons are succeeding in introducing a clear message, and testing how political cartoons in Iraq are taken seriously by the Iraqi people. The data in this study are analysed by following the cognitive semiotic theory, by which the researcher adopts eclectic models: Facconnier and Turners' theory (2002) "Blending Theory", Sonessons' theory (1989) "Pictorial Concept", Van Dijks' theory (2006) "Ideological Theory" and Lakoff and Johnsons' theory (1999) "Metaphorical Concept". In the collecting and analysing data the researcher follows the qualitative method. The data in this study are samples of political cartoons which categorized to serve the aims of the study. As a result, it is important to take political cartoons seriously, according to their role in criticizing, visualizing and exposing the corruption. This study also improves that all the aspects of cognitive theory are cooperating with semiotics, which provide full recognizing, interpreting and perception of new opinion, or ideas that may the audience cannot be found before.*

**Keywords:** Political cartoons, cognitive, semiotics, qualitative

## 1. Introduction

" Einstein said, " The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything "" (Nokomis, 2014, P. 16).

Around the world, there are many governments who seek to make their citizens live in luxury life, but there are other government who unable to help their people due to the corruption. Germanys Transparency International in (2006) reports that Iraq is in the fifth level of the most corrupt countries. In (2017) Iraq takes the tenth level in their list. Moreover, the justice system is unable to help the Iraqi people because of the corruption.

Therefore, people use political cartoons to express their unpleasant and to expose that corruption. In order to answer the research questions the researcher analyses cartoons by dividing them into groups according to the purpose of the political cartoons: Political cartoons which concerning the demonstration in Iraq on 25 of October 2019, the financial corruption, the governments' promises, the weakness of the integrity and the procrastination of the Iraqi government.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### Political Cartoons

Through history, political cartoon plays an important role to visualize the corruption, or injustice systems. Press (1981) defines cartoons as " pictures as the essence of truth, messages as the what ought to be done" (P. 62). Starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when the use of *satire* to express the opinion towards important issues by cartoons. Morrison (1969) illustrates that people are using non- verbal symbols to express events is more direct than verbal onece, just like

the use of visual images such as political cartoons. Therefore, many linguists consider political cartoons as the use of symbols which reflect the opinion about events, or specific issues.

### The History of Political Cartoon

The historical background of political cartoons as explained by Scully (2014) is dated in the sixteenth century in Italy. Leonardo de Vince made his first work in this field as a caricature in (1732). In America political cartoon began in (1754) by the work of Benjamin Franklins' "Join or Die". In the eighteenth century cartoons are used as a satire to criticize people in Britain at that time. The work of James Gillaray in (1805) is the famous one.

Salah (2008) suggested that the events in Iraq after 2003 provide a suitable space to create important political cartoons. Thus, before this period the Iraqi people couldn't criticize, or talk about bad issues, due to the law and the rules in Iraq under the umbrella of Albath Party. Over 2003 people can criticize the corruption by speech, writing, or drawing, but this doesn't mean they are saved from the government, most of them killed or threatened by killing or leave Iraq to another country to write and draw in freedom.

### The Techniques of Analysing Political Cartoon

There are many theories and approaches that are used in the analysis of any visual images such as political cartoons:

#### Metaphor

Metaphor as explained by Alousque (2013) is the use of language in a deep way, it is a way of communicating information. Popa (2013) states that metaphor can be considered as a tool which is used to communicate the opinions about the world, it is an internal techniques of the cognitive. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) clarify that metaphor

lays an effective role not only by using words, but also in idea or images.

### Symbol

There are many arbitrary things in our life that have a specific meaning, these meanings sometimes depends on cultural group, or conventional meaning. In political cartoon symbols help to recognize a lot of unclear things, such as persons, events, thoughts and communicate with the intended meanings of the cartoonists, which cooperate with our previous experience and\ or our conventional meaning. Pierce (1975) argues that many linguists emphasize on the quality of arbitrariness of the symbols, and the links between these symbols and their conventional meanings.

### Irony

It is an important technique in political cartoon drawings. It can be understood by making the audience recognize the hidden meaning between how things appear in the cartoon and the real event in real life situation. Cartoonist creates an ironic drawing to criticize the bad events, or specific situation, or to shed a light towards a hidden message. Colebrook (2005) reports that there are many important roles of irony, it has an ethical effect, political and challenge.

### Blending

Turner (2014) explains blending as a cognitive aspects by which the audience can create new idea and information which cannot be found before. It is the cooperating of sight and mind. The author explains how the human beings' brain tries to make blending about different things, but the best one who arises. Thus, it is a way by which human beings combine the information from different sources to produce new idea or information.

