

**A SEMIOTIC-COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF  
SELECTED ARAB SPRING POLITICAL  
CARTOONS (2011-2013)**

by

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## DEDICATION

*To my family.....*

*To my beloved country.....*

*With deepest love and respect.....*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

APGs	Arab Postgraduates
ARS	Arab Spring
ASPCswMT	Arab Spring Political Cartoon(s) with Minimal Text
CSD	Close Salient Denotation
CSC	Close Salient Connotation
DC	Denotative Clues
HOM.	Homonymous
IDMs	Inferred Denotative Meanings
ICMs	Inferred connotative Meanings
OCs	Other Connotations
ODs	Other Denotations
OMPs	Other Meaning Potentials
P.	Panel
Par.	Participant
POL.	Polysemous
SD	Salient Denotation
SC	Salient Connotation
SDM	Salient Denotative Meaning
SCM	Salient Connotative Meaning

# **ANALISIS SEMIOTIK-KOGNITIF DALAM KARTUN-KARTUN POLITIK ARAB SPRING YANG DIPILIH (2011-2013)**

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini menganalisa maklum balas dari dua puluh lima mahasiswa Arab di USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia berhubung dengan kartun politik Arab Spring yang dipilih dari perspektif semiotik-kognitif. Sebanyak lima panel kartun Arab Spring dari tahun 2011 hingga 2013 dipilih dari akhbar dan laman web elektronik, dimana mereka mencerminkan peristiwa Arab Spring secara progresif untuk menyiasat makna denotatif dan konotatif, pola tafsiran dan kemajmukan makna. Kajian ini menggunakan semiotik visual Barthes' (1977) dan aplikasi Moriarty (1997; 2005) dari kesimpulan kognitif Peirce (1933; 1994) untuk menyiasat visual Semiotik. Analisis ini adalah berasaskan orientasi teks dan pembolehkan kognitif. Kajian-kajian terdahulu telah membantu dalam meringkaskan pembacaan panel sementara kajian-kajian terbaru memberikan kesimpulan kognitif untuk mengenal pasti corak tafsiran yang ditimbulkan dari maklum balas peserta. Analisis kartun ini disertakan dengan mesej politik yang mencerminkan pandangan yang optimis atau pesimis mengenai isu-isu politik pemberontakan Arab. Kajian ini mengenal pasti lima tema utama dari respons; niat negatif ke arah Arab Spring, Manifestasi perjuangan rakyat Arab dengan demokrasi, media sosial yang kuat, masyarakat antarabangsa yang enggan menawarkan krisis politik Syria tanpa penyelesaian kompromi, dan pencapaian kebebasan Arab Spring. Didapati bahawa pola segera adalah dominan dalam kajian ini berbanding pola interpretasi analitik. Kemajmukan makna jelas pada kedua-dua tahap denotatif dan konotatif yang dinilai sebagai kartun polysemik yang sangat denotatif. Kajian ini menyediakan beberapa cadangan pedagogi dan implikasi

teori-teori yang boleh digunapakai dalam bidang akademik khususnya dalam bidang kajian bahasa visual dan literasi visual.

# **A SEMIOTIC–COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ARAB SPRING POLITICAL CARTOONS (2011-2013)**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzed the responses of twenty five Arab postgraduates in USM, Penang, Malaysia in relation to the selected Arab Spring political cartoons from semiotic-cognitive perspectives. A total of five Arab Spring cartoon panels from the year 2011 to 2013 are selected from electronic newspapers and websites, as they reflect Arab Spring events progressively to investigate their denotative and connotative meanings, patterns of interpretations and plurality of meaning. This study utilizes Barthes' (1977) visual semiotics and Moriarty's (1997; 2005) application of Peirce's (1933; 1994) cognitive inferences to investigate visuals Semiotically. The analysis is text- oriented and cognitive- reader oriented based. The former helps summarize the panels' readings while the latest provides cognitive inferences to identify patterns of interpretations elicited from the participants' responses. The analysis of these cartoons is connoted with political messages that reflect either optimistic or pessimistic views about the Arab uprisings' political issues. This study identified five main themes from the responses; negative intention towards Arab Spring, manifestation of Arab peoples' struggle with democracy, the powerful of social media, the reluctant international community offers the Syrian political crisis no compromising solution, and Arab Spring freedom achievement. It is found that the immediate pattern is dominant in this study compared to the analytic interpretive pattern. Plurality of the meaning is evident on both denotative and connotative levels. They are rated as highly denotatively polysemic cartoons. This study provides some pedagogical recommendations and theoretical implication that



can be employed in the academia in the area of visual language studies and visual literacy.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Overview**

Visuality dominance has led many scholars to tackle it in their studies from the perspective of non-verbal language (Pun, 2010). In this respect, Pun defined images as “a natural outcome of the age of globalization and the concept of global village” (p.85). He further maintained that the supremacy of images as means of communication over other types are attributable to the fact that they are “form[s] of innovative and creativity” (p.85). Thus, visual images started to be the focus of many recent studies and scholarships in different fields and cultures.

