

Palestinian-Israel Conflict in Political Cartoons: Exploring Visual Narrative Building Through Media

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Keywords

- Conflict
- Critical Discourse Analysis
- Discourse Historical Approach
- Multimodal Discourse Analysis
- Palestine-Israel
- Political Cartoons
- Power Dynamics

Abstract

This study examines how political cartoons construct semiotic meanings, ideological narratives, power dynamics, and human suffering in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ledin & Machin's Multimodal Analysis (2020) and Wodak's (2015) Discourse Historical Approach are used to examine the interplay between visuals and text. The data consisted of political cartoons purposively selected from websites and newspapers chosen due to their global reach and contrasting perspectives. The data were analyzed to identify semiotic resources and discursive strategies to project the Palestinian-Israel conflict. The analysis of cartoons reveals asymmetrical framing to justify the conflict in Western media. The combination of multimodal analysis and discourse historical approach offers a comprehensive view of how political cartoons of Israel and Palestine serve as a powerful tool that influences the global media policy. The research explains how cartoons exhibit ideological bias, highlighting the need for further research on different political cartoons and how audiences interpret them across cultures.

1. Introduction

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the longest-running and deeply entrenched conflicts in recent history, marked by constant bloodshed and its complexities are often reflected in media through political cartoons. These cartoons are multimodal texts which influences how people understand and frame the conflict.

The history of the Palestine and Israel conflict dates to the 19th century, which includes the emergence of the Zionist movement, the British Mandate, and the creation of Israel in 1948 (Morris, 2004). There were decades of war between Israel and Palestine, which led to the dominance of Israel and support from other countries that allowed Israel's growth (Chomsky, 1983). The entire world witnessed a serious conflict between Palestine and Israel on 7th October 2023. A war erupted when Hamas which is an Islamic militant group, attacked Israel, resulting in a deadly war in Gaza destroying houses, schools and even hospitals leaving more than 46,700 people killed (Ferris & Lyons, 2024).

Despite calls for a humanitarian pause by the UN Security Council, many countries like the US, India, and Germany have aligned themselves with Israel. Consequently, it has resulted surge in social media campaigns urging a boycott of Israeli and American brands in support of Palestine. The repercussion of this conflict, the entire world's media outlets have been saturated with news, articles and political cartoons of the war showing the hypocrisy of the world. Over the years, the public's perspective of the war has been significantly shaped and influenced by a variety of media. The numerous battles between Palestine and Israel have increased the importance and creation of political cartoons which depict different subjects, including evacuation, rebellion and emergency crisis (Lulu et al., 2022).

Political cartoons have become an effective tool to convey ideas engagingly, analyze power dynamics and capture public opinion (Refaie, 2009). Political cartoons have become a powerful medium in this competitive media landscape that can evoke emotions, capture complicated truths of world and sway public opinion. Political cartoons are a special and effective kind of media communication because they can condense complex social and geopolitical events into images that prove to be both powerful and easy to understand (Sharaf Eldin, 2024).

There is different research studies conducted on examining political cartoons, but there is very limited work done on political cartoons of Israel and Palestine conflict. A previous study by Lulu et al. (2022) examined the eviction of Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah using Kress and Van's multimodal framework and focused mainly on representational meaning. Similarly, Gondwe (2024) looked at how victims and aggressors were portrayed in editorial cartoons. While Liaqat et al. (2024) examined the conflict of Palestine and Israel using only one cartoon without looking at the larger discursive structure that underlies the cartoon. While prior studies focus on representational meanings, this integrates historical discourse to uncover power asymmetries. This study bridges the gap by combining Discourse Historical Approach to explore how media construct, reinforce, portray and validate power narratives. The combination of Multimodal Discourse and Discourse Historical Approach framework establishes an interdisciplinary foundation that allows the research to explore beyond surface level description of political cartoons towards how both textual and visual elements produce and challenge ideologies.

1.1 Research Objectives

- i. To analyze how visuals in political cartoons construct one side of the Palestine-Israel conflict as the legitimate victim.
- ii. To examine how discourse strategies influence public perceptions of Palestine-Israel conflict that reflect media ideologies.

1.2 Research Questions

- i. How do visual elements in political cartoons frame one side of Palestine-Israel conflict as legitimate victim?
- ii. How does political cartoons of Palestine-Israel conflict employ discursive strategies to shape perceptions that reflect ideologies?

1.3 Significance of Study

The topic of Palestine and Israel is one of the most divisive topics and the study of political cartoons of such a polarizing issue reveals how the media is presenting the conflict. The cartoons made on Palestine and Israel reveal war crimes, human rights abuses and political prejudices. They expose underlying meanings hidden in the visuals. This study emphasizes that political cartoons made on Palestine and Israel influence how the conflict is being portrayed to the public and how they perceive it. This research study is important as it promotes the expanding combination of visual communication and conflict studies. Even though the majority of discourse is still centered on textual analysis, this research study emphasizes the necessity and importance of examining visual modes which are powerful carriers of ideology and power. The research study is significant as it provides an interdisciplinary method for decoding meanings in political cartoons by using both Multimodal Discourse Analysis and the Discourse Historical Approach framework.

2. Literature Review

This literature review explores the developing field of political cartoons as an important aspect of multimodal discourse, its importance and implications in the way Israel and Palestine conflict is portrayed. The purpose of this literature review is to critically analyze how political cartoons shape the discourse of the Israel-Palestine conflict with an emphasis on how these visual representations affect public opinions, ideologies and political narratives of the audience. The review concludes by pointing out the research gaps and outlining how this current research study fills them.

2.1. Cartoons and Power

Political cartoons have an important role in examining the hidden truths and realities of the world (Aazam et al., 2020). Political cartoons depict characters from real life and on the other hand, they make and present fictional narratives about the world. They usually convey metaphorical meaning from the visuals (Raheem, 2020). Moreover, political cartoons also

highlight disparities by exposing the bias of people in authority through the use of satire (Dijk, 2008). It is believed that by reducing complicated topics into symbolic images and visuals such as cartoons have the power to rebuild political narratives and realities and, thereafter enable a critical analysis of such realities (Lemke, 2002).

