Visualising the Russia-Ukraine War: A Semiotic Analysis of Arab Social Media Cartoons

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Abstract—This study is a verbal-pictorial analysis of the Russia-Ukraine war in Jordanian cartoons. It examines socio-political contexts related to the Russia-Ukraine war through a semiotic analysis of selected political cartoons posted on the official Facebook accounts of two well-known Jordanian cartoonists, Emad Hajjaj and Osama Hajjaj, between January and September, 2022. These cartoons show the conflict through the eyes of Arabs, who may be considered neutral and distanced from the conflict. As such, the study provides novel insights for semiotics by analysing signs in verbo-pictorial entities and demonstrating how verbal and visual signs can work synergistically to connote powerful messages. Sixty-eight political cartoons were collected and classified into the themes of: negotiation, alliance, economic consequences (the food and energy crisis), the Russia-Ukraine war and COVID-19, the refugee crisis, Putin vs. peace, nuclear war, and the mocking of Putin's policies. We selected a representative cartoon from each theme and analysed their messages via the Roland Barthes model (1967, 1977) according to three types of message: verbal (i.e., text), non-verbal (i.e., denoted visual signs), and symbolic. These verbal and visual signs were used to clarify and interpret the symbolic messages of the selected cartoons. The thematic findings reflect the views and attitudes of an Arab community (Jordanian, in this case) regarding the Russian-Ukraine war.

Index Terms—cartoons, Russia-Ukraine war, verbal signs, non-verbal signs, symbolism

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the world became a witness to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The history of this conflict dates back to 2014 when Russia launched a military operation to annex Crimea from Ukraine, and pro-Russian separatists assumed control of parts of Ukrainian lands in the Donbas region, igniting regional fighting. Tensions over the borders between the two countries continued until February 4, 2022, when Russia began a major military escalation with missile attacks on military targets inside Ukraine, before sending soldiers and tanks across the border into the country. This significant escalation has had catastrophic humanitarian and economic consequences in the displacement of nearly seven million Ukrainian refugees and the onset of a food and energy crisis (Behnassi & Haiba, 2022). Shortly before the Russian military operation, Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared in a televised speech in which he expressed the Russian unitary view and opposed the Ukrainian-Western rapprochement (Rainsford, 2022).

Since the first days of the repercussions of these events between Russia and Ukraine, global and Arab media outlets have been filled with news and articles expressing different viewpoints towards the war. Certainly, social media plays an effective role in this regard, as users' posts can be both written and visual. Visual posts are seen as a more effective and direct expression than the conventional written form, as they can convey messages easily and quickly. Among the distinct categories of visuals, cartoons (i.e., caricatures) are important as they are the most prominent means of attracting attention (Hameed & Afzal, 2021). As well as being intended to poke fun, cartoons exhibit a truth which triggers people's thinking (Fairrington, 2009). Political and social events are considered excellent opportunities for cartoonists to become substantially inventive and active. Political cartoons are created to shed light on the status quo through cryptic yet comic messages and discourses. However, cartoons are not merely humorous, as they are often intended to express the ideologies, views, and attitudes of the cartoonists themselves as well as their societies (Al-Momani et al., 2017). In this respect, a pictorial representation of the Russia-Ukraine war helps illustrate the bitter realities of the conflict.

Cartoons are an integral part of media discourse, including conventional forms such as newspapers, television, and magazines as well as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (Al-Momani et al., 2017). Although cartoons are classified as

visuals, they usually appear with verbal texts. According to Al-Momani et al., "visual images in cartoons are usually accompanied by verbal sub-texts and texts that end with a punchline to create a humorous mood that is achieved through the violation of conversational maxims in the analogies, exaggerations, and symbolism used in the cartoon" (2017, p. 64).

In this study, we analyse verbo-pictorial representations of the Russia-Ukraine war from 2022. Semiotic studies have discussed political events, particularly political cartoons in the Arab world (Qassim, 2007; Ahmad, 2007; Najjar, 2007; Mazid, 2008; Ibrahim, 2014; Al Kayed et al., 2015; Al-Momani et al., 2017). However, the focus of the current study is Arab social media (i.e., Facebook) for visual (i.e., cartoonish) representations of Russia-Ukraine war-related themes. For this purpose, eight cartoons from among 68 collected cartoons, were selected and analysed using a semiotic theoretical lens. Cartoons usually exhibit social or political scenarios according to the cartoonists' intention, and thus it is important to grasp the intended schemas in cartoons while also reflecting upon political or social events and realities.