However, it has been shown that different scholars have dealt images differently. For instance, some scholars such as DeSousa and Medhurst (1982), Cohn (2012), Jimoh (2012), and Navasky (2013) studied caricatures or cartoons as an independent genre of visual images. They defined caricatures and cartoons as a visual art consisting of simple graphic lines and exaggerated characters’ features. Such graphic lines can (or cannot) be accompanied by written comic comments to attract directly the attention of the viewers, leaving either a big smile and/or comic sarcasm. Barthes (1977) stated that caricatures provide either overt or covert conceptual information. They can be a source of both denotative and connotative meanings. They help reflect a critical message about reality to address certain social or political issues. Besides, they might burgeon the sense of reformation and rebellion against a deteriorating societal issue. Recently, scholars exerted great efforts in investigating linguistically the comic aspect of images even though such studies are regarded as a vogue for several decades, especially in Europe. Furthermore, coming across the proverb that says “a picture is worth a thousand

words” highlight the role of visual images in general, and for cartoon images in the Middle East and Arab countries, they reflect more meanings (Göçek, 1998).

Therefore, when visual symbols are used in place of words to express an idea or to evoke a feeling or a mood within people, one should make sure that the viewer is able to understand the message (Oring, 2000, p.58). Owing to the importance of images nowadays, the researcher investigates the role of cartoon images of Arab spring (henceforth ARS) (vis. minimal text political cartoons) in generating the intended mental concept (denotatively and connotatively), and seeing the different patterns of interpretations of the type in question.

### **1.1 The Arab Spring**

A review of the ARS area seems vital to foreground this study against a substantial body of knowledge about ARS era of revolutions in Arab countries. This goal could be accomplished through revealing the previous studies done in this context and through following the relevant history of ARS. This phase of research is considered significant in academic research. For example, Walker and Chaplin (1997) related the achievement of critical understanding with the supportive actual examples of a given artifacts of certain historical and social context because “every artifact is the result of multiple determinants or factors, economic, political, cultural [and] institutional” (p.4). Brown (2005) argued that these substantial preliminaries are intuitive because they “will then be used to guide scholarly reading of the ... illustration and offer some insights into questions raised...” (p.316). Al-Shaibani (2011) accentuated the role of contextualizing and/or situating the research in its boarder historical, and political background to depict a clear relevant sketch to help the researcher critically analyze the issues of the investigated text. In this regard, Rose (2012) considered contextual knowledge of the basic requirements when

researching whatever type of imagery that is of interest to the researcher or the viewers. This is because “developing a ‘good eye’ requires a lot of a certain kind of ...contextual information” (p.52). Accordingly, this section mainly aims to briefly and firmly set forth the history and background information about the reasons and causes of the actions of Arab Street during the public protests and citizens’ revolution. This enables the researcher to prove the relevance of the questions related to the setting and themes of the data of the study to contextualize it. This is because ARS offered different Arab community spectra, such as the intellectualism, the freedom to express their views on issues such as corruption, poverty, inequality, the absence of freedom of opinion and expression etc. This has further steered the raised public awareness’ state and created some sort of self-esteem among the revolutionist in addition to the Arab cartoonist, the active artists of Arab community. Its contribution towards shaping a new self-perception of Arab identity was immense.

The series of revolutions and protests in the Middle East have come to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’ ARS, which started on December 17, 2010. The rebellions of ARS manifested themselves across the following Arab countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and Iraq who have demands for both liberty and rights. It has resulted in the fall of dictatorships, like: Bin Ali in Tunisia, Housni Mubark in Egypt, Gadafi in Libya, Salih in Yemen, and up till now combat against the Assad dictatorship in Syria (Lesch & Haas, 2012).

The state of frustration among Arab youth, population who mostly suffer from unemployment has increased the rates of the anger wave that found its opportunity through the Internet, new media and social online communities (Campante & Chor, 2012). Moreover, the deterioration and serious decline in the general condition of the majority of Arab countries resulted in structural imbalance

