



Decoding the Syrian Crisis through Arabic Political Caricature: A Jakobsonian Semiotic Study

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Caricatures are not merely visual humor but function as powerful instruments of socio-political critique. This study analyzes three caricatures by Osama Hajjaj that depict the condition of Syria following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Guided by Roman Jakobson's semiotic framework, the analysis applies six language functions: addresser, addressee, message, context, code, and contact to explore the layered meanings embedded in Hajjaj's works. Jakobson's model is relevant for visual texts because its communicative functions operate through both verbal and non-verbal signs, allowing caricatures to be interpreted as structured messages. A qualitative approach was employed, with primary data obtained from caricatures published on Hajjaj's Instagram account and secondary data drawn from scholarly literature and credible news reports. The results demonstrate that Hajjaj's caricatures transcend mere satire of Assad's leadership; they articulate broader grievances regarding foreign intervention, systemic repression, and the uncertainties surrounding political transition. Furthermore, the visual narratives reveal how caricatures can simultaneously criticize power structures and express collective resistance. This research contributes to the field of semiotics by expanding Jakobson's framework into the analysis of political caricatures and provides new insights into visual communication in Middle Eastern contexts. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on Syrian-themed caricatures, a topic rarely examined in previous research, and in its analysis of the interaction among Jakobson's functions to reveal the ideological dimensions within Hajjaj's works.

Keywords: Jakobson's Language Function, Political Semiotics, Syria, Caricature

INDONESIAN ABSTRACT

Karikatur bukan sekadar humor visual, melainkan juga berfungsi sebagai instrumen kritik sosial-politik yang kuat. Penelitian ini menganalisis tiga karikatur karya Osama Hajjaj yang menggambarkan kondisi Suriah setelah runtuhnya rezim Bashar al-Assad. Dengan menggunakan kerangka semiotika Roman Jakobson, analisis difokuskan pada enam fungsi bahasa pengirim, penerima, pesan, konteks, kode, dan kontak untuk mengungkap makna berlapis dalam karya Hajjaj. Model Jakobson relevan untuk teks visual karena fungsi komunikasinya bekerja pada tanda verbal maupun non-verbal, yang memungkinkan karikatur dibaca sebagai pesan terstruktur. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan, dengan data primer berupa karikatur yang dipublikasikan di akun Instagram Hajjaj, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari literatur akademik dan laporan berita yang kredibel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karikatur Hajjaj melampaui satire terhadap kepemimpinan Assad; karikatur tersebut mengekspresikan keluhan kolektif terkait intervensi asing, represi sistemik, dan ketidakpastian transisi politik. Narasi visual ini juga memperlihatkan bagaimana karikatur dapat sekaligus mengkritik struktur kekuasaan dan merepresentasikan bentuk perlawanan kolektif. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada bidang semiotika dengan memperluas penerapan kerangka Jakobson dalam analisis karikatur politik serta menawarkan wawasan baru tentang komunikasi visual di konteks Timur Tengah. Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada fokusnya pada karikatur bertema Suriah, tema yang jarang diteliti sebelumnya serta pada analisis interaksi antarfungsi Jakobson untuk mengungkap dimensi ideologis dalam karya Hajjaj.

Kata Kunci: Fungsi Bahasa Jakobson, Semiotika Politik, Suriah, Karikatur

Introduction

Along with the development of technology, caricatures are now more accessible through various social media platforms, allowing the spread of messages in them more widely and quickly. Caricatures, which initially only functioned as entertainment, have now developed into an effective communication tool in conveying social, political, and cultural messages (Aritonang, 2022). The uniqueness of caricature lies in its ability to combine humor, criticism, and aesthetics in one image, thus attracting public attention (Constantinou, 2019; Nugraha, 2024a; Prahastiwi, 2022).