For analysis, the selected visuals were taken from the renowned Facebook accounts of two outstanding Jordanian political cartoonists, Emad Hajjaj and Osama Hajjaj, both of whom have portrayed different themes concerning the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war in their cartoons. It is important to mention that cartoonists are concerned with exhibiting social and political discourse in a visual form. In so doing, semiotics was selected as the analytical framework as it provides the tools required to clarify intended and hidden meanings in the cartoons as visual signs (Hodge et al., 1988). According to Hameed and Afzal (2021), semiotics effectively contributes to the examination of caricatures as a political and social discourse. As such, the selected analytical framework can contribute to the comprehension of the Russia-Ukraine-related issues and themes as represented in the selected cartoons, a factor which also divulges the political implications and complications of the war. For this reason, the study sought to identify the main themes manifested by the selected cartoons during the Russia-Ukraine war.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a conceptual overview of the most common notions and theoretical frameworks and a review of the related studies. The first subsection presents the literature on the theoretical framework used in the study, while the second presents its major concept (i.e., cartoons) as a significant means of media. The third subsection is a review of the most relevant studies in the literature.

A. Semiotics

In semiotics, the concept of sign plays a substantial role as an interpretable entity. According to Pierce (1931) "nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign" (quoted in Hameed & Afzal, 2021, p. 86). Signs in Saussure's theory are classified into signifiers and signifieds. In this regard, the study of signs addresses the link between entities and their meanings (Lee & Goguen, 2003). Mendoza (2016) defined a sign as any entity in the form of an image, word, gesture, thought, or voice which can be decoded for its surface meaning, or even underlying meaning, as it can be understood via ideological links or worldviews. Semiotics as a term was used by Pierce (1839–1914) to denote an area of knowledge concerned with the study of signs (cited in Chandler, 2007). Imperial (2020) proposed that the study of signs, from Pierce's perspective, deals with the links between an entity (i.e., a sign) and its subject. Later, the concept of a sign was defined by Barthes (1967) as any format such as a word, image, gesture, or even musical note. Accordingly, Barthes used connotative and denotative meanings to decode signs. In the current study, Barthes' theoretical dimensions of semiotics were adopted for the analysis.

The aim of semiology, as described by Barthes (1967), is to probe the deep unifying structures of discourse in all their forms. Barthes (1967, 1977) classified signs as verbal or non-verbal, with the former being the linguistic elements (i.e., a unit of discourse or text often seen in cartoons), and the latter related to the visuals themselves. Barthes (1967, 1972, 1977) studied signs in terms of their connotative and denotative meanings, producing a system of signification divided into three aspects (Figure 1): 1. The linguistic message (i.e., text or linguistic component); 2. The non-coded iconic message (i.e., direct or denoted message); and, 3. The coded iconic message (i.e., figurative, connoted message). The linguistic message is simply the linguistic component or text that usually appears in visuals such as images, cartoons, and graphics for the sake of clarification of a given visual form. According to Barthes, "At the level of mass media it is present in every image: as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, and comic strip balloon" (1977, p. 41). The second part of the system of signification is the non-coded iconic message which is the direct or literal message conveyed by a given visual form, with the link between the signifier and signified being direct and literal. According to Barthes, "the role of the denoted image […] is one of naturalising the symbolic message—supporting and contextualising the connoted elements, making them innocent" (1967, quoted in Al-Momani et al., 2017). However, Barthes explains that absolute denotative signs never exist, especially when they are used in a context other than their inherent one, and thus they attain a symbolic meaning. The third part of the system of signification is the coded iconic message which is the symbolic or "connoted message" (Barthes, 1977). Barthes debated whether connotation is something cultural, where its signs can be "gestures, attitudes, expressions, colours or effects, endowed with certain meanings by the practice of a certain society: the link between signifier and signified remains" (p. 27). Every image can connote various messages or meanings from which a viewer chooses a meaning from among multiple meanings as suited to their knowledge. This means that others may derive other meanings in other contexts.

