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**The Iraqi Political Affairs in Editorial Caricature A Semiological Study of Al-Sabah Newspaper**

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**Abstract**

*Political Caricature are one of the journalistic arts utilized by media outlets - in various forms - to convey specific messages to the public, especially regarding political issues. They contain a wide range of implicit visual communication messages aimed at influencing the audience both intellectually and emotionally. This study aims to explore the main topics addressed in the political Caricature published in "Al-Sabah" newspaper concerning the Iraqi political scene during the study period. Additionally, it aims to identify the key symbols, icons, and visual messages employed in these Caricature, as well as the predominant artistic elements used. The study poses an important question: What is the contribution of political Caricature in analyzing the Iraqi political scene from 10th October 2021 to 10th December2021? The research falls under the descriptive research category, and the researcher adopts a semiotic approach to reveal the hidden meanings and messages conveyed in these Caricature. The study delves into the underlying connotations and symbols to determine the newspaper's orientations during the study period. To achieve this, Martin Jolly's approach to semiotic analysis using a comprehensive survey method was employed on (7) political Caricature dedicated to the Iraqi political scene.*

***Keywords:***

**1. Introduction**

Caricature is considered one of the most important forms of media and communication due to the ideas they contain and the nature of the issues they address. Despite their humorous and satirical nature, they carry semiotic meanings and encrypted messages that other journalistic arts fail to convey. Caricature plays an active role by adding a sarcastic and mocking style while educating the public through various topics that concern the society and the public opinion. They serve an informative function, as they deliver messages to the recipients in a satirical and mocking manner, yet simultaneously in a meaningful and widely accessible way. In addition to this informative role, Caricature also has an educative and guiding function, as they guide the reader and present them with an image of the events, often keeping pace with current affairs.

The researcher divided his study into three sections: the methodological framework, the theoretical framework, and the analytical study. Among the key findings are the following:

1. Caricature are one of the most active sections in the "Al-Sabah" newspaper, as they constitute a distinctive feature and are consistently present in the newspaper on a daily basis.

2. The newspaper always strives to address various issues concerning society and public opinion in a manner that attracts attention and admiration."

3. Editorial Caricature have reflected the reality of the Iraqi political affairs by highlighting the ongoing internal conflict between conflicting political parties vying for power, external interventions, as well as the issue of uncontrolled arms proliferation and the spread of armed militias in the country.

1.1. Research Problem:

The research problem is the first step in the research process and can be defined as "a question that revolves in the researcher's mind about an obscure subject that needs explanation". Since Caricature are inherently semiotic texts and popular discourse that encompass various meanings and symbols, this study aims to uncover the connotations, signs, and symbols that "Caricature" address in relation to the Iraqi political affairs, represented by Al-Sabah newspaper, during the period from 10/10/2021 to 10/12/2021. Therefore, the study poses the following question: "To what extent does the art of Caricatureing contribute to the analysis of the Iraqi political affairs during the period from 10/10/2021 to 10/12/2021?"

1.2. Research Significance:

The research is significant theoretically as it seeks to understand the semiotics of editorial Caricature, their connotations, symbols, and trends present in Al-Sabah newspaper concerning the Iraqi political affairs. From an applied perspective, it aims to comprehend the semiotic meanings, symbols, and messages conveyed by the Caricature in the newspaper, through using Martin Gunning's approach to analyze editorial Caricature.

1.3. Research Objectives:

Research objectives refer to "the researcher's ability to reach new facts and information that contribute to filling existing gaps. Any study cannot be devoid of these objectives, which must be formulated in a clear and specific manner". Therefore, this study aims to understand the semiotics of the art of Caricatureing in Al-Sabah newspaper, specifically related to the Iraqi political affairs.

