

## The Representation of Visual Language in Non-Verbal Communication: The Case of Arab Spring Political Cartoons

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### ABSTRACT

*Political cartoons constitute a specific genre of visual images. They are pictorial representations or attitudes with different cartoon elements which depict political and social issues, and events of a country, an institution or a party (Sani, Abdullah & Ali, 2014). Visual language as non-verbal communication may or may not be supported by a verbal text (Peñamarin, 1998). This paper sheds light on the themes of 29 selected Arab political cartoons as a sample that is widely spread during the Arab Spring era and its aftermath (Woźniak, 2014). It also looks to identify the cartoon elements used by the cartoonists and to highlight the use of these elements such as colours, symbol, signs and others that connote different meanings. The study revealed that the visual language of Arab Spring cartoons from 2011 to 2013 reflected some common themes that highlight issues such as the image of democracy, the involvement of interfering countries and powers in the events of the Arab Spring, government authorities, military-people relations, the role of media and social media, an account of the stages of the Arab revolutions and issues of women's image in relation to socio-political change and ethical responsibilities for both the cartoonists and the Arab people. These are represented via visual messages that connote different meanings. It also revealed that the role of non-verbal visual language can be effectively realised and highlighted through the Arab cartoonists' utilisation of the interaction between different signs of the cartoons' elements such as symbolism, metaphor, labelling, irony, analogy and colour to convey certain intended messages.*

*Keywords: Arab Spring, non-verbal communication, political cartoon, representation, visual language.*

## INTRODUCTION

Visual images, according to Apkon (2013) are predominantly spread in our contemporary world. That is to say, we are surrounded by many figures of visual culture, such as photographs, TV programs, advertisements, newspapers layout, paintings and the art of caricature or cartoons. In this vein, Rose (2003) stated that "we now live in a world where knowledge, as well as many forms of entertainment, are visually constructed and where what we see is as important, if not more so, than what we hear or read" (p.1). Apkon (2013) in his book *"The Age of the Image"* noted that images are powerful because of the physiology of our brains that make the act of seeing a constant creative experience. The significance of visual images in political and social domains is on the rise. This is because, in such situations, visual images stir the mentality and highlight different semantic inferences.

Worth and Gross (1981) revealed the significance of visual communication as meaning is communicated via visual images. Over the past two decades of critical work, there has been a shift from the purely verbal linguistic studies to non-verbal visual studies. Such a shift is termed by Mitchell (2002) as "the visual or pictorial turn" (p.170). Being "bombarded with digital images" as Pardieck (2012, p.71) stated, images have started to be dominant resources to embody the dynamic issues of a particular society such as social and political issues. Here, Mitchell (2002) stated, "if visual culture is to mean anything, it has to be generalised... [to] study...all the social practices of human visibility, and not to be confined to modernity or the West" (p.174). Moreover, Hilligoss and Howard (2002) considered some graphic elements that constitute parts of the strategies to read common types of images and graphics in their study. They (2002) suggested that these elements are significant in cartoon visual language interpretation such as the person (who is portrayed), settings, colours, symbols and signs.

## VISUAL LANGUAGE AND ARAB SPRING POLITICAL CARTOONS

Language in its verbal or non-verbal mode is the basic means that enables communication via reflecting and constructing reality (Finch, 2000). According to Pettersson (2000, cited in Eilam, 2012), visual language was used as an early form of communication in the primary societies and by illiterate people. Visual data is interpreted as "an active thinking process" of visual perception that also employs the spectator knowledge and expectations (Hilligoss and Howard, 2002, p.7). Furthermore, according to Hall (1997), people live in a represented world via signifying things and applying meaning to those things through signs in a representation process. Thus, Hall (1997) defined representation as "using language to say something meaningfully about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people." (p. 18).

Cartoons in general as Cohn, Taylor-Weiner, & Grossman (2012) maintained, is a universal means of communication and expression that employ representation of cultural symbolism. The visual language of cartoons in general and political cartoons, in particular, provides the spectator with an opportunity to interpret it from different perspectives as it communicates meanings succinctly and with a quick impact. Visual language also involves raising sympathy or indignation towards the represented issue in certain cartoon images. It does so through a world of signs people

live in along with the world of reality that enables us to know the 'real' world through those signs. Thus, this world is a represented one via signifying things and applying meaning to those things.

The technology of the Internet has increased the importance of reading and understanding visuals and electronic contents due to their essential reliance on the visual language mode. Alhindi, Talha, & Sulong (2012) realised that "these technologies have a great impact worldwide, upsetting both developed and developing countries". Moreover, it is reasonable to suggest that the dominant visual language is now controlled by the global cultural or technological empires of the mass media. Furthermore, Alhindi, Talha, & Sulong (2012) acknowledged the visual mode of the internet and social media as "developing the national identity of any country, especially in the Arab world... [as]...a media revolution is contributing to the presence of a reawakened regional Arab awareness" (p.102). Pardieck (2012) stated, "visuals are used for communication purposes...visual language is connected to verbal language for interpretation, decoding, and reading images and symbols" (p.28). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) affirmed that visual language is not only universal and transparent, but it is also culturally specific. They indicated "language and visual communication both realise the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but [...] each does so by means of its own specific forms" (p.19).