Accordingly, the connoted message is constructed by both the image maker and its viewer, making the task of analysing such connotations difficult (Barthes, 1977). As such, Barthes (1967, 1977) proposed that both types of signs (i.e., the linguistic and visual) can be deciphered to comprehend what is transferred in media images. Semiotics is the leading manner of analysing cartoons; thus, many researchers have used the above-mentioned framework (cf. Al-Momani et al., 2017; Hameed & Afzal, 2021).
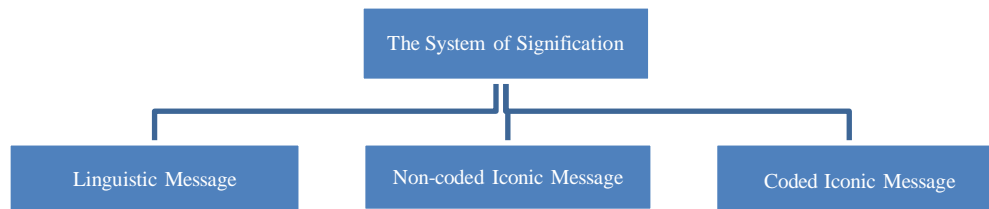
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│ Linguistic Message │  │ Non-coded Iconic Message │  │ Coded Iconic Message │
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Figure 1. The System of Signification Aspects

B. Cartoons

As a visual means of communication in which information and messages are conveyed, often without words, cartoons are important for readers as they directly facilitate the task of understanding. According to Mateus (2016), cartoons are a source of laughter and amusement. However, they differ from comics as "in cartoons, an action, a situation, or a person are caricatured or symbolized in a satirical way, whereas comics are more originated towards stories, and the drawings often resemble reality" (Samson & Huber, 2001, p.1). Cartoons often highlight trending topics, either social or political, through analogy and caricature. To determine the intended message of a cartoon, viewers should have a good knowledge of the topic portrayed in that cartoon. In this regard, Onakpa (2014) states that cartoons from a given period help us to remember the events associated with that period.

As mentioned in the introduction, cartoons are not drawn merely for fun and can potentially represent social and political phenomena, with ideological and social intents playing an important role in their guidance (Al-Momani et al., 2017). According to Lewis et al., cartoons "can either draw people together or push them apart" (2008, p. 12). As such, they can be positive in some contexts and negative in others. A positive side of cartoons is their function in alerting viewers to violations or rule breaking, thus making the viewer conscious of a current context or situation as represented via an analogy. Attracting the viewer's attention to such violations could have a mobilising impact, which might initiate significant changes in the social or political scene, particularly if such cartoons are published at the time of the violation (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 21). Although political cartoons can be positive for the cartoonist and their community, a negative role of cartoons appears when they are offensive and harmful to out-groups in a society, as they are originally intended to criticise and mock (Tsakona & Popa, 2011, p. 5).

Cartoons as notable means of conveying messages via media have long been the concern of researchers (e.g., Lawate, 2012; Onakpa, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Hussain & Benqian, 2016; Mateus, 2016; Al-Momani et al., 2017; Adetol & Abioye, 2020; Hameed & Afzal, 2021). However, the present study uses a semiotic approach to analysis and concentrates on cartoons representing the Russia-Ukraine political conflict.

C. Previous Studies on Cartoons

Few studies on political cartoons can be found in the literature, especially in the Arab world. However, in these semiotic studies, the cartoons are considered visual forms that convey messages and meanings and are a one-way manner of communication. Among the prominent studies on this topic, we can cite Al-Momani et al. (2017), who analysed political cartoons related to the parliamentary elections in Jordan in 2007, 2010, and 2013, following Barthes' framework. This suggests that cartoons are an important means of communication which, although silent, still convey direct and powerful messages. Such means need to be examined to investigate the relations between different signs and their ideological and social implications. Another study by Tyumbu (2018) examined cartoons and how semiotic signs in these cartoons can be interpreted to clarify their underlying meanings. The study discussed the verbal and non-verbal signs that can carry intended messages, suggesting that cartoons are fundamental means of communication.

Two recent studies by Mohamed (2020) and Hasanah and Hidayat (2020) analysed political cartoons in two contexts via different semiotic frameworks. Mohamed (2020) analysed presidential election-related caricatures in 2018 in Egypt, identifying the main ideas and themes in addition to the symbols and signs used in these caricatures. It was purported that caricatures carry brilliant and powerful messages via signs, visual expressions, and gestures in images, communicated without verbal language. Hasanah and Hidayat (2020) analysed cartoons portraying Jakarta's governor

in his first period of office. The study used Pierce's categorisation to classify signs into icons, symbols, and indexes. The author argued that the Indonesians' ambitions for the new government were transferred via cartoons.