One of the most important features of political cartoons is their capacity to reveal underlying power structures and peel back the layers of ideologies constructed. The use of metaphor in cartoons exposes the systemic violence that is often disregarded or lessened by the media, acting as a criticism of the power disparity of the media (Sharaf Eldin, 2024).

Furthermore, cartoons frequently showcase the unsaid or misinterpreted viewpoints of society. Representation entails both creating and reflecting reality. Political cartoons can represent conflicts in governmental policy to provide a voice to the downtrodden (Hall, 1997).

Cartoons do not necessarily depict power in political terms explicitly. It can also appear in stereotypes and social conventions. Even the little verbal or visual decisions can perpetuate social dominance and inequality. Therefore, cartoons can reveal hidden facts and contribute to the stifling of minority voices (Fairclough, 1995).

The ability of cartoons to create power reversals is an intriguing feature. They can subvert established hierarchies and make the weak look powerful and heroic, whereas the powerful look absurd. This reversal portrays cultural catharsis and disempowerment with a brief symbolic victory. Building on Ledin & Machin (2020) notion of visual power, this research study analyzes how Western media cartoons reveal dominance and victimhood.

2.2. Framing through Political Cartoons

According to Khang (2002) In framing theory, the media constructs a center frame around the thought and mental process of the audience. Cartoons simplify complicated societal issues into highly powerful symbols which makes them very useful as rhetorical intervention in public discourse (El Refaie, 2009). As stated by DeSousa (1984), readers understand complicated subjects by using cartoons as frames. The political cartoons are created in a frame that distill several related themes and concepts in a single comprehensive picture.

In addition, political cartoons have been an effective tool for rhetorical intervention. The visuals in cartoons combine with artistic expressions to provide precise criticism that questions, makes parody or undermines prevailing opinions of people. Cartoons are rhetorical items that weigh on public discussions by using humor and irony to elicit thought, disapproval and activities. They are particularly effective instruments for protest and ideological framing in war and in difficult situations (Danjoux, 2012; El Refaie, 2009). Therefore, analyzing multimodal framing within conflict cartoons is very significant. This study proceeds the work of (DeSousa, 1984; Khang, 2002) by considering political cartoons not just frame but as an actual setting where the image mixes with certain discursive strategies to legitimate the narrative.

In view of Lemke (2002), the audience is persuaded to give sympathy or oppose the scenario presented by these visual illustrations. Cartoonists engage the audience to make political

commentary both humorous and comprehensive, while making serious criticisms about social and political concerns (McCloud, 1993).

Irony in political cartoons produces an emotional disconnect that encourages the audience to explore the meaning and it boosts their interest (Danjoux, 2012). Political humor makes a psychological modification that enables people to have opposing opinions of common traditional narratives. Cartoons use caricature to shift the audience's perspectives on the subject and encourage skeptical thinking (Davies, 2007).

Cartoons criticize and ironically depict events by simplifying and overstating certain aspects of them. Cartoons serve as a framework for the formation of knowledge by employing a variety of strategies, including illustrations that aim to convey the core idea of the ongoing issue (Gamson & Stuart, 1992).

Political cartoons provide incisive comments on political issues through an effective channel of communication that cuts across linguistic barriers. They can serve a variety of purposes due to their diversity in both visual and semantic elements ranging from persuasion and information to resistance and mockery. Political cartoons impact the opinions and narratives of the audience through the use of humor and satire (El Refaie, 2009). Images from wars and natural disasters have themes related to misery and help to elevate viewers to a higher status as either observers or protectors. These visual narratives justify the domination of powerful ideologies of the West while ignoring the societal roots of distress (Chouliaraki, 2006)

2.3. Representation of Palestine and Israel's conflict in Media

The political and ideological perspectives influencing Israel's actions and U.S foreign policy in the Middle East are reinforced by media sources in both Israel and the U.S. Media portrayal of Israel and Palestine's conflict is sometimes skewed by strong political agendas rather than objectivity and strives to promote the interests of the powerful rather than the general population (Chomsky, 1983). This review analyzes the framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict by Western media as explained in the book *Fateful Triangle* by Chomsky (1983) which critiques that Israel has long been considered a democratic companion with the United States and some parts of Europe.

Building on Said (1981), this review highlights Orientalist biases in Western media, extended here to visual cartoons. Orientalist views influenced Western depictions of Palestine and its people, and showed them as violent and illogical while portraying Israelis as logical and intellectual. Linguistic choices in news stories, such as portraying Israel's violence as reprisal and violence and Palestinian action as rage reinforce these representations (Barkho, 2008).

One of the important factors influencing public opinion is the media's limited selection and use of substitute words, which either exaggerate or downplay the event. According to Philo & Berry (2004), BBC and ITV coverage hardly mentioned international rules of law and US resolutions and neglected to explain Israel's occupation. The empathy with Arabs is very crucial with the issue of Israel and Palestine is viewed as both seen as an area of concern and a struggle for justice (Said, 1992). The Arab media portrays the Palestine's struggle as a fight for freedom from Israeli tyranny. The conflict is framed in the Western media where

actions of Israel are presented as required for security while actions of Palestine are depicted as wrong (Entman, 1993).

Moreover, he talked about the dehumanization of Palestine's people in the media which emphasizes that this process of dehumanization legitimates the ongoing violence and oppression. People of Palestine are often portrayed as human animals in the media, which deprives them of their humanity. This dehumanization also prevails in the visual and multimodal texts, like political cartoons and news (Chomsky, 1983)

Western media have come under fire for their inability to provide reliable, impartial and thorough coverage of the conflict in Gaza (Khamis, 2023). The unfair and slanted reporting of the Gaza crisis gave an advantage to Israel's perspective over Palestine. The western media reports using opinions of Israel's side only and blame them for not performing the required fact-checking from both sides. (Youmans, 2024).

Political cartoons made on the Israel-Palestine conflict are not without criticism. Some cartoons provoked strong controversy and charges of hate speech against Jews, for instance, Gerald Scarfe's 2013 illustration of Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu constructing a wall from the bodies of Palestinian people. These disputes highlight how political cartoons must strike an appropriate line between sarcasm and derogatory stereotypes, especially during such a sensitive situation of Israel and Palestine (Islam, 2025).

