PROPOSITIONING THE POWER OF RUSSIA THROUGH METAPHORICAL CONCEPTS AND CONSTRUCTION: A STUDY OF AL-JAZEERA POSTED CARTOONS

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ABSTRACT

The present study is a timely and relevant exploration of the Al-Jazeera conceptual and constructive meanings of the power of Russia, as depicted in the cartoons posted in different articles on online news websites. The descriptive study has adopted Jose J. Riera's (2020) semiotic analysis model, which has three major aspects: Concept, Construct, and Proposition. We have meticulously selected five cartoons for analysis based on the invasion of Russia, atomic deployment, media, and African and European perspectives. The domains and the cartoons were selected using purposive sampling. The cartoons are selected and published during the year 2022. The study finds that the signs are presented based on the ground realities while the construction of the signs is based on the power stretches in which Russia is presenting as the dominant. The recipient of the sender's message can define that the power of the Russian Federation is dominant in all domains. At the same time, the passivity of Ukraine and the Western countries is evident as they are helpless in the War. The study also finds that the wrath of the Russian invasion is presented with full power, while the resistance of Ukraine is not presented powerfully. Atomic reducing policy is presented as the deploying and usage of the atom bombs to special targets in Ukraine, which is the discursive practice. Western perspectives are perceived as helpless, while the African perspective is neutral. On the other hand, the media is depicted as loaded with national discourse and narrative change according to the changing ground situations.

Key Terms: Concept, Construct, Symbols, Meanings, Recipient, Cartoon, Semiotic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2022, following the onset of tensions between the two countries in 2014. The political justification for criticizing the opponents is the driving force behind the war (Chaya et al., 2022). In addition to increasing the number of wounds and health problems, the Russian-Ukrainian war also had an impact on Ukraine's infrastructure (Haque et al., 2022). Mearsheimer (2022) claims that the world has looked into the main causes of conflict, which include Russia's dominance in the area, NATO membership of Ukraine, and the blow-up of war caused by Western intervention pressuring Russia.

Political cartoons contain complicated narratives and explanatory statements depicting current events (Forceville, 2024). A creative metaphor is a common tool for assessing circumstances (Wawra, 2018). According to Sani (2014), visual metaphors are pictorial representations of problems heavily loaded with verbal discourse. Mario (2023) states that visual metaphors allow for universal communication in every circumstance by bridging linguistic and cultural divides.

Al-Jazeera is the news channel that presents the neutral narrative or, particularly, the Arab narrative. The cartoons presented by Al-Jazeera News are selected for analysis under the semiotic model of Riera (2020), which is about the concept, construct, and proposition of the images. The Semitic model presents the embedded meanings of the cartoons and the reciprocal meanings that arise in the recipient of the symbols. Both meanings present the different domains. The study is conducted to understand these domains.

Statement of the Problem

Cartoons are loaded with metaphorical illustrations based on different concepts and constructs. These concepts and constructs have particular meanings in the domain of conveying an understanding of complex situations. There are meanings loaded in the cartoons' signs and symbols, and there are meanings intended to be raised by the reader or observer of the cartoons. Both meanings present different illustrations in different domains, and these can be understood differently according to the reader's background.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the metaphorical meanings based on concepts and constructs of power presented in the cartoons of Al-Jazeera News.
- To present the propositional meanings and concepts of power developed as the recipient of the image of the Russia-Ukraine War interpreted by Al-Jazeera News.

Research Questions

1. How are the cartoons loaded with different concepts and constructs of power for particular meanings by Al-Jazeera news about the Russia-Ukraine War?
2. What are the propositional intentions of power understanding in the cartoons of Al-Jazeera News arising in the recipients of the cartoons?

Significance of the Study

The present study helps to understand the neutral stance of international media cartoons. It reinforces the reader's understanding of the complicated meanings of the concepts and the constraints loaded in the cartoons for particular intentions of power stretches understanding. The study is not based on the polar narrative, yet it presents the analysis of metaphorical meanings as an observer of the war. The cartoon analysis is conducted on the cartoons posted by Al-Jazeera, so the study helps to understand the perception of war in the Gulf countries as well.

