

OVERLAPPING BETWEEN INDEXICALITY AND ICONICITY IN CARTOONS IN THE WAKE OF SHIREEN ABU AQLEH'S ASSASSINATION

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Abstract

This study explored the interplay between indexicality and iconicity in political cartoons following the assassination of Shireen Abu Aqleh. It addressed a gap in the literature on semiotic interactions in cartoons by examining how indexical and iconic signs overlap, particularly in this context. The research analyzed the use of these signs in political cartoons to assess their effectiveness in portraying sensitive social and political issues, thereby enhancing the understanding of the relationship between signs and interpretation in political discourse. Using qualitative analysis, twenty political cartoons from international websites were studied. The findings highlighted the critical role of the overlap between indexicality and iconicity in effectively representing and communicating social and political issues while eliciting emotional responses. The study underscored the power of political cartoons as influential tools for shaping public opinion and enhancing the understanding of cultural, political, and social dynamics.

Keywords: Indexicality, Iconicity, Political Cartoons, Semiotic Analysis, Shireen Abu Aqleh.

INTRODUCTION

Political cartoons have long been recognized as a powerful communication tool across disciplines (Bolter C Grusin, 2000). Peirce (1998) noted that signs can function as both likenesses (iconic) and indications (indexical), with reasoning often relying on a blend of likenesses, indices, and symbols. McCloud (1993) emphasized the unique ability of cartoons to convey complex ideas through visual and textual elements. The overlap of indexicality and iconicity creates intricate associations within cartoons, enriching their meaning (Eco, 1976). This interplay enhances their role in reflecting cultural, social, and political realities, effectively communicating public opinions and societal dynamics (Orihuela-Gruber, 2009).

Iconic signs resemble their referents, while indexical signs maintain a direct relationship, and symbolic signs rely on convention (Peirce, 1998). Eco (1976) and McCloud (1993) explored how indexical and iconic signs intersect, creating a powerful communicative medium. Analyzing political cartoons through this lens reveals their strategies and impact on audiences, offering insights into their semiotic depth.

Shireen Abu Aqleh, a renowned Palestinian-American journalist, was a fearless voice in reporting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Born in Jerusalem in 1971, she studied journalism at Yarmouk University and became one of Al Jazeera's pioneering reporters, gaining prominence for her coverage of the second Intifada. Her assassination by Israeli soldiers on May 11, 2022, at age 51, sparked widespread outrage and inspired numerous political

cartoons addressing her legacy and the political context (Al Tahhan, 2022). This research investigates the intersection of indexicality and iconicity in political cartoons responding to Abu Aqleh's assassination. Using Peirce's semiotic model, the study analyzes how these cartoons blend indexical and iconic elements to communicate political and social messages, contributing to a deeper understanding of their semiotic complexity and cultural impact.

Statement of the Problem

While existing research has explored semiotic signs—symbolic, iconic, and indexical—in cartoons addressing social, cultural, and political issues, limited attention has been given to the overlap of indexicality and iconicity. This study addresses that gap by examining the interaction between these two modes of representation in political cartoons, focusing specifically on those related to Shireen Abu Aqleh. Her assassination made these cartoons a compelling subject for analysis, as they often combine all three types of signs. By analyzing how indexical and iconic signs intersect in these works, this research aims to deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between signs and meaning in political discourse.

Research Objectives and Questions

This research aimed to investigate the interplay of semiotic signs, with a specific focus on the overlap between indexicality and iconicity, using selected samples from international webpages. It sought to examine the use of indexical and iconic signs in political cartoons, particularly those created in response to Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination, to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between signs and interpretation in political discourse. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the effectiveness of this overlap in representing sensitive social and political issues, focusing on cartoons related to Abu Aqleh.

The study tried to answer the following questions

- 1) How do political cartoons employ indexical and iconic signs, particularly in the wake of Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination, to enhance a better comprehension of how signs contribute to the construction of meaning in political discourse?
- 2) How does the overlap between indexical and iconic signs contribute to representing social and political matters, specifically centering on the cartoons related to Shireen Abu Aqleh?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach, rooted in the concept of subjective reality, which posits that individuals construct personal interpretations of the world based on their interactions and experiences (Cropley, 2019). To investigate the overlap between indexicality and iconicity in cartoons related to Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination, the researcher utilized Peirce's triadic model of signs. This model facilitated an in-depth examination of iconic and indexical signs and their interaction, focusing on three key components: the representamen, the interpretant, and the object.

Convenient sampling was used to select a dataset of political cartoons, specifically those that depicted Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination, ensuring relevance to the study's objectives. The analysis process involved classifying the cartoons, identifying iconic and indexical signs, and interpreting their meanings within the framework of political and social discourse.

Data Collection and Study Sample

The dataset was collected using a convenience sampling method, chosen due to time and resource constraints. The selection criteria ensured that the cartoons:

- 1) Represented the study's subject, Shireen Abu Aqleh.
- 2) Addressed the primary focus of the study—symbolic, indexical, and iconic signs.
- 3) Included both indexical and iconic signs.

Cartoons were sourced from popular media outlets to capture a wide audience's perspectives and the significant influence these cartoons have on public discourse. The data was collected from search engines and websites, with the timeframe for cartoon selection spanning from May 11, 2022, to May 15, 2022.

Keywords such as "Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination cartoons" and "Shireen Abu Aqleh in popular media" were used to identify relevant cartoons. On August 8, 2022, the final dataset of 20 cartoons from various international sources was finalized (Appendix 1).