These political cartoons of Israel focus on the prevailing narratives of Israel's culture and present Israel as a defender of the country against the danger from Palestine. While findings reveal Western media often show complex and challenging images of both countries, whereas the perspective of Palestine's people is more accepted and more prevalent in areas like the Global South and Islamic countries, the publications of Pakistan typically represent the sufferings of Palestine but the UK media utilize irony and comedy to criticize governmental organizations (Zararsız & Sönmez, 2024).

2.4. Research Gap

Despite the increasing corpus of studies on visual communication, the Palestine-Israel conflict remains limited and fragmented. For instance, Lulu et al., (2022) analyzed displacement of Palestinian people from their village of Sheikh Jarrah using the multimodal discourse analysis of (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) primarily focusing on representational, interactive and compositional meanings of the images and emphasizing semiotic resources such as color and composition. However, there is a lack of detailed work on the conflict between Palestine and Israel and how political cartoons reflect this conflict.

Even though the framework of Machin (2007) is well known and widely recognized. The application of this framework is MDA is limited especially in political cartoons. Only a few studies have used the Discourse Historical Approach by Reisigl & Wodak (2015) to examine cartoons even though it is a mindful technique to contextualize media text and visuals to the political and historical contexts. This study aims to investigate the semiotics and linguistic meanings generated and conveyed through political cartoons of the Palestine and Israel conflict. This research examines the use of semiotic elements and incorporates historical reference to provide a better understanding of the conflict and to explain power dynamics and ideologies hiding in cartoons. Similarly, Gondwe (2024) and Saleh (2024) examined

how victims and aggressors are represented in editorial cartoons from Israel and Palestine conflict but restricted to representational meaning only, overlooking historical implications.

However, these studies concentrated on published cartoons without employing DHA's strategies to show how these prejudices stem from enduring unequal power distribution. Moreover, the research done by Eldin (2024) examines how political cartoons influence perceptions about the Gaza war. It examined symbols and ideologies employed in cartoons from Arab publications using Van Dijk's CDA framework only. Liaqat et al., (2024) only examined the humanitarian sides of the Palestine and Israel war by analyzing one political cartoon from The Guardian newspaper using Kress and Leeuwen's framework to examine compositional, interactive and representational meanings.

While prior studies worked on representational meanings of cartoons, there is a lack of historical discourse explored in political cartoons and conflict situations. This research study combines both of these frameworks to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of political cartoons and how they create, challenge and oppose different prevailing ideologies over time. Unlike Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse Historical Approach allows historical contextualization, uncovers power asymmetries, ideological framing and hidden narratives within cartoons. The research aims to address the gaps by focusing on political cartoons as central for the analysis instead of keeping them as supporting visuals only and examining both visual and textual modes using a theoretical framework that combines both Discourse Historical and Multimodal discourse approaches. Unlike visual grammar and multimodal discourse analysis alone, this multidisciplinary framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Discourse Historical Analysis reveals media depictions of the Palestine-Israel conflict and bridges the gap between semiotic and discursive analysis.

3. Methodology

The section outlines the methodology used in the research. It covers the theoretical framework, sampling plan and data collection techniques applied to examine how the Israel and Palestine conflict is portrayed both textually and visually in political cartoons. The selected methodology shows an interpretative analysis of facilitating a profound comprehension of the socio-political perspectives inherent in visual communication.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach were used to provide a theoretical foundation analysis and interpretation of results.

3.1.1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The multimodal model explained by Ledin & Machin (2020) presented an approach to examine different semiotic elements in the text including visuals, text and spatial characteristics. This model is basically focused on the analysis of both visual and textual elements and how they convey ideologies and feelings of people, which makes it more relevant for examining cartoons with political elements in them. Meaning is not only

expressed through the means of language, but it is also communicated through a variety of semiotic elements such as images and layout. These elements influence the ideologies of people and how they interpret media. Elements like facial expressions and gestures have a significant role in creating the narrative. This model also focuses on symbols and metaphors. The use of metaphor enhances the depth of visual texts. Whereas modality is also important because cartoons usually use modality to critique or emphasize actions, Machin's model is well-suited and helpful in analyzing political cartoons because of its focus on both image and text. Political cartoons are multimodal by nature which convey political criticism by using and combining words and pictures together.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis is suitable for political cartoons because they express political criticism through visual symbolism, exaggeration and different narratives. MDA can help analyze and understand how power and aggression are expressed visually in the Palestine-Israel conflict.

3.1.2. Discourse historical approach (DHA)

Discourse is not created in a vacuum instead; it is influenced by and influences the circumstances around it. A person cannot fully understand and comprehend the meanings of texts and symbols without considering historical context. DHA This approach examines how digressive practices create power relations and influence ideological stances. The examination of visual media through the Discourse Historical Approach uncovers how dominant ideas are created and applied in the discourse (Wodak, 2015) approach helps examine power dynamics between nations or politicians in political cartoons.

The context of an event is always analyzed by the relationship between the participants and the socio-historical conditions that shape discourse. DHA highlights the construction of national identities, political omission and fear-based rhetoric. Different strategies of DHA are significant in analysis, such as the nomination strategy established in groups and outgroups through labeling the social actors. It refers to how social actors such as politicians, nations or groups are referred to in the discourse. The prediction strategy assigns either positive or negative characteristics to support preconceived ideologies. Moreover, prediction strategies include the use of argumentation or debating schemes to support exclusionary strategies. This involves use of metaphors and adjectives to create positive or negative connotation. In DHA, argumentative methods include using lines of argument to validate behavior and viewpoints. In a perspectivation strategy, speakers or writers place themselves in conversations, affecting how events are interpreted. Moreover, intensification and mitigation strategies are used to put emphasis or downplay events of discourse to influence the ideologies of people (Wodak, 2015).

Multimodal analysis is incorporated by DHA, reflecting the increasing importance of digital and visual communication in influencing the discourse. The language of media, memes and political cartoons contributes to the creation of ideologies and different narratives of (Wodak, 2015). DHA adds historical depth, which allows a link between political cartoons and different narratives in the Palestine-Israel conflict. It provides a more comprehensive framework to analyze ideologies in media representation.