1.4. Type of Study, Methodology, and Tools:

This study is descriptive and relies on precise monitoring and observation of a specific phenomenon or event in a quantitative or qualitative manner within a defined time frame. It aims to identify the content and substance of editorial Caricature in the newspaper under study, uncovering the implicit and hidden meanings of the media message conveyed in those Caricature, as well as the connotations and symbols that help the researcher determine the direction of the Caricatureist in Al-Sabah newspaper.

1.5. Research Methodology:

The researcher adopted the semiotic analysis method, which is concerned with the text as a visible and deep structure that needs analysis, and highlights the tight relationship between form and content. This method relies on structure, form, and the use of signs or symbols to obtain practical results that could not be achieved without adopting this scientific method, which is one of the essential qualitative research methods. The researcher used the semiotic analysis approach through Martin Gunning's framework, which involves both denotative and connotative analysis of the editorial Caricature. It also aims to identify the formal and iconic signs contributing to the composition of the Caricature image. The researcher employed a comprehensive survey method, intending to "survey the entire research community and enumerate all the variables within the community if it is small. This method is characterized by comprehensiveness, impartiality, and the accuracy of results". Accordingly, all the editorial Caricature related to the Iraqi political affairs in Al-Sabah newspaper during the period from 10/10/2021 to 10/12/2021 were surveyed, revealing the existence of seven Caricature in total.

1.6. Data Collection Tools:

In line with the pre-defined objectives and in order to decipher the evidence and symbols in the editorial Caricature of the study, the researcher adopted the method of media discourse analysis, utilizing Martin Gunning's approach. The identified integral signs in the Caricature are as follows:

1. Formal Signs: They represent the set of formal elements added to iconic and contribute to the formation of the image. The main elements are:

- Frame: Each image has physical boundaries regulated by frame directions. When the frame is absent, the Caricature appears as if it is incomplete and not fully visible.

- Framing: It refers to the size of the image as a presumed result of the distance between the subject being depicted and the capturing lens.

- Viewing Angle and Target Selection: It establishes the continuity between the viewer's eye and the viewed subject.

- Composition and Layout on the Paper: It refers to the method followed in reading the image. The eye cannot scan the entire image at once; instead, it focuses on a specific area and then moves on to other elements.

- Shapes: It describes all the shapes in the image, whether they are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or irregular.

- Colors and Lighting: Colors are a cultural matter analyzed from the society's perspective and the civilization it originated from. As for lighting, it is one of the elements that draws attention in the image through approximation or shading of the subject or character.

2. Iconic Signs: They are based on the principle of resemblance between the signifier and the signified. For an iconic sign to be valid, it must contain some characteristics of the signified object. Iconic messages seek to find the signs contained in the image.

3. Embedded Analysis: This process involves the deconstruction of the embedded messages in the editorial Caricature based on the recipient's culture. It aims to explain and interpret the implicit connotations and symbols present in the Caricature.

1.7. Research Community:

The term "research community" refers to all the elements of the phenomenon intended for study, whether these elements are individuals, institutions, educational activities, or others. In this study, the research community consists of the political Caricature on the website of the Iraqi newspaper "Al-Sabah," which is specialized in Iraqi political affairs. These Caricature were subjected to research and analysis from a semiotic perspective, using the "Martin Jolly" approach to analyze political Caricature in Iraq. This newspaper was chosen for the following reasons:

1. It is the most widely circulated newspaper in Iraq.

2. The newspaper is quasi-official for the Iraqi state.

3. The newspaper regularly features political Caricature, which enriched the research sample during the study period.

1.8. Research Fields:

1. Spatial Field: This field involves selecting the Caricature published on the "Al-Sabah" newspaper's website, which address Iraqi political affairs during the study period.

2. Temporal Field: This field encompasses the study period specified by the researcher, which extends from October 10, 2021, to December 10, 2021.

3. Subject Field: This field involves the endeavor to analyze political Caricature related to Iraqi political affairs, using the semiotic method in analyzing the Caricature under study.