Literature Review

Abbasi et al. (2024) mentioned in their study that political cartoons are an essential tool for deciphering reality and obscure realities. It conveys the information in its entirety by encapsulating multiple meanings in a single image or caricature. Political cartoons depict events on a national and worldwide scale and are based on universal themes. Political cartoons depict the battle lines between the several states during wartime and show the war's chronological progression. In 2022, the Russia-Ukraine war emerged as one of the world's biggest conflicts. In various ways, the writers and researcher raised their voices to represent the battle. Similarly, political cartoonists use imaginative and humorous cartooning to represent the state of war. The objective of their study was to analyze the semiotic meaning of political cartoons produced on social media during the Russia-Ukraine war. This study's theoretical foundation was based on semiotic theory. Furthermore, Barth's methodology was used to analyze the interpretations that political cartoons generated during the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Tribune Content Agency provided the data for the semiotic study. Ten political cartoons were examined in great detail using their literal, indicated, and implied meanings. The study's conclusions demonstrated that most political cartoons depicting the conflict between Russia and Ukraine were satirical and humorous regarding Russia's use of force to invade Ukraine. The results also showed that a large number of political cartoonists included "Bear" in their works, demonstrating how determined and serious Russia is to destroy Ukraine. Political cartoonists criticize Russia's aggression, might, pride, and egocentrism.

Al-Dala'ien et al. (2022) study examined the Jordanian cartoons depicting the Russia-Ukraine war from a verbal and visual perspective. Through a semiotic analysis of a few chosen political cartoons shared between January and September 2022 on the official Facebook pages of two well-known Jordanian cartoonists, Emad Hajjaj and Osama Hajjaj, it explored socio-political settings

surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war. Arabs, who might be viewed as impartial and removed from the conflict, are depicted in these cartoons as viewing it from their perspective. As a result, by analyzing signs in verbo-pictorial entities and illustrating how verbal and visual signs can cooperate in connoting potent messages, the study offers fresh perspectives on semiotics. The subjects of negotiation, alliance, economic ramifications (the food and energy crises), the Russia-Ukraine war and COVID-19, the refugee crisis, Putin vs. peace, nuclear war, and ridiculing Putin's actions were gathered and categorized into sixty-eight political cartoons. A representative cartoon was chosen for each theme, and its messages were analyzed using Roland Barthes' model (1967, 1977) in terms of three different message types: symbolic, non-verbal (i.e., indicated visual signs), and verbal (i.e., text). The symbolic messages of the chosen cartoons were explained and interpreted using these spoken and visual cues. Regarding the Russian-Ukrainian War, the thematic findings represent the opinions and attitudes of an Arab population.

Aljojado et al. (20220) conducted the research study, and the study's researchers dispelled certain illusions regarding editorial cartooning about the current, much-debated conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The researchers identified the signifiers related to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine through an analysis of ten editorial cartoons from cartoonmovement.com. The most frequently used elements by the cartoonist to describe the situation are the emotional signifiers, angry and helpless, which represent Russia's anger and devastated Ukraine; the exasperated bear, which represents Russia's state toward Ukraine; the color of the Russian and Ukrainian flags, which are being torn by a bear, which represents the deprivation of the Russian government from the Ukrainian government; and the war tanker and guns, which represent the chaotic settings in which the two countries fought for their rights and their specific intentions towards each other. In conclusion, despite the fact that this event is highly ambiguous, the researchers have carefully examined the ideas and how the many components relate to the problem. To comprehend the relationships between the denotative and connotative meanings of the elements, the researchers advise researching the signals that are employed to depict the scenario.