represented in the great disparity in income distribution, the absence of democracy, the erosion of wealth and the decline of the Arab (Rose, 2011). The review of ARS later (see Chapter Two, section 2.1) reveals the different images and scenes raised up during the events and actions of ARS revolutions' age that tempted the cartoonist all over the world to employ and utilize it as a rich substance for their cartoon panels' representative icons. Hence, this stimulated and enhanced, directly or indirectly, the sparking of the phenomenon of ARS political cartoons. These issues and the related ones are explained in the review of ARS literature in section 2.1.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The dominance of visual images in the world nowadays as an economic means of communication creates a necessity to understand how to interpret the meanings they communicate (Jenks, 1995; Felten, 2008, & Pun, 2010). However, the different interpretations an image might bear have been explicated differently by different scholars. Yoon (2006), for instance, explained that the lack of deep understanding of a visual image's intended message is a problem as it is sometimes interpreted inappropriately or wrongly. Gombrich (1969), Pettersson (1989), and El Refaie (2009) argued that the polysemous or homonymous semantic plurality of an image is related to the reliance on the non-literal way of thinking, subjectivity, and/or on context differences. Scholars such as Rose (2001), As-sudani (2011), and de Olivera (2012) had a similar opinion in that images are generally ambiguous. Several reasons contribute to this phenomenon but As-sudani (2011) noted that in the Arab context, the level of ambiguity increases because many Arab teachers and learners still do not know how to fully exploit the advantages of images in their teaching and learning processes.

The absence of knowledge in comprehending visuals will thus have an implication on the understanding of their intended meaning (denotative and/or connotative) or on the generating of other meaning potentials (less related or totally distant meanings) (Barthes, 1977 & Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2010). Moreover, visual literacy is an important element that helps enhance students' critical thinking process and creativity in both work and life (Zainol Abidin, 2014). Yet, the semiotic aspects of visual images regarding the plurality of meanings derived by the readers of a visual discourse, and their semiotic-cognitive effects have been scarcely received (Uvaraj & Begum, 2011). Visuals as in the form of cartoons, as opined by Woźniak's (2014), reflect different interesting political and societal events. This may be true in the case of Arab uprising that provides a glance into the Arab people's thoughts. Therefore, issues related to the Arab audiences' understanding of political cartoons of this era deserve exploration, more so, in the context of students who have exposure to international learning experiences. A study by Chuah and Singh (2010) found that implications of visual literacy skills on different English language learning and teaching skills reflect a positive output of students' language proficiency in general at the tertiary level. However, there is a polemic that the Arab readers "who witnessed a boom in cultural production relating to music, graffiti, and political cartoons" have difficulties in understanding visuals and political cartoons (Woźniak 2014, p.5). Hence, this study explores how Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Arab postgraduates (henceforth APGs), whose countries have witnessed ASR, perceive these cartoon visuals. The choice of USM is attributed to the fact that Arab students in higher education stages are living in an international environment and have experienced diverse cultural experiences in a Malaysian university setting. This diversity initiative may influence students' productive thoughts, critical and creative

thinking of the graduate students (Pandian, 2008 & Chang Da, 2007). Accordingly, this study on visual discourse aims to bridge the gap identified in the literature review and explore the perception of the students based on the political cartoons presented to them. This is because the researcher believes that issues, such as the usual intended meanings a visual discourse (Arab Spring political cartoons with minimal text (henceforth ASPCswMT)) communicates meaning potentials. Do APGs have difficulties in understanding visuals and political cartoons as shown by Woźniak's (2014) study? Accordingly, this study explores further the role of visual discourse, highlighting the intended or unintended meanings, and the extent to which the given meanings are concurrent and/or different as they are deemed important in visual discourse studies.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This research is intended to attain the following objectives:

1. To investigate the explicit salient denotative and connotative meanings of the selected Arab spring political cartoons with minimal text (2011-2013)
2. To explore the patterns of interpretations that Arab postgraduates in USM provided when reading the selected Arab Spring political cartoons with minimal text.
3. To examine the plurality of meanings in terms of polysemous, homonymous and other meaning potentials of the selected Arab Spring political cartoons with minimal text.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the explicit salient denotative and connotative meanings of the selected Arab Spring political cartoons with minimal text (2011-2013)?

2. What are the patterns of interpretations of the selected Arab Spring political cartoons with minimal text provided by postgraduates in USM?

What is the plurality of meanings in terms of polysemous, homonymous and other meaning potentials of the selected Arab Spring political cartoons with minimal text?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Visual images have become a transparent and widely spread means of communication (Worth & Gross, 1981; Petterson, 1989; Davies, Bathurst & Bathurst, 1990; As-sudani, 2011); especially with the enhancement of the phenomenon of globalization and internet webs. The latter, for instance, have played a vital role in the daily lives of its users to the extent that they have helped in the formation of different kinds of visual images, messages and in the creation of a visual culture (Mitchell, 1995; Felten, 2008; Rockenbach & Fabian, 2008 and Pun, 2010). In this respect, Jenks (1995) mentioned that the world nowadays is realized as a 'seen phenomenon' due to the dominance of visual signs. He also maintained that visual communication "culturally intertwines looking and seeing with knowing and understanding of the world" (p.1-2). Pun (2010) further added that people nowadays live in visual societies and communicated communities. He also stated that "visual images exert tremendous impact and influence in the way we conduct our businesses and our lifestyles. They are the driving forces behind marketing and communication" (p.85). Moreover, Mitchell (1995) reported that the development of visual language competence was traditionally the main concern of artists and designers; this is because, as Eisner (1967) elucidated, it raises the sense of nurturing artistic intelligence in our students.