1.9. Research Terminology:

1. Semiology: It refers to the study of signs and codes, i.e., systems that enable humans to understand events as meaningful symbols. In this study, it denotes the meanings and symbols used by Caricatureists in the newspaper under study to achieve their objectives.

2. Caricature: It is a form of art that typically portrays a person or a portrait with distorted features or exaggerated elements to evoke humor in the recipient.

3. Affairs: The term "affairs" refers to the state, circumstances, status, and destiny. In this context, it is used to describe the subjects related to Iraqi political affairs during the period between October 2021 and December 2021, as depicted in the political Caricature.

**2. The Emergence of Caricature (Characteristics, Types, Functions)**

2.1. Caricature Etymology:

The word "caricature" is derived from the Latin word "Carrera." The term "caricaturist" is derived from the Latin word "carica," which means satire, distortion, exaggeration, or counterfeit.

2.2. Caricature in Terms of Art:

Caricature refers to drawings and ideas presented with the purpose of influencing individuals in a humorous or pleasing manner. It often includes comic elements and aims to comment on social or political issues, among others.

2.3. The Emergence and Evolution of Caricature:

Some researchers believe that ancient Egyptians were the first to recognize this art form, using it to criticize and ridicule their rulers' weaknesses and shortcomings. They employed animals and simple symbols to express their true opinions about their rulers.

Assyrian sculptures also featured satirical caricature-like characteristics. For instance, a marble slab found in Nimrud in 1846 depicted the defeated Jewish king "Aye" kneeling before the king "Sennacherib," who was shown with caricature-like features such as a long, crooked neck and a hooked nose. This artwork dates back to around the mid-9th century BCE.

Leonardo da Vinci's drawings are considered the real starting point of caricature in Europe. He created a collection of exaggerated and distorted faces, which laid the foundation for the caricature school in Europe. The Polish brothers, August and Stanisław Węgrzyński, are credited with popularizing caricature within social circles. They were initially apprehensive about drawing people and exaggerating their features, so they experimented with turning faces into animal-like forms and distorting them.

In France, the artist Charles Philipon made significant strides in the history of caricature by publishing the first illustrated satirical weekly newspaper called "Le Caricature" in 1830.

In the United States, William Charles, a Scottish immigrant, is credited with laying the groundwork for caricature art. He left his homeland and immigrated to America in the early 19th century due to his sharp criticism of Great Britain. During Jackson's presidency, a group of satirical illustrators emerged and introduced a new style where text was depicted as a knotted ribbon or connected to the character's mouth.

2.4. Functions of Caricature:

1. Communication Function: Caricature serves as a form of communication between the artist and the audience and between readers and the newspaper. The caricaturist expresses specific positions, events, or phenomena, connecting with the audience through a familiar language.

2. Informative Function: Caricature holds significant value as it reflects awareness of all that occurs in society. It remains abreast of political, social, and economic events, presenting them within a satirical artistic framework on newspaper pages.

**3. Semiological Analysis of Caricatures in Al-Sabah Newspaper**

The analyzed issues consist of 29 editions of Al-Sabah newspaper published between 10/10/2021 and 19/10/2022. These editions were chosen using a comprehensive inclusion method, as shown in Table 2, which presents the issue number, day, and date for each edition.

Table 2: Selected Editions for Semiological Analysis in Al-Sabah Newspaper

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Number** | **Day** | **Date** |
| 1 | 5238 | Thursday | 14/10/2021 |
| 2 | 5239 | Saturday | 16/10/2021 |
| 3 | 5249 | Thursday | 28/10/2021 |
| 4 | 5254 | Wednesday | 3/11/2021 |
| 5 | 5268 | Saturday | 20/11/2021 |
| 6 | 5269 | Sunday | 21/11/2021 |
| 7 | 4272 | Wednesday | 24/11/2021 |
| 8 | 5279 | Thursday | 2/12/2021 |
| 9 | 5284 | Wednesday | 8/12/2021 |
| 10 | 5286 | Saturday | 11/12/2021 |

3.1. Analysis of Image (1)

First Caricature: In the Al-Sabah newspaper on 14/10/2021, titled "Accepting Victory and Defeat" by the Caricatureist Khudair Al-Humairy.