Kooper's (2024) study concentrates on a particular facet of popular culture, political cartoons, to be exact, and adds to the ongoing conversations over the function of recognition in international relations. It made the case that examining political cartoons can help us better understand the recognition game, a term used by Ringmar by capturing characteristics of recognition that go beyond interactions between states in formal settings. The political cartoons regarding Russia and Putin in two eras were the main topic of the article. The first occurs following the acquisition of Crimea, while the second follows the start of the conflict in Ukraine. Caricatures from these two eras had very different tones, and the pictures in the first show a dangerously assertive Putin. The article contended that although these are not particularly positive pictures, they can be seen as a recognition of Russia as a major force to be reckoned with and may incite Russia's future irresponsible actions. Nevertheless, there is a break when we reach the second phase. The portrayal shifts to one of a pitiful, despicable Putin. These pictures portrayed humiliation as well as misidentification, a distinction that the discipline seems to have forgotten.

Semotiuk (2023) said that memes and cartoons have been a staple of media debate since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They are a unique contemporary account of the events as they develop as they use humor and satire to convey values and ideological concepts in addition to commenting on the war's progress.

Semotiuk's (2023) research paper offered a multimodal examination of the discursive aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian War and its application in political humor, integrating national and international levels of political humor discourse. With specific emphasis on presentation and setting, the author examines the dissemination of supportive and subversive humor in political cartoons from around the world, including those depicting Russian President Putin and Ukrainian President Zelensky, as well as the opposing parties. Based on an examination of the target, focus, and setting of political cartoons featuring Putin and Zelensky, as well as the interaction of verbal and nonverbal aspects in the cartoons, the distribution of supportive vs. subversive political humour was determined. Political cartoons can be characterized by their objectives, contexts, and methods. The

article's analytical framework was provided by these relevant parameters (goal-target, frame of reference-focus, means-setting), as well as the relationship between supportive/subversive political humor and one's own or one's external image. Khan et al. (2017) experienced media as a tool for capitalists. Ramzan and Khan (2019) highlighted the stereotyped ideological construction of power. Ramzan et al. (2020) suggested the use of speech as a source of different power. Ramzan et al. (2020) explained the manipulation and exploitation of politicians in the media. Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) claimed the collusive stance of the media for pacification in public. Nawaz et al. (2021) expressed power agenda for positive "us" and negative "them".

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive and qualitative, based on the semiotic analysis of the pictures. It has adopted Jose J. Riera's (2020) semiotic analysis model, which has three major aspects: concept, construct, and proposition.
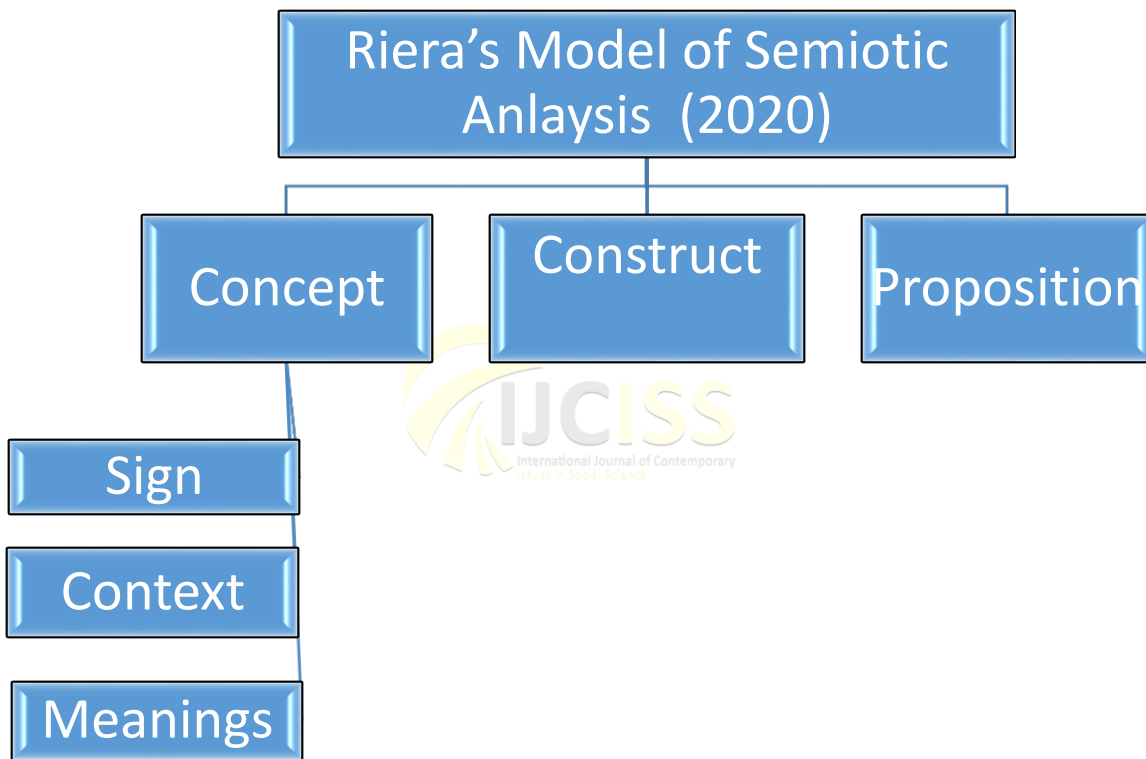
The concept has three main aspects: sign, context, and meaning. The signs are the symbols and text used in the image, context is the happening such action presented in a particular background, and meanings are receipt of the signs and content printed in the image.