For instance, the wide turning to social networking sites in different Arab countries to express the rage of mounting frustration among the Arab youths due to unemployment resulted in series of uprisings- also known as 'Arab Spring'. These series that began in Tunisia when the street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire on 17th December 2010 which later led to igniting the Arab Spring (Campante & Chor, 2012). Political cartoons as an effective visual mode of expression were greatly exploited by artists and social media to highlight the new mode of thinking of some Arab countries and elsewhere as a whole translated in different messages of freedom, dignity, democracy, and Arab human rights. Thus, a great part of different Arab and global issues have been widely revealed and dealt out via utilising the role of the visual mode of expression of the political cartoons, because the visual language of political cartoons indirectly reflects its effect on its consumers' attitudes and thoughts (Diamond, 2002). Therefore, this era of the Arab Spring is considered as "a 'Golden Age' for political cartoonists" (Woźniak, 2014, p.14). Moreover, according to Al-Momani, Badarneh, & Migdadi (2016), Arab cartoons generated a sense of humour that conveys serious messages to highlight the social and ideological implications of the role of different cartoons. Furthermore, Arab Spring cartoons played a crucial role in depicting and documenting the revolutions as they "were the first signs of the Arab Spring". Cartoons were drawn in the streets of Tunisia and Egypt when the revolutions were in their first days and made clear that the people were not scared anymore and that if they control the media they can't control the streets." (Al Baih, 2016). While a lot of academic attention has been paid to the beginnings and reasons of the Arab Spring revolutions, the themes of the political cartoons and the elements used to express these themes of Arab Spring has not been thoroughly investigated. Therefore this study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the themes of the political cartoons of Arab Spring era (2011-2013)?
2. What are the elements of the cartoons used by the Arab cartoonists of the Arab Spring era?
3. How do Arab cartoonists use these elements (such as colours, symbol, signs, etc.) in their drawings?

## ELEMENTS OF CARTOONS

According to DeSousa and Medhurst (1982), elements of cartoons are "means of graphic persuasion" (p.197). Cartoon elements play a role in the production and interpretation of a cartoon image so as to convey a persuasive message of a political or social issue. Accordingly, these elements constitute part of the "formal principles utilised by graphic artists in the construction of their persuasive invitation to their reader" (DeSousa and Medhurst, 1982, p. 198). The role of non-verbal visual language is highlighted through the Arab cartoonists' utilisation of the interaction between the different signs of the cartoons' visual elements. These elements (also known as cartoonists' persuasive techniques) are **metaphor, symbolism, exaggeration, labelling, analogy and irony**.

A metaphor is a property of thought and concepts (Lakoff and Johnson's, 2003). According to El Refaie (2003), besides the verbal mode, a metaphor is also represented in the non-verbal mode. In the visual language of a political cartoon, a metaphor is related to the concepts behind a cartoon message or to its intended meaning. Cartoonists use visual metaphor to express an idea, a concept or an opinion in a certain message of one thing in terms of another thing, to be used as a commonly used weapon by a political cartoonist (DeSousa and Medhurst, 1982). As for symbolism, it is simple objects or symbols used by the cartoonists to stand for larger concepts or ideas. Lester (2003) explained the meaning of visual symbolism in terms of using the symbols such as a flag to express and communicate different thoughts and ideas such as the idea related to patriotic symbolism. Exaggeration is the overdoing or exaggerated physical characteristics of people or things a cartoonist uses in order to reveal the essence of a person by emphasising particular aspects that visually identifies the target individual. This exaggeration or distortion of certain features of the cartoon characters is commonly known as a caricature (El Refaie, 2009). Political cartoons invest this element and/or device to capture new ideas or to make a point. As for labelling, it is the words or abbreviations that inform what an item in a picture is supposed to represent. Cartoonists often label objects or people to show what they stand for or symbolise (Jensen, 2002). As for analogy, it is a comparison between two different things that share some characteristics. Thus, cartoonists can help their readers see their cartoon images in a different light via making a comparison of a complex issue or situation against a more familiar one. As for irony, which is also called sarcasm, it is the difference between the ways things are and the way things should be or the way things are expected to be (Fetsko, 2001). It is commonly used to expose and criticize incompetence or vices in a political cartoon, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other relevant issues.

## OBJECTIVES

Three objectives have been identified, which are:

1. to look at the themes of the political cartoons of Arab Spring era (2011-2013),
2. to identify the elements of cartoons used by the Arab cartoonist of Arab Spring era, and
3. to highlight the use of these elements (such as colours, symbol, signs, etc.) by the Arab cartoonists of this era.