### Political Corruption

There are different types of corruption around the world, but the term which is widely used nowadays is the political one. It has a direct impact on people and their life. Amundsen (2006) defines political corruption as the misuse of power, which effects on the life of the citizens, whether in political, social or economical. Therefore, it is the misuse, or the wrong use of the power or law which destroy the country. However, there are many ways to stand against the corruption, especially the political one. The most attractive way is by using visual images such as political cartoons.

### Previous Studies

Many linguists and scholar interested in the study and analysing political cartoons. " Cartoonists and Political Cynicism" by Hogan (2001), who explains the role of political cartoons in the criticizing of the political events without fear. Cartoonist sometimes criticizes and exposes the politicians, or the government. The author reports that because of these political cartoons some politicians keep honest, and accountable. Therefore, these cartoons achieve the aims in exposing of corruption. Au Mhtamdi (2017) "The use of Political Cartoons During Popular Protests: The Case of the 2011 Tunisian Uprising" argues that the role of a political cartoon is very important in the Tunisian events during (2011), and he explains how these cartoons were used in criticizing, and visualizing issues at that time. He

also clarifies the important role of the context to understand the picture, whether with or without a text. This study concerned with the role of political cartoons in Iraq after 2003, and how these simple drawings succeed in the visualizing, criticizing and exposing of the corruption of some Iraqi politicians.

## 3. Methodology

### Cognitive Semiotic Theory

There are many theories in the analysis of visual images, one of them is the Cognitive Semiotic. This theory is used to study and analyse meaning- making, it depends on methods in semiotics and cognitive. It is a kind of reaction against the traditional one, by which there is an integration between semiotics and mind. As explained by Anderson et al (2007), the mind of human is signifying and cognized in our recognition by using the human ability to think and feel at the same time, which produce a suitable comprehensive.

### The Models in the Study

The analysis of the data in this study depends on eclectic models, following the cognitive semiotic theory. There are many levels in the analysis: The semiotic level, which analysis the symbols' meanings, icons, communication, index, labeling and analogy. The cognitive level which analysis the meaning of the images according to the blending theory and ideology. The figurative strategies, such as metaphor, irony and satire. Finally, the functional level by which the researcher tests how emotional expression and the exaggerated effect on the audiences' understanding of the meaning which lead to change their ideas, or ideology.

## 4. Data Analysis



Figure 4.1: " I Want a Home"

Note. I Want a Home. From *Cartooning Education*, by Al Fahdawy, A. 2019.

<https://www.facebook.com/audaalfhdawycartoon/>

### The Analysis of the Cartoon

This cartoon holds a huge message, by which the cartoonist labels the time and place clearly. It is in Iraq during the demonstration of the Iraqi people on the 25<sup>th</sup> On October 2019, when the Iraqi people stand against the corruption. The little boy who holds the iconic " I want a home" symbolizes all the Iraqi people. The phrase "I want a home" can be analysed into two parts: Firstly, it reveals the needs and suffering of the Iraqi people. The simple needs that

many other countries can easily achieve for their citizens. Secondly, the word (home) means peace, rest, future or even the life which the Iraqi people lost.

The second *symbol* is a group of men who in *exaggerating* way *symbolized* the corrupt politicians in Iraq. They are busy to achieve their personal needs, or the needs of their parties only, do not care about the Iraqi people and their suffering. This part of the cartoon has a great message, when the cartoonist in a skilful way *symbolized* to Iraq as a cake and to emphasize the idea of division of the Iraq's wealth he draw a mathematical *icon*. It is a *metaphor* to make the audience recognize the comparison between the Iraq as a country under the corruption, and the cake, which is divided into portions and each party takes his own portion.

In a *satirical* way the cartoonist criticizes the corrupt politicians in Iraq, and their way of dealing with the needs of the Iraqi people who want a home. The use of *facial expression* in the face of the little boy who is surprised from the politicians' situation adding to the previous experiences of the audience about the suffering of the Iraqi people make the audience recognize the message of the cartoonist, and *change* their *ideology* about the events in Iraq whether the audience are Iraqi people or not.



Figure 4.2

Note. The Corruption in Iraq. From *Al Araby News*, by Hajadg, A., 2018, [www.alarbynews.com](http://www.alarbynews.com).

### The Analysis of the Cartoon

This cartoon criticizes the weakness of commission of integrity in Iraq, when the corruption is enlarged without fear from law or any punishment. In this cartoon there are many important techniques to clarify the cartoonist's message. Starting from the pocket of money as the first *symbol* in this picture which holds the key of the message, there is an *icon* of (\$) Dollar which stands for the wealth of Iraq, that is in the pocket of the corrupt politicians. This *symbol* ensures the message that the laying man is a corrupt politician and he steals the wealth of Iraq.

