

# Analyzing Political Cartoons in Arabic-Language Media after Trump's Jerusalem Move: A Multimodal Discourse Perspective

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**Abstract**—Communication in the modern world is increasingly becoming multimodal due to globalization and the digital space we live in which have remarkably affected how people communicate. Accordingly, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies with the underlying assumption that other semiotic resources such as images, colours, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, music and sound, etc. combine with language in order to communicate meaning. One of the effective multimodal media that combines both verbal and non-verbal elements to create meaning is political cartoons. Furthermore, since political and social issues are mirrored in political cartoons, these are regarded as potential objects of discourse analysis since they not only reflect the thoughts of the public but they also have the power to influence them. The aim of this paper is to analyze some selected cartoons on the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital by the American President, Donald Trump, adopting a multimodal approach. More specifically, the present research examines how the various semiotic tools and resources utilized by the cartoonists function in projecting the intended meaning. Ten political cartoons, among a surge of editorial cartoons highlighted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) - an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States - as publications in different Arabic-language newspapers in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran and UK, were purposively selected for semiotic analysis. These editorial cartoons, all published during 6<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> December 2017, invariably suggest one theme: Jewish and Israeli domination of the United States. The data were analyzed using the framework of Visual Social Semiotics. In accordance with this methodological framework, the selected visual compositions were analyzed in terms of three aspects of meaning: representational, interactive and compositional. In analyzing the selected cartoons, an interpretative approach is being adopted. This approach prioritizes depth to breadth and enables insightful analyses of the chosen cartoons. The findings of the study reveal that semiotic resources are key elements of political cartoons due to the inherent political communication they convey. It is proved that adequate interpretation of the three aspects of meaning is a prerequisite for understanding the intended meaning of political cartoons. It is recommended that further research should be conducted to provide more insightful analyses of political cartoons from a multimodal perspective.

**Keywords**—Multimodal discourse analysis, multimodal text, political cartoons, visual modality.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**I**N a short speech delivered from the White House on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017, the US President, Donald Trump, challenged worldwide warnings and declared that arrangements would be made to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to

Jerusalem but no schedule for the relocation was given by him. Officials, however, predicted that this process will take at least three years. "I have determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel," Trump said. "*While previous presidents have made this a major campaign promise, they failed to deliver. Today, I am delivering . . . My announcement today marks the beginning of a new approach to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians,*" Trump added. Whereas the US President's announcement was hailed by the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and by leaders in different areas across the Israeli political spectrum, it provoked condemnation from the US allies and a furious reaction from the Palestinian leaders and the Muslim world. That resulted in violent demonstrations in the West Bank and on the Gaza Strip's border with Israel.

In the wake of the declaration of the US President, Donald Trump, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, there was a flow of anti-Semitic cartoons in Arab-language media. The ADL, which is an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States, declared that this issue had prompted a surge of "editorial cartoons suggesting Jewish and Israeli domination of the United States." The ADL highlighted cartoons from Arabic-language publications in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran and UK. They ranged from portraying the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, pulling the arm of an American personality who is blindfolded while the two of them are raising a wand shaped like the Star of David to portraying the US President, Donald Trump, as a circus elephant attempting to balance the globe on its trunk, thus obeying the commands of the Israeli trainer. Other images depicted Trump driving off a cliff in a car having the Star of David as a mark on it. Other cartoons portrayed the Israeli flag on top of Uncle Sam's hat while throwing it away showing a Jewish skullcap, and a Jewish personality giving a thumbs-up while Trump is declaring Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The aim of this paper is to analyze some of the cartoons that highlight the condemnation of the Arab World of Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The framework of Visual Social Semiotics, as explained by [1], is being adopted in the present study. Adopting the grammar of visual design as a framework, we illustrate the different aspects of meaning (representational, interactive and compositional)

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communicated by these visual compositions. The research is an attempt to answer the following research question:

1. How are the various semiotic tools employed by the cartoonists function in realizing some particular functions: representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning?

The paper is structured as follows: It starts with a theoretical background about MDA and a characterization of the genre of political cartooning; then, it briefly portrays some of the previous studies related to a multimodal analysis of political cartoons; next, the methodological framework adopted in the study is presented. This is followed by a detailed analysis of each of the political cartoons selected for the present study in terms of three aspects of meaning: representational, interactive and compositional. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for future research are presented.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. MDA

Communication in the modern world is increasingly becoming multimodal in different contexts as text producers frequently draw upon a wide range of semiotic resources for constructing and conveying meaning. One major reason of this new change is globalization and the digital space we live in which have remarkably impacted the way people communicate. Another major reason is that verbal and non-verbal language cannot be separated [2]. Therefore, MDA is relatively recent paradigm in discourse studies where the analysis of language is combined with the analysis of other semiotic resources such as images, gestures, music, sound, colours, actions, etc. for interpreting meaning [3]. Multimodal discourse creates an "integrative meaning" by employing two or more semiotic resources including language, image, video and sound that makes traditional discourse analysis which is restricted to language far from being comprehensive. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) provides a theoretical framework for MDA [4]. Researchers in this area seek to identify the influence of mode on meaning within a given context focusing on the interaction between multiple semiotic systems. MDA is essentially concerned with the analysis of such semiotic resources and the semantic expansions resulting from the combination of 'semiotic choices' in various multicultural occurrences. A central area of research in MDA studies is the inter-semiotic relation that stems from the interaction of semiotic choices which is known as inter-semiosis [5].

'Visual modality' is one key component of this theory and is primarily concerned with the extent to which an image is judged as either being 'realistic' or being classified as a 'fantasy' or 'caricature'. According to [6], the growing interest in visuality as an area of scholarly research dates back to the 1980s and 1990s "when a number of authors who had been working in linguistics began to realize that meaning is generally communicated not only through language but also through other semiotic modes" (p.6). Scholars in visual analysis argue that images can be analyzed in the same way words are analyzed using theories of language analysis such as Systemic

Functional Linguistics [2].

According to [1], the term 'modality' is a linguistic one which refers to "the value or credibility of statements about the world" (p. 155). The authors further argue that modality is 'interpersonal' rather than 'ideational' since it does not usually express 'absolute truth' or 'falseness'; rather, it produces 'shared truths' that readers or viewers believe in. In terms of visual modality, visuals can portray people, places or things as though they are real. However, modality judgements are 'social' since they depend on what is regarded as real in the social group to which the representation is directed. According to [7], modality results from:

*"... the degree to which certain means of pictorial expressions (colour, representational detail, depth, total shades, etc.) are used. Each of these dimensions can be seen as a scale running from the absence of any rendition of detail to maximal representation of details or from the absence of any rendition of depth to maximally deep perspective" (p. 256).*

Reality is basically related to the frequency of such factors in an image. This means that the more they are prevalent, the more realistic the image would be whereas the less they appear, the more abstract it would be. However, modality depends largely on the context. It follows that this theory is suitable for the analysis of the selected colourful cartoons.