## METHOD

This study focuses on the visual language and graphic representation of the Arab Spring (2011-2013) when demonstrations mounted in Egypt in Tahrir Square in the capital Cairo, the most important symbol of the popular uprising. It created a manifestation of many cartoon images with different messages (Woźniak, 2014). This era (2011-2013) represents wide, fast and radical changes in the political and social phases of the Arab region (Dalacoura, 2012). The method of this study is based on providing procedures for data collection and data analysis as presented in the following sub-sections:

### PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTION

The researchers established the data of this study on a firm and substantiated platform of political cartoons selected from different cartoons posted on Arab websites. We identified the most common themes of a body of 29 images which were drawn by different Arab cartoonists. Then these images were classified into six groups based on common and related themes or topics. These groups of cartoon images are mostly featured and based on certain criteria. The criteria according to Ma (2008) is created to meet the objectives and to fit the purpose of the conducted study. Accordingly, this study built its criteria as a response to the above-mentioned vision and requirements. Therefore, certain criteria such as the selected cartoons are to be with minimal verbal text or textless, the verbal mode represented by the use of talk bubbles or speech balloons is not used by the cartoonists. However, captions, words or their abbreviations that label certain parts of the cartoon images are employed. These cartoons have been widely posted on cartoon websites, online journals, and social networks such as [en.ammonnews.net](http://en.ammonnews.net), [black-iris.com](http://black-iris.com), and other online journals such as [assawsana.com](http://assawsana.com), [Asharq al-awsat](http://Asharq-al-awsat), [Albayan](http://Albayan) and a few others. The researchers considered selected samples of the cartoon drawings of a group of Arab cartoonists to be the data of the current study.

### PROCEDURES OF DATA ANALYSIS

The selected 29 cartoon images were classified into six cartoon groups as listed in the following section. The classification is based on finding common implied themes and meanings. This is achieved via analysing the meaning of the content of the cartoon within each distinct cartoon image.

## DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse the selected cartoon images' intended meanings and defining their respective themes, the researchers employed Barthes' (1977) visual semiotic concepts of the denotative and connotative meanings of each image topic. Barthes (1977) stated that caricatures provide either overt or covert conceptual information. Self-portraits, political cartoons or caricatures are recommended to be studied semiotically to understand various semantic references and implications (Barthes, 1977). Consequently, this study focuses on the visual language in the Arab Spring political cartoons as

reflected via the content analysis of the meaning of each cartoon image separately. The following table sums up the classified groups of the study's data according to the identified themes:

Group No.	Cartoons		The cartoonist	Date	Elements	Themes
	No.	Title				
One	1	Democracy	Mohammad Sabaaneh	04/01/2011	Symbol	Democracy Image
	2	الديمقراطية: Democracy	Amjad Rasmi	22/07/2013	Irony, metaphor and labelling	
	3	The Arab	Amer Al-Zoubi	08/07/2013	Metaphor and labelling	
	4	Killing democracy	Mohamed Sabra	26/11/2011	Metaphor and labelling	
	5	Re-revolution	Sherif Arafa	02/06/2012	Symbol and analogy	
Two	6	Iran-Turkey	Hassan Bleibel	2011	Metaphor and symbol	The involvement of other countries and powers in the Arab Spring
	7	Arab Spring	Emad Hajjaj	2011	Metaphor and color	
	8	مسار الثورات العربية : The pathway of Arab revolutions	Amjad Rasmi	30/06/2011	Labeling and symbols	
	9	Libya Oil	Nedal Hashem	04/03/2011	Symbols and colour	
	10	France-Turkey-Libya	Hassan Bleibel	20/04/2011	Labelling, colour and symbol	
Three	11	Reform	Amjad Rasmi	19/02/2011	Irony, symbol and metaphor	Authorities/military-people relations
	12	Arab Spring Bowling	Osama Hajjaj	01/09/2011	Analogy, Exaggeration and label	
	13	Dictatorship	Sherif Arafa	19/01/2011	Symbol and analogy	
	14	The Dictator and the People	Youcef Bechkit	25/05/2012	Label, symbol and analogy	
	15	Arab Street	Amjad Rasmi	12/02/2011	Analogy colours and labels.	
Four	16	The new Revolutionary Weapons	Emad Hajjaj	27/01/2011	Symbol, colours and metaphor	The dual role of media and social media
	17	Official Media	Amjad Rasmi	29/03/2011	Analogy, symbol and label	
	18	الاعلام الرسمي: Official media	Esam Ahmed	2013	Symbol, metaphor and label	
	19	A Dictator's Worst Fear	Sherif Arafa	07/02/2011	Symbol and label	
Five	20	The Start of the Revolution	Hicham Oumames	30/05/2012	Symbol and colour	Stages of the Arab revolutions
	21	ويستمر الربيع...: the Spring is continued	Emad Hajjaj	2011	Symbol and analogy	
	22	Stages of the Arab Revolution	Khalid Albaih	16/04/2011	Exaggeration and label	
	23	The death of...	Amjad Rasmi	17/06/2012	Symbol and analogy	
	24	ثورة 25 يناير : January 25th Revolution	Omayya Joha	2013	Symbol, label and analogy	
	25	Arab spring and extremism	Emad Hajjaj	09/10/2013	Symbol and label	
Six	26	Women Equality	Doaa Eladl	29/03/2013	Symbol	Women's issues and consequences of the Arab Spring 2011-2013
	27	The Voice of Egyptian Women	Doaa Eladl	21/01/2013	Symbol and metaphor	
	28	Constitution for all	Doaa Eladl	/2012	Symbol and analogy	