Political cartoons represent a mode of visual communication and a great way to challenge thinking about an issue. According to Peñamarin (1998), whether with or without a text, these simple drawings are packed with meanings that stir many responses. They are often specific to a particular time and culture and might be a source of offence if they are taken out of their context. Therefore, Barthes (1977) added that unlike the other genres of visual images, such as self-portraits, political cartoon or caricatures are recommended to be studied semiotically and linguistically due to their ability to denote and connote various semantic references and implications. Furthermore, Hiley (2009) Pun (2010) and Fayyad (2012) asserted that visual images in general and political cartoon in particular need to be examined from the cognitive and semiotic point of view. This is because such a type of cartoon is almost of a minimal text and is highly dependent on an individual's interpretations and cognition and on the conventional knowledge of certain symbols. Thus political cartoons can capture new ideas through certain cartoons devices, such as: humor, satire and caricature (i.e. exaggeration or distortion of certain features of the cartoon characters) (El Refaie, 2009).

The importance of the present study is to give new insights into the understanding of the political cartoon image through raising the readers' awareness of how the cartoonist can convey certain messages in such visual communication contexts (Uvaraj & Begum, 2011). Therefore, the reader can infer or interpret the political cartoons. This is according to El-Refaie (2009) will "solve the mental puzzle that every cartoon poses, which can encourage viewers to see things from new angle" (p.168). Thus, political cartoon triggers the reader mental concepts (such as: freedom, dignity, justice, his/her rights, etc.). To this end, the researcher seeks to identify the different meanings of the selected ARS political cartoon panels on the

denotative and connotative levels as they attribute to the whole coherent message of the cartoon.

Moreover, the need to gain a better understanding of different patterns of interpretations and/or readings is apparent. It can be achieved through probing their ways of seeing these visual cartoons texts because these cartoons represent an essential data to help people decipher the cartoonist's political message and understand his cartoon visual language.

It is hoped that the findings of the study can provide a better knowledge of how visual images, including cartoons, can be read or seen in different domains such as politics education, etc. and to create interpretations or readings patterns. Moreover, it is hoped that acquiring skills that help to infer political cartoons can be translated into language learning pedagogical needs. In this regard, Thakur and Al-Mahrooqi (2015) maintained that acquiring skills of reading visual images can be exploited as stimuli to orient learners, such as EFL or ESL, towards critical thinking abilities. They recommend exploiting political cartoons for this pedagogical aim promoting maximally the productivity of English language proficiency through the use of cartoons in ESL/EFL.

Accordingly, the researcher adopts Barthes' (1977) model of visual semiotics in order to semiotically analyse the selected cartoons. In addition to Moriarty's (1997; 2005) adapted model of Pierce's abduction theory is employed to provide a cognitive logical inference of the data selected. This is because "reading a political cartoon involves far more than just the ability to identify the real-life referents of visual representations" (El Refaie, 2009, p.182). Further, adopting such models provides insights into image-to-viewer or reader interaction, which address the basic

questions that remained open in visual texts (cartoons) analysis (Medhurst & Desousa, 1981, p.236).

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The present study is limited to the investigation of selected political cartoon images on the phenomenon of ARS encountered in the following Arabic countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen (Lesch & Haas, 2012). Despite the huge amount of studies on political cartoons in general and on different contexts of various themes in particular, still more research needs to be conducted on ARS in particular from the semiotic point of view to maintain a proper understanding of the concepts and connotative messages lying behind them. To sum up, the importance of this era in the Arab lives, on the one hand, and the shortage of studies in this respect, on the other are all motivating forces for the researcher in her exploration of the previously set research questions in this chapter.

The researcher examines (5) political cartoon panels with minimal texts of ARS (January 2011- 2013) as read and interpreted by a group of individuals of 25 Arab postgraduate students in USM. This is because during this period, as Wekesa (2012) stated, “the growing influence of the visuals... in contemporary society is quite alarming; hence, learning to explicate them is inevitable” (p.223). In addition, Rose (2012) confirmed that “very little attention is paid either to the ways of seeing brought to particular images by specific audience, or to the social institution and practices through which images are made and displayed” (p.189). Then, the selection and number of these cartoons samples is based on the established criteria that help attain the intended goals of this study (see section 3.2 & 3.4). This is because, in qualitative studies, criterion-based sampling of the selected data, is unavoidably adopted (Ma, 2008). Although the verbal mode represented by the use of “talk

bubbles” or “speech balloons” is largely used by the cartoonist in their cartoons to express or communicate concepts, messages or ideas in certain cartoon panels (Conners, 2007, p.264), it can even be described as one of the ‘still... persists’ features of political cartoon to this day (El Refaie, 2009), but such types are found to be insignificant because this study aims at understanding how meaning can be deciphered in messages that are primarily visual. According to Moriarty and Sayre (2005), this is “particularly relevant when the message is one that relies almost exclusively on visual communication cues.” (p.244); therefore, the focus on verbal mood is excluded because this study basically focuses on the nonverbal mood of language and/or communication.

