

## POLITICAL CARTOON AS A MEANS OF VINDICATION: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CARTOONING FOR PEACE'S EDITORIAL CARTOON ON THE 2023/2025 GAZA WAR

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary geopolitical context, the war in Gaza has sparked heated debate on the international stage, positioning itself as one of the most controversial events in global politics today. In the contemporary world, a significant number of artists specialising in humorous and satirical representation, commonly known as cartoonists, have recently used their talent to denounce the military actions carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip, highlighting the disastrous humanitarian consequences of this conflict. As part of this study, a semiotic analysis of the illustrations produced by 'Cartooning for Peace' artists was conducted. This analysis focused on the key semiotic strategies and visual metaphors used by the artists in their works to depict the political controversy surrounding the war in Gaza. As part of this study, a qualitative content analysis was conducted as a research method. Semiotic theory is used as a theoretical framework for this study. Moreover, the meanings generated by political cartoons during the Israeli-Palestine conflict are analysed using Barthes's model. The data for the semiotic analysis was taken from Cartooning for peace association web site. A total of 5 political cartoons are deeply analysed through the literal, denoted, and connoted meanings they show. The findings demonstrate the potential of cartoon to function as a medium for political resistance and vindication, effectively transforming conventional symbols into instruments of struggle and collective memory. This study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the emotive power of cartoon in disseminating messages of resistance, and it opens doors for future research on drawing activism in times of conflict.

**Keywords:** Cartooning for peace; Gaza war; Political cartoons; Semiotics; vindication

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## 1. Introduction

Media plays a crucial role in society because “the more informed a person is, the better their perspectives and judgments on issues. Humans need information on virtually everything happening not only around them but globally too”. It is impractical for individuals to be physically present in all locations at all times. It is evident that the populace depends on information that is disseminated through various channels. Such channels include traditional electronic media, such as television and radio, print media, including newspapers, tabloids and magazines, online newspapers, social media platforms, and blogs. (Toyese & Omolola, 2024, p. 144).

In the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, which was designated ‘Al-Aqsa Flood’, the Israeli invasion of Gaza commenced on 7 October 2023. This action, which occurred within a complex geopolitical context, has significant ramifications for the security and future of Gaza and the Middle East in general. The contemporary world is, once again, the scene of armed conflict on an unprecedented scale. This sensational news, which sent shockwaves around the world, was reported by all media outlets, which consequently made it the main topic of their news coverage. It is important to note that the level of media coverage of this conflict has since diminished to a certain extent. Nevertheless, it appears that it remains a source of ongoing concern for most countries worldwide. In the current geopolitical climate, the conflict is facing heightened competition from another major event that has attracted considerable media attention, namely the incursion of the Russian armed forces into Ukraine, which commenced on 24 February 2022.

The controversy surrounding these cartoons demonstrates that, despite the decline of press cartoons as the primary medium for depicting distant conflicts, they retain the capacity to elicit strong reactions from the public. For researchers specialising in caricature, this demonstrates the impact that a drawing can have on the perception of a conflict in an era of instantaneous information access. This raises questions regarding the role of these drawings during a period in which they served as the primary medium for graphic representations in the press, and the manner in which they depicted various conflicts.

The subsequent discourse will centre on the manner in which the cartoonists has approached the subject of the army and wars. Michel and Élisabeth Dixmier have demonstrated that the military is a recurrent theme in artistic works, frequently depicted in a critical manner. A significant proportion of the illustrations under consideration, which are dedicated to the armed conflicts and large-scale killings that have occurred in Gaza, serve as the primary source material for the present article. In this particular context, the Cartooning for Peace Association is of particular interest, given its global renown. To the best of my knowledge, the cartoons of this association have not been the subject of local studies. However, given that the present article focuses on a single source, it should be noted that the study can only be considered as the view of a small group of cartoonists on the Gaza conflict.

As demonstrated in previous research, the deconstruction of political cartoons has been shown to reveal latent meanings, biases, ideologies and subtle messages (e.g., Kabir et al., 2019; Zrekat et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the examination of political cartoons has thus far been inconclusive in comprehending the complex interplay between humour styles, visual rhetoric, visual framing, and emotional appeals, and in understanding how such interplay influences audience perceptions and reactions, particularly within the context of the Gaza tragedy (2023/2025). Moreover, there is a paucity of empirical evidence concerning the potential role of political cartoons in advocating peace and de-escalating conflicts. The field of scholarship pertaining to peace journalism has historically centred on conventional media outlets, as evidenced by seminal works such as Lee and Maslog’s 2005 study. However, there

remains a paucity of research exploring the intricacies of digital media and the political cartoons that have emerged as contemporary forms of expression.

The coverage of the Gaza war in *Cartooning for Peace* gives rise to several questions, which this study will attempt to answer. The manner in which cartoonists choose to depict warfare is a subject that merits closer examination. The following investigation seeks to ascertain the sources of inspiration for the drawings in question. Why such images?

This paper sets out to explore the linguistic and semiotic meanings generated by political cartoons in the aftermath of the Israeli-Gaza war. The following research question is proposed: How do political cartoons represent the Gazan people's suffering and determination in the context of the Israeli-Gaza war?

The present study is of paramount importance as it addresses the latest escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, a subject which has hitherto received insufficient scholarly attention within the domain of visual communication. Furthermore, it is among the earliest to analyse the entire cycle of political cartoons, from their construction to their functions and evaluations. Moreover, it extends the existing scholarship on peace and war by examining the patterns reflected in digital political cartoons.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section includes an analysis of past studies. The two types of studies are discussed below, namely theoretical and the empirical literature. At the end of this part, the literature gap is also identified.