	Egyptians				
29	Controlling Women	Rasha Mahdi	27/09/2011	Symbol and metaphor	

TABLE 1. Data of the study

GROUP ONE: DEMOCRACY IMAGE

Thoughts of democracy orientation have dominantly thrived via social media. Democracy is the basic demands of the protesters during the time of Arab revolutions (2011-2013) (Moussa, 2013). Hence, the democracy theme commonly represented in the Arab cartoonists' drawings by reflecting the way it is understood and the way it is practised in the Arab countries. It is presented in Mohammad Sabaaneh's cartoon as a first site or strip of this cartoon where a person who is depicted to symbolize an authoritarian, a president or a party leader, is addressing his people where only one of the people is not conformist enough. Hence, such a person is a threat as he committed the fault of being different and thus he must perish; therefore, the symbol of the blood spot replacing him in the second site or strip of the same cartoon. Thus, the integrated signs of the different used symbols (the colour of blood, the exaggerated facial expression and hand movement of the personalities) are effective in representing the visual language. This language is employed by the cartoonist to connotatively expose the misunderstood democracy as it merely represents a hollow phrase. The cartoon connotes negative meanings such as the wrong choice made when offering such democracy with the wrong notion and wrong practice.

Another cartoon image by the cartoonist Amajid Rasmi connotes the process of implementation of democracy in the Middle East as useless by denotatively presenting a hair comp labelled as الديمقراطية: Democracy, to a bald person labelled as الشرق الاوسط: the Middle East. The cartoonist Rasmi also employed three active elements in this panel (irony, metaphor and labelling). Likewise, Amer Al-zubi employed the metaphor element to denotatively offer a matchbox labelled democracy to an infant baby that symbolizes the Arab making use of a second label on the baby hand. The denotative signs Al-Zubi depicted through metaphor and labels employment connotes a negative sense of the fear of wrong practice of democracy in Arab countries.

Mohamed Sabra's cartoon depicted denotatively a process of shooting a ballot slip metaphorically causing bleeding before inserting into the ballot box slot to convey the intended message about the Elections in Egypt then. It is connoted through the utilization of the integrated signs relations of the main elements such as the visual symbols that are the Egyptian flag, the ballot box, the ballot slip, the gunshot; the label Elections; the metaphor suggested through the invested cartoon symbols; and the title Killing Democracy which emphasizes the intended theme. Moreover, some cartoonists such as Sherif Arafa depicted a perspective on the outcome of the presidential elections of 2011 in Egypt. He utilized the use of a symbol of two statues attached to the wheel machine denotatively used in order to change the direction of the transmitted motion. Connotatively, it is acting analogically as a recycling symbol of the first action or movement to indicate the fear of electing figures who represent some of the public, a return to the one-party power as of former President Mubarak (Chick, 2012). Thus, this cartoon connotes a warning to the public that no change will take place and that the same regime preceding the revolutionary elections will be in power again with different faces.

Thus, the Arab Spring political cartoons reflect the dark passive democracy image and the disappointment resulting from such democracy as in Egypt. Noticeably, the choice of employing the metaphor element, in El Refaie's (2003) words "as visual expressions of metaphorical thoughts or

concepts" (p.78), is ubiquitous among the group of Arab cartoonist's products. The cartoons of Arab Spring 2011- 2013 also reflected the intentional sense of ethical responsibilities for both the cartoonist and Arab people, rather than being funny or humorous. This is because the Arab public fears and worries are much more intense than the happiness of their newly born democracy due to the unsettled political situation of the Arab region in general (Chick, 2012). Thus, all the selected cartoons of **Group One** highlight the theme of Democracy Image issues and problems.

#### GROUP TWO: THE NEGATIVE INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER COUNTRIES AND POWERS IN THE ARAB SPRING

Countries and powers from different parts of the world played an interfering directive role in the Arab Spring events. For instance, Hamid (2014) stated that "For better and worse, international actors influenced the first phase of the Arab Spring and, in several countries, defined it; in Libya, Yemen, and Syria, Western and regional powers in the Gulf played significant, even decisive roles" (p. 213). For instance, the cartoonist Hassan Bleibel utilized the element of symbols of different things in his cartoon drawing. For example, the use of hats and dress to represent visual signs of persons, things, identities and objects such as scissors represented by the two men with a beard and a mustache to refer to political hypocrisy under the guise of religion to metaphorically project the Iran-Turkey interfering role in the Arab Spring and in the region as well. As these two neighbouring powers, according to Crisis Group institution's (2016) report, are making use of the opportunity of the weak and corrupt general political state of the Arab region to settle their own old conflicts at the expense of the Arabs. The negative value is privileged in this cartoon due to the utilisation of the frontal position of the scissors shaped as if planning for the right time to cut off or make use of the Arab Spring. Denotatively, in Emad Hajjaj's cartoon using labelling to certain objects such as Arab Spring above a speedy moving train on a railway line which is a metaphor of the Arab Spring being changed into three directions by three men symbolises three powers via the investment of cultural costumes and colours. These three powers are America, Iran and Turkey also connotes the role played by these powers in changing the path of the Arab Spring revolutions. Another cartoon by Rasmi denotatively, employs labelling element that clearly stated مسار الثورات العربية: The pathway of Arab revolutions, symbolizes as a confused man who is guided by America and other powers in different ways which connote the state of other countries and powers in meddling and affecting the Arab Spring negatively.