Caricature is an effective medium to convey social and political commentary. Generally, caricatures raise social phenomena that reflect actual issues in society, such as injustice, religious criticism, political conflicts, and social change (Himawan, 2023; Suari, 2022). Through a symbolic visual style, caricatures are often used as a means of criticizing government policies, international events, and humanitarian issues (Budiyono & Kartika, 2017; Eldin, 2024). Today, some countries even have special institutions that document political caricatures, such as the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in

the USA and the British Caricature Archive (Dugalich, 2018). The presence of these institutions emphasizes the important role of caricatures, especially political caricatures, in voicing public opinion in the contemporary era.

Cartoonists utilize social media as a means to convey criticism and provide perspectives on various global events (Fitrawahyudi et al., 2024). One cartoonist who is active in voicing social and political criticism through his work is Osama Hajjaj. He is widely known for his consistency in raising issues, especially in the Middle East region, including the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Along with the increasing intensity of the conflict in Syria, caricature has become one of the media used to illustrate the impact of political policies on society (Blakey et al., 2022).

In recent years, Instagram has become an important platform for the circulation of political caricatures (Nugraha, 2024a). It's fast and interactive visual format enables caricatures to function as tools of digital activism capable of attracting public attention, sparking debate, and shaping collective interpretations (Nugraha, 2024a). This is evident from the significant public response to Osama Hajjaj's caricatures depicting the Syrian conflict. Caricatures also excel in conveying social and political criticism due to their concise and non-monotonous visual form (Arrafi & Surur, 2024; Nugraha, 2024b). The development of social media has expanded the reach of cartoonists and provided space for the public to express opinions, engage in social action, and respond to controversial policies (Nisa et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2023), thereby strengthening the role of caricatures as instruments of criticism and public communication.

The Syrian conflict began in 2011 when the Arab Spring triggered demonstrations against the authoritarian rule of Bashar al-Assad (Hapsari, 2019; Rafaldhanis & Saputra, 2022). The conflict rapidly escalated due to political, religious, economic, and regional factors, leading to a humanitarian crisis that drew global condemnation (Lubis & Aswar, 2022). While Assad justified his military policies as efforts to combat terrorism and defend national sovereignty, many argue that his actions served political interests rather than the welfare of the Syrian people. This context forms the basis of Osama Hajjaj's caricatures, which employ strong visual symbolism to depict the political and humanitarian impacts of the conflict.

In this study, there are several caricatures as research objects from the @osamahajjaj Instagram account that are unique in conveying social and political criticism. Osama Hajjaj is known as a Jordanian cartoonist who can illustrate the complexity of conflict in the Middle East in a simple but meaningful visual form (Al-Dala'ien et al., 2022). His caricatures often use strong symbolism, such as political figures, state flags, and metaphorical representations that show the impact of government policies on civil society. The uniqueness of Osama Hajjaj's caricatures lies in his ability to combine elements of criticism with a touch of humor or sharp irony.

The study of visual communication semiotics is often associated with the analysis of visual representations that address various aspects of meaning in a form of visual communication, including the cultural context that surrounds it (Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023). Visual semiotics examines not only signs and symbols but also how visual elements are interpreted by audiences across different contexts. Its scope includes images, paintings, print advertisements, diagrams, and other visual forms, each of which carries specific codes and conventions that contribute to meaning-making, both explicitly and implicitly. As a distinctive style and powerful symbolic representation, political caricatures can shape public opinion and influence people's perceptions of certain issues (Nugraha, 2023).

From the various descriptions above, this study employs Roman Jakobson's semiotic framework to analyze how meaning is constructed in visual political communication. Jakobson argues that every communicative act, whether verbal or visual, operates through six fundamental factors that interact to shape the production and interpretation of meaning (Jakobson, 1960; Waugh, 2015). The six communication functions are presented in the following table.

	Context	
Addresser	Message	Addressee

	Contact	
	Code	

The table above summarizes Jakobson's six functions of communication, each of which contributes to the processes of encoding and interpreting meaning. In the context of political caricature, the cartoonist functions as the addresser who conveys critical messages through visual codes, while the socio-political situation in Syria serves as the context that frames meaning. Instagram audiences act as the addressees, and the platform itself becomes the contact channel that enables the message to be transmitted. Thus, this model provides the analytical basis for understanding how these communicative elements operate within Hajjaj's caricatures.