The use of two frameworks allows a holistic analysis of political cartoons. DHA can enhance the analysis by providing historical interpretation whereas MDA enables a thorough analysis of semiotic elements. This combination helps to analyze beyond the visuals and provide a critical analysis of political cartoons and prevailing narratives regarding the conflict between Palestine-Israel. It establishes the framework superior to prior research that used either MDA or CDA alone without the historical discourse that DHA offers.

3.2. Research Design

A qualitative research design is used for conducting this study as it focuses on interpreting existing cartoons. This design is thought to be ideal for investigating the linguistic and visual aspects of political cartoons that show the conflict between Israel and Palestine. An in-depth analysis of the cartoon's semiotic elements and discursive techniques is made possible using the qualitative method.

However, the analysis is qualitative in nature which allows the interpretation to become subjective. The interpretations of political cartoons also depend on the critical judgment of the researcher's awareness. To avoid subjectivity, reflexive notes are kept throughout the analysis to minimize bias and the interpretations are frequently compared with the frameworks.

3.3. Source of data and Sampling Procedure

The data for this research consisted of political cartoons depicting the Palestine and Israel conflict sourced from recognized Western newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *Global Times*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *Politico* and online cartoon websites including *Cartoon Movement* and *Chappatte* due to their global reach and contrasting perspectives. The sample of six political cartoons was selected for its ability to allow for in-depth multimodal and discursive analysis as recommended in visual analysis. Cartoons were chosen for their clear authorship and publication dates, enabling proper citation and organization. The Figures 1-3 represent Israel's perspective and Figures 4-6 are from Palestine's perspective.

The research study employed a purposive sampling technique for the selection of political cartoons that represent the Israel and Palestine conflict from 2023-2025 that highlighted themes of power, victimization and ideological framing, ensuring they delivered strong ideological messages and included speech bubbles and captions for better comprehension of the conflict. This period marks the intense coverage of Israel-Hamas war in global media.

3.4. Data Analysis

The selected data were qualitatively analyzed using multimodal and discursive analysis of the data. Firstly, Machin's Multimodal Discourse Analysis (2020) examined visual elements including actors, background, colors, composition, modality and interaction with viewers of the cartoons. Secondly, Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (2015) was applied to analyze cartoons using its discursive strategies on captions and speech bubbles. The results

from both analyses provided a holistic interpretation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This two-layered analysis allowed us to examine both visual and textual elements in political discourse.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Texts and visual in political cartoons

4.1.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 4.1 shows a Hamas fighter in green uniform hiding behind a child using the child as a human shield. The child symbolizes innocence which contrasts with extremism of Hamas.

The color choices contribute to ideological framing. The child's bright red shirt draws attention and symbolizes danger and attention. In contrast, the green uniform of the armed man is visually linked to aggression. The rubble and destruction reinforce the emotional contrast between innocence and violence.

The child is portrayed as a focal point in the cartoon due to its central placement which immediately catches the viewer's eye signifying helplessness and innocence. The armed man placed in the lower left side of the image is the second focal point of the cartoon emphasizing his violence. Moreover, the child's significance is symbolically increased by being held vertically above the militant.

Furthermore, the smoke trails more left to right provide more details and dimension as the viewer's eye is drawn from devastation to the militant and then towards the child. On the left side, a red arrow is positioned towards the child literalizing the metaphor portraying that the child is being used as an "iron dome", implying that Hamas uses children as physical shields. Moreover, there is no eye contact between cartoon's characters and viewers which shows no engagement between them and encourages judgment. The child's eyes are big and round and his mouth slightly shows the terror. His face emphasizes that he's a passive victim of Hamas.

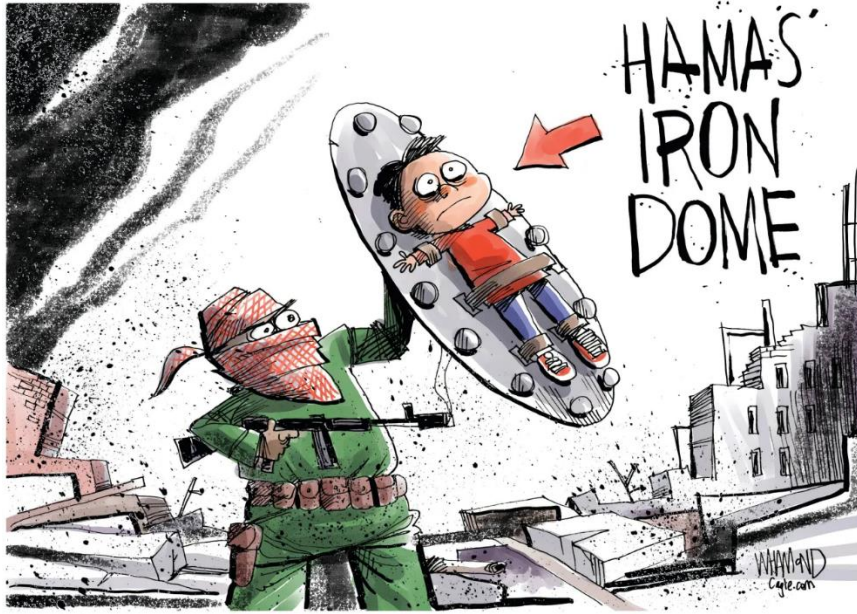


Figure 4.1: *Hamas' Iron Dome*

Source: Los Angeles Daily Newspaper, 2023.

<https://www.dailynews.com/2023/10/16/war-in-the-middle-east-political-cartoons/>

4.1.2 Discourse-Historical Analysis

In the caption, “Hamas” is explicitly identified as the actor of violence, whereas the child is textually nominated as a passive victim. The actors from Israel’s side are omitted which highlights that Hamas is a threat to its own people. The overall ideological interpretation of Figure 4.1 shows that the human shield metaphor is a key component narrative about Palestinian’s resistance. The figure reinforces a hegemonic worldview that defends Israel’s action and shows how Hamas is against its own people. The predication reinforces Hamas as a manipulative and unethical actor that uses children of Palestine for protection showing cruelty and cowardness whereas the child is depicted as sacrificial. Hamas is predicated as a terrorist group that takes advantage of vulnerable people and still calls for retaliation. This shows a theme of aggressor vs victim often observed in Western representation.