Construct, also known as semiosis, is the relationship that exists between the sign, context, and meanings in the image.

The proposition is the response to receiving the sender's message presented in the image. The sender of the image is intended to understand the image and respond to the sent message.

Population

All the images presented on the Al-Jazeera news website about the Russia-Ukraine War represent the study's population.

Sample

The sample is the representative part of the study, and five images are selected from the Al-Jazeera news website. The sampling process is purposive, as purposive sampling is the process of extracting the sample based on intentions (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample is selected from images of War, Media,

Western perspectives, African Perspectives, and Russian intentions about nuclear.

Tool of Research Data Collection
The data was collected through intensive study, and a sample of cartoons was taken using the observation method.

Process of Data Collection and Analysis
The data is collected through observation, and the sample is selected through the purposive sampling process. The data is enlisted, and Riera 's Semiotic Analysis model (2020) is adopted for the analysis. The analysis is conducted simultaneously based on the three aspects mentioned in the model.

Data Analysis

Source:
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/24/syrians-stand-by-ukraine-after-russia-attack

Analysis
The signs in the image are a bear with a rash and Russian President Putin as a Rider and fighter of the war. The other sign is the map of Ukraine. At the same time, there are the signs of mountains and two other countries.

The image's context is the war scenario between Russia and Ukraine. Here is the context that Russia has already attacked two other neighbouring states. The meanings of the context describe that Russia is in a high rash with its soldiers and intends to attack Ukraine. Ukraine is printed with no resistance in the image. The signs describe that Russia had a great army to fight as well as the weapons to deploy for war against Ukraine. Ukraine was exercising the European proxy and intended to join NATO, so the Russian president took the step of invasion. The

war is ahead, and Ukraine is paying the price in the shape of loss of assets, land, and humans.

There is an imbalanced relationship between Russia and Ukraine as Russia is among the largest producers of weapons, and Ukraine is isolated from its supporting countries. The signs describe the rash of Russia as Russia warned Ukraine not to join NATO and not to give land to the American or NATO airbase in Ukraine. The images also describe that there can be no proper resistance against Russia, and the Russian president and his army rash is too high to occupy the land. There is a high integration of Russia against Ukraine because it is an easy target, and the state has no proper support from the rest of the world.

A recipient of the semiotics can view that there is a high stretch of power and subjugation between Russia and Ukraine. Both countries are suffering from war phobia, and Ukraine had to prey on the European proxy. At the same time, it can be said that Russia is exercising its physical and soft power in Ukraine by demolishing the minor states and the Ukraine at the same time. Power is physical due to the huge army, weather, and lack of support from a country near Ukraine, as the Europeans are far away from Ukraine. By exercising the proxy policy, Ukraine had to prey on the Russian rash as Russia had been the global power and believed in the polar power exercises. Due to the enemy of Russia with Europe, Russia is unable to accept the proxy of Western power exercise in its close region.