Several studies have analysed political cartoons in the Arab world (Ahmad, 2007; Najjar, 2007; Qassim, 2007; Ibrahim, 2014; Al Kayed et al., 2015). Najjar (2007) and Qassim (2007) investigated cartoons that tackle political conflict, considering them significant social artefacts which help communities formulate their identities and sense of self. It is worth mentioning that these works analysed humour in cartoons following a pragmatic framework based on Grice's conversational maxims, namely, manner, relation, quantity, and quality. Other previous studies (for example, Shehata, 1992; Kanaana, 1995; Kishtainy, 1985; Fathi, 1991; Badarneh, 2011; Sherbiny, 2005) have argued that political humour is a means of criticising government policies and politicians in repressive contexts, where locals are not free to express their views and attitudes. Some studies have analysed cartoons that are not political but related to the messages and themes conveyed by cartoons related to Covid-19 (Hussein & Aljamili, 2020; Sattar et al., 2020; Robingah, 2020; Flexer, 2020; Alkhresheh, 2020; Martikainen & Sakki, 2021; Leone, 2021; Hameed & Afzal, 2021).

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the present study adopts Barthes' semiotic approach (1967, 1977) based on the concepts of denotation and connotation, and divides the system of signification into the linguistic message (i.e., text), non-coded iconic message (i.e., denoted), and coded iconic message (i.e., connoted) for the analysis of the sample cartoons.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

A qualitative analysis was undertaken of 68 Russia-Ukraine war-related cartoons posted to two Facebook accounts from January to September, 2022 from the Jordanian political cartoonists Emad Hajjaj and Osama Hajjaj; 48 cartoons were collected from the Emad Hajjaj account and 20 from the Osama Hajjaj. It is worth mentioning that their works are used in some mainstream media sources, but in this research the internet was used to access the intended accounts. Permission was obtained from the two cartoonists to include their cartoons in the current study.

B. Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed in two stages. In the first, the authors classified the 68 sample cartoons according to their most notable themes, of which eight were identified: negotiation, alliance, economic consequences (food and energy crisis), the Russia-Ukraine war and Covid-19, the refugee crisis, Putin vs. peace, nuclear war, and the mocking of Putin's policies. The distribution of the cartoons according to their themes is shown in Table 1. In the second stage, a semiotic and thematic analysis was conducted of eight selected cartoons. The researchers unanimously agreed to analyse one cartoon (selected randomly) as a representative of each theme to avoid duplication and similarity, and because of space constraints. The selected cartoons were analysed using Barthes' model (1967, 1977) in three parts (i.e., the system of signification aspects): the linguistic message, the denoted message, and the connoted message (cf., Al-Momani et al., 2017; Eka Pratiwi & Sulatra, 2020; Hameed & Afzal, 2021; Trisnayanti et al., 2021). The linguistic message is simply the text or caption that appears in the cartoon for clarification. The denoted message (i.e., the non-coded iconic message) is the direct or literal message that is conveyed through the cartoon, whereas the connoted message (i.e., coded iconic message) refers to the hidden or symbolic message.

TABLE 1
THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE CARTOON

Theme	Cartoon Frequency	Percentage (%)
Negotiation	7	10.3%
Alliance	14	20.6%
Economic Consequences (Food and Energy Crisis)	15	22%
Russia-Ukraine War and Covid-19	2	3%
Refugee Crisis	3	4.4%
Putin vs. Peace	18	26.5%
Nuclear War	5	7.4%
Mocking Putin's Policies	4	5.8%
Total	68	100%

IV. FINDINGS

This section presents the semiotic analysis of the selected cartoons following Barthes' framework (1967, 1977). Each cartoon was analysed according to the above-mentioned three types of messages associated with three types of signs, namely: the verbal message (i.e., linguistic sign), which presents a description of the text or caption; the non-verbal message (i.e., denoted), where the image itself is described in terms of its non-linguistic features (e.g. physical exaggeration, gestures, colours, graphics, and facial expressions); and, the connoted message (i.e., symbolic) that presents a semiotic interpretation of the internal relationships between the linguistic and non-linguistic signs in a

cartoon, which complement each other to enrich the representation (see Figure 2). The contextual background of all the selected cartoons was related to the Russia-Ukraine war.
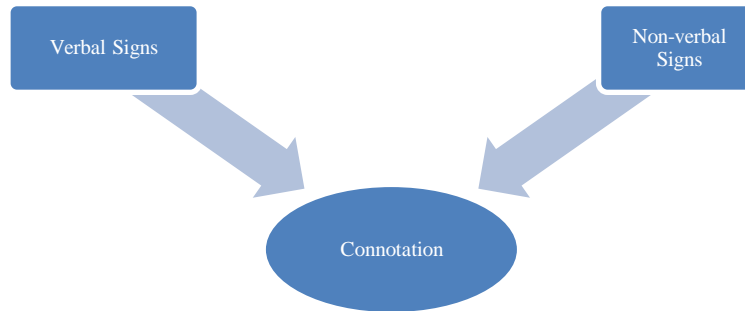