In this study, the author found several relevant previous studies. First, a study conducted by Ghana Aldila Septiani and Dien Nur Chotimah in 2024 with the title *Roman Jakobson's Semiotic Lens: Deciphering Caricatures of Israel's Aggression in Palestine* (Septiani & Chotimah, 2024). Second, an analysis conducted by Aldrian, Septi Lestari, and M. Anwar Mas'adi in 2024 entitled *Islamophobia Values In The French Magazine Charlie Hebdo's Cartoons: A Semiotic Perspective Of Roman Jakobson* (Aldrian et al., 2024). Third, an analysis conducted by Muhammad Naufal Arrafi, Misbahus Surur in 2024 entitled *The Palestinian and Israeli Humanitarian Conflict Report in Instagram Caricatures: A Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis Study* (Arrafi & Surur, 2024).

From the search of previous studies, the author found no studies that specifically examine caricatures representing the Syrian conflict; most existing research focuses on Gaza–Palestine themes. Although the study by Septiani and Chotimah employs Jakobson's framework, it remains limited to descriptive identification of communicative elements without analyzing the interaction among these functions (Septiani & Chotimah, 2024). As a result, the ideological dimension of the caricatures has not been critically explored.

The research conducted used Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach. The research tends to be descriptive and has not critically explained how discourse interactions in caricatures shape the ideological position of the creators. Meanwhile, the research conducted by (Arrafi & Surur, 2024) has not broadly linked the visual symbols in caricatures with the socio-political context. Consequently, this research seeks to present a more contextualized visual interpretation.

Based on the description above, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to Jakobson's semiotic studies, especially in analyzing caricatures as a form of visual communication. This research also has the potential to open new interpretations of several Osama Hajjaj caricatures, especially in revealing the reality of Syria. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to describe the six elements of Roman Jakobson's semiotics and represent the reality of the Syrian conflict contained in some of Osama Hajjaj's caricatures by applying Roman Jakobson's semiotic theory.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach using the semiotics method. The data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary data are three caricatures retrieved from Osama Hajjaj's Instagram account, while the secondary data include articles, journals, books, news, and scholarly works related to caricature studies and Roman Jakobson's semiotics. Data collection was conducted from January to February 2025, while the caricatures analyzed were posted in December 2024, a period that represents the peak of political transition following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The caricatures were collected through screenshots and subsequently identified based on Jakobson's semiotic elements to reveal their embedded meanings and messages.

The application of Jakobson's six functions was carried out by identifying visual symbols such as characters, colors, objects, and textual elements, and mapping them onto the indicators of each function. This research adopts an interpretive qualitative stance, in which visual interpretation is conducted by situating the signs within the socio-political context of Syria and supported by relevant literature.

The selection of the three caricatures was conducted purposively, as they explicitly represent key aspects of the Syrian crisis after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, namely foreign political intervention, the humanitarian tragedy in Saydnaya prison, and the irony of post-Assad political transition. The selection was based on the following criteria: (1) the caricatures directly depict the Syrian situation, (2) they contain clear and relevant visual symbols, and (3) they are suitable for analysis using Jakobson's six functions.

The analysis was carried out through three main steps following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first step was data reduction, in which the caricatures were classified into Jakobson's six language functions along with the supporting visual elements. The second step was data display, which involved describing the relationship between the visual and linguistic elements of the caricatures and their connection to the Syrian socio-political context. The final step was conclusion drawing, in which the identified patterns and meanings were synthesized to formulate the research findings.

To maintain validity, triangulation was applied by comparing the semiotic findings with academic references and credible news reports. This strengthened the reliability of the analysis and provided a comprehensive understanding of how Osama Hajjaj's caricatures operate as tools of political and social communication.

Result and Discussion

Amid the ongoing conflict in Syria, caricature is not merely a form of visual art but a sharp reflection of realities that are often difficult to capture through conventional narratives. Through Osama Hajjaj's works, portraits of humanitarian crises, political repression, and the dynamics of power following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime are conveyed with powerful and evocative symbolism.