The Semiological Analysis "Surface Level":

The Caricature comprises two segments of the same individuals. In one segment, the smaller-sized person raises the hand of the larger-sized person, who is smiling with a sign of victory. In the other segment, the larger person chokes the smaller person, displaying anger and frustration.

The Visual Message:

- Placement: The Caricature is placed on page 10 of Al-Sabah newspaper in the lower-left corner of the page.

- Frame: The image is confined within a 9.5 cm width and 8.5 cm height frame.

- Framing: The Caricature focuses on a small white background that quickly turns brown, with slight shading beneath the characters. The image is centered to emphasize its core message.

- Shooting Angle and Target Selection: The Caricature faces the reader and is centered on the page to draw the reader's attention to the main subject.

- Composition and Layout: The subject is presented through two divided blocks with a title for the Caricature and the Caricatureist's signature on the left side in the middle of the Caricature.

- Colors and Lighting: The Caricature has a brown background color, symbolizing contrasting elements. In its positive aspect, it represents stability, peace, and security, while its negative aspect signifies harshness and isolation. The main character is dressed in gray, reflecting formality, strength, and control.

The Iconic Message:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Iconic Functions | First-Level Evidence | Second-Level Inclusion |
| The Winning Man | Man raising his hand in victory | Accepting election integrity and transparency |
| The Ruler | Man with a small body and build | Weakness of the Independent High Electoral Commission |
| The Losing Man | Man choking the election announcer | Doubting the fairness and transparency of the elections |

Shapes: The Caricatureist employs the natural shape of the human body, focusing on portraying the emotions of joy and anger in the same character through facial expressions in the two segments.

Semiotic Analysis "Inclusion":

The Caricature highlights an important issue - political parties in Iraq do not embrace the culture of accepting defeat as they do with victory. When election results align with their desires, they praise and compliment the "Independent High Electoral Commission," expressing satisfaction with its work and how it ensured transparent and fair elections. However, this approach quickly changes when the results do not meet their expectations. They start questioning the credibility of the commission, as losers never blame themselves.

3.2. Analysis of Image (2)

Second Drawing: In the Al-Sabah newspaper on 16/10/2021, titled "Untitled" by the Caricatureist Khudair Al-Humairi.



Iconic Analysis (Apparent):

The drawing depicts a seesaw with a chair at each end, and at each side, there is an unidentified and indistinct figure trying to pull the chair.

Iconic Message (Formal):

Location: This caricature was placed on page 10 of Al-Sabah newspaper, in the lower-left corner of the page.

Frame: The image is limited by a frame measuring 10 cm in width and 8 cm in height.

Framing: The details of the image begin with a gradient background starting with the blue color, then dominated by white color with slight shading in gray for the chair, which is the essence and core of the subject.

Angle of view and target selection: The image is centered to face the reader directly, allowing the reader to focus on one subject only.

Composition and layout on paper: The artist portrayed the subject through three blocks in the drawing, with no title for the Caricature and the artist's signature in the lower-right corner of the drawing.

Colors and lighting: The caricature is presented with a gradient background starting with blue, which signifies calmness and may symbolize the calm before the storm. Then, the white color dominates the background. The chair in the center is brown, symbolizing power and control in a symbolic reference to whoever sits on this "ruling chair." At the ends of the chair, there are two tied ropes held by hidden hands wearing gray color, which symbolizes formality and mystery, indicating the presence of hidden forces that prolong and fuel the conflict.