Source:https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/4/21/the-russia-ukraine-war-an-opportunity-for-nuclear-disarmament

Analysis
The signs in the image are of President Putin and the tree, which looks like a blast. There is fire in the

roots of the tree. At the same time, there is a small board of Ukraine, and words are written about reducing nuclear weapons.

The context of the sign is the Ukraine war issues and the rash behaviour of Putin. The concept is about the reduction of nuclear weapons, which is a statement given by Putin during the Russia-Ukraine War.

The sign meaning is the deliberate intention of Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin to deploy nuclear weapons on Ukraine. The meaning is to expand the war and reduce the weapons at the same time. There can also be the meaning that Russia keeps Ukraine as easy prey to deploy the weapons. The signs have close relations with the statement and the intentions of the Russian president. The signs denote that the Russian president wants to reduce his nuclear weapons by deploying them in Ukraine. Ukraine is printed as the expanding tree, which is seen as the target, and at the same time, there can be the deployment of nuclear war on Ukraine by Russia. The situation seems uncontrolled by war rather than expansion. The threat is given from the perspective of expansion of war as Europe started providing weapons to Ukraine. At the same time, Ukraine also started to resist the Russian invasion. The Western world was on the back of the Ukraine, which was not acceptable to the Russian Federation, and they intended to expand the war.

Russia seems to be in rash behaviour and intends to expand the war to experience its nuclear power. Through nuclear power exercising, Russia wants to prove its supremacy over Ukraine and the allied countries. The image is printing the diplomatic moves of Russia as Russia intends to secure its foreign policy and does not intend to allow Westerners to have military bases near Russia. Besides this, the reader can understand that the weapons are not intended to be reduced. Rather, these are intended to be deployed and target the Ukrainians temporarily to stop allying with the West.

Source:
https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/1/covering-ukraine-a-mean-streak-of-racist-exceptionalism

Analysis

The sign in the image is the beautiful and fatty woman presenting the West. There are signs of Russia's unexpected revolt and behaviour against Europe. The expanded noses and yellow hair suggest the woman's wise attributes.

The image's context is Russia's statement and actions against Europe regarding the seizing of oil and gas supply to Europe in case of intervention in the Russia-Ukraine war. The context is the disturbance of European countries regarding the creation of energy crises in Europe.

The meanings of the image are the disturbance and the statements of the Europeans against the unexpected revolt actions of Europe. At the same time, Europe thought the base camps could be easily established along the Russian borders in the Ukrainian territory. Still, the actions had been transformed into revolt, and Russia encountered Europe's actions being deployed as a proxy in Ukraine.

The women's sign seems attractive, and the native colour of the Westerns is printed on it. At the same time, the notion of the nose means that Westerners think it is compulsory to interrupt others' affairs. At the same time, it also meant that Europeans had been enjoying the proxy wars, and others had been fighting on their behalf. Here, the proxy war seems to have failed, and the helpless situation is presented. The shocks are given to the Europeans, and they flop in the Ukraine war.

Being the recipient of the image, it can be understood that Russia had shocked the Westerns, and the Westerns had to be the prey of the Russian

revolts. The proxy of the war had been against Europe, and it had to pay the price in the shape of oil and gas seizure as well as the demolition of the economy and restlessness in their countries. Russia is loaded with energy powers and is not a state of compromise. As Russia had been feeling the wounds of the Cold War Start, the wounds were gone, and the revolts were taken as the Cold War by seizing the energy and energy sources for Europe.

The recipient of the intended message can elaborate that the Westerners are isolated in the world due to their colonial thinking and making the other people enslaved people and occupying the sources. Hate is produced everywhere, and the policy statement is that they are helpless and have not been dealt with as humans in the past. Similarly, they are unable to support any narrative or the policy stance on behalf of the Westerns, yet they printed their country and the state as the prior colonials of the Westerns, and they could not give any favor to the Westerns.