### *2.1 Brief History for Cartoon*

The Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (1948) offers the following definition of the term 'cartoon': "An amusing drawing in a newspaper or magazine, especially one that comments satirically on current events." The 1994 edition of the *Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia* asserts that cartoons were originally regarded as full-size drawings used for transferring a design to a painting, tapestry, or other large work. The encyclopaedia also asserts that it was in the 19th century that the term acquired its popular meaning of a humorous drawing or parody. It is a common misconception amongst non-initiated viewers that cartoons are merely animated figures. Instead, they are considered to be comic constructions that range from mildly humorous to savagely satirical, and are based on current happenings and/or people's lives (Webster's Dictionary, 1972). The most renowned figure in the realm of cartoons during the early modern period was William Hogarth, a 18th-century British artist. In the 19th century, the French artist Honoré Daumier was a pioneering figure in the use of text in cartoons, employing it to convey unspoken thoughts and ideas. Consequently, Britain's *Punch* assumed the role of the predominant source of cartoons during the 19th century. Subsequently, *The New Yorker* assumed the leading position among American publications (*Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia*, 1994). As posited by Museum Broadcast Communication (2008), the contemporary conception of cartoons is believed to have evolved in the 1920s.

Evidence of graffiti has been found in the form of inscriptions on walls in the Greek, Roman and Pharaonic civilisations. During the medieval period, the phenomenon of caricatures was observable in both the exterior and interior sculptures of ecclesiastical buildings. The term "caricature" emerged during the Western Renaissance. The Italian artist Annibal Carrache is recognised for his seminal work in the field of caricature, as evidenced by the publication of his inaugural album, which featured the term "caricature" for the first time.

Caricature is a term used to describe a form of visual representation that is characterised by exaggeration and the use of satire to critique a particular subject. In France, political instability provides caricaturists with a rich source of material. The 18th and 19th centuries are widely regarded as the golden age of caricature. The advent of printing engendered a paradigm shift in the realm of caricature, paving the way for novel artistic horizons. The advent of lithography facilitated the dissemination of caricature on a broader scale. The inaugural illustrated newspaper was published in France on 4 November 1830.

In the 20th century, following the First World War, caricaturists sought to combat the bitterness of war. In the post-Second World War era, caricature assumed a pivotal role within societal discourse, employing a blend of critique and distortion to condemn prevailing social and political issues. Political cartoons gained popularity during the American Civil War after World War II (Vinson, 2014). According to Abdul-Raheem (2020), political cartoons remained successful due to the use of both verbal and non-verbal features. Becker (2022) stated that cartoons deal with the subjects in a more satirical way than comics. Cartoons are intended to say what one is unable to say in written text. They give liberty to the creator to spread awareness through the impeded message in the form of cartoons (Barker, 2016).

In the Arab world, *Abu Nadara Zarka* was the inaugural Arabic satirical newspaper. The foundation of the institution was established in 1877 by Yaacoub Ben Sannouh. The most prominent exponents of Egyptian cartoons are widely considered to be Alexandre Saroukkan, Highzi Baahjat Osman and Mustafa Hussein. In Syria, the first satirical magazine to appear was *Zahrak Balak*, which was launched on 2 April 1909. This was followed by *Al Modhek al Mobki*. Among the Syrian cartoonists, we can mention Toufic Tarek, Ali Arnaout, Abdel Wahab Abou Sououd and Samir Kahalé. As stated by Khadija (2017, p. 10–12), Palestine was the country of origin of Naji al-Ali.

## *2.2 Semiotic Theory in Semiotic Analysis*

The present study employs semiotic theory as a theoretical framework. In accordance with Pierce's theoretical framework, the categorisation of any image or sign is predicated on a tripartite structure, encompassing three distinct levels: namely, icons, indexes, and symbols. The icon is reminiscent of physical reality. Indexes are components of the sign that reflect the message, and the symbols are either universal or culturally acquired (Kull, 2019). In his seminal work *Course in General Linguistics*, Freddie de Saussure conceptualises language as a "sign system". It was further asserted that the concept under discussion consists of two constituent elements, designated as 'signified' and 'signifier'. The former is defined as the "mental concept", whereas the latter is understood to be the "physical form" of the object, respectively. Furthermore, in this study, the focus will extend beyond the linguistic message to encompass the denoted and connoted meanings depicted by the cartoons.

## *2.3 Roland Barthes's Semiology*

Roland Barthes is a semiotician who belongs to the European school of semiotics. The subject's thinking was influenced by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who advanced the concept of the sign as consisting of a signifier, which refers to the sound, and a signified, which is the concept (Benadji & Aliouchouche, 2025). The relation between the two is arbitrary (Saussure, 1983). The signifier and the signified are inextricably linked; they are interdependent. Accordingly, Roland Barthes advanced this theory of Saussure, proposing that Semiology's objective is to encompass any system of signs, irrespective of their substance and limits. This encompasses images, gestures, musical sounds, and objects, along with the intricate associations that bind them collectively. These elements, constituting the content of ritual, convention, or public entertainment, are not languages in the conventional sense, but rather systems of signification (Barthes, 1964, p. 09).

According to Barthes (1977), images possess a significance, and he introduced two levels of meaning: 'denotation', 'connotation', and 'myth'. He posits that the denotative meaning "corresponds to a plentitude of virtualities: it is an absence of all meanings, full of all the meanings" (p. 42). Denotation can be defined as the literal meaning of the visuals. Therefore, it can be posited that this constitutes the primary interpretation of the image, or that which is perceived visually. Furthermore, the same message can be decoded by viewers from different cultures. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the precise elements that are represented in the caricature. "It is evident that the coding of the literal prepares and facilitates connotation, since it immediately establishes a certain discontinuity in the image" (p. 158). The execution of a drawing is a process that is inherently imbued with connotation. The connotative meaning is understood as a social interpretation, the interpretation of which is dependent upon the context and differs from one culture to another. Yassine (2012, p. 23) defines connotation as referring to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign. Such associations are generally associated with the interpreter's sociocultural background (including, but not limited to, class, age, gender, ethnicity, and education. So, the connotative meaning is a level that can only be comprehended by individuals belonging to the same cultural milieu.

Moreover, Barthes disclosed the existence of a myth surrounding the concept of semiotics. The term "myth" is employed to denote a form of communication that is accepted as factual, despite the absence of empirical evidence to substantiate its veracity. The myth is the medium through which an ideology is conveyed. According to Barthes (1968), the concept of myth in semiotics is not a concept in itself, but rather a means of ascribing meaning. The employment of myth in this instance does not pertain to the conventional interpretation of myth as found in traditional stories. In the present study, the researcher employed cartoons as the object of study.