Iconic Message (Iconic Functions):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Iconic Functions** | **First-Level Evidence** | **Second-Level Inclusion** |
| Chair | Ruling chair | Authority, power, and influence |
| Rope | Rope tied to the chair | Struggle of political parties for power |
| Hands | Hidden forces | Nourishing and prolonging the conflict |

Shapes: The drawing represents the idea of political conflict over power, relying on the symbolism of the chair, which represents the "ruling chair," and the symbolism of the "rope" signifying rivalry and conflict among political parties in Iraq.

Semiotic Analysis (Implicit):

Khudair Al-Humairi illustrates in this drawing the danger of the political situation in Iraq due to the ongoing power struggle and the failure to reach a solution to the political crisis, represented by the inability to form a new government. This is depicted through the representation of authority or the state as a seesaw, with the chair symbolizing a well-known authority, and on each side of the chair, there are two tied ropes, each with hidden hands seeking to pull the chair towards them. This is a clear symbolic representation that the continuation of this conflict and the lack of flexibility by these parties to resolve the crisis will eventually lead to the breaking or collapse of the chair, meaning the collapse of the entire political process.

3.3. Analysis of Image (3)

Third Drawing: In the Al-Sabah newspaper on 13/10/2021, titled "Starting to Receive Appeals" by the Caricatureist Khudair Al-Humairi.

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Iconic Analysis (Apparent): The drawing consists of several individuals carrying swords and daggers, heading towards the ballot boxes to appeal.

Iconic Message (Formal): Location: This caricature was placed on page 10 of Al-Sabah newspaper, in the lower-left corner of the page. Frame: The image is limited by a frame measuring 10 cm in width and 7.5 cm in height. Framing: The details of the image begin with a light pink background, with the focus on the image in the center as it represents the essence and core of the subject. Angle of view and target selection: The image is centered to face the reader directly, allowing the reader to focus on one subject only. Composition and layout on paper: The artist portrayed the subject by dividing the drawing into several blocks, with the title of the Caricature and the artist's signature in the lower-left corner below the drawing. Colors and lighting: The caricature is presented with a light pink background, which signifies hesitation and lack of trust. This is a clear symbolic reference to the lack of trust in the announced results and the transparency and credibility of the officials overseeing the electoral process. Therefore, the artist portrays this aspect by using the word "appeals" as a challenge to the credibility, integrity, and transparency of the "Independent High Electoral Commission." Additionally, the use of the symbolism of "swords and daggers" further emphasizes the message.

Iconic Message (Iconic Functions):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Iconic Functions** | **First-Level Evidence** | **Second-Level Inclusion** |
| Ballot box | Ballot box | Democracy and transparency |
| Swords and daggers | Receiving appeals | Challenging the elections and doubting their credibility |

Shapes: In the drawing, there is a representation of skepticism and appeals against the election results by the losing parties. This is depicted through the symbolism of the ballot box receiving appeals with swords and daggers held by the political parties, signifying the challenge and skepticism towards the credibility of the "Independent High Electoral Commission."

Semiotic Analysis (Implicit): This caricature was published three days after the legislative elections in Iraq, which, as usual, were met with doubts and suspicions from the political parties in Iraq, especially the losing ones. These parties do not accept their defeat in the elections but strive to prove the opposite by not recognizing and doubting the results that were announced.

Therefore, Khudair Al-Humairi depicts that starting to receive appeals against the election results is like a stab with a sword or dagger carried out by the political parties, aiming at the integrity, credibility, and transparency that the "Independent High Electoral Commission" should possess. This is portrayed through the strikes of the swords on the ballot box, which is a clear symbolic representation of the "Independent High Electoral Commission."

3.4. Analysis of Image (4)

Fourth Drawing: In the Al-Sabah newspaper on 3/11/2021, titled "Which Side Will the Scale Tilt?" by the Caricatureist Khudair Al-Humairi.