This section presents the findings of the semiotic analysis based on Roman Jakobson's six language functions, which serve to uncover the structural messages embedded in each caricature. Hajjaj's visual narratives function not only as political satire but also as a medium of social critique and collective resistance. By linking the visual elements of the caricatures to the actual socio-political situation in Syria, this study seeks to reveal the layered meanings behind these symbolic representations.

Syria's Condition Ahead of Assad's Downfall

The period leading up to Bashar al-Assad's resignation in December 2024 marked a turning point in Syria's turbulent history. The political, social, and humanitarian crises that unfolded during this time were vividly captured in Osama Hajjaj's caricatures, which reflect the struggles of the Syrian people under authoritarian rule and foreign intervention. To better understand the layers of meaning in these works, Jakobson's six






language functions are applied to classify the communicative elements present in the caricatures. The following table outlines the semiotic structure of Jakobson’s six functions as manifested in Hajjaj’s caricature *Sūriyā al-Ān* (Syria Now):



Figure 1. Instagram @osamahajjaj, Desember 09, 2024 (Hajjaj, 2024b)

Table 1. Explanation of the caricature of Osamahajjaj using the six elements of Roman Jakobson's semiotics

No.	Symbol	Element	Statement
1.		Context	Rulers in Syria
		Message	Criticism and satire
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Bashar al-Assad
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Word games in Arabic with different colors
2.		Context	Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict
		Message	A critique of Bashar al-Assad's dependency
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Bashar al-Assad
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	The bear with a military helmet symbolizes Russia as the dominant power and the flag held tightly by the Syrian leader

3.		Context	The situation in Saydnaya prison
		Message	Satire and criticism
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Human rights activist
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	A building of iron bars shrouded in barbed wire
4.		Context	The situation of political prisoners in Syria
		Message	Criticism of the Assad regime
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Human rights activist
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	People run around happily, and white birds as a symbol of freedom
5.		Context	Situation at the Presidential Palace
		Message	Satire
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Assad regime
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	A symbol of power visualized with luxurious buildings
6.		Context	Situation at the Presidential Palace
		Message	Ironic and satire
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Assad regime
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Symbol of people running around carrying things when leaving power
7.		Context	Geopolitical conflict
		Message	Criticism of Israel
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Arabic society
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Israeli soldiers dragging a mountain symbolizes the forced annexation of strategic territory in Arabia

The first picture above is an illustration from the Instagram account @osamahajjaj with the title *Sūriyā al-Ān*. The caricature was published on Monday, 9 December 2024, by a Jordanian cartoonist named Osama Hajjaj. The post attracted public attention, gaining 3,834 likes and 156 comments. The caricature depicts the state of Syria, which is being hit by various world problems.

From the elements of Roman Jakobson explains that Osama Hajjaj, the creator of the caricature, is the sender. The addressees are human rights activists and the public. In the caricature, there is a code that has a connection between Syria, Russia, and Israel. The channel used to convey his criticism is Instagram media in the @osamahajjaj account.

In one caricature above, four images visualize the complex situation of Syria. This first image depicts the various political and social situations in Syria. In this image, Bashar al-Assad is depicted riding a Russian bear, symbolizing his dependence on the power of Moscow to maintain power. Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011, Russia has been Assad's main military and political ally. This support includes arms aid, military training, and direct intervention in 2015 that saved Assad from total defeat. This is also in line with the news content in Aljazeera which revealed that Assad brought \$250 million in cash to Russia, signaling the possibility of political protection or safeguarding personal assets amid Syria's deteriorating conditions (Financial Times, 2024). Thus, the Assad regime survives not on the support of its people but through foreign intervention.

A researcher from the Syrian Legal Development Program stated that "Russia has been a financial haven for the Assad regime for years." (Financial Times, 2024). This statement reflects the fact that the relationship between Russia and Syria is not only political and military, but also includes a complex economic dimension, where Russia acts as a financial protector for the Syrian power elite. Through this relationship, Assad is suspected of storing his personal wealth abroad to maintain the regime's financial stability and strengthen the power network, while securing himself personally in the event of domestic political turnover.