The argumentative strategy implies that people who put their own people in danger are accountable for the fatalities that occur. This visual justifies the violence under the pretext of self-defense. The perspectivation invites viewers to condemn Hamas’ purported actions and express sympathy for the child. The cartoon and the caption both show the perspective of Israel. The image depicts Palestine and Hamas as self-destructive and supports prevailing Western narratives that defend Israel’s actions. The use of children for self-defense is a very strong claim. It mitigates Hamas’s authority and portrays their objectives as harmful and intensifies the emotional appeal in favor of children and against Hamas. Moreover,

employing “Iron Dome” for children intensifies emotional reactions and moral blame on Hamas.

4.2.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 4.2 shows three armed of Palestine driving recklessly towards a cliff marked by flames. Their faces are obscured by black masks and green headbands associated with a militant group of Palestine known as Hamas. They wave Palestinian flag towards a road sign reading “Freedom”. A kidnapped person is visible in the trunk, only hair and blood visible. The background shows darkness in the sky, dust and blood which highlights chaos and destruction. This suggests that Palestinian armed forces destroy their own freedom by through violence and kidnapping people. Figure 4.2 reflects the idea that Hamas prioritizes bloodshed in the misguided belief that such actions lead to freedom but result in death.

The semiotic composition includes bold colors such as red blood, orange and yellow fire flames, against muted background to symbolize destruction. The central position of truck draws attention and its white color contrasts with the background, while the flag and bullets show unstoppable movement.

The men’s faces are covered, yet their eyes show aggression and celebration. The carelessness of Hamas while waving a flag and making a victory sign highlights the irony of their aggressive actions framed as victory. It implies that Palestine is involved in killing and kidnapping people and calling it victory. Palestine’s struggle for victory is doomed to fail because of its violent nature and kidnapping people, veiled in their national flag. The idea of freedom reinforces perspectives of moral superiority by amplifying the ideological idea that Palestine’s understanding of freedom only results in devastation.

In addition, the participants of Hamas maintain no direct gaze, fostering emotional detachment. The exaggerated, non-realistic style cartoon with outlines and cartoonish guns and fire shows low realism and high modality to criticize Palestine’s militant group.



Figure 4.2: *You cannot drive to freedom with a kidnapped person in your trunk*

Source: Cartoon Movement, 2023.

<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/hamas-1?collection=/collection/israeli-palestinian-conflict>

4.2.2 Discourse Historical Analysis

In the caption, “you” is being referred to the armed force Hamas without directly calling them to create ambiguity but it’s clear through the visuals. The term “kidnapped person” is a passive construction that frames the person as innocent. The whole caption basically gives moral judgment to the actor “you” which is indirectly Hamas and disregards their claim to get freedom through kidnapping people. The caption offers a negative predicate to the action of carrying a “kidnapped person” suggesting victimization, implying that it is not associated with the idea of gaining freedom. The phrase “drive to freedom” shows Hamas journey towards freedom. Whereas, the phrase “kidnapped person in your trunk” predicates hypocrisy that the idea of gaining freedom gets corrupted when human rights violation and kidnapping is involved in that process.

The caption is built on the topos of justice, morality and impossibility. It infers that one’s goal to achieve freedom is invalid if he wants to achieve it through unethical kidnapping. It is impossible to gain noble goals through the violation of human laws. The use of 2nd person pronoun “you” makes the viewer personally involved and accountable. It gives a clear stance

that the speaker disagrees with the actions and justifications of Hamas group. The term “you cannot” is a non-negotiable claim with strong intensification and no mitigation. This intensification creates rhetorical power and prevents any chance of ideological explanation. These discursive strategies suggest that Figure 2 creates Western media narratives that link Palestine with terrorism. It highlights Israel’s ideological stance that Palestine is aggressive and associated with violence.

4.3.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 4.3 depicts a bearded man wearing Keffiyeh emerging from an underground tunnel indicating Palestine’s man. The emergence from underground reflects hidden tactics and propaganda of Hamas to attack without transparency. The visual scene is shown as a hospital with a Palestine’s flag is accidentally attacked by an Islamist person. Rats are also shown as a visual metaphor to link the man with filth. Hamas is cynical which utilizes international assistance as a buffer against its own shortcomings. The rats around the Palestine’s man raise dehumanization metaphors which are used historically to refer to the enemy as filth and this strategy is well used in political cartoons.

The scene is set on a barren land with destroyed buildings and the minimalism in the background draws the viewer’s attention more towards the attack on the hospital and emphasizes the impact. The muted tones of colors, except for the red and orange explosion which makes it a focal point. The speech bubbles are organized in a natural order, with the first above the second which allows the viewer to read in a natural order. The cartoon is created in proximity to highlight the attack of Hamas on hospital.

The cartoon exhibits calm body language despite attacking the hospital. The viewer’s distance allows them to witness a reality being exposed rather than being a participant in that reality. The speech bubbles provide insight into an ongoing narrative about Palestinians reflecting the ideology that accidental attacks on their hospitals are inconsequential because UN will rebuild them new hospitals. This follows a cycle that if something is destroyed, someone will fix it for us and it turns into a criticism depicting that aids are being misused. The whole cartoon basically represents the idea that Palestinians are the one who attack Tel Alviv, a city of Israel and in the process, they may accidentally hit their own hospitals and civilians and blame it on Israel’s army. and Palestinians are attacking their own people in the process of sending missiles to Israel. The cartoon is not photorealistic and stylized. The explosion is also depicted in a dramatic style with red and orange flames which are not realistic but add intensity.



Figure 4.3: *Chief, I just missed Tel Aviv....*

Source: Cartoon Movement, 2023.

<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/palestine-hospital>

4.3.2 Discourse Historical Analysis

The presence of a chief nominates that Hamas has a hierarchical organization. “Tel Aviv” is an explicit signal towards the capital city of Israel is used to refer to Israel as a whole. U.N, a worldwide humanitarian organization is ironically presented here to show how they are being overused by Palestine as a reliable international assistant that would build hospitals attacked by Hamas themselves. It predicates an attacker who confessed to a botched attack that struck a hospital saying “I just missed Tel Aviv”. The response “No problem, the UN will build us a new hospital” conveys a careless and contemptuous attitude and shows human casualties are not a concern for Palestine.