#### *2.4 Hidden Realities and Political Cartoons*

The persuasive, provocative and entertaining nature of political cartoons has been well-documented (Gamson and Stuart, 1992). The impact of visual media has been shown to often exceed that of written text, due to its ability to leave a lasting impression on the viewer (Akinwole & Scholar, 2015). During periods of conflict, the potency of political cartoons is known to increase, serving as mobilisation tools for collective action against perceived adversaries (Kabir et al., 2019). Savarses (2000) observed that the use of political cartoons serves to persuade the public of a particular point of view without resorting to explicit statements (p. 365).

As also posited by Aazam, Baig, and Azam (2020), the function of political cartoons is to provide a lens through which hidden realities in society may be analysed by depicting a particular point of view. As Abdel-Raheem (2020) noted, political cartoons function as a representation of imaginary stories about the beliefs of the world, as well as real-life characters and events. The metaphoric message is predominantly conveyed through visual representation in the medium of political cartoons. Newcomer and Wholey (2015) lend support to this notion, emphasising the significance of logical connections and visual representations in effective communication. In order to comprehend visual representations with any degree of effectiveness, it is essential to explore these cartoons within the context of the socio-political environment. In the absence of contextual background in political cartoons, readers may encounter difficulties in comprehending the issues depicted by the cartoonists.

Moreover, the use of cartoons in the depiction of values that are subject to societal challenges, contention, and debate has been a subject of scholarly interest (Genova, 2018). In the domain of political cartoons, the employment of humour is of paramount importance, yet

it is imperative to prioritise the effective communication of the intended message to the audience. As Silaski and Durovic (2019) argue, cartoonists are responsible for depicting harsh realities that cannot be expressed openly. Should cartoons be permitted to depict what is openly expressed, they would inevitably lose their authenticity and effectiveness.

Furthermore, the medium of cartoons allows for the articulation of negative views and sentiments without the responsibility of having to substantiate them. The medium of political cartoons has been demonstrated to serve as a conduit for the articulation of group interests and perspectives within diverse societies. As posited by Al-Momani, Badarneh, and Migdadi (2017), the function of political cartoons is twofold: firstly, to satirise the status quo, and secondly, to highlight the socio-political discourse and hidden stance in a comic way. The medium of political cartoons has been demonstrated to serve as a conduit for the articulation of the attitudes, ideologies and perspectives of the cartoonist, whilst concurrently functioning as a vehicle for the expression of the prevailing social attitudes and beliefs within the relevant societal group. The purpose of the caricatures is therefore to draw attention to hidden messages (Gibbs, 2016).

### *2.5 Political Cartoons and Israeli-Gaza war*

The depiction of both positive and negative aspects of a given situation is a hallmark of cartoons. As Kuttner et al. (2017) have observed, the phenomenon under discussion has the capacity to either draw individuals towards one another or to create a sense of disconnection. Conversely, the potential for positive impact is evident in the ability to stimulate awareness regarding violations of rules and regulations. Through the use of inferences, issues are highlighted, therefore facilitating the recognition of real-life scenarios. As posited by Al-Momani, Badarneh, and Migdadi (2017), the act of accentuating issues through the medium of caricatures has the potential to engender a favourable societal shift towards transformation. In contrast, McClennen (2018) proposed that cartoons may exert beneficial effects on cartoonists and the in-group community, yet concurrently, they may inflict detrimental impacts on the out-group community. This is predicated on the premise that cartoons are predominantly devised to criticise, mock and undermine their community.

The issue of Palestine has for a considerable period been a subject of interest to cartoonists, who use it as a medium to express their perspectives on the social and political dimensions of occupation and its implications. In the context of the pervasive use and escalating influence of digital media, the dissemination of international subjects to the public has undergone substantial transformations with regard to global reach, accessibility, engagement and interactivity. The Israel-Palestine conflict has been thoroughly illustrated in graphic form by cartoonists who espouse a variety of perspectives and ideological inclinations, across a range of digital platforms. The subsequent paragraphs provide a detailed analysis of the visual representation of the Gaza conflict in global digital media from 7 October 2023 to the present.

The approach adopted by political cartoons in their coverage of the Gaza conflict has been the subject of scholarly investigation, with particular interest focusing on the role of graphic journalism in this context. In his 2024 article, Sharaf Eldin examines the role of political cartoons in shaping discourse surrounding the Gaza conflict. The author conducts a thorough analysis of cartoons, exploring a range of perspectives including context, visual elements, ideology, and language. In doing so, the author seeks to elucidate the persuasive strategies employed by cartoons, as well as the power dynamics and thematic elements that are present. Moreover, the author's objective is to emphasise the ideological substance inherent within these visual narratives.

Gondwe and Walcott (2024) also analyse online editorial cartoons illustrating the Israel-Palestine conflict. Their analysis demonstrated a marked tendency to express support for Palestine in cartoons originating from the Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. The research also revealed that cartoons published in both *The Washington Times* and *The Washington Post*, from the United States, provided further evidence in support of the State of Israel and criticism of Hamas.

In a separate study, Somia et al. (2024) analysed political cartoons in Pakistani and British newspapers, focusing on the theme of the war on Gaza. The analysis of Pakistani cartoons reveals a tendency to employ "symbolic imagery" to accentuate the narrative of confrontation. The study under discussion highlights "the victimisation of Palestinians, criticises Western support for Israel, and advocates Islamic and international solidarity against the policies of Israel" (Somia et al., 2024, p. 7). Conversely, British cartoons, which predominantly employ humour and satire to critique political leadership and broader international concerns, offer a more balanced perspective, examining both sides of the war and emphasising the legal and moral ramifications (Somia et al., 2024, p. 7).

In their 2023/2024 publication, Zemmal and Zoghbi (2024) undertook a social semiotic analysis of Carlos Latuff's political cartoons, with a view to investigating the ways in which different semiotic modes interact to fulfil Israel's agenda during the "Toofan Al Aqsa" operations. The cartoons are analysed in terms of the methods employed to convey messages through a combination of textual and visual elements.