The second picture shows the release of prisoners from Saydnaya prison, which is known as a place of torture for political prisoners. From this illustration, Osama Hajjaj

illustrates that freedom in Syria is still a crucial issue, where many activists and oppositionists are suppressed by the government. Meanwhile, the third picture shows the destruction of the Assad regime represented by the looting of the Presidential Palace. This shows that the government's authority is getting weaker and the Syrian people's loss of trust in their leader.

The fourth picture depicts Israeli soldiers trying to take control of Mount Al-Sheikh (Mount Hermon) after the collapse of the Assad regime. The mountain is known as a strategic area and thus became part of the geopolitical conflict. Israel launched a massive military campaign that included air, land, and sea attacks. This step was taken to fill the power vacuum and prevent armed groups considered dangerous from controlling strategic areas near the Israeli border, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

The message conveyed in the caricature above is a criticism of the Assad regime. Through his caricature, Osama Hajjaj criticizes the Assad regime for relying on Russia, repressing its people, and failing to defend Syria's sovereignty from external threats. This criticism is also aimed at Russia, which continues to strengthen its influence in Syria, and Israel, which is considered to be utilizing this situation for its geopolitical interests. Osama Hajjaj not only satirizes the Assad government but also highlights the harsh reality that the Syrian people face due to war and injustice. If the first caricature exposes Syria's dependence on foreign powers and the external threats to its sovereignty, the second caricature turns inward to reveal the domestic realities of repression, focusing on the symbolism of Saydnaya prison.




Prison Conditions after Assad's Fall in Syria


Following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime, one of the most critical issues that surfaced was the condition of political prisoners in Syria. Saydnaya prison, in particular, had long been notorious as a site of repression, torture, and systemic human rights violations. Through caricatures, Osama Hajjaj symbolically illustrates the atmosphere of fear, suffering, and eventual resistance that characterized this prison. By employing Jakobson's six language functions, the communicative structure embedded in the caricature can be analyzed to uncover deeper meanings about oppression and the fragile hope for freedom in post-Assad Syria.



Figure 2. Instagram @osamahajjaj, Desember 10, 2024 (Hajjaj, 2024c)

Table 2. Explanation of the caricature of Osamahajjaj using the six elements of Roman Jakobson's semiotics

No.	Symbol	Element	Statement
1.		Context	Repression and the rise of resistance in Syria
		Message	Authoritarian regimes begin to falter
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addresse	Human rights activists and Syrian opposition
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	A curved building symbolizing the destruction of the Saydnaya prison system
2.		Context	The regime's cruelty to the people
		Message	A critique of power
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addresse	Arab society and human rights activists
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Skulls symbolize victims of violence and oppression
3.		Context	The situation of political prisoners in Syria
		Message	Resistance to oppression
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addresse	Mass media
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Handcuffs and broken chains symbolize freedom from tyrannical regimes

4.		Context	Political prisoners
		Message	Freedom
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Arabic society
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	The white bird symbolizes freedom from oppression

The second caricature above is a caricature uploaded to the @osamahajjaj Instagram account on Tuesday, 10 December 2024. The caricature is entitled *Tahrīr Sijn Şaydiyānā* and gets 2,220 likes and 19 comments. This caricature depicts the state of the Syadnaya prison after the collapse of Syria's rulers.

This caricature is a sharp criticism of the system of oppression and injustice that occurs in Syria, especially regarding the Syadnaya prison, which is known as a symbol of brutal repression against political opposition and prisoners who are considered a threat by the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Visually, the caricature features a human-shaped prison structure with both hands raised after successfully breaking the chains of shackles. The clenched hands symbolize the struggle and freedom that can finally be achieved after a long period of oppression.