Thus, the researcher focuses on studying the political cartoon as a type of *static visual image*, as a visual language and on visuals as communicative devices. The labeling, the cartoonist's name or signature in any cartoon panel is an exception. This is because such information is a symbolic element of the cartoon panel that is expressed with verbally written figures. Such an element symbolizes and suggests implicitly or indirectly more than what they state directly. It is considered as an original part of the drawing itself or of its narrative (Barthes, 1977). Chandler (2007) illustrated that “the label seeks to anchor our interpretation and yet at the same time the label is part of the painting itself rather than a title attached to the frame.” (p.70). As for the present study, all selected cartoon panels involve titles or captions that condense and brief their meanings as intended by the cartoonist. According to Al-Shaibani (2011), the major function of the title is to reflect the meaning of the text as intended by its producer and pre-set to be conveyed to the consumers. Titles further help the researcher in establishing the cartoonists' perspectives to be later matched

with the different related, close or other interpretations of the participants of this study (see 3.8.2 Analysis Procedure, Stage I, Stage II).

However, the study excludes the animation cartoon images and restricts its sample selection to static political cartoon panels. This is because static cartoon can elaborate and motivate the creativity mechanisms of the spectator, and does not present the phenomena directly. In this vein, Eilm (2012) maintained that “another possible disadvantage is that animations present phenomena directly; therefore, students can remain passive observers without engaging in active cognitive processing.” (p.58). Furthermore, it is worthy to mention that the focus on cartoon images and neglecting the other types of visual images such as photographs, propagandas, movies images or oil paintings and other visuals, as stated by Maupoint (2010), is obviously due to the fact that:

...cartoon is a universal form of expression and communication, crossing cultural, national and language barriers. Acting as a metaphor/analogy, each individual can apply his/her own connotation to the image...adopt his/her ‘preferred meaning’. It is clear that one of the main attributes of the cartoon, is that it can express an idea, succinctly, thus providing an immediate impact (p.199).

## **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

This section provides brief definitions of the key terms and words frequently used in the chapters of this study.

### **1.7.1 Cognitive**

Martine and Ringham (2000) defined cognitive as one of the “fundamental dimensions of narrative [in addition to pragmatic and thymic] that is related to mental activities, such as knowing, convincing, deceiving [and so on]” (p.34). Its

function and significance is discourse-based. Moreover, Danesi (2009) referred to cognitive style to mean a “mode or way in which information is processed for example...visual cognitive style” (p.65). Goldstein (2013) explained “cognitive influences on perception [as] how the knowledge, memories, and expectations that a person brings to a situation influence his or her perception.” (p.409). According to Pettersson (1989), perception and image interpretation occurs on ‘low’ (immediate) and ‘high’ (analytic) cognitive levels (p.89). In this study the term *Cognitive* is to describe the cognition process of visual information of the viewer responses.

### **1.7.2 Cue/ Clue**

A cue or a clue can be defined, according to Moriarty and Sayre (1992), as “a signal of something or a reminder of something. It brings to mind something from past knowledge or previous experience that provides a framework of meaning that can be used to interpret the sign.”(p.3). In this frame, the study also employs the term ‘Denotative Clue’ abbreviated as DC that can be defined in light of the same definition of Moriarty and Sayre’s (1992) to interpret the sign on the denotative level. Hence, the plural form of this term is Denotative Clues.

### **1.7.3 Homonymy**

The term homonymy has been semiotically defined by Shaumyan (1987) as “different signs that have the same form, that is, the same sound” (p.13). He (1987) added that homonyms are two similar linguistic forms, but with different meanings such as “the noun *bear* and the verb *bear* are said to be homonyms of each other” (p.13). From the semantic point of view, Taylor (2003) defined homonymy as “the association of two or more related meanings with a single phonological form” (p.32). It is “one of the most important properties of semantic analysis” (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2007, p.152). In this study, it refers to different meanings diverted from

the intended meaning of a cartoon image as interpreted across the members of participants and only partially related to the broad general context of the respective image.

#### **1.7.4 Polysemy**

Rose (2012, p.133) stated that the meanings of signs are very complex as they are multiple; that is, polysemous. From the purely semiological perspective, polysemy is considered one of the main issues that lead to the diversity of the ways of seeing (Chandler, 2007). Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2007) stated that phenomenon of polysemy reflects the flexibility of meaning. Whilst, Helenquin (2011) pointed out that semantic ambiguity is attributed to polysemy. In this study, it refers to the multiple similar and related meanings for the same intended cartoon message across the members of participants or readers.