Other cartoonists focused on the reason behind the other powers interfering in different issues of the Arab Spring. Such as Nedal Hashem's cartoon; Libya oil that is basically connoted its meaning through integrated signs of the denotative symbols and the labelled 'Oil barrel' to explain the real reason behind America's interest and attention of the revolutionists in Libya. Similarly, France-Turkey- Libya cartoon by Hassan Bleibel basically highlights the use of symbols of the Libyan flag, oil tower and two men with iconically coloured costumes that represent France and Turkey's real intentions behind their interest in Libya in addition to the caption that emphasises the connoted meaning. These elements employed in the cartoons of **Group Two** represent the involvement of other countries and powers in the Arab Spring as negatively affected the revolutions tracks as perceived by the cartoonists.

#### GROUP THREE: AUTHORITIES AND MILITARY-PEOPLE RELATIONS



The authorities in Rasmi's cartoon are represented as a military ununiformed person trying to extinguish the fire of the Arab revolutions using his cudgel as a symbol of power leaving behind the symbol of reform as the label also confirms this meaning on the extinguisher itself; ironically speaking, they neglect the perfect way to end the protests and revolution's fires. Hence, it is intended to indicate a sense of failure of the previous governments to solve their problems as they are following a way that will lead to burn themselves metaphorically as well. The label and analogy elements also utilized by Osama Hajjaj cartoon to depict how the people toppled down their former dictatorial regimes as he uses an analogy of a Bowling-Ball game in which any fallen pin would cause the other pins to fall. Thus, he labelled each pin with an Arab country name to connote Arab revolutionists toppling down the rulers of these countries who are depicted with exaggerated faces one by one in his cartoon *Arab Spring Bowling*. The way Hajjaj employed his cartoon elements is also metaphorical. Thus, his cartoon message clearly tells the story of the Arab people rejection of their unwanted ex-leaders. This rejection is loudly raised in a visual language of angry and miserable people symbolically shouting in the ears of their deaf leaders in another cartoon drawing by Sherif Arafa, who based his cartoon on the elements of symbolism and analogy. He used the symbols denotatively to depict an analogy that connotes the message of the Arab leader's negligence of their people's voice and rights. While Youcef Bechkit's cartoon depicted dictatorial regimes' negligence of the people's rights who live under poverty, injustice, fake democracy and social alienation which ultimately led this wave of anger in the Arab Spring (Castells, 2011). He denotatively represented this idea via employing visual cartoon elements such as the symbols of different objects, two labels (People and Dictator), and an analogy of people angry with the sea wave. This cartoon connoted part of the people suffering in different Arab countries and revealed the negative image of the people-authority relation as Arab reactionary and dictatorial regimes.

Another denotative symbol used during the Arab Spring is the Arab Street as (Shaybeddine, 2011). It is frequently used in the headlines of different reports and news agencies of the series of street demonstrations organized to reflect the intensive campaign of civil resistance; hence it functions as an icon to represent the Arab revolutions (Taki, 2013). The street is an iconic symbol in Rasmi's cartoon connotes the Arab people's anger during the Arab uprising. Therefore, the cartoonist chose to denotatively depict the Arab street as resurrected humans. The depicted situation in the panel shocks the authorities who expected the death of the Arab street. The interpreted symbols connote authorities fear from the people. **Group Three** interpreted cartoons convey targeted messages that represent Authorities/military-people relations theme through the cartoonist use of the visual cartoon elements of symbol in the first place analogies, colours and labels.

#### GROUP FOUR: THE DUAL ROLE OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The new media provide an opportunity for certain individuals' efforts to play an influential role in recording, narrating, portraying and disseminating Arab Spring events, thoughts, notions and sites of Arab Street and Arab Spring revolutions through their artworks (Najjar, 2012). Emad Hajjaj drew *The new Revolutionary Weapons*. In this cartoon, Hajjaj integrated different cartoons' elements to activate his cartoon's visual language such as colours and the employment of the symbols of Facebook, Twitter and SMS messages. He employed metaphor for the new weapons used by the revolutionists as the caption *Rebels in arms* clearly emphasizes this meaning. Hajjaj's cartoon connotes a positive message about the role of social media supporting the Arab Spring revolutions' success. However, Amjad Rasmi's cartoons *Official Media* in the Arab region depicted the negative