For the study of visual communication, [8] adopts a linguistic approach suggesting that there are two separate levels of visual signification: denotation and connotation. Where the level of denotation corresponds to the literal meaning of an image, the level of connotation corresponds to the symbolic or ideological meaning of an image. Kress & van Leeuwen are pioneers in the analysis of printed texts. In analyzing texts, they adopt a multimodal approach where semiotic modes that accompany language or through which language is realized are included. In fact, social semioticians generally believe that the visual mode is able to express many of the complex meanings as verbal language, though in different forms. These researchers assert that the visual mode has a kind of 'grammar' which determines how visual elements combine into a meaningful whole [9]. As a matter of fact, [1] hypothesizes that "*in a literate culture the visual means of communication are rational expressions of cultural meanings, amenable to rational accounts and analysis*". Therefore, the problem we face is that "*literate cultures have systematically suppressed means of analysis of the visual forms of representation, so that there is not, at the moment, an established theoretical framework within which visual forms of representation can be discussed.*" (p.22). According to [1], images are "*structured messages, amenable to constituent analysis*" (p.24).

A close look at the literature on visual communication reveals that visuals prove to be effective in reinforcing the details given in oral language and even provide additional details to oral communication. The theorized effects of visual images are 'mnemonic power' which means that they can be remembered in their general details; their ability to be 'icons', i.e. they can serve as exemplars of certain issues or events; their 'aesthetic impact'; their emotional power, i.e. their ability to

create an emotional reaction such as sympathy or rage inside us; and finally, their significant 'political power' which refers to their ability to alter popular beliefs and further affect the policy of the government [2, p.4]. Such positive effects of visual images justify the increasing popularity of the visual medium in projecting meaning in modern times. In fact, the use of visuals as a mode of communication has gained much significance in modern communication. More specifically, these effects explain the growing relationship between politics and visuality in contemporary times. For instance, politicians resort to the mnemonic power of the visual so that their political followers would retain the general details of the information about their political ideologies, plans and vision. Generally speaking, visuality is an essential aspect of political expression. Politicians all over the world usually employ visual resources for their popularization prior to elections and similarly, visual images are used in media representations of politicians, their attitudes to the public or the effects of their actions on the public. This is due to the fact that text producers believe that visual images have the ability to provoke deeper feelings in people than verbal language [2]. In addition, editors of newspapers and newsmagazines rely on this mode of communication to voice their thoughts and messages on important political issues. Therefore, through the use of sarcastic political cartoons, editors ensure that messages are conveyed and enriched. The job of a cartoonist is to attack a certain phenomenon through the convention of satire. Political cartooning is a visual medium that engages the audience and helps them to understand the political, social and economic scene in the country and the world [5].

### B. Political Cartooning

#### 1) Nature and Significance of Political Cartoons

A political cartoon is "*a satirical comment, usually humorous... about a political person, event, institution or idea, and reflecting the cartoonist's own values or opinions on that issue*" [10, p.4]. Thus, political cartoons most commonly address a current political issue or event, a social trend or a famous personality in a way that presents a particular point of view. Though they are not always humorous, they generally contain an element of irony or at least something incongruous or surprising [9]. The political cartoon constitutes a peculiar genre with its own history, conventions and communicative purposes.

In illustrating the uses and effects of political cartoons [11] asserts that there are three basic paradigms that have appeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which can be identified as the psychoanalytic, the sociological and the rhetorical. The psychoanalytic paradigm stresses that symbolism is "*the heartbeat of caricature and that condensation and displacement play central roles in the production and interpretation of political cartoons... Cartoons are merely the adult's way of displacing aggression through the adoption of symbolic substitute*" [11, p. 84]. On the other hand, the sociological approach goes beyond the mind and motives of comic inventors to emphasize "*societal structures which limit and enhance caricature, the symbolic resources available in*

*such a society, and the potential meaning and uses of such symbology within specific sociopolitical contexts*" [11, p. 84]. The authors [11] believe that caricature is a pictorial way of representing a person, the meaning of an event or a summary of a current 'power constellation'. The central function of political cartooning is showing the interrelationships of people, events and power from a sociological perspective. Third, the rhetorical approach draws upon both the psychoanalytic and sociological perspectives as well as upon Gestalt psychology to concentrate on the interaction of creator, message and audience. The underlying assumption is that graphic art has persuasive dimensions. Cartoons are attempts "*not to provide information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process*" [11, p. 85]. Thus the power of political cartoons does not lie at the intent or success of an artist in fostering change but in inviting readers to reaffirming cultural values and beliefs and maintaining them.

#### 2) Characteristics of Political Cartoons

Political cartoons, a sub-genre of the news discourse genre or journalesse, is one of the effective multimodal media that employ both verbal and non-verbal elements to construct meaning. Cartooning or caricature first emerged in Italy during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was considered a significant part of the newspaper discourse during this era since political cartoons in particular function as tools of communication that update people on current issues. They have a descriptive function since they are characterized by allusion to a socio-political situation, event or person; moreover, factual knowledge is essential for their correct interpretation since they are related to current events [12]. Since political and social issues are mirrored in political cartoons, these are regarded as potential objects of discourse analysis. They not only reflect the thoughts of the public but also have the power to influence them [13]. Cartoons have always been referred to in the literature as "*the most neglected genre of political communication*" [11, p. 84]. It is believed that editorial cartoons provide "*a subtle framework within which to view the American political process and its players. Cartoons not only reflect our culture but also invite us to think about its constituent parts and their meaning for our own lives*" and that cartooning is a "*culture-creating, culture-maintaining, culture-identifying artifact*" [11, p.84].

One key aspect of political cartoons is that they have a satirical nature [12]. They amuse the viewers and impact them due to the spontaneous way a certain message is delivered. They construct social reality through satire, humour, metaphors and symbols, etc. On the one hand, political cartoons may be a mouthpiece of the dominant who is intending to keep status quo for the powerful. Moreover, they show dissatisfaction with injustice and prejudices and they raise voice against social threats; in this way, they reflect public opinion [14]. In fact, [15] illuminates the role of editorial cartoonists as follows:

*"Editorial cartoonists, in their role as journalists and commentators, participate in the political image-making process. The amusement potential of editorial cartoons, as*

*political satire, sometimes eclipses their discursive function in creating social reality. Cartoons are framed within a unique, condensing form that facilitates representation of candidate images with clear, concise, visually reinforced messages disseminated on a daily basis*" [15, p.2141].

The author further argues that the cartoonist first interprets the image of a candidate and then offers "counter-images developed through a variety of inventional strategies that recreate the world or political discourse". Thus the combination of a factual and fictional world presented by cartoonists expresses "the message-driven process of fantasia". It follows that "the power of the political cartoon is not in its direct, persuasive effects...but in the way it frames and defines what is at issue and participates in the process of fantasia" [15, p.2141].

In contrast to comics, the political cartoon is generally contained through a border, the main function of which is to signal a separation between the dramatic cartoon world and the real world of news reporting [16]. However, political cartoons are able to function as narratives since viewers are encouraged to complete in their heads what has been suggested by the depicted moment. A sense of action is created by the cartoonist through the portrayal of movement which is 'frozen' at the time of the representation in addition to the use of vectors: strong, diagonal lines formed obliquely by depicted objects or people which indicate the direction of an action. Some cartoons use conventionalized motion lines leading to or from a moving element [9].

As a matter of fact, [11] argues that the cartoonist turns for a number of resources: political commonplaces, literary/ cultural allusions, personal character traits, and transient situational themes. Whereas language may be more precise in expressing some areas of meaning, other meanings can be easily and more effectively represented in images rather than words:

*"The sequential/temporal characteristic of language-as-speech may lend itself with greater facility to the representation of action and sequences of action; while the spatial display of visual images may lend itself with greater facility to the representation of elements and their relation to each other"* [17, p.147].