This cartoon and its caption use topos of threat to show how Palestine’s people are dangerous who attack their own hospitals first and then blame it on Israel and seek help from United Nation later. It reflects hypocrisy by attacking and committing crimes and demanding aid and protection internationally. The cartoonist has taken a critical viewpoint towards Palestine. The caption is ironic which mimics and indirectly criticizes actions of Palestine. It predicates a stance against Palestine, its people and militants. The speaker’s tone causes an

emotional distance and condemnation of the actors that they are the cause of their own sufferings.

The captions intensify the situation and premeditated violence from Palestine and show that the situation is worse. The response of the chief on call saying “no problem” is casual and it mitigates the seriousness of the situation by portraying the role of United Nations as very naïve. It represents the legitimacy of United Nations showing that they are also a part of Palestine’s war cycle.

4.4.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 4.4 shows a male figure with an enlarged head and his mouth wide open symbolizing hunger. There is a black and white scarf around his neck also known as Keffiyeh which is primarily a cultural symbol of Palestine. The background also shows destroyed buildings depicting war in the city. The background and setting are kept minimal to portray a war setting.

It shows an irony between blue sky and chaos in background where missiles disrupt the peace. The bright orange food aid symbolizes hope but are placed far from the man.

The central focus in the cartoon is the man with his open mouth being visual anchor of the composition. The man placed at the center shows importance and emotional focus. The cartoon is composed with a top-to-bottom flow. The flow of the composition highlights the fate of Palestinians dictated by those in power.

The viewer is positioned to receive more sympathy from viewers using the close-up of the man’s face to create intimacy and evoke sympathy. This cartoon symbolically invites viewers to see the suffering and starvation of people in his expressions of agony revealing the plight of the entire oppressed community of Palestine and reinforcing narratives of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It also exposes humanitarian crises in Palestine prompting viewers to question prevailing power dynamics. Figure 4 reveals Palestine’s narratives by foregrounding their suffering as a concern while the absence of Israel in the visual reflects how ideologies are constructed through selective emphasis and framing. The selective framing reveals that Western media tend to highlight Palestine’s sufferings while marginalizing Israel’s actions. The political cartoon mirrors and criticizes the Western tendency to take a stance on the conflict.

The colors in cartoons show low saturation creates a grim reality to portray the condition of Palestine’s people. The visual details such as textures and wrinkles and his physical expressions enhance the modality despite the figures being somewhat exaggerated, particularly the man’s face size.



Figure 4.4: *A massacre against the starving people of Gaza*

Source: Cartoon Movement, 2024

<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/massacre-against-starving-people-gaza?collection=/collection/hunger-in-gaza>

4.4.2 Discourse Historical Analysis

The caption has used loaded term “massacre” and not a neutral term like “conflict” or “war”. It portrays brutal and unjust killing of Palestine’s people. In addition, the phrase “starving people of Gaza” nominates that victims of Gaza are suffering from extreme suffering, hunger and vulnerability constructing sympathy for them. The caption basically predicates the hardships on people of Gaza by calling them “starving”. The phrase “massacre” is used to attribute violence to Israel who is causing criminality on people of Palestine.

The argumentation strategy portrays the principle of humanitarianism that no legitimate reason should justify violence against the weak people and the use of “starving people” subtly supports the condemnation of massacre. So, the caption generates a powerful emotional appeal based on moral and ethical principle to condemn actions of starvation.

The caption and visual creates a strong empathetic perspective towards the people of Palestine in Gaza. This perspective is not objective but emotionally and ethically charged and portrays the human rights. Both the caption and visual intensifies the situation by using highly emotive language including “massacre” and “killing”. Moreover, there is no mitigation which forces the viewer to sympathize the Palestinians.

4.5.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

In Figure 4.5, the presence of Western leaders highlights power asymmetry. The illustration of one leader gestures for silence while another displays disinterest in the devastation shows strong involvement of them in conflict. Also, Arab people can be seen marginalized, screaming at the left bottom. The background is divided into two sides. A hospital can be seen at the background with tanks creating chaos and bombing Hospitals and other buildings on left sides with smokes fuming in the sky. the figure constructs a narrative of western leaders involved with Israel. They are seen as emotionally detached with Israel's destruction.

A large sign of "H" in front of the hospital, surrounded by smoke and tanks symbolizes and reveals that Western leaders prioritize the destruction of Gaza over humanitarian aid. The visual moves from left showing higher authorities and a bombed hospital with vector lines guiding viewers towards destruction.

It shows the conflict in Palestine through a passive viewership with no direct gaze between characters. The cartoon is created from a horizontal angle showing an eye-level perspective that allows the audience to be an observer. The "SILENCE" in the center is shown as an irony indicating that this sign is not for a hospital but a silent command by a system. Furthermore, the actors in the cartoons are cartoonish with a simplified political style. The cartoon shows a real conflict imagery of Palestine-Israel with cartoonish figures and destruction to reveal how Western leaders are equally involved with Israel. There is no shadow of figures and objects showing a typical type of cartoon. Minimal use of shadow and lighting reduces the realism of scenes. The ideological interpretation centers on both the condemnation of the violence against Palestine and the unwillingness of other countries to intervene and speak out.



Figure 4.5: *Gaza: Watch out, Hospital!*

Source: Chappatte, 2023.

<https://chappatte.com/en/images/gaza-watch-out-hospital>

4.5.2 Discourse Historical Analysis

The use of word “Gaza” in caption instantly identifies the conflict and evokes up a history filled with misery and confinement and the word “hospital” which is a worldwide representation and place of protection is at the target. The caption nominates that even such places as hospitals are unsafe in Gaza. It is predicated that the hospital is in danger and not kept safe. The phrase “watchout” predicates danger and threat towards the hospitals in Gaza. It conveys that hospitals in Palestine are not just healthcare providers but also under threat, highlighting the emergency. The caption uses topos of danger and injustice to portray the logic that hospitals in Gaza are targets of militants and hospitals which are commonly known as protected space for people’s healthcare itself needs protection. The term “watch out” creates an imperative tone which shows warning from powerful military. It is a critical perspective against the forces which are causing violence at vulnerable places such as hospitals. It allows viewers to see and analyze this situation from the perspective of people being affected like people of Gaza.