image of the official media when hiding the crimes of the Arab regimes against the protesters. The cartoonist connoted the previous meanings to his cartoon via employing a visual language by using elements of the label الاعلام الرسمي *the official media*. An analogy of the official media represented by the icons of TV and a newspaper with a servant cleaning his master's hand from the blood after shooting the victims as it can be interpreted via the existence of the symbolic sign of a gun. Similarly, another cartoon by Esam Ahmed makes use of the label element written as words الاعلام الرسمي: Official media on the shirt of a character of an Arab artist, as a symbol of the headdress (*the Egal*) which connotes his Arab identity. Thus, the metaphorically depicted Arab artist character in Ahmed's cartoon is drawing a fake and unreal image depicting the relation between the military authority and the people. The military authority is denotatively represented as a military person and the people are denotatively represented by a tortured person under the feet of the military authority. In addition to the denotative symbol of the Arab homeland map, Ahmed also makes use of the colour elements such as the blood, the military uniform and the black map colours to confirm the connoted negative message that tells the corrupt negative role played by the Arab official media. In contrast to the previous cartoons, *A Dictator's Worst Fear* in Sherif Arafa's cartoon reflected a positive value. The denotative cartoon details reflect a drawing of a military ununiformed person with a crown on his head standing horrified up on his chair and a small Twitter bird looking wonderingly. Thus, **Group Four** cartoons succeeded to connote the intended ideas to represent *the dual role of media and social media* theme via the employment of symbols, analogies, colours and labels as elements of the visual language.

#### GROUP FIVE: STAGES OF THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

The initial stage of the Arab Spring or Uprisings started with the Arab Spring symbolic figure 26-year-old Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi, who was the igniter of the uprising in Tunisia, then the spark spread to other Arab countries in the region (Geurts, 2014). Thus, the name Mohamed Bouazizi related to the first stage was employed to depict denotatively a symbolic hand that ignites fireworks connected cartridges and to connote the aforementioned meaning in *The Start of the Revolution* cartoon by Hicham Oumames. The element of symbolism is employed in an identifiable way by Oumames. The flag colour is used to symbolize and identify one of the Arab countries to be the place of the next revolution in this cartoon. The choice of the element reflects an optimistic sense as the selected symbol of fireworks is conventionally associated with forms of happiness, a celebration of victory, success, and joy. Hence, the employment of the elements of cartoon visual language is also supported by the cartoonist's choice to convey the cartoon's intended message. Another cartoon that reflects a similar optimistic positive perspective towards the Arab Spring era by Emad Hajjaj is entitled: ويستمر الربيع...: *The Spring is continued*. The cartoonist made an analogy with a track and field race where the year 2011 symbolized as an Arab Spring young athlete of a relay team who is passing the relay stick to another following member of his team to continue the race. This following member represents the Arab Spring 2012 surrounded by the Arab countries flags that are raised up on flagpoles along the racing track. Different supplementary symbols such as the flowers crowning the top of the relay stick and the mobile phone carried by the runner are integrated to each other to produce the connoted intended message that can be visually read as resuming the Arab Spring. This reading is emphasized by the above-mentioned cartoon caption itself that is framing this cartoon within the Arab Spring initial stages. The Arab Spring stages are seen in a more concise and practical way as three panels exposed major transitional stages of the revolutions starting with

oppression moving to revolution and then to the alleged reforms (Bond, 2011). This meaning is represented through the presence or the absence of the mask on the person's mouth in Khalid Albaih cartoon. It is supported by the exaggerated facial expressions and the raised up, the firm closed hand fist.

Furthermore, the election stage in the Arab Spring countries such as Tunisia and Egypt was heavily portrayed by the Arab cartoonists. Rasmi's cartoon depicted the ballet box symbolically, as a tomb to suggest the death of the revolution represented by the image of a torch with a black mark that is used to be placed at the top of a photo of a dead person. The other stage represents the military stage that started new oppression against the revolutionists symbolized by the symbol of the flower of Arab Spring and symbols of a military boot to stop the revolutions in Omayya Joha's cartoon. She simply employed two objects in her cartoon: a military boot and a flower, to depict the domination of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces on the outcomes of the revolution of January 25 in Egypt (Hamid, 2014). She analogically used the symbol of a flower denotatively crashed under the military boot to connote the corruption involved in the Arab revolution in Egypt as the label ثورة 25 يناير : *January 25th Revolution*, confirms this connotation. Thus, Joha used symbolism through analogy and labelling for persuasive strategies. However, the stage of political turmoil and corruption inflects Arab Spring revolutions in different Arab countries not only in Egypt but also in Libya and Syria as well leading to a civil war in these countries. This is related to the emergence of different extremist groups coincided with Arab Spring events that burned the spring flower in Emad Hajjaj's cartoon's *Arab spring and extremism*. The flower that symbolises the Arab Spring as this connotation supported by the label *Arab Spring* الربيع العربي: on the flower leaf, turned to be the symbol of a terrorist gun. Although the denotative symbols of the dark armed overall suit obviously connote a terrorist image, another label is also written on the terrorist cagoule mask, التطرف: *extremism*, in order to emphasise the identity of the terrorist as such and to identify, confine and focus the use of the symbol itself as a reference to the notion of extremism not to a person or a cartoon character. The cartoonist thus enlightened the audiences that the problem of the current stage of the Arab Spring is a problem of the emergence of the Islamic extremism and its dominance over the original Arab Spring thoughts and demands of freedom and dignity. Arab cartoonists depict their drawings rising from their ethical sense of responsibility to warn their people of the increasing danger of those extremists. Thus, the visual language represented by **Group Five** cartoons' elements succeeded to be equally communicative and historically informative as it narrates an account of the different *stages of the Arab revolutions* theme.