In the genre of political cartooning, metaphor has been a recurrent device [12]. A metaphor consists of a topic, or 'target', and of a vehicle, a 'source', to which the target is metaphorically compared. An example is "love is a battlefield" where 'love' is the target and 'battlefield' is the source [18, p.4]. From a cognitivist point of view, metaphors can be defined as "sets of mappings between a more concrete or physical source and a more abstract target domain" [19, p.67]. A metaphor is pictorial if both the target and source are cued in the visual mode [18]. In political cartoons the two domains are usually visually integrated (i.e. fusion) since caricatures often overlay the features of a famous personality onto any other being or object [9, pp.177-178]. In political cartoons visual metaphors not only highlight similarities between two different objects but they encourage us to view things in a completely new way and thus re-conceptualize reality. Visual metaphors are frequently more

specific than words since they capture shades of meaning that would be difficult to convey through language only [9]. Metaphors are regarded as "rhetorical constructions that condense features and define realities in a particularly potent fashion" [15, p.2142].

Political cartoons are intended to be suggestive and to require readers to leap mentally from the level of language to the level of visual meaning. Political cartoons can trigger thought processes about the relationships between seemingly unrelated areas of reality. They often go beyond what pure texts could convey [9].

### 3) Functions of Political Cartoons

According to [11], political cartoons serve four functions that include entertainment, aggression reduction, agenda-setting and framing. First, to consider political cartoons as comic is rather simplistic; these can be comic to the degree that they portray the shortcomings of public figures who are suspected of moral or ethical fallacies. Secondly, generally speaking, ordinary people may not take effective action against deceitful or incompetent leaders. However, as forms of communal criticism, cartoons may serve as outlets for protests which might surface in other forms. The ability to vent hostility in socially approved symbolic activities may lessen or even prevent the need for violent aggression. A cartoon might not lead to a subsequent action but it is a symbolic act. Its function is to provide the reader with some sense that the guilty has been punished, thereby providing the reader with internal equilibrium [11]. Thirdly, most political cartoons are invariably mirroring the present reality. It is the reflection of the political presence that makes a political cartoon "an important index to the major issues of the day" [11, p.92]. So long as this mirroring eventually leads to the public discussion of certain issues, the political cartoon may take part in the powerful role of mass media in shaping perceptions of public opinion. In this context, agenda-setting acquires more significance than simply assigning topics in terms of their significance. Rather, it may result in greater public discussion which may result in attitudinal changes among participants in the discussion. Finally, as [11] suggests, the condensed nature of political cartoons whereby a complex issue or event is reduced to a simple metaphorical form provides the reader with a sense of understanding that can serve as a prelude to a subsequent thought or action.

### 4) Interpretation of Political Cartoons

Reading a political cartoon involves more than the ability to identify real-life referents of visual representations. What makes political cartoons unique is the way in which they use a fantasy scenario to comment on an aspect of social, political or cultural reality [9]. According to [20], they are "complicated puzzles mixing current events with analogies" (p.39). Therefore, interpreting cartoons is a complex process whereby readers are required to draw upon a whole range of various 'literacies'. These include wide knowledge of past and current events, a good repertoire of cultural symbols, familiarity with the cartoon genre and conventions in addition to the ability of

analytic and critical thinking of real-life events and circumstances [9].

According to [21], political cartoons are basically meant to be read as narrative images. Accordingly, viewers must be able to read not only the visual lexis of a cartoon but also its visual syntax; i.e. the specific patterns for how meanings are put together in images. As [9] opines, social semioticians believe that visual syntax is more flexible than its verbal equivalent since visual structures represent a 'meaning potential' rather than a specific code. A viewer of a political cartoon is always trying to activate the characters depicted in a cartoon and to work out their story. In addition, understanding the meaning of a cartoon requires the viewer's ability to interpret gestures and facial expressions and to attribute emotions to the depicted characters. In cartoons, facial expression, which is regarded as one of the most important clues to which we react instinctively, is merely suggested by few simple lines which are sometimes more ambiguous than the human face itself. Generally speaking, there is a close relationship between the way viewers read facial expressions and how they interpret the overall narrative meaning of a cartoon [9].

### III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

One key trend of research on political cartoons addresses the relationship between political cartoons and reality. Another key trend of research focuses on the mechanisms used for producing the satirical and critical effects of cartoons [13]. With regard to this, exaggeration and distortion are important tools for the cartoonist; other tools are incongruity, condensation and blending [22]. Other studies of political cartoons concentrate on what they can do. Cartoons are capable of communicating "*subtle, complex, multilayered messages about people and events in the details of how they are drawn messages that would be difficult or impossible to express verbally*" [23, p.536]. The views expressed may identify with certain ideologies, clarify issues, contrast self with other, and/or reinforce certain positions [24]. However, given the influence and popularity of political cartoons, they have not been given the academic attention that they actually deserve. In relation to the focus of the present study, the review of the literature has yielded few works in which multimodal analyses of political cartoons are carried out. For example, Sani et al. [25] explore the role played by political cartoons in setting social agenda in Nigerian newspapers to shape public opinion in recurrent representations highlighting current socio-political issues during a given period of time. 50 cartoons were taken from two major Nigerian newspapers, Daily Trust and Vanguard, due to their wide readership during 2007-2010. The researchers adopted content analysis in order to identify the themes highlighted in the visual representations. A qualitative method was used to conduct semiotic analysis of the cartoons. The results reveal that Nigerian political cartoons set social agenda by reflecting current issues that people are concerned with. Thus the paper contributes to the research on the cartoon genre by offering insights into this field through agenda setting theory.

Kulikova & Detinko [26] have analyzed the representation of 'others' in British political cartoons. The authors believe that

"cartoons as types of multimodal texts are actively exploited in a media determined political discourse for construction of 'other' which is especially characteristic of the British press" (p.1381). In the inter-cultural perspective, the authors of multimodal texts use generalized visual images where there is an extensive use of well-known metaphors and well-known politicians. On the other hand, in the intra-cultural perspective, there is more focus on the detail and the image reflects the concrete actions of politicians. Facial expressions and posture of the characters create cartoons which are more emotional. The authors state that "in each of the two perspectives, the mechanism of representing the 'other' is different" [26, p.1381].

Tehseem & Bokhari [27] have carried out a MDA of political cartoons in Pakistan from two Pakistani newspapers. 12 political cartoons, six selected from each of the two newspapers, were analyzed in the study. Through their multimodal analysis, the authors show that the newspapers had different attitudes toward the government of Pakistan and the leader of the opposition party in the country. The cartoons reflect the affiliations of the respective media groups which own the two newspapers. Thus political cartoons reflect the pro-government and the anti-government stances depending on the political inclination of the media groups publishing the cartoons.

Shaikh et al. [28] have attempted to analyze the political cartoons published during the general election campaign in 2013 in Pakistan. The semiotic analysis of Pakistani political cartoons in this case study reveals how cartoons are used as communicative tools on the internet and print media to highlight current political themes and thus convey significant meanings. That was a critical era when Pakistan experienced political conflicts among various political parties who made use of different resources including print and electronic media in order to persuade voters. Hence, this study investigates the impact of cartoons on people in the absence of political, social and religious milieu.