Source:
https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/2/23/what-the-kenyan-un-ambassador-got-wrong-about-colonialism

Analysis
The image is loaded with signs that print the policy statements of the African countries and the embedders. The sign is of the mature man and presents the particular discourse of one's narrative. The context of the image is the policy statement about the Russia-Ukraine war and telling the audience about the helplessness of the Africans about the running situation in the region of Russia and Ukraine.

The meaning denoted by the image is describing the helplessness of the war and getting away from the Western narrative that the people of Africa had been colonized and they are unable to support any block.

The signs, context, and meanings are closely related. The African leader presents the African states as helpless and shows that they are unable to support the Western narratives. They have small borders, and Westerners have mostly colonized these borders. The meanings are neutrality and getting away from the Western narratives, as the subjugation of the African public had been evident.

Source:
https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/3/9/on-the-ukrainian-david-and-the-russian-goliath

Analysis
The signs in the image are mainly of Putin, and in the lap is the new generation as the public. There is a sign about what the media is saying. The notion is about the news spreading, especially about the media.

The image's context is the time before the Russia-Ukraine war when the media was asked to spread the news about the separation and different generations existing in the country and surrounding region.

The meaning of the image is that the news of regional politics was based on separate generations, as the war had not begun, and soon after the war, the news changed in the media.

The image describes how the Russian president controlled the media, and soon after, the narrative of the same generation was developed. At the same time, the image describes the relationship in which the media is in the hands of the official's power, and the directions are strictly followed. Similarly, the controlled media is told to publish only state-oriented news.

A recipient of the image can view that the reports and the narrative are run on the media according to the state's choice. On the other hand, the media can never be free as it has to follow the culture and traditions given to it by the state. The media role is limited, and Russia planted a particular narrative in the media that was required to be published. At the time of war, a particular narrative was built. The image describes the state and official policy of the state through which the state is highly obliged, and the public opinion is driven based on the instruction of the state.

Conclusion

The study is conducted to understand the representation of the power of Russia in the war with Ukraine. The study is descriptive and conducted from the current perspectives. The study adopted the semiotic model of Riera (2020), which describes the meanings of symbols, their construction, and the meaning that arises in the mind of the recipient. The study selected five cartons from the Al-Jazeera website about the Russia-Ukraine war from the perspectives of war, media orientation, and Western and African stances, which are evident. The study is dynamic and presets the dynamics of the power of Russia in the war with Ukraine.

Findings

The major findings of the study are as follows:

- The symbol used in the cartoons represents Russia's power in the army, defense, and diplomacy.
- The symbols denote the helplessness of Ukraine, Africa, and the West in war proxy in the Russia-Ukraine War.
- The media is presented as controlled and following the official narrative.
- The meanings are constructed to present the imbalanced relationship, presenting Russia as more powerful and aggressive than Ukraine and the West.
- Ukraine and European countries seemed helpless before the power and diplomacy of Russia.
- The recipients of the images are asked to raise the meanings as well.
- A receipt can understand that Russia has more power in the global stretch of power and has

not been under any pressure from European powers and diplomats.
- The diplomatic stance is deeply rooted, and Europe seemed helpless. It has not gained ethical support from the media, African countries, or any country except the West.
- War is played on both sides, offensive and diplomatic, and Russia is winning.
- The media is controlled and has to follow the national narrative when keeping some friends and enemies. Time is necessary for media ideology and discursive practices.

Recommendations

- Power stretches can be explored by adopting Riera's (2020) semiotic model, which is loaded with embedded and reciprocal meanings.
- Both cultural and political cartoons can be best analyzed through the semiotic model of Riera (2020).

Gap for Further Research

Research on the cultural and language strategies used in cartoons of the same or another dimension can be conducted. Research on cartoons can also be conducted through critical discourse and cultural discourse analysis. Future research can also use the codes, themes, frames, and analysis of the practice.

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