#### GROUP SIX: WOMEN'S ISSUES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE ARAB SPRING 2011-2013

Among the different issues of freedom, democracy, dignity, social equality, and human rights demands at the centre of the Arab Spring dynamics is the issue of Arab women rights (Bayoumy, 2013). According to Coleman (2011), women's image and role represented clearly "From Tunis and Cairo to Riyadh and Sana'a, female protesters have become the iconic image of the Arab revolutions. Their defiance has surprised many in the West who have long viewed Arab women as oppressed victims of conservative patriarchy and religion." (p.197). Doaa Eladl is an example of a female cartoonist and activist in social equality and women's rights as well. She reflected the image of Arab women in her cartoon. She depicted herself as a denotative symbol for the women marching equally to other workmates who are all men. Humorously, she drew the symbol of her hair tangled to the moustaches of the four male workmates. The cartoonist conveyed connotative

messages that highlight the positive values of women's social status significance in the Arab society nowadays provided that they work together and they are mutually productive. Despite the active role that the Arab women played in the Arab Spring, they were disappointed as they anticipated that the uprisings would support their rights in the new political system with fair representation in the elections (Bayoumy, 2013).

Another cartoon by the same cartoonist that focuses on *The Voice of Egyptian Women's* issue entirely employed symbolism element. Denotatively, the male character is depicted wearing as a fundamentalist with a streaming beard in a symbolic reference to an exploitation of Islam that extends to close the mouth of a scared woman to keep her voiceless to consequently deprive her of her rights (Woźniak, 2014). Thus, in Egypt, *the constitution of the Brotherhood party* cartoon represents the Egyptian women's disappointment with this constitution. This disappointment is reflected via a symbolic scene of its elements' signs interaction that expresses the visual intended message of Eladl's opinion about women's wasted rights after the Arab Spring. Denotatively, this scene presents the Muslim fundamentalists at the top of the podium as a first class citizen, the Copts and the Egyptian Christians as a second; whereas women's low status is even not considered at any status. The choice of cartoon visual language Eladl made via the analogical employment of the podium symbol is also supported by the caption: *Constitution for all Egyptians*. These elements provide the cartoon image with the necessary signs to interweave its connotations to produce a meaningful visual text. It critically, directly and comprehensively conveys the way women's issues are considered and affected by the socio-political change resulted from the Arab spring revolutions especially in relation to different women's rights that should have been protected by the revolutionists.

The cartoonist Eladl paid much attention to the women's problems in her cartoon against a male background, making use of the interacted relation of the group of signs created from such a controversy. That is, in the three previous cartoons Eladl chose to denotatively depict a man or group of men where she places a single woman as a whole complete symbol. Whereas, other cartoons present only parts as symbols to refer to a whole symbol; for example, this method exploited in a cartoon by Rasha Mahdi where she chose to denotatively depict her ideas as part of a whole symbol using a man's hand and a woman's head to convey her refusal attitude of different controlling practices towards women and women's rights. Thus, the title *Controlling Women* clearly reflects and supports the same connotative meaning suggested through the employed symbol. Generally, the visual language of **Group Six** cartoons reflects *women's issues and consequences of the Arab Spring 2011-2013* theme, which is very negative.

## CONCLUSION

Arab Spring political cartoons (2011-2013) have amalgamated pictorial, editorial, arty, and social presentations beyond the constraints of the written word of a verbal text. Arab Spring political cartoons (2011-2013) offer a manifestation of the political dispute and certainly public opinion in relation to the events ensued during Arab Spring, the most recent hazy political turmoil. It is best defined as an indicator of Arab preparedness, worries and chronic struggles for their human rights, dignity and solidarity. Hence, the selected cartoons are drawn to generate ethical responsibilities rather than presenting a sense of humour to the spectator with exaggerated graphic figures. The use of semiotic and hermeneutic analysis is crucially fruitful to illuminate the structures and contents of

these political cartoons. Accordingly, in terms of answering research question 1, Arab cartoonists from different Arab countries reflected common themes in their cartoon products. These themes focused on a range of different issues associated with the Arab Spring.

The general vision of the Arab Spring themes represented visually is both negative and positive. These themes are: (i) Democracy image that is presented as a negative and positive notion. (ii) The involvement of interfering countries and powers in the events of Arab Spring that is presented as the negative influence of the international powerful actors in some Arab countries along the different phases of the Arab Spring for oil sources in particular. (iii) Authorities, military-people relations theme that is represented highly negatively in a way that indicates a sense of failure of the previous governments to resolve their problems. Arab authorities are signified as reactionary and dictatorial regimes who are hiding their crimes behind fake democracy practice. (iv) The role of media and social media is represented as a double-edged sword. It played a positive role in arming the revolutionists with the necessary communicative social media platform that responds to their calls of justice and freedom. Though, the media negative role is clearly represented in hiding the crimes of some Arab regimes against the revolutionist by official media of some Arab Spring countries. (v) Stages of the Arab revolutions are signified as different major dynamic transitional stages of the revolutions. Corruption has affected the Arab revolutions in different countries; especially in Egypt to the alleged reforms and ending with the emergence of extremist groups that spoiled the Arab Spring. (vi) Women's issues reflected Arab female protesters as an iconic image of the Arab revolutions. Arab females are also represented as activists who seek to protect their rights and social equality in embedded male-controlled societies. However, the negative side of this image was their frustrated hope in the uprisings. Generally, visual language cartoons of women's issues of the Arab Spring 2011-2013 reflected the negative image of women's rights issues. Arab Spring political cartoons reflected an active visual language used to communicate certain intended messages more openly than the days of dictatorial regimes. The intent of the visual language of the Arab Spring political cartoon was predominantly to provoke an awareness to mobilise them against any form of injustice and power abuse.