#### **1.7.5 Cartoon genre**

Cartoon as a genre can be defined as a graphic drawings (Navasky, 2013). Nevertheless, different scholars, such as De Sousa (1981), Peñamarin, (1998), Burns (2007) and Cohn (2012) referred to cartoons adopting various terms which are: visual, graphic drawings, image, visual text or discourse, illustration, cartoon panel, caricature according to different viewpoints. Lobinger (2010) denoted that although there are vast varieties of images with different genres, all share the name ‘image’ (p.39). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use them interchangeably because they refer to the same concept of cartoon, but focus on ‘panel’.

#### **1.7.6 Political Cartoon**

According to Matthews (2011) it is also called “Editorial cartoons” (p.4). Danesi (2009) defined it as a “drawing that caricatures [current] event or personage [in magazines and newspapers]” (p.55). It is “one of the oldest forms of graphic

representation” (Maupoint, 2010, p.81). In addition to language, Barthes (1987) considered such image (cartoon), photograph, fashion style as another “mood of representation” (p.124-6). In this study, political cartoon is a graphic static visual image, drawn and/or designed to represent and convey a social or political message using cartoon and/or graphic visual language (devices). One of the political cartoon formats or forms that this study has focused on is the *single cartoon panel* which can be defined as a cartoon whose entire idea is represented usually in one picture, with or without a caption. The caption is usually placed within a single panel or box with an inferred rather than actually sketched frame (Matthews, 2011; El Refaie, 2009 & Sani, Abdullah, Abdullah & Ail, 2012)

#### **1.7.7 Salient**

Salient: is an adjective (of the noun Salience) that means the most noticeable or important (Salient, n.d.). Salience is essential as it is where the viewers will begin their reading paths in relation to a visual product. According to Machin and Mayr (2012) Salience “is where certain features in compositions are made to stand out to draw our attention to foreground certain meanings. Such features will have the central symbolic value in the composition.” (p.54). Salience in this study is recognized on the denotative and connotative levels where these concepts are considered in Barthes’ (1977) visual semiotics model adapted in this study. Furthermore, based on the above definitions, other operational terms are reflected in this study and can be defined as follows:

i) Salient Denotation abbreviated as SD:

It is the most noticeable or important meaning on the denotative level or the intended one.

ii) Close Salient Denotation abbreviated as CSD:



It is the closely or approximately related to the most noticeable or important meaning on the denotative level.

iii) Salient Connotation abbreviated as SC:

It is the most noticeable or important meaning on the connotative level or the intended one.

iv) Close Salient Connotation abbreviated as CSC:

It is the closely or approximately related to the most noticeable or important meaning on the connotative level in contrast

v) Other Denotations abbreviated as ODs:

They are different meanings that have no close or approximation relation to the intended meaning on the denotative level

vi) Other Connotations abbreviated as OCs:

They are different meanings that have no close or approximation relation to the intended meaning on the connotative level.

### **1.7.8 Semantics**

Danesi (2009) defined semantics as “the study of meaning in language in all its dimensions, including word meaning, phrase meaning, sentence meaning, utterance meaning, etc.” (p.265). In addition to the meaning standard, Martin and Ringham (2000) defined semantics in terms of its functionality within linguistic studies as that branch of linguistics that is responsible for basing and explaining the standards of the relations existed between signs and what they denote or symbolize. Finch (2000) related semantics with the aspect of “sense, that is, the meaning which the word has by virtue of its place in the linguistic system...[that deal with] number of items such as synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy and hyponymy”(p.146). In this study, the term *semantic* is used to approach the meaning

of visual image (a cartoon) processes. It is related to the intended meaning and/or the representation of the intended concepts in a given political cartoon.

### **1.7.9 Semiotics**

Traditionally, it was defined by the Swiss linguist de Saussure as “the science of sign” termed as *semiology* and in America, the philosopher Peirce almost agreed on the same basics but with different terminology as *semiotics*. According to Lacey (1998), “semiology and semiotics mean the same although the latter term appears to have gained greater currency [as] a wonderful tool for analyzing images” (p.56). It deals with the verbal phase of language and with the nonverbal as well.

### **1.8 Organization of the Study**

This study consists of five chapters. **Chapter One** is an introductory chapter, which includes the overview of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study, and the definition of the key terms which followed by the organization of the study.

**Chapter Two** encompasses two parts. The first part surveys the relevant literature to ARS. Then, it presents the previously conducted studies on visuality in general and on the specific domain of cartoon studies in particular to situate this study among previous manifested studies. Further, it provides a general background to cartoons and visuals defining the areas of cartoon studies and the following related issues: forms of cartoons in general, the features of political cartoon, the functions of cartoon, the Arab political cartoon, the Arab electronic newspaper, new media and its psychological impact that addresses the relationship of media visual image and emotional aspect of the reader. The second part of this chapter reviews the basics of

semiotics, sign, the core of semiotic analysis, the theories adopted in this study and the theoretical framework.