There are visuals of birds flying in the sky, symbolizing hope and long-awaited freedom. The white bird in particular carries a layered symbolic meaning. On the denotative level, it represents a universal emblem of peace and liberation, yet on the connotative level, it reflects the fragility of such hope in post-Assad Syria, where foreign interventions and internal conflicts persist. This duality emphasizes Jakobson's contextual function, as the bird is situated within the broader reality of uncertainty and instability. The soaring bird can thus be read not merely as a decorative visual element, but as a semiotic signifier that negotiates between aspiration and vulnerability in the Syrian people's struggle for freedom.

The foundation of this "prison man" stands on a pile of skulls, suggesting that this freedom was not gained without great sacrifice. This pile of skulls symbolizes the prisoners who have long been victims of torture, executions, and disappearances in prison. This caricature not only highlights the atrocities that have taken place, but also reminds us that change always requires sacrifice and that every death is not in vain.

On 9 December 2024, Al-Jazeera reported on the massive rescue effort of thousands of prisoners in Syadnaya Prison (Jazeera, 2024). Rescuers from the Syrian Civil Defense faced tremendous difficulties in accessing these areas, which allegedly have secret doors and undiscovered dungeons. The situation is exacerbated by the prison's extremely poor conditions, including a lack of air ventilation, food, and water, as well as prolonged power outages. The families of the prisoners have been waiting to know the fate of their relatives held in this prison. This rescue operation is not only an important moment in Syrian history, but also highlights the systematic human rights violations under Bashar al-Assad.

The message conveyed through this caricature is about injustice, oppression, and the spirit of the Syrian people's struggle that cannot be extinguished against the authoritarian regime. Prisons, which have become a symbol of fear, can be a trigger for resistance and revival. This caricature is a critique of authoritarian rule that suppresses freedom of expression and a warning that every dictatorship will eventually collapse in the face of popular resistance. With a strong symbolic approach, Osama Hajjaj not only presents a picture of suffering but also conveys the hope that freedom is something that cannot be forever restrained by tyranny. While the second caricature foregrounds the human tragedy and the resilience of the Syrian people under repression, the third caricature extends this narrative by questioning whether the downfall of Assad truly leads to freedom or simply transforms into another form of domination.

Conditions after the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria

The downfall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 did not signify the end of Syria's prolonged conflict. Instead, it opened a new chapter marked by political uncertainty, power struggles, and the emergence of alternative authoritarian figures. Osama Hajjaj's caricatures vividly capture this transitional period, illustrating both the hope for freedom and the risk of falling into new forms of domination. Through Jakobson's six language functions, the communicative elements in these caricatures can be classified to reveal how visual symbols express the ambiguity of Syria's post-Assad reality.



Figure 3. Instagram @osamahajjaj, December 16, 2024 (Hajjaj, 2024a)

Table 3. Explanation of the caricature of Osamahajjaj using the six elements of Roman Jakobson's semiotics

No.	Symbol	Element	Statement
1.		Context	The political situation in Syria
		Message	The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's influence
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Mass media
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Destroyed statue bearing the word "Assad."
2.		Context	Political situation
		Message	Criticism of the rulers
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Mass media
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	Flag change and hasty expression
3.		Context	The political situation in Syria
		Message	Criticism of someone who is perceived as an authoritarian figure
		Addresser	Osama Hajjaj
		Addressee	Mass media
		Contact	Platform Instagram
		Code	The visual language "الجولاني" refers to Abu Mohammad al-Jawlani, leader of the militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

The third caricature above is an illustration from the Instagram account @osamahajjaj with the title *Al-ba'd*. The caricature was published on Monday, 16 December 2024, by a Jordanian cartoonist named Osama Hajjaj. The post attracted public attention, gaining 1,996 likes and 136 comments. The caricature depicts the political conditions of Syria at the time of the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime.