The term “watch out” with an exclamation mark intensifies the situation and amplifies the urgency without softening or mitigating the message. This intensification allows people to be aware of the situation in Gaza and feel the urgency by increasing the rhetorical impact. It evokes awareness, action and empathy from the viewers.

4.6.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 4.6 shows Donald Trump driving a bulldozer over rubble showing a victory sign, while Netanyahu sits behind him wearing a red hat symbolizing his support in the process. Gaza is represented as rubble with an Arabic board in the bulldozer which implies erasure of Gaza by Trump and Netanyahu. The barren land in the background, which resembles a desert, emphasizes destruction in Palestine. The highly salient yellow bulldozer is central and dominant in the cartoon, representing unstoppable movement, while the red hat of Netanyahu symbolizes aggression and danger towards Palestine. The bulldozer’s bucket and the Gaza sign attract the viewer’s attention towards the plan of Trump. The placement of Gaza in rubble draws the immediate attention of viewers. Trump’s large depiction signifies his central role in the conflict of Israel-Palestine, with Netanyahu portraying a secondary position, suggesting the strong connection of the US with Israel. The cartoon represents the ideology of the idea that power is embodied by Trump with a focal objective to erase Gaza from the map. The facial expressions of Trump and Netanyahu show anger and aggression towards Palestine. The angle of the cartoon gives a clear image of the whole situation.



Figure 4.6: *Donald Trump's plan for Gaza*

Note. From Guardian, 2025

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/picture/2025/feb/05/nicola-jennings-donald-trump-plans-gaza-cartoon>

The scene shows an emotional distance between viewers and allows them to evoke sympathy for Palestine. The prominent caption “PEACE PLAN” rendered in capital letters and quotation marks highlights the US and Israel’s focus. The cartoon critiques how the US has betrayed and abandoned Palestinians and how their sufferings are trivialized within Trump’s peace plan. The cartoon shows low modality with highly exaggerated facial expressions, lacking realistic depth. The cartoon allows the viewer to question the peace plan of Trump and provoke an introspection about the narratives of the Israel-Palestine conflict

4.6.2 Discourse Historical Analysis

The caption represents Trump executor of the “peace plan” for Gaza. He is positioned as the main actor for proposing a solution to Israel-Palestine’s conflict. The nomination strategy frames the discourse around Donald Trump for proposing and imposing a plan on the conflict-affected territory of Gaza for peace. The peace plan of Trump is described as the relocation of thousands of Palestinians. The people of Palestine are downplayed and are predicated as objects to be moved. This strategy frames Gaza and its civilians as objects that can be controlled and erased which portrays a power imbalance and disputed independence, whereas Trump is shown as a transformational force.

Trump suggests a humanitarian justification or a forcible relocation by providing the viewpoint that this would be a peace plan by evacuating Palestine and peace would come by erasing Palestine. The argumentation strategy suggests that this plan is unfeasible and

breaches international law as violence and erasing people from their own country is illegal. Moreover, the peace plan contradicts with the violence in Gaza.

The scene is framed as a place where the powerful entities are centered and victims of Gaza are shown as rubble and debris. It shows irony and violence without being emotionally appealing by the actors. It reveals power dynamic between Israel and Palestine and shows how US is involved and supports destruction in Palestine. The situation is intensified through the visuals in the cartoons including bulldozers and rubble. The caption is a neutral term that does not intensify the event. The “peace plan” downplays and is ironic of what is being shown. The language is used to hide violence but the visuals amplify the message.\

Table 2

Summary of Multimodal and Historical Findings

Cartoon	Key Elements	Semiotic	Discursive Strategies	Ideological Implications
Figure 4.1	Hamas fighter, Iron Dome, Child, Rubble, War Zone, Red shirt,		Hamas nominated as aggressor, visual frame aligns with Western media, intensifies violence	Emphasizes Israel’s narrative of Hamas using human shield, Israel as rational, mitigate Palestine’s victimization.
Figure 4.2	Hamas’ militants, victory sign, blood, freedom board, bullets and fire flames.		Hamas depicted as self-destructive, freedom vs violence, intensifies conflict, predicates hypocrisy.	Hamas as kidnapper, reinforces Israel’s ideology, delegitimizes Palestine freedom effort.
Figure 4.3	Palestine’s man, rocket, Palestine’s hospital, rats around man, explosion		Hamas predicated as careless, mitigation of Palestine’s victimization, argument of self-inflicted harm	Dehumanization of Hamas as portrayed in western media, highlights Hamas as the real threat.

Across all six analyzed cartoons, semiotic elements create narratives of victimhood via color, composition and framing. In 3/6 cartoons, Palestine is shown as aggressors using violence and recklessness whereas, 4/6 cartoons have portrayed Israel and Western perspectives as defensive through mitigation strategies. This ideology mitigates the narrative of Israel’s violence. The usage of Iron Dome as a human shield in figure 1 visually depicts the one narrative of Western media that Palestine’s defense system is basically their own human children.

Figure 4.4	Large man with wide open mouth, rockets, food aid, destruction	Emphatic perception towards Palestine, argumentation on humanities	Palestinian as victims and starving, reinforces sympathy for Gaza
Figure 4.5	Western leaders, violence, destruction of hospital military tanks, smoke and rubble	Hospitals predicated as violent space	Frames Palestinians as suppressive, shifts blame for aggressor to victim, highlights involvement of western leaders in conflict
Figure 4.6	Bulldozer, rubble, Gaza sign, Trump and Netanyahu	Nomination of western leaders as violent destructor, argumentation of legitimacy, intensifies violence of Israel	Critiques US and Israel's strong relation, exposes hypocrisy of politics in peacemaking,

In figure 4.3, the man from Hamas aims at Tel Aviv but attacks Gaza hospital implying that Palestine inflicts self-harm. This framing subtly eliminates Israel's direct responsibility for killing Palestinians. The caption in figure 4.2, "you cannot drive to freedom with a kidnapped person in your trunk" frames Palestine's people as misguided terrorist and kidnappers responsible for their own downfall in the Western media. Conversely, 4/6 cartoons subvert this structure by depicting Gaza's suffering through violence and hunger. As portrayed in Figure 4.5 and 4.6, the intervention of US leaders in exploiting Palestine.