Samuel [5] has conducted a study that aimed at satirizing the Nigerian climate by identifying the multimodal discourse features of four cartoons selected from January and February, 2016 editions of TELL newsmagazine. These were purposively selected since they highlight political themes and issues. The data were analyzed using the frameworks of MDA, as explained by Kress and van Leeuwen [1]. The researcher concludes that the political cartoons are meant to enhance easy comprehension of the messages conveyed by them.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

Since this research explores a political issue as being mirrored in political cartoons, the research design is qualitative in approach. Visual Social Semiotics by Kress & van Leeuwen [1] is adopted as a linguistic framework for analyzing a small set of political cartoons published in Arabic-language newspapers after Trump's Jerusalem move. In analyzing the selected visual compositions, the researcher adopts an interpretative approach which focuses on depth rather than

breadth. It is hoped that such an approach would lead to insightful analyses of the cartoons under study.

### *B. Selected Sample*

The small-size cartoon corpus consists of 10 political cartoons selected from a surge of editorial cartoons as highlighted by the ADL, an international Jewish non-governmental organization located in the US, claiming the Israeli domination of the US. The ADLA foregrounded cartoons portrayed in Arabic-language publications in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran and UK. They represent anti-semitic cartoons in Arabic-Language media which convey the same message in the wake of the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the US President, Donald Trump. They were selected for semiotic analysis in the present study because they portray a particular political issue; hence, the selection of these cartoons is not subjective. These cartoons can be found at [29].

### *C. Theoretical Framework*

According to Systemic Functional Linguistics, language is a social semiotic system [30]. Halliday asserts that language is a system network and all the grammatical and other features of language are sets of choices. Furthermore, he claims that all languages involve three meta-functions which are realized simultaneously: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function [31]. Although this theory was originally developed for the study of language, it has been widely used for analyzing other semiotic resources. Kress & van Leeuwen's *Reading Images* [7] is always regarded as the pioneering work in interpreting visual compositions. In fact, [1] allows us to read a single image in multiple ways. The authors propose that semiotic tools are artfully represented to realize some particular functions; namely, representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning [4].

According to [1], representational meaning refers to how semiotic tools and resources represent objects and the relationships between them in a certain context. More specifically, it is related to the internal relations between the represented participants, the action(s) they are performing as well as the setting of the circumstance. The two patterns that show the internal relations of visual images are narrative process and conceptual process. The presence of a vector, formed by some part of the represented participant or by an abstraction such as an arrow, is the key signal for distinguishing the two processes.

The narrative process might be either 'transactional' including both an 'actor' (from whom the vector is produced) and a 'goal' (towards which the vector is directed), or they may be 'non-transactional', including only an 'actor'. A different kind of narrative processes is the 'Reaction' which is being signified by an eye-line vector. Similarly, it may be transactional, involving both a senser (the one who looks) and a phenomenon (the one looked at), or non-transactional involving only a vector. Additionally, [1] lists other three narrative processes: a) Conversion, in which a participant, the 'Relay', is the goal of one action and the actor of another, b) Mental Process, in which a thought bubble serves as a vector between the 'Senser' (from

which it emanates) and the Phenomenon, c) Verbal Process, in which a dialogue balloon or any similar device forms a vector between the Sayer (from whom it emanates) and the utterance (participant within the dialogue balloon). The tool that forms the vector or executes the action is regarded as 'Means'. The participant which does not have any vectorial relationship is called the 'Accompaniment'.

Contrary to the dynamic nature of the narrative process, the conceptual process is more stable and it represents participants in terms of types, structure and meaning. In general, conceptual processes can be classified into three sub-processes: classificational process, analytical process and symbolic process. In classificational process, the relationship of taxonomy between the participants is established whereby a set of participants are made 'Subordinate' to another participant 'Super-ordinate'. These relations are established via the ordering of an image. Taxonomy may be either overt where the Super-ordinate and the Subordinates are connected through a tree structure or covert where the Subordinate participants are distributed symmetrically along the axes. The analytical processes establish a whole-part relationship between two types of participants: Carrier (the whole) and Possessive Attributes (the parts). The Symbolic processes establish the meaning and identity and include the Carrier and the symbolic attribute [1].

Visual communication involves two kinds of participants: represented participants (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and interactive participants (the people who communicate with each other through images, the producers and viewers). It involves three kinds of relations: 1) relations between represented participants; 2) relations between interactive and represented participants; and 3) relations between interactive participants [1, p.114]. According to [1], the communicative function of an image is realized through three types of systems: image act and gaze, social distance and power relations.

The first dimension, the system of image act and gaze, makes a distinction between 'demand' (visual contact with the viewer) and 'offer' (no visual contact). When represented participants look directly at the viewer, vectors, formed by the participants' eye-lines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established even if it is only on an imaginary level. When there is visual contact with the viewer, it is called 'demand' since, following [29], the participant's gaze and gesture, if present, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her. Other pictures address us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made. This kind of image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. The second dimension to the interactive meaning of images is related to the choice between close-up, medium shot and long shot, etc. The system of social distance is related to the extent of which the degree of intimacy determined by represented participants appear to the viewer in an image (close-up shot signifies intimacy, long shot signifies impersonal relation, medium shot signifies objects being within the reach of a viewer). Third, the system of involvement and power involves the way participants are positioned along the

horizontal and the vertical angles where the horizontal angle shows involvement or detachment (frontal angle involves maximum involvement; oblique angle signifies minimum involvement or maximum detachment). On the other hand, the vertical angle expresses power relations (high angle signifies power, low angle signifies vulnerability and eye level signifies equality). Such power relations may be between the represented participants and the viewer or between the represented participants within an image. These perspective techniques add subjectivity to the images. The removal of subjectivity signifies objectivity and is employed in scientific images. In addition, as [1] suggests, the modality of an image is established by the resemblance of an image to reality as well as the cultural standards with regard to real or unreal of a certain social group.

The relations set up by an image are not exhausted by these patterns only. The third element is the composition of the whole: the way in which representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other; i.e. the way they are integrated to form a meaningful whole. Pictorial elements can receive stronger or weaker 'stress' than other elements in their vicinity and thus become more or less important 'items of information' in the whole [1, p.176]. Composition relates the representational and interactive meanings of the image to each other through three interrelated systems: information value, salience and framing [1].

The first aspect of compositional meaning, which is information values, basically means that certain values are given to images based on the placement of elements in a composition. The placement of elements provides them with particular informational values related to the different 'zones' of an image: left as opposed to right, top as opposed to bottom or centre as different from margin. The composition is called 'centred' if it has an element placed at the centre and is called 'polarized' if it does not have any element placed at the centre. The elements can also be assigned information values based on their specific placement on the left and right or at the top and bottom. In a horizontal left-right structure, the left element signifies 'Given'- something the viewer already knows while the right element signifies 'New'- something that requires special attention and is somehow problematic and still needs to be known by the viewer. In using top – bottom structures, the top element signifies the 'Ideal' whereas the bottom element signifies the 'Real'. In contrast to the sense of continuation along the horizontal axis, a sense of contrast or opposition is suggested by the division along the vertical axis. For example, in advertisements, which are designed along the vertical axis, the upper section is made emotionally appealing showing viewers 'what might be' whereas the lower section is made more realistic and informative showing the viewers 'what is'. Moreover, there is usually a sharp line separating the upper section from the lower one. Thirdly, the centre presents "the nucleus of information on which all the other elements are in some sense subservient" [1, p.206]. It plays an important role in establishing a transition between the Given and the New or the Ideal and the Real. The centre of such polarized compositions unites the polarized elements to each other and is called the 'Mediator'. The second aspect of visual composition is salience.