Osama Hajjaj's caricature reflects the political situation in Syria with strong symbolism. On the left side, the statue of Bashar al-Assad appears destroyed, symbolizing the diminishing legitimacy of his regime in the eyes of some Syrians. In semiotic terms, the shattered statue carries a dual meaning. Denotatively, it represents the literal downfall of an authoritarian figure whose image once dominated Syria's public spaces. Connotatively, it reflects the erosion of an entire ideological system that has shaped Syria's socio-political order for decades. Statues traditionally embody permanence, authority, and national identity, and their destruction signifies not only the fall of Assad as an individual but also the dismantling of the authoritarian legacy he represents. This layered interpretation resonates with Jakobson's message function, as the broken statue visually communicates the vulnerability of authoritarian regimes that attempt to resist change. Moreover, through Jakobson's contextual function, the ruins of the statue echo broader historical patterns in the Middle East, where revolutionary movements often target monuments as symbolic acts of rejecting oppressive power. Thus, the caricature situates Syria's struggle within a regional narrative of resistance and transition.

People can be seen running away from Assad's statue, carrying opposition flags and the words "Free Syria", showing their hope to get out from under his control. However, on the right side is a statue of Abu Mohammad al-Jawlani, the leader of the HTS group, standing tall with an authoritarian gesture. This illustrates that the people are unconsciously moving from one form of repression to another. As such, there is a sign that while they are trying to break away from Assad's leadership, they are instead entering a new system that also restricts their freedom.

The caricature conveys the message that the transition of power in Syria does not guarantee true freedom, but rather the potential for a transition from one system of domination to another. This is in line with the narrative in Al Jazeera's opinion piece

discussing the diplomatic moves of the new Syrian President, Ahmad al-Sharaa (Alwan, 2024). Despite the promise of international relations and regional support, the reality on the ground shows that the people are still trapped in a repressive cycle of power.

More broadly, this caricature illustrates the dilemma of the Syrian people who are still trapped in a prolonged conflict. This phenomenon invites many supporters to adapt to the new power. The message Hajjaj wants to convey in his caricature is that a change or shift in power in Syria does not necessarily mean true freedom for its people, as they remain under the influence of forces that limit their space.

In addition to the symbolic and ideological meanings identified earlier, these caricatures also demonstrate the power of visual texts to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Caricature, as a medium, condenses complex political realities into striking images that communicate instantly to diverse audiences (Waugh, 2015). This is particularly important in the Syrian case, where conventional political discourse often fails to capture the full extent of human suffering and social disintegration (Jazeera, 2024; Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023). Through irony, exaggeration, and symbolic codes, Osama Hajjaj transforms political critique into a form of public pedagogy that raises awareness and stimulates critical reflection. Moreover, these caricatures highlight the global interconnectedness of conflicts: the Syrian tragedy, as visualized by Hajjaj, resonates with broader issues of foreign intervention, authoritarian repression, and humanitarian crises worldwide. This suggests that caricature does not merely serve as a local critique but also as a transnational discourse that links the struggles of Syria with those of other oppressed societies.

Conclusion

Caricature is not just a visual work, but a symbolic representation that contains meaning and becomes an effective communication tool in delivering socio-political criticism. Based on the analysis of three caricatures by Osama Hajjaj using Roman Jakobson's semiotic approach, this study found that the six functions of language play an important role in building a complex structure of meaning in the caricatures. Osama Hajjaj utilizes sharp symbolism to represent the reality of Syria before and after the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime, ranging from political dependence on foreign

powers, and human tragedy in the prison system to the irony of the transition of power that does not guarantee true freedom. The caricatures not only criticize certain figures but also depict the recurring dynamics of power and express the unrest of the Syrian people. Thus, caricatures emerge as a form of visual resistance and a reflective medium that captures the complexity of contemporary political realities while highlighting the urgency of semiotic studies in examining political visual communication in the digital era.

Theoretically, this study extends Jakobson's framework from verbal texts to the realm of political visual communication. Practically, it highlights the potential of caricatures as media for political literacy, public awareness, and symbolic resistance, contributing to the strengthening of media literacy in the Arab world and supporting digital activism and critical pedagogy through reflective engagement with political symbolism. However, this study is limited by its small dataset of only three caricatures, which cannot fully represent the broader visual discourse on the Syrian conflict; therefore, future research should examine a larger corpus and apply alternative semiotic approaches to deepen understanding of political visual communication in the Middle Eastern context.

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