Figure 2. How The System of Signification Aspects Complement Each Other

A. Negotiation

Figure 3. https://www.facebook.com/photo/?Fbid=495737238582266&set=a.204225337733459 (copyright consent obtained)

(a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): The caption represented in Figure 3 reads as follows: 'The drums of war are beating and Putin is negotiating!!'

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): Putin sits at an oval bipolar table with several negotiators and a bright white tablecloth hides Putin as he sits confidently on top of a tank with negotiation papers in front of him. On the other side of the table, there are four negotiators representing the European Union, sitting with their negotiating papers in front of them. The negotiators have bulging eyes and direct apprehensive looks towards Putin.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): The symbolic message in this cartoon can be interpreted through the sum of the accompanying caption and literal image. The caption says 'The drums of war are beating and Putin is negotiating!!' indicates that the time for negotiations is past and the war has become an inevitable reality for Putin. This is evident through the symbolism of Putin sitting confidently on the tank under cover of the negotiating table, and this is a clear indication that Putin has already decided to go to war despite sitting at the negotiating table. The bright white of the tablecloth symbolises that what appears is different from what goes on under the table (i.e., Putin is hiding his intentions under the cover of innocence). On the other side of the table, the expressions of the negotiators show alternatively their fear of Putin's intentions, what they have just read, or perhaps surprise at what they are hearing from Putin. The presence of Putin at one end of the table in a caricature that appears larger than the four negotiators at the other end has implications related to Russia's geographical location and size relative to other European countries. The negotiators and Putin sit at the opposing poles of the table, potentially symbolising that East and West cannot and will not meet.

B. Alliance

Figure 4. https://www.facebook.com/photo/?Fbid=492567448899245&set=a.204225337733459 (copyright consent obtained)

(a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): The caption in Figure 4 says: 'Russia and China!!'

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): Figure 4 depicts a huge grey bear standing on the globe with a golden dragon draped over its shoulders; they gaze at each other with looks of admiration. The bear also appears to be wearing a traditional Russian fur hat with the flag of Russia upon it.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): The verbal caption that appears in the cartoon is 'Russia and China!!', clarifying that the two creatures depicted in the cartoon symbolise Russia and China. It is known that the bear wearing such a hat is a symbol of Russia, whereas the dragon is a traditional symbol of China, proving that the cartoons are both context and culture-based texts, as suggested by Al-Momani et al. (2017, p. 77). The appearance of the dragon wrapped around the shoulders of the bear symbolises the strong alliance between the two countries. Furthermore, their admiring gazes symbolise the extent of their compatibility or perhaps that their alliance is a pragmatic one, at least from a Chinese perspective, as indicated by the dragon's somewhat predatory stare at the naive and reckless bear. Another aspect that appears clearly through this cartoon is the relatively huge size of the bear and dragon as they stand on the globe, symbolising the strength of their alliance given the economic and military power that each possesses. The symbolism also indicates their countries' huge geographical areas, and is perhaps a reference to the aspirations of this alliance to dominate the world.

C. Economic Consequences (Food and Energy Crisis)

Figure 5. https://www.facebook.com/abumahjoobnews/photos/a.499011796804397/5478964238809103 (copyright consent obtained)

(a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): The caption in the cartoon in Figure 5 appears on the fuel filling machine, and reads: 'Fuel prices'.