The man *symbolizes* all the corrupt politicians in Iraq, who busy in their stealing of the country's wealth care less about the needs of the Iraqi citizens or the destruction in the country. The cartoonist *labels* everything in his work to make the message clear. Therefore, he writes a word "Corruption" on the man to make the audience recognize that this man stands for the corrupt politicians. The cartoonist also writes another word on the tree of palm, "Iraq" to make the audience understand what this tree is

standing for. Thus, it stands for Iraq who suffers from the corruption.

Choosing the tree of palm to stand for Iraq has two main reasons: Firstly, Iraq is a famous country in the Arab Homeland of dates. So, if anyone says the country of palm it will be easy to recognize that it's Iraq.

Secondly, the tree of the palm is full with dates, this stands for the wealth of the country, not as a date only, but also the religious places, airports, oil and factories all of these sources of wealth for the country which is in the pockets of the corrupt politicians. In this sense, the cartoonist *metaphorically* compares between Iraq and the tree of the palm. The cartoonist makes this tree as if it will fall out, because this tree doesn't bear the huge weight of the corruption, and its destruction effect on the country.

The cartoonist in a *satirical* way criticizes and exposes the corruption in Iraq, as well as the weakness of law to stand against it. In this work the audience can easily recognize the message behind the cartoon, and *communicate* with the cartoonist's opinion. This *communication* is *blending* with the previous experience of the audience and produce new information, and idea about the events in Iraq. This *blending* helps the audience to *change* their *ideology* and take a decision to stand against the corruption.



Figure 4.3: Dream in a Cold Winter

Note: Dream in a Cold Winter. From *Al Sada News*, by Kareem, B., 2017, [www.asadanews.com](http://www.asadanews.com)

### The Analysis of this Cartoon

Many Iraqi politicians have a chance to be the prime minister, because of the election law, but year by year the Iraqi people couldn't have any benefit from those corrupt politicians. In this cartoon, the cartoonist criticizes the fake of some politicians. This cartoon holds huge messages, the cartoonist *labels* the time and place, by using the clothes which stands for the Iraqi clothes, and many written words which refer to the needs of the Iraqi citizens.

In this picture there are two suns: The first one is in the sky, it *symbolically* stands for the desire of the Iraqi citizens to live in a good life. It also refers to the bright future. The second sun is as a *symbol* for the hopes of the Iraqi people. Thus, the sun shines to reflect the starting of the right steps in the achievement of the goals. This sun is an *ironical* way to visualize the real situation.



Secondly, is the *symbol* of the babbles, that stands for the promises of the politician to the people. These bubbles are *labelled with* written words to make the information clear, they refer to the needs and ambitions of the citizens such as, catering, services, safety, electricity and other reparations. All of them are the promises of those corrupt politicians which is in reality is just a fake promises, similar to that bubbles that can easily despair. The use of bubbles by the cartoonist is a *metaphorical* comparison between the promises of those corrupt politicians to the Iraqi people and their action.

Thirdly, the *symbol* of a group of Iraqi people. They are Children, youth, women, men. They are smiling eagerly. Moreover, the *emotions* of those citizens reflect their believes that this man will achieve their needs. The cartoonist refers to all the corrupt politicians in Iraq by the man who promises the Iraqi people to achieve all their aims and needs. The cartoonist criticizes and exposes the corrupt politicians in a *satirical* way because of the fake promises. The experiences of the audience about the Iraq are *blended* with the recognizing of the idea in this cartoon that change in the information and the opinion of them.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examines how political cartoons have an important role as a means of communicating feelings, thoughts and ideas. It has a great message and it can also help the others to change many unpleasant things in their life. People can use cartoons to visualize the bad events in their countries, and to expose the corruption. Thus, it is not only a way of making fun or relive. The study improves that the cooperating of the symbols and their meanings which are conventional one, or related to a specific country or culture with the mind of human beings can create a perfect understanding of the hidden messages behind the cartoon. This understanding needs to be taken seriously, which affected by the environment of the specific cartoons, and the previous experience of the audience about a specific event. Therefore, this study illustrates how political cartoons in Iraq expose and criticize the corruption of some politicians by visualizing their corruption in the drawing. These cartoons visualize many documents of corruption, and help the Iraqi people to take their role in their country. The cartoons also encourage people to take a clear reaction against the corrupt government, especially after 2003. This study improves how the semiotic aspects are integrated with cognitive, it means the understanding of any visual images such as cartoons need to fill the gap between the sight and mind. In this sense, there is a close relationship between what we see in the cartoon and what we recognize. These elements work together at the same time to produce new ideas, or information and sometimes change the ideology of the people towards specific issues.

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