In a visual composition, elements are meant to attract the attention of the viewer with varying degrees, as realized by factors such as placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in colour, difference in sharpness or the way it overlaps with other elements in that composition. Irrespective of where they are placed, salience can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more worthy of attention than others. Finally, the third aspect of compositional meaning is framing. The absence or presence of framing devices such as dividing lines either connect or disconnect the different elements in an image, thus denoting whether such elements belong or do not belong together in a certain way [1, p.177]. This aspect implies the degree certain elements are visually separated from each other through the use of frame lines, empty space between these elements or other framing devices. Framing renders elements as separate from each other. Framing is usually helpful in defining information value. For instance, there is always a dividing line to make the Ideal-Real structure clear [1].

To answer the research question of the present study, some of these concepts of visual modality are being employed by the researcher in analyzing the political cartoons under investigation.

## V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, each of the selected political cartoons is analyzed by adopting the theory of Visual Social Semiotics, as explained by [1], in order to explore the underlying ideologies. The image shown in each visual composition is first given a brief description, then analyzed in terms of some aspects of the three levels of meaning: representational, interactive and compositional. The analysis of each of the individual visual compositions under investigation is followed an overview of the three aspects of meaning in the selected corpus.

### A. Analysis of the Selected Corpus

This cartoon (Fig. 1) was published in Al-Ahram newspaper in Egypt on 18th December 2017. In this cartoon the main personality is the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who is leaning over a number of killed bodies. The other personality depicted in the cartoon is a blindfolded person wearing the American hat and holding a label with the inscription القدس. Both of them join in carrying a wand shaped as Star of David.

#### 1) Analysis of Political Cartoon 1

With regard to representational meaning, which basically refers to the internal relations between the represented participants, things, the action(s) they are performing as well as the setting portrayed in the image, the cartoonist successfully portrays a narrative process. The Israeli Prime Minister, the main represented participant, is the 'actor' and the ones he is leaning over are the 'goal'. There are two sub-processes here: an action process and a reaction process (transactional reaction). The oblique line across the cartoon draws us to the second main participant in the cartoon, the American personality who is blindfolded. In terms of the conceptual process, the symbolic

aspect is the most prominent one: the Israeli Prime Minister symbolizes brutality and ruthlessness while the American personality symbolizes thoughtlessness. Every object in this cartoon is a signifier representing a significant phenomenon. The Israeli Prime Minister represents the Israeli government. The killed bodies signify the Palestinian people who are tortured or killed under the Israeli government. The blindfolded person, wearing the American hat, represents the US which lacks wise vision. The fact that both the US personality and the Israeli Prime Minister are holding a wand shaped as Star of David strongly expresses collaboration and union against Palestinian people. The sign reading القدس (Jerusalem) signifies Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Another key aspect of the conceptual process is the classificational aspect. An overt taxonomy is realized through depicting the main participant as the super-ordinate whereas both the minor participants (the Palestinians) and the American personality are the subordinates since the former are depicted as much smaller in size and of almost equal equivalence and the latter is depicted as much smaller in size and in the background. The cartoonist artfully conveys the meaning of the superiority of Israel over the US.



Fig. 1 Cartoon 1: Al-Ahram (Egypt), 18 December 2017

In this cartoon the interactive meaning is mainly realized through two aspects: gaze and power relations. There is no direct contact, either by the main participant or the second participant, with the viewer (offer). The picture addresses us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made. This kind of image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. The oblique angle used in the cartoon signifies the maximum detachment of the viewer from the world of the represented participants. From the point of view of interactive meaning, the viewer is closer to the main represented participant than to the US personality. Moreover, the image shows a clear contrast between the facial expressions of the American and the Israeli personalities which show satisfaction and the bleeding faces of the Palestinians.

Regarding compositional meaning, first, in this cartoon certain values are given to the visual composition based on the placement of the different elements in the composition. The

composition is centered since it has one element placed in the centre. A horizontal left-right structure is being used where the left element, which is the American personality being blindfolded, signifies 'Given'- something the viewer already knows whereas the right element, which is the Israeli Prime Minister leaning over a number of killed bodies, signifies 'New'- something that requires special attention and still needs to be known by the viewer. The right-left axis employed by the cartoonist provides a sense of continuity. Second, salience is the aspect of visual composition that refers to the degree to which any element in such a composition draws the view's attention to it. This can be due to factors such as size, colour, placement in the foreground or the way it overlaps with other elements in that composition. In this composition, the main represented participant, the Israeli Prime Minister, is the most salient, the most eye-catching element in the visual representation since it is placed in the foreground and forms the largest element in the picture. Accordingly, special attention is given to the main participant due to its size and its placement in the foreground. The size of the Prime Minister is much larger than that of the victims (salience) highlighting the helplessness of the victims. The huge size of the depicted Prime Minister reflects a sense of power and tyranny. This contrasts with the size of the person representing the US. Jerusalem is now in the hands of the US which collaborates with Israel through holding the same wand. Moreover, the main participant is placed in the foreground while the other participant, the American personality, is placed in the background. Third, framing is another important aspect of compositional meaning in this cartoon. On the one hand, the two represented participants are closely related as they are simultaneously holding the same wand by their hands. On the other hand, there is no space between the main participant and the minor participants he is kneeling on. In this way, the cartoonist successfully delivers the message of the union of the US and Israel on the one hand and the torture of the Palestinians by the Israeli government on the other hand. The cartoonist shows the Israeli Prime Minister as a ruthless character that is ferociously attacking the feeble helpless Palestinians.

In this cartoon, semiotic resources interact to project the meaning intended by the cartoonist. The communicative message conveyed by the image is the collaboration of Israel and the US in considering Jerusalem as the capital of Israel despite the torture of the Palestinians by Israel.

## 2) Analysis of Political Cartoon 2



Fig. 2 Cartoon 2: Al-Masry Al-Youm (Egypt), 17 December 2017



Following Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, this cartoon (Fig. 2), published in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* newspaper in Egypt on 17th December 2017, is depicting the American President Donald Trump as a circus elephant balancing the globe on its trunk upon the command of its Israeli trainer.

In terms of representational meaning, the cartoonist successfully portrays a narrative process. The main narrative process described in this cartoon is the 'Reaction' which is being signified by an eye-line vector. This process is transactional involving the Israeli trainer as the one who is looking (sensor) at the American President, the one being looked at (phenomenon). There is a clear vector emanating from the eyes of the trainer to the trainee. There are two main participants in the cartoon. The two clear sub-processes are an action and a reaction. The former is clear in the movement of the trainer and the latter in the movement of the American President. In terms of the conceptual process, the most prominent sub-process is the classificational one where the Israeli trainer is the superordinate and the American President is the subordinate. Another clear sub-process is the symbolic one. The trainer is a symbol of the authoritarian, domineering role of Israel and the trainee is a symbol of subservience and obedience to the instructions given by the trainer. The ball is a symbol of the whole world that the US is playing with. Though the cartoonist does not use any linguistic tools, the message is successfully conveyed through the use of visual metaphor. In this cartoon visual metaphor is a key device for projecting meaning: TRUMP IS A CIRCUS ELEPHANT. The target is the American President and the source is a circus elephant. As noted in political cartoons, the two domains are visually integrated (i.e. fusion) where the cartoonist overlays the features of the main represented participant onto another object. Trump is portrayed as an elephant and Israel is portrayed as a trainer. The happy movements of the American President signify utter joy and satisfaction.