Salim and Syed Ismail (2025) presented a semiology of visual representations of Palestinian children in political cartoons on Twitter. The study presents a range of phenomena, including victimhood, emotional appeal and social response, cultural symbols and references, political commentary, resilience and resistance, and unaligned representation (blames on Israel or Hamas or both for the war). The war on Gaza has also been covered by Liaqat et al. (2024), Zararsiz et al. (2024), Yasmin et al. (2024), Guta and Eissa (2025), Salim and Syed Ismail (2025), and Famaz Noori (2025). The present study aims to address the lacunae identified in previous research and to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, which enables researchers to capture and ascertain the meanings within the data based on the research concepts (Neumann, 2011). In the present study, the semiotic approach was employed, as this is defined in philosophical terms as a method of interpreting messages in terms of their signs and patterns of symbolism. Barthes is widely regarded as one of the most prominent semioticians. Barthes's work built extensively on that of Saussure, with the concept of third-order signification being employed in the analysis of cultural texts and social phenomena. The author explored the manner in which signs, symbols and cultural artefacts convey layers of meaning that extend beyond their immediate referents, therefore highlighting the ideological implications that are embedded within them. Unlike Peirce's triadic model, which emphasises signs and their referents, Barthes (1957) revealed the manner in which these cultural texts function as signs that signify not only the products being advertised but also broader social constructs, power dynamics, and cultural myths. Below is a visual summary of Barthes' (1957) main ideas.

The following figure, adapted from *Insights into Communication Studies: Understanding Foundational Theories for Media Literacy* (Riabko et al., 2024), Pressbooks, outlines the order of significance.

## Orders of Signification



**Figure 1:** Orders of Signification: Denotative, Connotative, and Mythological Levels

*Note.* Adapted from Riabko and Williams (2024), Semiotics, in A. Williams et al. (Eds.), Insights into communication studies: Understanding foundational theories for media literacy.

### 3.2. Procedures

The data is analysed through semiotic analysis of cartoons, incorporating written text, facial expressions, colours and other visual elements. This analysis is conducted at three fundamental levels, namely denotative, connotative, and myth.

The present research is grounded in a qualitative research design. It employs a qualitative research approach, analysing the political cartoons in question from the perspective of Gaza. The data set under consideration comprises an array of political cartoons, which were collected from the Cartooning for Peace Association web site. The study examined a total of five cartoons, selected to represent the full spectrum of the genre.

### 3.3. Presentation of the Corpus

**Table 1**

*Description of the cartoons*

N°	Title of the Cartoons	Date	Cartoonist
01	Humanitarian crisis in Gaza	Editorial published on October 19, 2023	Kroll
02	Gaza: for the right to inform	Editorial published on September 01, 2025	Tony
03	Gaza is burning	Editorial published on September 18, 2025	Kichka
04	Gaza: faced with the unbearable, Israel's allies review their position	Editorial published on May 21, 2025	Dilem
05	Gaza on the brink	Editorial published on July 10, 2025	Amorim

## 4. Results

The data is analysed through the semiotic analysis of cartoons, following the three basic levels of meaning developed in Barthes's model. A total of five political cartoons have been selected from Cartooning for Peace's editorial and are being analysed individually. The Israeli invasion of Gaza has been depicted by different political cartoonists in different ways.

#### 4.1 First Cartoon



**Figure 2:** Cartoon One

*Note.* From “Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza,” by Cartooning for Peace / Editos, October 19, 2023. Retrieved from <https://chatgpt.com/c/695cddd8-46f4-8328-b2dc-b9f4f9c4c31c>

##### 4.1.1 The denotative Level

It is evident that the imagery in question comprises an Israeli tank and a warplane, both of which are decorated with the Star of David, thus serving as symbols of the Israeli army. Adjacent to them is an armed and masked individual (presumably, a soldier from the Hamas army). He/she is depicted with a bandage on his head bearing the name of Mohamed written in Arabic.

In the background of the scene, there is clear evidence of complete demolition and destruction of both residential buildings and infrastructure. The scene is set against a backdrop of ruins and rubble, symbolising the devastation of a destroyed city (Gaza).

The text is contained within speech bubbles. The Israeli pilot is heard to shout: The fighter is urged to flee, lest many lives be lost. "Stay! It is imperative that a significant number of fatalities occur in this region, thus engendering widespread animosity towards Israel. The civilian on the ground poses the following question: ‘To which direction should we proceed?’

The image below depicts a member of the press, equipped with a protective helmet and a photographic camera, documenting the scene. The signature of the Belgian cartoonist Kroll is visible in the bottom left corner. The following caption is to be appended to the bottom of the page: ‘Humanitarian crisis in Gaza – Kroll (Belgium)’.

##### 4.1.2 The Connotative Level

The phenomenon of tragic double discourse is evident. The cartoon denounces the humanitarian and political trap in which Palestinian civilians find themselves, being caught between Israeli violence and the media or ideological strategy of certain Palestinian groups.

The cartoon suggests that both parties are complicit in the civilian casualties. The act of offering criticism in a subtle, indirect manner. It is evident that Israel is depicted as the agent of destruction, technologically superior and prepared to initiate hostilities. However, the Palestinian militant is depicted as exhibiting cynicism, leveraging the bodies of the deceased to elicit sympathy from the international community. The civilian is characterised by two key qualities: innocence and powerlessness. These two qualities are embodied by the civilian, who is situated between two opposing forces.

**Ideological connotation:** The cartoon is noteworthy for its depiction of the intricate moral complexities inherent in the conflict, effectively denouncing both the Israeli military’s actions and the political exploitation of Palestinian suffering. This perspective constitutes a

fundamental component of a humanist critique, underscoring the notion that it is invariably civilians who bear the greatest burden.

#### 4.1.3 Mythical Level

According to Barthes, myth constitutes the cultural or ideological message that is veiled by the image. In this paradigm, the prevailing myth is that of an interminable war, wherein the victim becomes a hostage to the propaganda disseminated by both sides. The cartoonist has transformed a political event (the Gaza war) into a universal symbol of human powerlessness in the face of the logic of power and hatred.