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): This cartoon depicts Putin, bare-chested and sitting atop a fuel pump that also looks like a military tank with a cannon and guns pointed forward, while Putin himself watches something through military binoculars. The fuel pump's counters appear to be spinning fast and the pump's nozzle is hung at the back. Smoke can be seen rising from the cannon, showing that it is in use.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): The caption 'fuel prices' beside the spinning counters of the fuel pump explains that the movement of the counters indicates a rapid increase in fuel prices. The depiction of Putin sitting on top of a fuel pump resembling a tank with guns pointed forward symbolises the impact of the war on global fuel prices, as fuel prices have been steadily rising since Putin launched the war on Ukraine. The binoculars symbolise Putin's keen eye on the world situation and his reactions, as well as the point of time in the conflict after he had begun it. The fuel nozzle hanging at the back symbolises Putin's control of a huge stock of energy, enabling him to exercise some control over global prices.

D. The Russia-Ukraine War and COVID-19

Figure 6. https://www.facebook.com/photo/?Fbid=512873186868671&set=a.204225337733459 (copyright consent obtained)

(a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): Figure 6 presents multiple linguistic messages: 'Russia-Ukraine war' is written on a poster above a cinema ticket office; 'Corona' is written on a poster above another cinema ticket office; 'Theatre' can be seen above the cinema entrance door; and, 'Tickets' is affixed to the windows of the two ticket counters.

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): This cartoon depicts two cinema ticket counters with a film poster above the first window. In it, a huge predatory bear, wearing a Russian fur hat with the Russian flag, sticks its fangs into a map of Ukraine depicted in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. On the other side of the poster, Putin stands bare-chested and behind him there is a cluster of nuclear warheads. The caption 'Russia-Ukraine war' is written between the bear and Putin as the title of the film, and the word 'tickets' appears on the ticket counter. Another film poster appears above the second ticket counter, this time showing a purple coronavirus with an angry human face and green background and the caption 'Corona' written as the film's title. The cartoon depicts the ticket seller busy with a long queue of people wanting to buy tickets for the 'Russia-Ukraine war' film, while the other seller has fallen into a deep slumber as no one is standing at his counter. A couple can be seen heading to some double doors, above which is the caption 'theatre'.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): The combination of linguistic and visual signs in this cartoon connotes the people's lack of interest in the Covid-19 pandemic and its news, as their focus is on the news of the Russia-Ukraine war. This is represented by the visual sign of the crowded queue in front of the 'Russia-Ukraine war' film, which appears to be a new action/suspense film according to its poster; in contrast, there is no one in front of the ticket counter for the 'Corona' film, and this has made the depicted employee fall asleep. This interpretation can be associated with the actual context in terms of the beginning of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 coinciding with the end of the pandemic. The beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war played a pivotal role in accelerating the distraction of global attention from the developments of the pandemic. Thus, cartoons are context-dependent entities. From another perspective, this cartoon may connote that the world is a stage where all are performers. The pandemic was the first performance, after which the Ukraine-Russia war has become the new bestseller. Moreover, the public is just consuming news, ideas and mindsets, all of which are fake and performed.

E. Refugee Crisis

Figure 7. https://www.facebook.com/abumahjoobnews/photos/a.499011796804397/5165046493534214 (copyright consent obtained)

(a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): Three verbal captions appear in Figure 7. The uppermost caption is the title, 'Europe and the refugees fleeing from Ukraine'. On the right barrier, the caption reads 'Refugees who are welcome', while on the left there is the caption 'Refugees who are not welcome'.

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): This cartoon denotes a border checkpoint which has two crossings in the same direction, each with a barrier. Between the two crossings, a police officer's shadow appears through the window of a small building with the European Union flag flying above. The open crossing barrier on the right depicts

colour grades between white and pink, while the seemingly closed left barrier has colour grades between pale brown and black.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): This cartoon sheds light on the refugee crisis in Europe. Since the first military attack on Ukrainian cities by the Russian army at the beginning of 2022, waves of refugees began to move towards the European Union. Before these events, European Union countries were (and are) dealing with large numbers of forcibly displaced people due to war or poverty in several third-world countries, such as those in the Middle East and Africa. In this context, the cartoon depicts an EU border crossing (indicated by the drawn EU flag) where two checkpoints are shown. One welcomes white immigrants (i.e., Ukrainians) in the caption 'Immigrants who are Welcome' on an open checkpoint that has light colours shades, while the other has gradations of dark colours with the caption, 'Immigrants who are not welcome', symbolising immigrants from other races and countries, such as the Middle East and Africa. This combination of linguistic and visual signs connotes criticism of the segregation policies of the EU in dealing with immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, by preventing them from entering their lands to obtain asylum. This is compared to their welcoming behaviour toward the Ukrainian immigrants.