In terms of interactive meaning, which is clearly realized in the relationship between the two main participants in the cartoon, the two major aspects are gaze and power systems. There is an oblique line connecting the eyes of the two represented participants. The message intended to be conveyed by the cartoonist is artfully conveyed through power relations: the Jewish trainer is more powerful and more superior to the US trainee. The oblique angle adopted in the cartoon detaches the viewer from the world of the represented participants.

With regard to compositional meaning, which relates to the way different elements are placed in a visual composition, the horizontal left-right polarization is employed by the cartoonist in representing the two main participants in the cartoon. In this horizontal left-right structure, the left element, being represented by the Israeli trainer, signifies 'Given'- something the viewer already knows while the right element, being represented by the American President, signifies 'New'- something that requires special attention and is somehow problematic and still needs to be known by the viewer. In addition, the huge size of the American President (salience) compared to the miniature size of the trainer clearly reflects the

focus of the visual composition: the playfulness of the US with the whole world. Framing is another important aspect here: the white space between the two participants renders them as separate from each other with each adopting its own position in the allocated setting: a trainer and a trainee in a circus context.

The underlying message conveyed by the portrayal is the domination of Israel over the US. This meaning is projected through a circus context where Israel is the trainer and the US President is the trainee.

### 3) Analysis of Political Cartoon 3



Fig. 3 Cartoon 3: Al-Quds Al-Arabi (UK), 8 December 2017

This cartoon (Fig. 3), published in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper in the UK on 8th December 2017, contains two personalities: the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, climbing a ladder while carrying the Old City of Jerusalem and the American President holding a bag labeled "The Arabs' Money".

In terms of representational meaning, the cartoonist portrays a narrative process. The main narrative sub-process is the action one. There are two simultaneous actions: the American president holding the Arab possessions and the Israeli Prime Minister carrying the Old City of Jerusalem with the help of the US. Visual metaphor is deployed in this cartoon to convey certain meanings. One metaphor is: TRUMP IS A THIEF since the American President is portrayed as a thief stealing Arab possessions. In this metaphor, Trump is the target and the thief is the source. Another metaphor is: JERUSALEM IS A GIFT where the target is Jerusalem and the source is a gift. This remarkably expresses the great value of the city to Israel. The strong interplay between the American and the Israeli relationship is represented through the analogy of the back of Trump as a ladder that the Israeli Prime Minister is climbing. The message conveyed is that the US is giving help to Israel to take over the Palestinian capital while it is attempting to conquer the Arab World. Through the use of visual images, the cartoonist successfully succeeds in conveying the intricate political relationships between the three parties: the US, Israel and the Arab world.

In terms of interactive meaning, one key interpersonal aspect in this cartoon is gaze. The gaze of Trump's eye conveys a sense of cunningness. Furthermore, the facial expressions of the two personalities convey certain meanings: the big smile on Netanyahu's face expresses utter triumph and contentment, and

Trump's smile reveals cunningness and malicious intentions. Although the body of the main represented participant is angled away from the plane of the viewer, his gaze is frontal. Here there is a double message: "although I am not part of your world, I can still make contact with you from my own different world".

Regarding compositional meaning, the horizontal left-right polarization structure is being used by the cartoonist where two participants are being shown: on the left hand side is the Jewish leader (Given) and on the right hand side is the American President (New). Saliency is a clear aspect shown in portraying the huge body of the American President which strongly reflects power and sovereignty. Framing is another key aspect of compositional meaning in this cartoon. The closeness in physical distance between the two main personalities as portrayed in the cartoon indicates collaboration and unity.

The underlying message conveyed by the portrayal is the strong union between the US and Israel in seizing Arab possessions and attempting to add Jerusalem to these possessions.

#### 4) Analysis of Political Cartoon 4



Fig. 4 Cartoon 4: Al-Watan (Oman), 17 December 2017

This cartoon (Fig. 4), published in Al-Watan newspaper in Oman on 17th December 2017, is depicting a Jewish figure giving a thumbs-up while President Trump is declaring Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The cartoon includes two main participants: the American President, Donald Trump, and a Jewish figure. The American President is declaring that "Jerusalem is the capital of Israel". The Jewish figure is giving a thumbs-up as this announcement is being made. The entities of the two personalities are identified via the Star of David on the coat worn by the Jewish figure and the American hat left on the ground in front of the American President.

In terms of representational meaning, the cartoonist successfully portrays a narrative process. The Jewish figure (actor) is pointing (transactional narrative process) with his thumbs-up (means) towards the American President who is holding a microphone (goal) and is uttering the words القدس عاصمة إسرائيل (Jerusalem is the capital of Israel). Here the cartoonist is conveying the meaning that Israel is content with the declaration of Trump that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Another key narrative process in this cartoon is the Verbal Process, in which a dialogue balloon including القدس عاصمة إسرائيل forms a vector between the Sayer (from whom it emanates) and the utterance (participant within the dialogue balloon). The tool that forms the vector or executes the action

is regarded as Means. One of the key elements in this cartoon is the headphones which connect the two personalities together. This symbolizes the collaboration between the two entities. The gesture made by the Jewish figure indicates satisfaction with the announcement. At the macro level, it indicates the support given to the US by Israel.

The oblique angle adopted by the cartoonist in the cartoon signifies the maximum detachment of the viewer from the world of the represented participants.

With regard to compositional meaning, which relates to the way different elements are placed in the composition, the horizontal left-right polarization structure is being used by the cartoonist where two participants are being shown: on the left hand side is the Jewish leader (Given) and on the right hand side is the American President (New). The bodies of the two represented participants lean forward and thus form oblique lines which create two similar vectors. The two action parallel processes suggest the equal importance of the two characters in the cartoon by portraying the two represented participants in almost the same way. The images of the two characters are given identical saliency in the cartoon. They are placed at the left side and the right side separately leaving the center of the picture to be a margin. Moreover, they are taking the same posture and are dressed in almost the same colour. Framing is another key aspect in this composition: the white space between the two participants renders them separate from each other; however, they are connected via the headphones. This serves as a framing device that connects the elements in the pictorial composition.

The underlying message conveyed by the cartoonist in this image is the contentment and satisfaction of Israel on announcing Jerusalem as Israel's capital by the US President.

#### 5) Analysis of Political Cartoon 5



Fig. 5 Cartoon 5: Al-Youm Al-sabea (Egypt), 8 December 2017

In contrast to previous cartoons, Fig. 5, published in Al-Youm Al-sabea newspaper in Egypt on 8th December 2017, contains only one personality: the American President, Donald Trump. He is portrayed sitting at a table and holding a fork in each of his hands. The plate in front of him contains a killed pigeon. On his left, there is a menorah. The cartoonist successfully portrays a narrative process which is non-transactional involving a vector only. In terms of the conceptual process, which is less dynamic than the narrative process, and renders participants in a visual composition in terms of types or structures, every object in this cartoon is a signifier that

represents a particular phenomenon. The cap that the US President is wearing represents the Jewish identity and so is the temple on his left side. The killed pigeon symbolizes peace which has ended up. The plant which symbolizes peace is portrayed as feeble and fragile. Overall, the act of eating portrayed in the cartoon symbolizes devouring.