#### 4.2 Second Cartoon



Gaza: for the right to inform - Tony (Suisse / Switzerland)  
200 journalists killed in Gaza - Paper- Pencil - Eraser

**Figure 3: Cartoon Two**

*Note.* From “Gaza: For the Right to Inform,” by Cartooning for Peace / Editos, September 1, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/en/editos/gaza-for-the-right-to-inform/>

##### 4.2.1 The denotative level

The image in question depicts a journalist attired in a ‘PRESS’ vest and a protective helmet, situated amidst the ruins of Gaza. The subject is depicted holding three tools of the trade. The material under consideration is a white sheet of paper. The following instruments are required: A pencil (for the purpose of writing); and a missile in flight, designated ‘Eraser’, is positioned above him.

In the background of the scene, there is clear evidence of complete demolition and destruction of both residential buildings and infrastructure. The scene is set against a backdrop of ruins and rubble, symbolising the devastation of a destroyed city (Gaza). The signature of the Swiss cartoonist Tony is visible in the bottom left corner. The caption situated at the base of the image reads as follows: “The present text is entitled ‘Gaza: for the right to inform – Tony (Switzerland)’. It is estimated that 200 journalists have been killed in Gaza”.

##### 4.2.2 Connotative Level

The cartoon draws upon a potent visual metaphor: paper and pencil, which are widely regarded as universal symbols of freedom of expression and journalism, are juxtaposed with the ‘eraser’, which serves as a symbol of military violence that ‘erases’ not only the written

word, but also the individuals who engage in the act of writing – the journalists themselves. The journalist serves as the mouthpiece for truth, acting as an impartial observer in situations of significant human suffering. The missile-eraser is a metaphor for absolute censorship, representing the erasure of memory and narrative.

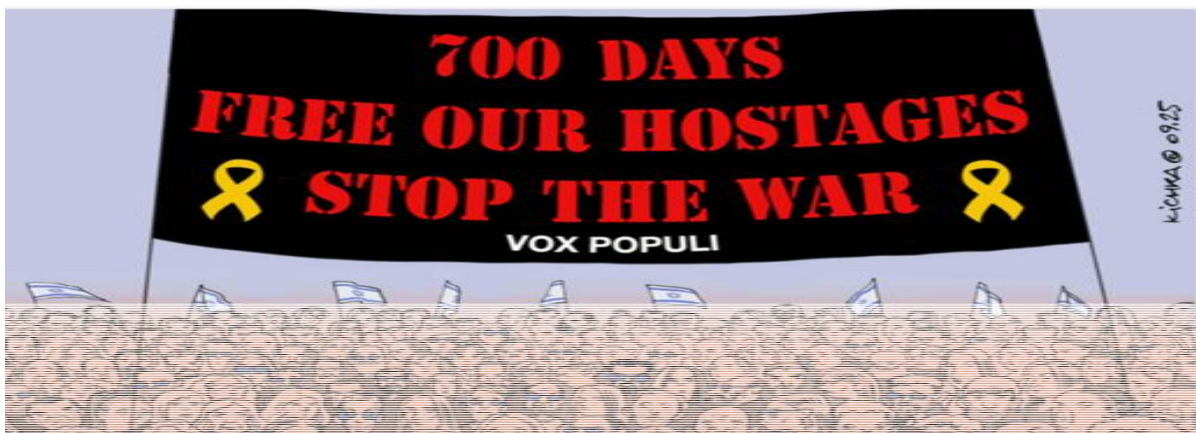
It is evident that the devastated environment in Gaza serves to underscore the notion that veracity is subject to attack in a manner that is comparable to the targeting of civilians. The opposition between ‘pencil/eraser’ thus transcends the confines of a simplistic childhood image, metamorphosing into a contemporary myth of a power struggle between speech and violence.

#### 4.2.3 The Mythical Level

It is characterised by the presence of an ideological or cultural message. At this level, Barthes’ analysis explores the ideology or myth the cartoon reproduces or challenges:

The cartoon constructs the myth of journalism as a heroic struggle for truth against systems of oppression, violence, and censorship. The piece critiques the erasure of information by those with power, in this case military force, and it exposes the silencing of journalists and the suppression of truth. The "eraser missile" serves as a metaphor for the notion that power can obliterate inconvenient truths, therefore implying that violence is employed to manipulate or destroy reality. The appeal of the film is further demonstrated by its ability to resonate with universal values, including freedom of the press, human rights, and moral resistance. It effectively transforms a specific event, namely the killing of journalists in Gaza, into a global moral message.

#### 4.3 Third Cartoon



"Gaza Is Burning" - Kichka (Israel)  
"700 jours - Liber

**Figure 4:** Cartoon Three

*Note.* From “Gaza Is Burning,” by Cartooning for Peace / Editos, September 18, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/en/editos/gaza-is-burning/>

##### 4.3.1 Denotative level (what we literally see)

The image displays a substantial congregation of Israeli demonstrators, their numbers densely concentrated, holding aloft a substantial black banner inscribed with red and white lettering. The inscription on the banner is as follows:

The text is accompanied by a symbol in the form of a yellow ribbon, which is interpreted as a sign of solidarity and hope for the return of the hostages. The text itself is

composed of three phrases, which when taken together, read as follows: ‘700 DAYS – FREE OUR HOSTAGES – STOP THE WAR – VOX POPULI’.

The scene is depicted in a frontal manner, with the crowd, which is compact and unified, occupying the entirety of the visual space. In the background, a small number of Israeli flags can be seen flying above the heads of the subjects. In the right of the cartoon, there is the signature of the Israeli cartoonist Kicha with the date (09.25).