Iconic Analysis (Apparent): The drawing is a caricature in which we see a group of people sitting between two chairs. The chair on the right is labeled "Consensus Government," while the chair on the left is labeled "Majority Government." We can observe that these people are tilting towards the chair labeled "Consensus Government," indicating their intentions and aspirations.

Iconic Message (Formal): Location: This caricature was placed on page 10 of Al-Sabah newspaper, in the lower-left corner of the page. Frame: The image is limited by a frame measuring 10 cm in width and 8 cm in height. Framing: The details of the image are clear due to the presence of a gray background with shading for the main characters of the drawing, and the focus is on the center as it represents the essence and content of the subject. Angle of view and target selection: The image is centered to face the reader directly, allowing the reader to focus on one subject only. Composition and layout on paper: The artist portrayed the subject through a single drawing block, with the title of the Caricature and the artist's signature on the left side of the drawing.

Colors and Lighting: The caricature is presented with a gray background, and there is simple shading for the characters and symbols in the drawing. Additionally, the artist used red color for the chairs, which symbolizes danger and blood that those who sit on them might face, as a reference to the danger or death faced by the "people" ruled by those in power.

Iconic Message (Iconic Functions):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Iconic Functions** | **First-Level Evidence** | **Second-Level Inclusion** |
| Chair | Seat of power | Authority and strength |
| Tilting deputies | Aspiring for governance | Preferring party interests over the nation |
| Chair | People's chair | Expressing national will for a civil state |

Shapes: The drawing represents the nature and direction of the upcoming government in the form of two chairs, which clearly symbolize authority and power. It also depicts the deputies in a specific body position "tilting towards the right."

Semiotic Analysis (Implicit): Through examining the caricature and analyzing its symbolism, it becomes evident that it carries a clear and distinct aspect. It reflects the intentions and inclinations of a group of "parliament deputies," which involve their aspirations and personal interests. Thus, their intentions and inclinations are clear in heading towards a "Consensus Government" and maintaining the status quo as if nothing has happened. The chair holds a specific symbolic significance as it represents absolute authority. Despite the question posed by Khudair Al-Humairi in his caricature, it is very clear, through the drawing, which direction the scale will tilt in forming the government.

**General Study Results:**

Below is a review of the results obtained by the researcher, as follows:

1. Caricature is considered one of the most active journalistic genres in Al-Sabah newspaper. The caricature is a prominent feature in the newspaper, with its daily presence, which indicates the newspaper's continuous effort to address various issues concerning society and public opinion in an attention-grabbing and appealing manner.

2. Semiological analysis is one of the most important supporting methodologies for decoding symbols and meanings conveyed by the caricature. This is because caricatures inherently consist of a set of semiological elements, each carrying different connotations and implications from one individual or community to another.

3. Caricatures have reflected the reality of the Iraqi political situation and the internal political conflict and power struggle within Iraq.

4. Caricatures have revealed many hidden aspects of the issues discussed, especially those related to corruption and political conflicts among parties.

5. Various color spaces were used in the study sample caricatures. The use of color gradients was appropriate for conveying the meaning of the images. Black, red, gray, and brown were predominant colors, each carrying multiple connotations and nuances, representing death, danger, blood, power, cruelty, and other implications.

7. The study sample caricatures contained rich symbolic spaces and connotations, as the artist skillfully chose the most impactful iconic symbols for the Iraqi audience, such as the symbols of "ballot box" and "chair."

9. The artist resorted to using significant and moral figures abundantly, such as "the ordinary citizen" and "the terrorist."

10. The semiotic analysis of the caricatures demonstrated the significant influence of the newspaper's policy on the content of the caricatures. Differences were found in the levels of criticism directed towards the ruling authority, parties, and armed factions under various designations in the newspaper. While the criticism of the ruling authority in the newspaper was high, Al-Sabah newspaper was distinguished by its indirect and implicit style of criticism. This caution might be due to the newspaper's proximity to the authority, as the official mouthpiece of the government, making it very cautious in dealing with sensitive political issues.

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