The interactive function of this image is realized through the gaze where there is visual contact with the viewer (demand). The represented participant is looking directly at the viewer's eyes. Here the vector, formed by participants' eye-lines, connects the participant with the viewer; contact is established. Following Halliday's SFG [31], the participant's gaze and the gesture, if present, demand that the viewer enter into an imaginary relation with the represented participant. The figure is a close shot where only the face and the shoulders of the represented participant are shown. The close shot serves to focus on the facial expressions and suggests engagement with the viewer. The close shot aims to capture subtle facial expressions combined with their body language or surrounding environment that is necessary to provide context. The main represented participant faces the viewer frontally. The facial expressions of the main participants reflect inner feelings of cruelty and ruthlessness. With regard to compositional meaning, this visual composition is 'centred' since it has only one element placed at the centre.

The communicative message conveyed by this visual composition is the domination of Israel over the US with regard to considering Jerusalem as Israel's capital which would result in violating any attempts of maintaining peace and, hence, evoking violence.

#### 6) Analysis of Political Cartoon 6



Fig. 6 Cartoon 6: Al-Quds Al-Arabi (UK), 6 December 2017

Fig. 6, published in Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper in UK on 6th December 2017, contains two personalities: the US president, Donald Trump and the Jewish Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. The podium having the inscription **خطاب ترامب** (Trump's speech) indicates the setting where the American President is giving his political speech on declaring Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The narrative process in this cartoon involves an 'actor' (from whom the vector emanates) and a 'goal' (towards which the vector is directed). The Jewish Prime Minister is the 'actor' and the US President is the 'goal'. Visual metaphor is one key device of projecting meaning in this cartoon: TRUMP IS A PUPPET.

The target is the American President and the source is a puppet. The two domains are visually integrated (i.e. fusion) where the cartoonist overlays the features of the main represented participant onto another object. Portraying the American President as a small puppet which is controlled and moved by the Jewish Prime Minister symbolizes the political influence of Israel over the US. The cartoonist draws a number of stars at the background which indicates the domineering role of Israel in the depicted situation. Through the deployment of visual images, the cartoonist successfully conveys a clear message: Israel is controlling the political decision and action made by the US.

The communicative function of the image is realized through the system of gaze and power relations which is between the two represented participants in the image. The picture addresses us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made with either of the two represented participants. This image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. Superiority is assigned to the Jewish personality who is in control of the US President. The oblique angle used in the cartoon signifies the minimum involvement of the viewer with the world of the represented participants.

With regard to compositional meaning, there is a clear contrast in the size of two personalities symbolizing Israel and the US. The miniature size of the American President and its movement, which is controlled by the Israeli Prime Minister, reflects the power and the great domineering role of Israel on the US. Framing is another key aspect in this visual composition. It renders the two main personalities in this cartoon close to each other as there is no white space between them. This strongly conveys a sense of closeness in relationship.

The underlying message conveyed by the cartoonist in this image is the domination of Israel over the US with regard to announcing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

#### 7) Analysis of Political Cartoon 7



Fig. 7 Cartoon 7: Al-Ryadh (Saudi Arabia), 10 December 2017

This cartoon (Fig. 7), published in Al-Ryadh newspaper in Saudi Arabia on 10th December 2017, has two personalities: the American President, Donald Trump and a Jewish figure. The former is wearing glasses and holding binoculars, each being shaped as the Star of David and the latter is carrying a

sign reading القدس عاصمة اسرائيل (Jerusalem is the capital of Israel). The cartoon has the caption الانحياز الاسرائيلي (Israeli bias).

In terms of the narrative process, the main narrative sub-process is the action one. The main action represented in the cartoon is the American president attempting to visualize the world with Jewish eyes. The main theme of the cartoon which is the American bias towards Israel is successfully and artfully expressed through visual images. The image of the Star of David on the glasses and the binoculars powerfully conveys the message sent by the cartoonist.

The interactive meaning in this cartoon is mainly realized through the system of gaze and social distance. The picture addresses us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made with either of the two represented participants. This image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. Regarding social distance, which is related to the extent to which the degree of intimacy determined by the represented participants appears to the viewer, the degree of intimacy between the two represented participants is clearly shown. The oblique angle used in the cartoon signifies the detachment of the viewer from the world of the represented participants. The close shot serves to capture subtle facial expressions and surrounding environment.

Saliency is a clear aspect of the compositional meaning in this cartoon. The viewer's attention is obviously drawn towards the element in the foreground of the visual composition. The American President is at the centre of the composition (saliency/new). Behind him in the background is a Jewish figure carrying a sign reading القدس عاصمة اسرائيل (Jerusalem is the capital of Israel) (given). This is also realized through the difference in size between the two participants. Framing is another key aspect of the compositional meaning. With no white space between the two represented participants in the cartoon, it renders them close to each other.

In this image the various semiotic resources, both verbal and non-verbal, interact in projecting the underlying meaning: the bias of the US towards Israel with regard to the announcement of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

#### 8) Analysis of Political Cartoon 8



Fig. 8 Cartoon 8: Al-Madina (Saudi Arabia), 8 December 2017

This cartoon (Fig. 8), published in Al-Madina newspaper in

Saudi Arabia on 8th December 2017, contains two personalities: the American President, Donald Trump, and a Jewish personality. The former is portrayed as presenting Jerusalem as a gift to the Jewish personality.

The cartoonist successfully portrays a narrative process. The two main sub-processes are an action and a reaction. The American President (actor) is presenting a gift (goal) to the Jewish people. The reaction of the Jewish person lies in his readiness to receive the gift with contentment and satisfaction.

Visual metaphor is a key device for projecting meaning in this cartoon: JERUSALEM IS A CAKE. The target is the Palestinian city and the source is a cake. The two domains are physically merged into a unified object. This strongly expresses the great value of the city to Israel.

The communicative function in this image is realized through the system of gaze and social distance. The picture addresses us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made with either of the two represented participants. This kind of image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. As far as social distance is concerned, the degree of intimacy between the two represented participants is clear. The oblique angle used in the cartoon signifies the detachment of the viewer from the world of the represented participants. The close shot serves to capture subtle facial expressions: the decisiveness of the US President and the contentment of the Jewish Personality.

With regard to compositional meaning, a horizontal left-right polarization structure is being used by the cartoonist. Thus, it shows two participants: the Jewish figure shown at the left-hand side of the image (given) while the American President is shown at the right-hand side (new). The cartoonist establishes Trump as much higher in stature than the Israeli figure (saliency) as indicated by the difference in their sizes. The underlying meaning is that Trump is presenting Jerusalem as a gift to Israel. Framing is another key aspect of this visual composition. The way the two participants are framed with little white space between them renders the meaning of closeness and intimacy.

The communicative message delivered by the cartoonist in this portrayal is the collaboration between Israel and the US. Jerusalem is presented as a gift sent to Israel by the US President.

#### 9) Analysis of Political Cartoon 9



Fig. 9 Cartoon 9: Al-Ittihad (UAE), 17 December 2017

Following President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, this cartoon (Fig. 9), published in Al-Ittihad newspaper in the UAE on 17th December 2017, is portraying Uncle Sam while throwing off his hat to reveal a Jewish skullcap with a Star of David. The cartoon contains only one personality and has the caption العم سام (Uncle Sam).

The narrative process portrayed in this cartoon is non-transactional since it involves only an actor without a goal. There is a vector emanating from the represented personality and moving us to his hat. In terms of the conceptual process, each element in the cartoon is a signifier. Uncle Sam represents the US and the skullcap is a symbol of the Jewish identity.