#### 4.3.2 Connotative Level

On a symbolic level, the cartoon evokes a moment of internal tension within Israeli society. The primary message, which demands the liberation of hostages and the cessation of hostilities, underscores a dual popular demand. The release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza is a significant development that has been widely covered in the media. It is imperative that military hostilities come to a conclusion. The yellow ribbon, employed on an international scale to symbolise the hope for the return of the missing, serves to reinforce the human and pacifist dimensions of the message. The slogan ‘Vox Populi’ (the voice of the people) serves to transform the crowd into a collective body, therefore conveying a message of unity and moral protest.

However, this image, with its visual monumentality and frontal framing, also reveals the tension between national compassion and political responsibility: the population is calling for peace, but from a perspective centred on Israeli suffering.

#### 4.3.3 Mythical Level

Barthes would interpret this as the establishment of a contemporary myth of the ‘moral people’, those who rise up against war not in opposition to their own government, but in the name of universal values (freedom, humanity, justice).

The myth constructed by Kichka is that of a collective consciousness, in which Israeli society reappropriates public discourse to say ‘enough’. Consequently, the message transcends its national context, becoming a universal symbol of opposition to war and the rehumanisation of conflict.

#### 4.4 Fourth Cartoon



Gaza: faced with the unbearable, Israel's allies review their position - Dilem (Algérie / Algeria)  
Gaza: the West raises its voice - We don't have the public's vote - Nor the jury's! - Ceasefire -  
Macron, Starmer, Carney

**Figure 5:** Cartoon Four

*Note.* From “Gaza: Faced With the Unbearable, Israel’s Allies Review Their Position,” by Cartooning for Peace / Editos, May 21, 2025. Retrieved from

<https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/en/editos/gaza-faced-with-the-unbearable-israels-allies-review-their-position/>

#### 4.4.1. *Denotative Level*

The image under scrutiny depicts three figures: on the right, three caricatured Israeli leaders are identifiable, notably Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the two far-right Israeli cabinet ministers, Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir. The latter two are wearing kippahs, or head coverings, which are generally brimless cloth skullcaps worn mainly by men in Judaism. The term "skullcap" is also known in Yiddish as a "yarmulke". This skullcap is worn as a sign of respect for God, to cultivate humility, and to remind oneself of the existence of a higher power. The following assertion is made: the three Western leaders are Emmanuel Macron (President of the French Republic), Keir Starmer (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom) and David Carney (current Prime Minister of Canada since 2025). This claim is substantiated by the presentation of a newspaper bearing the names of the aforementioned leaders. The subjects are positioned in front of a television screen on which the words 'CEASE-FIRE' are displayed in large red letters.

One of the characters makes the following declaration in French: "We do not have the public's vote" (we have ...), and Netanyahu adds: "Nor that of the jury!" In the background, an Israeli flag is visible, thus indicating the subjects' affiliation and the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the top of the cartoon is its title, written in capital letters and bold type: 'Gaza/The West Raises Its Voice'. The signature of Algerian cartoonist Dilem Ali is to be found at the bottom.

#### 4.4.2 *Connotative Level*

At the connotative level, the cartoon plays on the metaphor of a television competition, as "television discourse remains one of the most influential tools in shaping public opinion" (Boutora & Belkhiri, 2025, p. 39), such as *The Voice* or a reality TV show, where the winner is decided by the votes of the public and the jury. In this instance, the ongoing conflict in Gaza is presented as a media spectacle, with Israeli leaders seemingly prioritising their popularity and public opinion over the human tragedy.

The message 'CEASE FIRE' thus becomes a collective voice – that of the peoples of the world – calling for an end to hostilities. Nevertheless, the leaders' ironic response – that is to say, their acknowledgement that they did not have the public's vote, nor that of the jury – reveals a cynical distance between popular will and political decision-making.

The leaders' closed stance and casual tone serve to accentuate the moral criticism; they behave more like candidates in a popularity contest than leaders faced with a massacre. Dilem thus denounces the passivity and complicity of the Western powers, who claim to be 'raising their voices' but remain stuck in a logic of appearances (Dilem, 2023).

#### 4.4.3. *Mythical Level*

According to Barthes, myth has the function of transforming history into nature, consequently naturalising power relations and rendering them more acceptable. In this instance, the myth in question pertains to the notion of the humanist West as the custodian of universal values such as freedom, peace and human rights. In order to demonstrate the inaccuracy of this myth, Dilem deconstructs it by exposing the contradictions inherent within it. In one hand, the West presents itself as being morally superior to other regions of the world. In another hand, the subject in question does not respond or exhibits a lack of firm resolve in the face of Palestinian suffering.

The language of the cartoon inverts the meaning, for instance the phrase “The West raises its voice” becomes ironic, signifying that firm indignation is absent and the voice is raised without any concomitant action. The notion of Western ‘neutrality’ or ‘mediation’ is transformed into a spectacle of diplomatic cynicism.

Television is a medium through which the voice of the global populace is symbolised by broadcasting the programme ‘Ceasefire’. However, this voice is not wielded any real influence. The concept of a participatory global democracy is rendered invalid when considered in the context of geopolitical reality.

#### 4.5. *Fifth Cartoon*



**Figure 6:** Cartoon Five

*Note.* Adapted from “Gaza on the Brink,” May 7, 2025, by Cartooning for Peace. Copyright 2025 by Cartooning for Peace. Retrieved from <https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/editos/gaza-au-bord-du-gouffre/>

##### 4.5.1 *Denotative Level*

At the denotative level, Amorim’s cartoon, entitled ‘Gaza on the brink’, portrays a large hourglass situated centrally within the composition. At the zenith of the hourglass is the word ‘Gaza’, written in capital letters. The sand in the upper part has almost completely disappeared, and a single grain is on the verge of falling into the lower part. The base of the hourglass appears to be cracked, with the result that the cracked ground beneath is revealed. The background of the image is characterised by an intense shade of red. It is notable that no human figures are depicted. The composition is focused on a single object, with no other elements visible.

##### 4.5.2 *Connotative Level*

On a connotative level, the hourglass becomes an allegory for Gaza’s survival time. The final grain of sand is a metaphor for the final opportunity, or the imminent end, of a population under siege. The absence of human figures serves to reinforce the pervasive sense of collective despair, suggesting that the focus has shifted from the individual or the military to the broader concept of a territory succumbing to the passage of time and the perpetration of violence.