**Chapter Three** sets up the methodology and the research design of the study as follows: sample size, data selection, the criteria for data selection, the instruments used to collect the data, the technique and method used for data collection, the interviewing procedures, the procedures of analysis. It also shows how to address the research questions and to pilot this study to validate the adapted interview question and the sample analysis. It concludes with a summery and a discussion about the validity and reliability of the study.

**Chapter Four** is devoted to an in-depth semiotic text-oriented analysis of the seven selected cartoon panels and its related reader-oriented readings. Each cartoon panel is identified according to a table, and is then analyzed separately. Each table includes the basic semiotic categories and elements, the general explanations and descriptions of the introductory and preliminary information of the cartoon panel, and the main and the minor parts of the cartoon. Semiotic analysis on the denotative level leads to a semiotic analysis on the connotative level of each cartoon panel. The emerged semiotic analysis that reflects the cartoonist's perspectives is employed to match the participants' collected readings which will be tabled based on their relatedness into the homonymic or polysemic readings.

**Chapter Five** discusses the overall results obtained from chapter four and addresses the three research questions. It also draws some general conclusions, recommendations and sums up suggestions for future studies.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

It has been acknowledged by different scholars (such as Eisner (1967), Davies, Bathurst and Bathurst (1990), Mirzoeff (1999), Efland (2002), Kress (2010), Goldstein (2013)) that since the second half of the Twentieth century, the cognitive aspects, knowledge and understanding have been studied and expressed in linguistic domain as well as in other non-linguistic domains. Different means can be used to express the same piece of knowledge and that different modes can be used to express various types of knowledge (Eisner, 2008). As far as meaning is concerned, different scholars conducted many studies. Some of them concentrated on studying the meaning of verbal texts and the effect of grammar or styles on meaning; and others concentrated on the relation between orthography, phonology and semantics (i.e. homonymy, polysemy, etc.). Some of the studies were conducted on verbal texts in Arabic countries, others on the western world. Recently, the attention has been shifted towards studying a new mode of knowledge transfer; i.e. visual images. At the beginning, the attention was on examining the grammar of visual images, then on the humoristic aspect, the figurative verbal language of cartoon (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). The interest in visual language is on the move since ‘we embark on visual information age’, as MacEachren stated (1995, preface).

Mitchell (1995) added that “we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them” (p.13). He further mentioned that despite the major academic work on visual issues; however, there are still few guidelines on the possible methods to be used in image

analysis and interpretations. Accordingly, Mitchell (1995) draws the academics, researcher and undergraduate students' attentions to methodological and cultural issues of visual studies with respect to some interesting issues such as those raised from the diversity of visual.

Correspondingly, Hall (1997) emphasized that "there is no single or 'correct' answer to the question, 'What does this image mean?'" or 'What is this ad saying?'" (p.9). This is because no law can guarantee the possibility of having one and true meaning, and that because meaning changes over time. Consequently, to settle the different readings given, one should cross validate the meanings given the actual practices and forms of signification used.

Rose (2001) was in the line with Mitchell in that "there's an awful lot of hype around 'the visual'... We're often told that we ... 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). To the importance of images, Rose (2001) called for reconstructing schools and preparing syllabi on visual grammar. She further accentuated the importance of studying the latter with texts and numbers to know whether or not visuals are like languages in their nature and work. In the same vein, Mirzoeff (1999) stated that "modern life takes place on screen.... imagery seeing is much more than believing. It is not just a part of everyday life, it is everyday life" (p.1). The present chapter is therefore dedicated to review the previous work exerted in this respect. It also sheds light on the differences between the current work and the previously conducted ones. Moreover, it illustrates the models adopted in the analysis of the present work, as it is clearly stated in sections (2.6).

## 2.1 Review of Related Arab Spring Literature

Reviewing the ARS proposes an opportunity to the reader to know the different views and opinions of scholars and people from different Arab countries and from different parts of the globe about ARS, how they see the ARS scene and how they read ARS. Therefore, it is important to see how scholars looked, realized and depicted the ARS scene in their writings. This step resulted in supporting the researcher's justification in selecting the ARS as a topic.

Readings among different texts types about the topic of ARS clearly reveal two opposite and totally different visions of the ARS. The first is a positive optimistic vision of an image seeing it as an uprising of the Arab nation and Arab people after long decades of dictatorial regimes as the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia described in Gordner's (2013) words as "successful nonviolent democratic revolution[s]." Throughout these decades which represented different forms of Arab people severe exploitations and humiliation that kept the Arab people decades behind. Also, they set Arab communities and Arab citizens away from the progress turn of other parts of the globe, despite of the possession of great, giant wealth of black gold (petroleum) and countless different valuable natural resources. On the contrary to the first image, the second image seems as dominating the characterization of the second reading of the scene of ARS, depicting it as an Arab Autumn because of the huge damage and chaos that is affecting different life sectors in the Arab countries involved (Al-Jaber, 2010; Geurts, 2014).