The cartoons utilize discursive strategies to align and challenge Western media ideologies. They challenge the dominant power structure as in figure 2 and expose humanitarian interests. In 3/6 cartoons, Israeli perspectives mitigate violence in Palestine using mitigating strategies whereas the other cartoons with Palestine's intensify the conflict through visuals and victimhood. The link of freedom with kidnapping in Figure 4.2 uses argumentation strategies to control Palestine's resistance. In contrast, the "peace plan" of Trump in Figure 6 exposes the hypocrisy and criticizes dominance of US in Palestine. The selective use of framing, exaggeration and irony portrays a perspective that reflects and upholds prevailing ideologies in global media.

5. Discussion

Semiotic elements convey asymmetrical power dynamics and notions of victimhood. The depiction of "Iron Dome" used by Hamas as a shield aligns with (Fairclough, 1995) idea that visual discourse is used as a technique to legitimize power. Moreover, Framing is a very

effective factor in political cartoons as said by Entman (1993) that framing involves selection of what should be portrayed by highlighting certain aspects of a situation. In Figure 4.1, framing allows viewer to link Palestine's leadership with violence and use of children as shields whereas it also omits Israel's attacks. Figure 4.2 suggests that Palestinian armed forces destroy their own freedom by participating in violence and kidnapping people. Chomsky (1983) also claimed that Palestinians are portrayed as aggressors, and this can be seen in the cartoon too. The idea of freedom is used in the wrong way by Hamas. Chomsky (2015) criticizes the term "freedom" used by countries. Here, the cartoon in figure 4.2 also portrays how freedom becomes useless when you get it from a destructive path and violence. The language will not have any moral meaning when it's manipulated by such violent participants (Chomsky, 1983). The use of color, composition and settings to show conflict, as per Ledin & Machin (2020), highlights emotional resonance and allows the audience to feel sympathy. Figure 3, shows victimization and criticizes international organizations as portrayed in "UN will build Hamas' new hospital".

Hamas is cynical who utilizes international assistance as a buffer against its own shortcomings. The rats around the Palestine's man raise dehumanization metaphors which are used historically to refer to the enemy as filth and this strategy is well used in political cartoons. The media frequently depicts Palestinians with animals and according to Chomsky (1983), Western media dehumanize Palestine and this dehumanization is equally prevalent in multimodal texts including political cartoons.

Moreover, the findings also revealed cartoons against Israel and its perspective. It is said by McCloud (1993) that cartoons offer a simplified representation of reality that helps viewers relate emotionally to those visuals and easily understand geopolitical issues and conflicts. Figure 4.4 shows inequality and dominance by portraying that people of Palestine don't even receive aids, have no power and Israel has dominance over them. This portrayal of inequality is also stated by Fairclough (1999) that satirical discourse has a critical role in challenging authority.

According to Ledin & Machin (2020), semiotic elements construct reality. In the same manner, the gesture of "silence" in the figure 4.5 creates a discursive cover for war which allows the viewer to question authorities who control what can be seen or said. The use of Discourse Historical Approach strategies portrayed that silence is rhetorical act that aligns with power. This cartoon aligns with the ideas of Chomsky (2015) that Western government tend to ignore the aggression of Israel while claiming to support human rights. This directly aligns with Chomsky (2015) that peace plans of U.S usually act as a cover for Israel's actions for internal and political gains. According to Said (1992), Western media frames Palestine's suffering as legitimate through language of peace. The U.S portrays the East as violent. Figure 4.6 supports the idea that the U.S is not a peacemaker but reinforces power dynamics.

Moreover, cartoons expose media's ethical asymmetry, as said by Van Dijk (1998) that discourse is influenced by ideologies. Not all cartoons favor Israel's ideologies. 4/6 cartoons reverse the framing and show Israel as violent aggressor. The use of exaggeration in figures 4.4 and 4.6 with enlarged faces reinforce and highlights the violence. The figure 4 and 5 link with (Wodak, 2015) idea of discursive recontextualization where narratives of weak as Palestine attain visibility through political satire. The discursive strategies of visuals in cartoons depict victimhood, empathy and blame. 3/6 cartoons in the research emphasize on

this bias of Western media, but other 4/6 cartoons challenge it by exposing Israel as the oppressor too.

6. Conclusion

This research study explored how political cartoons create semiotic meanings and ideological perceptions depicting Israel-Palestine. The analysis revealed that political cartoons are not just illustrations but also serve as an effective technique for emotional persuasion and framing the ideologies of people. Multimodal discourse analysis demonstrated that the use of semiotic resources establishes different perspectives and generates emotional reactions from viewers. Moreover, the Discourse Historical Approach made it possible to comprehend discursive techniques in detail which create groups, allocate guilt and develop narratives. The research reveals some cartoons humanize Palestine's sufferings whereas others support Israel's action.

This disparity shows how historical representational practices and prevailing ideologies can influence global discourse. The dual framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Discourse Historical Approach emphasizes that political cartoons of the Palestine-Israel conflict are ideological battlegrounds where critical narratives and realities are mixed into visual metaphors. The findings also revealed that these cartoons use satire to highlight inconsistencies in international reactions, including selective outrage.

This study highlights power dynamics, unbalanced framing and ideologies present in the cartoons of Israel and Palestine conflict. Furthermore, the result of data analysis also challenges assertions made by scholars including Noam Chomsky who claimed that Western media only portrays Israel as victim of Palestine's terrorism.

Although the research study was comprehensive but it only looked at a few limited cartoons from a few chosen newspapers and online cartoon websites. Larger data in future studies that cover different languages and social media platforms, including Instagram and X might enhance the results. Future studies can also include comparative research on other global wars, which may shed light on the differences between universal and cultural variations in visual discourse. The research can also be expanded by including audience responses to political cartoons.

Political cartoons continue to have a lasting effect through criticism and persuasion in a world that has become more and more reliant on visual communication. This research study has demonstrated that the profound layers of meanings, ideology and different sentiments hidden within a frame of political cartoon can be revealed by employing the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Discourse Historical Approach. Moreover, the critical examination of political cartoons of Israel and Palestine not only allows to have better understanding of the conflict but also helps to understand how media and power dynamics shape the conflicts.

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