The colour red, the dominant colour in this context, functions as an iconic signifier of danger, blood and death. Concurrently, the fractured base of the hourglass serves to convey

the impossibility of sustaining this pressure any longer. Amorim does not depict war explicitly; rather, he alludes to its presence through the manipulation of temporality, thus transforming time itself into an instrument of destruction. This poetic abstraction is in stark contrast to the more verbose and anthropocentric caricatures of Chappatte or Dilem, offering a universal and symbolic reading of the Gaza drama.

#### *4.5.3 Mythological Level*

In a Barthesian reading, the myth conveyed by the image is that of time suspended in Gaza, a space caught between life and death, between existence and oblivion. In this text, Amorim deconstructs the Western concept of the "peace process", which is often presented as a gradual yet inevitable progression. However, the hourglass symbolises the notion that time does not necessarily bring about peace, but rather leads to its gradual dissipation.

According to Barthes, this image represents the transformation of reality (the siege, the war) into a universal sign of moral urgency. The city of Gaza has become a symbol of all injustices that have been overlooked, representing causes that have been disregarded by the global community. The hourglass has been used to symbolise despair, making it visible and thus 'naturalising' tragedy, before subsequently 'denaturalising' it through the use of metaphor, as described by Barthes in his semiotics theory.

### **5. Discussion**

The following section provides a comprehensive overview of the primary findings. Firstly, it is important to note that the background of all of the aforementioned cartoons, as referenced from the *Cartooning for Peace* editorial cartoon webpage, is the Israeli-Gaza conflict. It is interesting to note that cartoons illustrated by the *Cartooning for Peace* Association are more diversified and representative than those encountered by the rest of the world's media. Indeed, they cover the conflict by painting it in a way that represents a group of cartoonists from different nationalities. The aforementioned parties are known to defend the freedom of 'informing' on a daily basis. Furthermore, the conflict is brought closer to the public. Moreover, "Cartooning for Peace" facilitates discourse among cartoonists, therefore enabling the exploration of ideological variations. *Cartooning for Peace* employs the didactic potential of the medium of cartoons to highlight the injustices perpetrated by the Israeli military.

The focus of the analysis was to analyse the three levels of meaning of the selected cartoons, based on Barthes's semiotics. It was noted that mostly the cartoons carried brief linguistic messages at the denotative level. Moreover, these linguistic messages were provided as captions in most of the cartoons to assist the reader to identify the context and content of the cartoon. All cartoons carried less linguistic content as the message itself was very clear. Thus, it can be argued that the conflict related to the Gaza war is mostly presented in visualised forms with less focus on language.

The visuals were the most important part of the analysis highlighting various major dramatic situations related to Gaza war. The first representation that can be observed is related to humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The first cartoon explains how the already fragile humanitarian situation in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza is becoming dramatic. The Israeli blockade is causing unbearable shortages and forcing foreign forces to set up air bridges. In just few days, several thousand people have already been killed in the conflict. In other words, this cartoon underscores the humanitarian dimension of the conflict, focusing on civilian suffering and the dehumanisation of Palestinian victims. Kroll's minimalist aesthetic engenders a visual silence, wherein the absence of text serves to reinforce the impact of the image. According to Barthes (1964), this dynamic is part of the iconic connotation, where meaning does not lie in the

obvious sign, but in the underlying message. Caricature, as a form of graphic and satirical expression, functions as a counter-discourse to the prevailing media narrative, which frequently focuses on Israeli 'self-defence' (Philo & Berry, 2011). The author has reversed the logic of discursive power by giving voice to those whom Foucault (1971) described as the 'subjugated subjects' of historical narrative. Consequently, Kroll's drawing is part of the tradition of humanist caricatures, a genre that Chute (2010) describes as 'visual witnessing'. This is defined as a form of graphic testimony that transcends the limits of traditional reporting. Similar findings are observed by Elhosary, Elkashif and Aljamili (2025) in their comparative study analysing the visual rhetoric of the Arab and Western political cartoons that originated during the Gaza War.

Besides, another important dramatic event highlighted by the second cartoon, which describes instances of crimes committed against journalists and reporters in Gaza by the Israeli army. In another words, this cartoon aptly illustrates the media censorship surrounding coverage of Gaza. The cartoonist employs the allegorical representation of the press as a gagged actor, thereby underscoring the inherent tension between truth and power. This phenomenon resonates with the observations articulated by Herman and Chomsky (1988) in *Manufacturing Consent*, which posits that the dissemination of information within the context of war is subject to political and economic filters. The employment of visual elements, including chains and microphones, introduces a substantial metaphorical dimension, hence illustrating the discursive dominance of states over media narratives.

In his semiotic analysis of the work, Tony establishes a symbolic opposition between two distinct spaces: the space of silence, characterised by dark areas and hidden faces, and the space of speech, symbolised by obstructed microphones. This visual dialectic lends further support to Van Leeuwen's (2005) hypothesis that images possess the capacity to represent power relations in an autonomous manner. In this instance, the visual depiction serves to underscore the notion that the expression of free speech concerning the Gaza conflict is unfeasible.

The third significant issue portrayed is related to the Israeli army's initiation of a large-scale ground offensive towards Gaza City with the objective of 'intensifying strikes against Hamas until its final defeat'. In this particular image (cartoon number three), Kichka employs the metaphor of fire to represent both the physical and moral destruction of Gaza. The incandescent red that pervades the visual space is indicative of the psychological states of pain and anger, and the pervasiveness of media saturation. This configuration evokes the concept of 'the imagery of suffering' proposed by Zelizer (2010), wherein the image manifests as a space characterised by a tension between compassion and powerlessness.

From a rhetorical perspective, the symbolism of fire is characterised by a paradoxical representation of purification. The term denotes the aspiration to 'reduce to nothingness' a whole population, whilst simultaneously exposing the inherent violence within colonial power structures (Said, 1994, as cited in Ahmad Faysal & Rahman, 2013). In selecting an expressionist style, Kichka aligns himself with war artists who, as posited by Chouliaraki (2013), transmute collective anguish into a universal visual lament. Caricature, as a graphic and satirical representation, calls into question the moral responsibility of the viewer and highlights the media's trivialisation of violence.