Furthermore, attempts to define and to describe the ARS has become increasingly necessary to people as part of their cultural knowledge because naming may carry a *positive* or *negative* message to ideologically reflect the intended meanings pre-set to be conveyed to the media consumers (Al-Shaibani, 2011). ARS

is described by some media and scholars using different names such as *Arab Uprisings*. Schwartz, Kaye and Martini (2013) clarified that the term *Arab Uprising* is logical and unsurprising as it represents the “dominant characterization of the dramatic developments across the Arab world since 2011” (p.7). They correspondingly suggested to use the term *Arab spring* as it clearly implies potentially extremely optimistic connotation whereas the term *Arab Uprisings* seems to convey more realistic vision and that is “while the direction of these political transitions remains unclear, they nonetheless have the potential to improve the stability and well-being of the region’s people over the longer term” (Schwartz, Kaye & Martini, 2013, p.8).

Furthermore, other names include *The Qubtic Winter* which was used by Tadros (2011) as a reference to the persecution of Egypt’s Christians that they suffer from. In spite of the powerful image that showed both Muslims and Christians doing their prayers together in Cairo’s Liberation Square (Midan al-Tahrir), Egypt looked less tolerable to their Qubtic Christians than ever for certain corruptions against them done by subversive and dissident individuals broken into the revolutionist line. The corrupt actions exercised especially after the removal of the first democratic elected president of Brotherhood Egyptian party Mohammed Murssi as a president in July 2011 (Tadros, 2011).

Although the achievements of ARS are not that clear and the final scene of the ARS is not absolute, certain advents of change in variant forms started in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya that toppled their dictatorial governments. Amin, Assaad, al-Baharna, Dervis, Desai, Dhillon, Galal, Graham, and Kaufmann (2012) described the post-dictatorial regimes stage in those countries in a sort of unsettled political and economic situation and that, for example, “Libya struggles to

establish some sort of post-revolutionary rule of law, Egypt is losing foreign exchange reserves at a rapid pace, and in Cairo's Tahrir Square citizens are once again taking to the streets to press for an advance of democracy rather than a return of what seems to them the old order" (p.viii). Whilst in Oman and Algeria the governments seemed responding to the protesters' demands by making immediate radical changes to their infrastructures. Revolutions in the rest of Arab countries such as Syria were suppressed and the revolutionists of the public were attacked by their dictatorial regimes (Freeman, 2013; Maass, 2013 and NPR, 2011).

In relation to the above point, it seems that there are two major and most forceful ideological power directives dominating the authoritarian site in Arab countries, the nationalism and Islamism. Those ideologies have played a fatal role in the life of the Arab citizens and affected the current of the social and political events of the Arab communities and societies over the last two decades (Browsers, 2009).

Another view point concerning who produced the ideologies in the Arab countries, some scholars stated that politicians and religious men are the main producers and creators of the excited active ideologies on the Arab scene and not the intellectualist of the cultural product and project. The dominance of the ideological structures, over the cultural field and over its components of different publishing institutions, periodicals, Magazines, newspapers and centers of research and studies is definitely not a coincidence especially during the end of the half past century (Browsers, 2009).

Moreover, ideologies of democracy orientation have dominantly thrived via social media. Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari and Mazaid (2011) declared that "Ultimately, social media brought a cascade of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, and helped raise expectations



for success of political uprising” (p.4). Najjar (2012) argued that the new media provide an opportunity for certain individuals’ efforts to contribute an influential role in recording, narrating, portraying and disseminating ARS events, thoughts, notions and sites through their art works. For example, he referred to the work of Brazilian cartoonist Carlos Latuff:

to illustrate how this artist has formed a global identity based on political affiliation and shared experiences, rather than national origin...how lateral communication among people from different countries responding to the Latuff cartoons has enhanced cross-cultural connections with what used to be the distant “global other...focus mainly on cartoons of the Egyptian Revolution (p.160).

He illustrated that cartoons work of ARS create entries of communication and argumentation of different current events of Arab street, hence cartoon’s function is to connect people in new ways (Najjar, 2012). Also, Margo, Bonning and Neighbor (2012) defined the role of political cartoon as a dynamic device utilized in media and in new social media in disseminating information and facts of current events of Arab street, but with more space of freedom than before the ARS due to varied potentialities provided for most Arab individuals to express themselves with enough freedom horizon. Although, political cartoon can be challenging because it often needs background knowledge to understand it, it continued to be the most popular mode to express opinions about a wide range of topics, such as politics or culture. In this regard, Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) indicated that social media technologies such as Twitter and Facebook have been exploited in “promoting a sense of community and collective identity among marginalized group members, creating less-confined political spaces, establishing connections with other social movements, and publicizing causes to gain support from the global community” (p.1207).