F. Putin vs. Peace

Figure 8. https://www.facebook.com/abumahjoobnews/photos/a.499011796804397/5192591924113004 (copyright consent obtained)

(a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): The single caption in Figure 6 is 'UKRAINE', written in large and scattered English letters on the walls of destroyed buildings.

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): The cartoon portrays a black and white image of a destroyed area in a Ukrainian city showing the effects of destruction and rising smoke left by missiles and bombs falling from the sky; the attacks of warplanes are thus depicted. A group of people appear in the background. In the middle of this destruction, an image of Putin is portrayed with his usual true features.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): The sum of the single verbal sign 'UKRAINE' and the visual signs mentioned above connote the destruction in Ukrainian cities as a result of military attacks. Visual symbols, such as destroyed buildings, smoke, bombs falling from the sky, a warplane, and people fleeing from destruction, were added to reflect the situation in Ukrainian cities during the Russian military operation launched by Putin. Putin's face in the middle of the wreckage symbolises how his policies and military aspirations are the cause of all around him and the turning of peace into war. The symbolism of the colours used in the cartoon, especially the intensive use of black, plays an important role in conveying the misery and sadness of the situation. The image of a desolate area, with Putin's solitary head in the centre, may symbolise his actual situation following his decision to invade Ukraine.
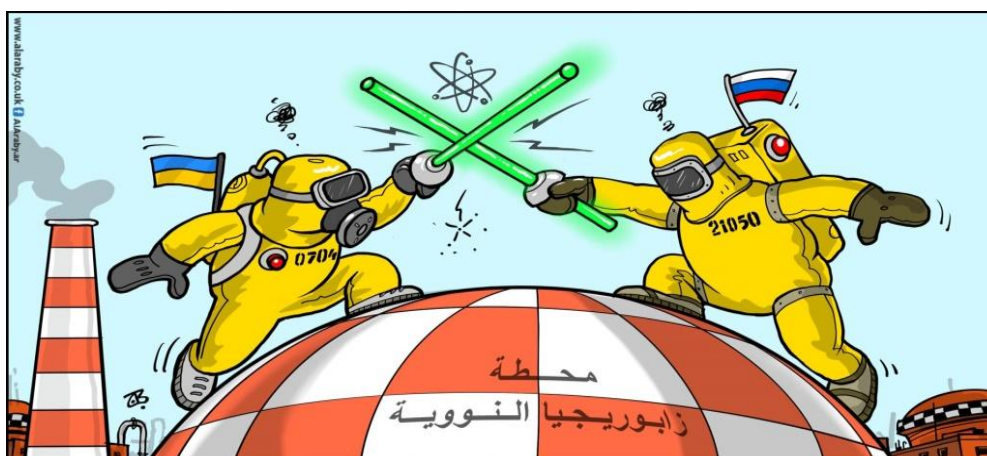
G. Nuclear War

Figure 9. https://www.facebook.com/abumahjoobnews/photos/a.499011796804397/5662016407170551 (copyright consent obtained)

a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): The verbal sign identified in Figure 9 is the 'Zaporizhia nuclear power plant', according to the caption on the dome.

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): The major non-verbal signs in this cartoon are two men standing on the dome of a nuclear reactor. They are wearing full protective suits and are fighting each other with luminous swords resembling Star Wars' light sabres. The man on the right has the flag of Russia on his back and the man on the left has the flag of Ukraine. They both have a big red button on their protective suits.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): All the visual elements used in this cartoon communicate the intended theme: nuclear war and the global fear of a nuclear war or nuclear contamination due to the bombing of the areas surrounding the nuclear power plant in Zaporizhia. The two men in protective suits represent the Russian and Ukrainian forces respectively attacking and defending the Zaporizhia nuclear power plant, around which the military conflict between the two sides is happening. The linguistic sign 'Zaporizhia nuclear power plant' written on the dome, which looks like the dome of a nuclear reactor, is employed to delineate the intended reactor in this cartoon. The use of protective suits indicates the seriousness of the situation in the event of any nuclear contamination due to the bombing near the station. The red buttons on the men's clothing indicate that both sides possess nuclear weapons, and a hasty decision by either could lead to a nuclear war whose effects would be globally devastating.
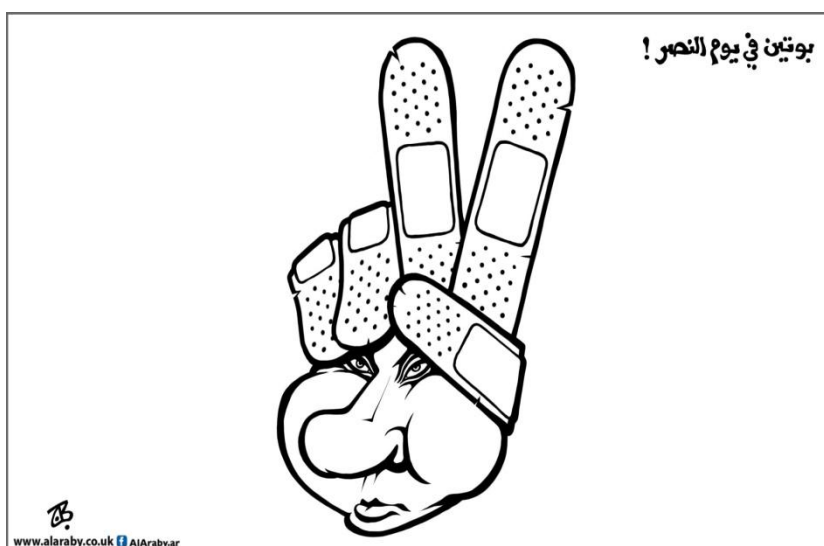
H. Mocking Putin's Policies