The next important issue represented in these cartoons was in consideration of the shift in international policy and the profound human rights situation in Gaza, Israel's allies are reevaluating their stance. Dilem's cartoon is both ironic and political in nature. By depicting Israel's Western allies as uncertain or culpable, the author underscores the inherent contradictions in diplomatic discourse in the face of escalating violence. This visual irony can

be regarded as a potent critical strategy, as demonstrated by scholars such as Bakhtin (1984), who posited that laughter and satire can be construed as modes of resistance to authoritarian discourse.

Visual analysis reveals a hierarchical staging, with Western leaders positioned either above or behind. This configuration illustrates the dissonance between symbolic power and moral power (Bourdieu, 1991). In his oeuvre, Dilem employs caricature as a medium of explanation, thereby unveiling the underlying realities that lie concealed behind the facade of diplomatic neutrality. The author highlights the hypocrisy and implicit collusion of international powers.

The final issue, as represented by the final selected cartoon, pertained to the Israeli government's declaration on Monday, 5 May, that its armed forces were preparing for a new operation to 'conquer the Gaza Strip and control the territories', or even its complete destruction, according to certain ministers. In conclusion, Amorim's cartoon portrays an almost depleted hourglass inscribed with the word 'Gaza'. This temporal metaphor conveys the imminent disappearance and precarious nature of Palestinian survival. The employment of hourglass iconography in the context of temporal representation confers a dualistic connotation. On the one hand, it evokes the perception of the inevitability of time passing; on the other, it refers to the perceived indifference of the international community to the issues at stake in the crisis. According to Barthes's (1957) theory, the object in the image becomes a myth when it conveys a cultural discourse. In this work, the hourglass is employed as a metaphor for the imminent collapse of Gaza.

Amorim's work combines minimalism and fatalism, therefore echoing the logic of what Mirzoeff (2015) calls the right to look — the right to see and bear witness to the invisibility of state violence. This graphic representation, which is both dissuasive and critical, aims to raise public awareness of the issues surrounding political inaction and the need for immediate action.

Collectively, these five caricatures constitute a visual corpus of resistance, articulating the aesthetics of testimony and criticism of power. In the context of this study, cartoon is shown to function as an alternative discursive space, wherein visual art deploys its critical, political and memorial functions.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study provides a critical analysis of political cartoons produced during the final five months of the Gaza War, demonstrating how visual rhetoric contributes to political discourse and the shaping of public perceptions. The analysis has identified framing approaches, and key semiotic and rhetorical strategies, including the use of universal symbols (such as the hourglass), direct allegories (such as the eraser-missile), and irony and caricature (notably in the depiction of Western leaders). Collectively, these strategies have framed the conflict in ways that advanced particular ideological interpretations aligned with the orientation of the Cartooning for Peace Association. The association's focus on human interest and emotional storytelling is also of interest in this context. Cartooning for Peace is an organisation that is committed to upholding the principles of pluralism, both in terms of cultural diversity and the spectrum of opinions that exist within any given society. Furthermore, it is a staunch advocate of fundamental liberties and the democratic process. Cartooning for Peace has been successful in establishing a connection with its audience by leveraging the educational value of the medium of cartoons to draw attention to the injustices and intolerances perpetuated by the Israeli army against the population of Gaza. Furthermore, the attribution of culpability, the foregrounding of victimhood, and the legitimisation of specific moral and political positions have been identified as key factors in this paradigm. The

work further emphasised the pivotal role of the Cartooning for Peace Association in the context of alleviating tension and fostering resistance and solidarity. While this perspective is valid, it simplifies the conflict and may overlook historical, socio-political, and humanitarian complexities. Recognising this limitation highlights that the findings represent a small, ideologically situated group of cartoonists, and future studies could explore other sources for a more comprehensive view.

The present study contributes to the existing scholarship on peace journalism by exploring the role of political cartoons as a medium for peace advocacy in a highly polarised digital environment. The study revealed that Cartooning for Peace cartoonists use their artistic medium as a tool to resist and denounce the use of force in times of war. Furthermore, the promotion of peacebuilding is congruent with the established paradigms of conventional media frameworks.

This finding highlights the emotional potency of political cartoons that emphasise shared suffering and resilience during conflicts. It also highlights the role of political cartoons as visual commentary and mobilisation tools, capable of reinforcing divides or fostering solidarity.

Similar to previous research, the results found that cultural and political ideologies often influence visual rhetoric choices, including emotional tone, humour style, and framing approaches. The research provides insights to media practitioners and peacebuilders seeking to design effective communication strategies during politically charged conflicts. By situating political cartoons within the broader context of visual rhetoric, the study underscores their power to shape public opinion, provoke emotional responses, and trigger ideological debates. It highlights political cartoons as spaces for resistance and ideological contestation within the digital sphere.

In conclusion, the present study provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the cultural, political and emotional dimensions of cartooning in the digital age, thus contributing valuable insights for scholars and practitioners alike. However, it should be noted that the findings of this research are specific to the 2023–2025 Gaza War and a purposive sample of cartoonists. Future scholars may wish to expand the study to encompass additional conflicts and to include a more diverse range of cartoonists with a view to enhancing external validity. Moreover, while sentiment analysis provides valuable insights into audience evaluations, it does not establish causal relationships. It is recommended that future experimental research be conducted in order to explore the manner in which political cartoons influence public perceptions and engagement within a controlled environment. Eventually, the study concentrated on the latter stages of the war, at which point it assumed a different character to that of its initial phase. Longitudinal studies could examine the evolution of rhetoric over time.

### **Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools**

In preparing this manuscript, [Claude Sonnet 4.6 was used to find out typos and language inconsistencies, to detect missing references from the reference list, ChatGPT-4 and Quilbot premium were used to assist with [language editing / literature organisation, references generation according to APA 7th edition]. All AI-assisted content was reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity of the manuscript.

### **Competing interests**

The author declare no competing interests.

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