In terms of interactive meaning in this cartoon, there is no visual contact with the viewer (offer). The picture addresses us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made with the main represented personality. This kind of image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. The oblique angle used in the cartoon signifies the maximum detachment of the viewer from the world of the represented participant.

With regard to compositional meaning, this visual composition is 'centred' since it has one element placed at the centre. In this cartoon, conventionalized motion lines are being used by the cartoonist leading from the moving element.

The main message conveyed by the cartoonist in this image is the identification of the US with Israel.

#### 10) Analysis of Political Cartoon 10



Fig. 10 Cartoon 10: Fars newspaper (Iran), 16 December 2017

This cartoon (Fig. 10), published in Fars newspaper in Iran on 16th December 2017, is depicting the American President, Donald Trump, driving off a cliff in a car which is marked with the Star of David.

The narrative process depicted in the cartoon is non-transactional involving only one actor (the US President) with no goal. The intended meaning, which is the Israeli domination of the US, is ostensibly conveyed through the Star of David on the car driven by Trump.

With regard to interactive meaning, there is no visual contact with the viewer (offer). The picture addresses us indirectly. Here the viewer is the subject of the look. No contact is made with the main represented participant. This image is called an 'offer'- it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or as objects of contemplation. Moreover, the communicative function of the image is basically conveyed

through the system of involvement and power: the low angle signifies power. Low angle gives the impression of triumph and superiority. If the represented participant is seen from a low angle, then the relation between the represented participant and the interactive participant is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant. Such power relations is between the represented participant and the viewer [1]. In this cartoon the angle is low. The US President is towering high as if he is looking down at the viewer. He is depicted as if he exercising symbolic power over us.

In visual compositions elements can be assigned information values based on their specific placement on the left and right or at the top and bottom. In this cartoon a top-bottom structure is being used by the cartoonist where the top element signifies the 'Ideal' and the bottom element signifies the 'Real'. The opposition between top and bottom is strongly emphasized: the constituent elements placed on the top are presented as the Ideal- the aspirations of the President whereas what is placed at the bottom is presented as the Real. In this cartoon, conventionalized motion lines are being used by the cartoonist leading to the moving element.

The communicative message conveyed by the cartoonist in this portrayal is the identification of the US with Israel and the high ambitions of the US in realizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

#### B. Aspects of Meaning in the Selected Corpus

##### 1) Representational Meaning

First, with regard to the narrative processes depicted in the political cartoons under study, there are variations among the selected visual compositions. In some cartoons, the narrative process is transactional involving an actor (from whom the vector emanates) and a goal (towards which the vector is directed); e.g. Fig. 1 and Fig. 4. In other cartoons, the narrative process is non-transactional, involving only an actor; e.g. Fig. 5, Fig. 9 and Fig. 10. A different kind of narrative processes is the "Reaction" which is being signified by an eye-line vector. Sometimes it is transactional, involving both a sener (the one who looks) and a phenomenon (the one looked at); e.g. Fig. 2, or non-transactional involving a vector only; e.g. Fig. 5. Second, with regard to the conceptual process, the symbolic aspect is the most prominent one. A clear example is in Fig. 1 where the Israeli Prime Minister symbolizes brutality and ruthlessness and the American personality symbolizes thoughtlessness. Next is the classificational aspect where the Jewish personality is often rendered as the super-ordinate and the American personality is the subordinate; e.g. Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 6. Finally, visual metaphor is a recurrent device in the selected cartoons which plays a key role in realizing certain meanings. Clear examples are in Fig. 2 where the US President is portrayed as a circus elephant playing with a ball which signifies the whole world and Fig. 3 where the US President is portrayed as a thief stealing Arabs' money.

##### 2) Interactive Meaning

The communicative function of images, which mainly relates

in the selected cartoons to the relationship between the represented participants in the each of the cartoons and the viewer, is mainly conveyed through gaze and power relations. With regard to the system of image act and gaze, a distinction is made between 'demand' where there is visual contact with the viewer; e.g. Fig. 5 and 'offer' where there is no visual contact; e.g. Figs. 1, 2, and 7-10. In most of the selected cartoons; e.g. in Figs. 7-9, the oblique angle is adopted by the cartoonist to signify the detachment of the viewer from the world of the represented participants. Frontal angle as in Fig. 5 signifies maximum involvement with the viewer of the image. The close shot, as in Figs. 5, 7 and 8, serves to capture the subtle facial expressions of the US President.

### 3) Compositional Meaning

In most of the cartoons under study, the cartoonists adhere to a basic left-right structure which signifies a sense of continuity. In some of the selected cartoons; e.g. Figs. 1-4 and 8, the left-right polarization is being used where the left element signifies 'Given'- something the viewer already knows while the right element signifies 'New'- something that requires special attention and is somehow problematic and still needs to be known by the viewer. In one cartoon (Fig. 10), the top-bottom structure is being used where the top signifies the 'Ideal' and the bottom signifies the 'Real'. A second prominent aspect of compositional meaning that contributes to realizing meaning is salience which refers to the degree to which any element in such a composition draws the view's attention to it due to factors such as size, colour, placement in the foreground; e.g. the huge size of Netanyahu in Fig. 1 or the way it overlaps with other elements in that composition. A third prominent aspect of compositional meaning is framing which implies the degree certain elements are visually separated from each other through the use of frame lines; e.g. the way the Israeli personality and the US President overlap in Fig. 3, or empty space between the elements; e.g. in Fig. 2 where there is some space between the Israeli personality as a trainer and the US President as a trainee in a circus context. Framing renders elements as either close or separate from each other.

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper was an attempt to explore a previously under-researched aspect of political cartoons- analyzing political cartoons from a multimodal perspective. The aim of this research was to analyze selected political cartoons on Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital using the framework of Visual Social Semiotics, as explained by [1], as a methodological framework. In light of analyzing the selected cartoons published in Arabic-language media in the wake of this event, it is proved that semiotic resources used by the cartoonists function in realizing the intended meaning of the cartoons: Israeli and Jewish domination of the US. Understanding the different aspects of meaning-representational, interactive and compositional- is a prerequisite for understanding the intended meaning inherent in each of the visual compositions.

It can be claimed that this research has its significance in both

theory and practice. First, this research has demonstrated that the political cartoon constitutes an effective multimodal genre that comprises both linguistic and non-linguistic devices that convey meaningful messages and, accordingly, help in setting social agenda and initiating social reform. Political cartoons constitute one of the effective media that not only disseminate information but depict social events and realities as well as render social representations of political figures. Second, it contributes to the research on the political cartoon genre by opening a new dimension through analyzing the semiotic resources employed in political cartoons rather than restricting the analysis to linguistic elements only. Third, it testifies the applicability of the Visual Semiotics framework in analyzing political cartoons. The application of a MDA framework to the investigation of the selected cartoons has proved that visual compositions are communicative tools that are embedded with meaning and that these contribute to conveying the implicated messages. This is consistent with the results of previous related studies which identify the significance of the role of political cartoons in addressing and highlighting social and political themes and issues. Finally, this research provides a more comprehensive perspective of the analysis of political cartoons which will enhance viewers' appreciation and understanding of the different modalities used in political cartoons.

It can be concluded that the integration of different modalities in political cartoons deserves further exploration; hence, this research might serve as a springboard for conducting further research on the analysis of other political cartoons from a multimodal perspective due to the rich communicative characteristics inherent in them.

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