Figure 10. https://www.facebook.com/abumahjoobnews/photos/a.499011796804397/5349397331765795 (copyright consent obtained)

a) The Verbal Message (Linguistic Signs): In Figure 10, a single linguistic sign appears in the title: 'Putin on Victory Day!'

(b) The Non-Verbal Message (Denoted Signs): This cartoon is comprised of the single visual sign of Putin's face caricatured with plasters on his head shaped into a victory sign.

(c) The Symbolic Message (Connotation): This cartoon was posted on on 9 May, the same day as Russia annually celebrates victory in World War II. A combination of verbal and visual signs is employed to mock Putin's policies. The cartoon connotes the situation in Russia on victory day, several months after the beginning of the war with Ukraine and after suffering many losses of personnel and military equipment. This is represented by the plasters on Putin's head, as he is used to symbolise Russia. The use of the plasters may also symbolise that he is paying the price for his reckless policies.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the sociopolitical contexts related to the Russia-Ukraine war by conducting a semiotic analysis of cartoons posted on the official Facebook accounts of two well-known political Jordanian cartoonists, Emad Hajjaj and Osama Hajjaj. The cartoons were posted during the ongoing war, between January and September, 2022. A semiotic approach i.e., Barthes' model (1967, 1977) was followed in the analysis. Eight cartoons were selected at random for analysis from a total sample of 68 collected and categorised according to their themes. The eight themes found in the data were: negotiation, alliance, economic consequences (the food and energy crisis), the Russia-Ukraine war and Covid-19, the refugee crisis, Putin vs. peace, nuclear war, and the mocking of Putin's policies (see Table 1). A single representative cartoon for each theme was analysed according to three semiological dimensions: the verbal message (i.e., text); the non-verbal message (i.e., denoted visual signs); and, the symbolic message (i.e., connotation). In all the selected cartoons, the verbal signs, as well as the visual signs (e.g., colours, clothes, analogies, gestures, drawings, facial expressions, exaggerations, etc.), were integrated to clarify and interpret the symbolic ones (see Figures

1–2). However, the focus of the analysis was largely on the non-verbal signs (i.e., visual) rather than the verbal, since the latter are clear and direct captions which help the reader identify the contexts and more obscure content. The analysis in the present study is thus mainly qualitative. However, Table 1 presents the distribution of the sampled cartoons, showing the percentages and frequencies of the cartoons according to their themes.

The findings reflect the views and attitudes of the Arab community (Jordanian, in this case) regarding the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The semiotic analysis of the verbo-pictorial signs reveals the conflict according to Arabs, a party that may be considered neutral and outside the conflict; the cartoonists themselves can be seen as representatives of their communities. Notwithstanding this viewpoint, the conflict is a global concern that has left traces all over the world. It is expected that this study will be a valuable addition to the existing literature in the fields of semiotics, multimodality, and discourse analysis, as it provides novel insights into these fields through the analysis of signs in verbo-pictorial entities (i.e., cartoons), demonstrating how verbal and visual signs can work in synergy to connote powerful meanings and messages. Thus, cartoons are not mere drawings for fun, as they can effectively represent the realities of a given novel context.

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