Furthermore, in terms of answering research questions 2 and 3, the study revealed how the produced meanings on the denotative and connotative levels help to reveal the cartoonists' messages that challenge and question the authority. Relying on the cartoons' visual narrative structures via employing the visual cartoon elements, clarifies the way visual language is represented in this genre of cartoon images. These elements provide the cartoon image with the necessary signs interweaving its connotations to produce meaningful visual discourse. It critically, directly and comprehensively conveys the way different issues and events are considered and affected by the socio-political change resulted from the Arab Spring revolutions. Such consequences represented by the effective role of social media in supporting the revolution against the official biased media. The role of fundamentalist arrival at the top of authorities ruling power and decision making in Egypt in subsiding the issue of women rights exemplified in women low status in their new constitution.

The employment of the elements of cartoons' visual language is supported by the cartoonists' choices of certain elements used such as the reason behind the use of symbolism and labelling. These reasons are the symbols' accountability as an identifier and emphasiser of the cartoon's intended message. Labelling element is often combined with symbolism in the sampled cartoons. Hence, the employment of these graphic elements in certain cartoons is individual stylistic choice-governed. The cartoons describe common and almost a general state of the Arab countries reality in this era (2011-2013); therefore, the Arab Spring political cartoons rarely specify or name a certain

country individually. Arab Spring political cartoons presented Arabs visions and anticipations towards freedom of expression and noticeably manifest the elevated public consciousness among Arabs.

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## APPENDIX



FIGURE 1. "الديمقراطية: Democracy" Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi (Example of group one: Democracy Image)



FIGURE 2. "Iran- Turkey" Cartoon by Hassan Bleibel (Example of Group Two: *the negative involvement of other countries and powers in the Arab Spring*)



FIGURE 3. "Arab Spring Bowling" Cartoon by Osama Hajjaj (Example of Group Three: *Authorities and military-people relations*)

### Rebels In Arms !

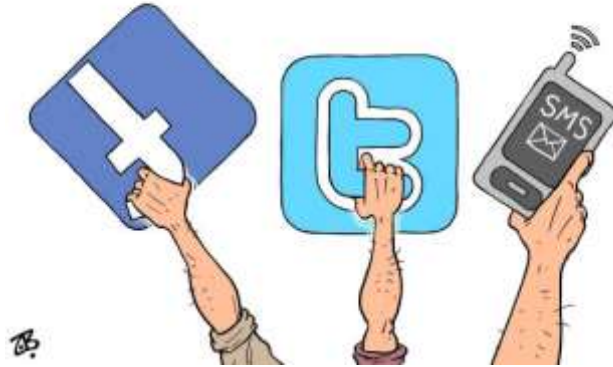
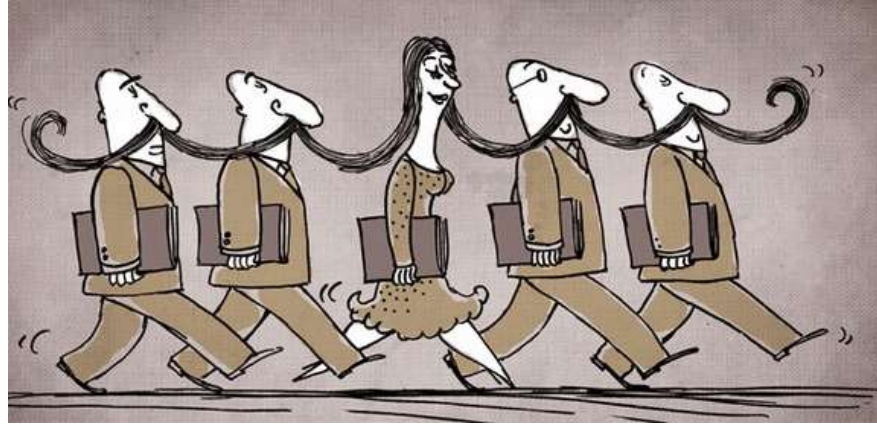


FIGURE 4. “The new Revolutionary Weapons” Cartoon by Emad Hajjaj (Example of Group Four: The dual role of media and social media)



FIGURE 5. “.. ويستمر الربيع...: the Spring is continued” Cartoon by Emad Hajjaj (Example of Group Five: Stages of the Arab revolutions)



*FIGURE 6. Cartoon by Doaa Eladl (Example of Group Six: Women's issues and consequences of the Arab Spring 2011-2013)*