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the selected cartoons to examine the relationship between indexicality and iconicity and how these semiotic elements were employed to convey meaning. Using Peirce's triadic model of signs (representamen, object, and interpretant), the analysis focused on interpreting the strategies and mechanisms used in the cartoons to represent the assassination of Shireen Abu Aqleh.

A structured table was developed to organize and present the findings clearly, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how indexical and iconic signs intersect in political cartoons. This approach highlighted the effectiveness of these signs in portraying sensitive political and social issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study contributes significantly to the field of semiotics and visual communication by focusing on the overlap between indexicality and iconicity in political cartoons. A review of existing literature reveals the pivotal role of semiotic signs in shaping public discourse, conveying socio-political narratives, and addressing complex cultural issues.

By synthesizing diverse studies across contexts and disciplines, this review highlights the intricate interplay between indexical and iconic signs and their ability to communicate layered meanings effectively. The integration of semiotic analyses with real-world phenomena, such as political protests and public health crises, demonstrates the practical

applications of semiotic theory in fostering critical engagement and influencing public perception.

Research by Tanaka-Ishii and Ishii (2007) establishes a foundational link between semiotic frameworks, such as Hjelmslev's denotation-connotation-metonym and Peirce's icon-index-symbol model, across domains like programming languages.

Their findings suggest that while Hjelmslev focuses on expression-content relationships, Peirce's triadic model offers a broader perspective by integrating representamen, object, and interpretant. The compatibility of these frameworks illustrates the benefits of combining dyadic and triadic approaches for more comprehensive analyses, applicable not only to programming but also to broader semiotic interpretations.

Naser and Baseel Al-Bzour (2015) extend semiotic applications to translation studies, arguing that a semiotic approach provides a deeper understanding of meaning transfer between languages. By incorporating annotations, sociocultural connotations, and contextual elements, they demonstrate that translation studies benefit significantly from a holistic semiotic perspective, which surpasses the limitations of traditional semantic approaches. This integration highlights the hidden layers of meaning within texts and supports the study of semiotics as a tool for understanding complex communication.

The role of metaphor, as examined by Al-Ali, El-Sharif, and Alzyoud (2016), further demonstrates semiotics' applicability. Their analysis of the Qur'an underscores the metaphor's linguistic creativity and its role in religious discourse, revealing its capacity to transfer meaning and influence language, thoughts, and actions. Building on this, El-Sharif (2018) highlights metaphors in the Prophet Muhammad's traditions as powerful communicative tools for persuasion.

These metaphors, chosen to achieve specific social and religious goals, demonstrate how semiotic devices shape attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, Al-Shraideh and El-Sharif (2019) explore semiotic meanings of colors in the Qur'an, showing their role in Islamic cultural symbolism and the nuanced layers of meaning embedded in color signs.

Contemporary applications of semiotics in media studies also reveal its versatility. Alsoufi and Albzour (2021) analyze the use of semiotics in news coverage of the New Zealand Mosque Massacre, uncovering covert ideological biases embedded in verbal and visual signs. By employing Peirce's triadic model, they demonstrate how signs influence public opinion and shape narratives.

Similarly, Albzour (2021) examines the semiotic use of signs and symbols during the 2021 US inauguration, highlighting their role in constructing meaning and engaging audiences through cognitive and cultural contexts. In a related study, Albzour (2022) analyzes Donald Trump's tweets leading up to the January 6 Capitol attack.

Using Speech Act Theory and semiotic analysis, the study reveals how Trump's tweets functioned as both directives and commissives, employing explicit and implicit language to incite action. This analysis underscores the importance of socio-political contexts in understanding how semiotic signs function as tools of persuasion and influence.

These reviewed studies illustrate the adaptability and significance of semiotics in analyzing various forms of communication. From political cartoons and religious texts to media coverage and political discourse, the application of semiotic frameworks enhances our understanding of how signs construct meaning across cultural, social, and political domains.

By focusing on the overlap of indexicality and iconicity, this research aims to build on these foundations, contributing valuable insights into the nuanced mechanisms through which semiotic signs convey complex messages in political cartoons.

Related Empirical Studies

Numerous studies have explored semiotic analysis, emphasizing its application in cartoons, visual media, and communication to decode the interplay of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism. Arko (2012) traced the historical evolution of cartoons, from simple illustrations on walls to their modern manifestations in print and animated media.

His work highlighted how cartoons have become a significant medium for societal commentary, adapting to various forms like comic strips and animated films. This foundational understanding offers insight into their transformative role in visual communication.

A notable example of semiotic application is found in *Tom and Jerry*, analyzed by Dweich and Al Ghabra (2022). Their study employed Peirce's semiotic theory to categorize signs into icons, indices, and symbols, revealing a dominance of negative themes in the episodes. The findings underscored the need to scrutinize children's exposure to such content, particularly the verbal and visual signs that influence their perception of values.

Similarly, Muslimin (2017) investigated *Masha and the Bear* through Barthes' framework, identifying layers of denotation and connotation. This study categorized connotations into attitudinal, associative, affective, and allusive types, urging future researchers to extend semiotic analysis to various animated films to enrich literature education.

Semiotics has also been extensively applied to political and editorial cartoons, demonstrating their capacity to engage with complex socio-political issues. Ako and Ottoh (2011) analyzed Nigerian cartoons in *The Punch* and *The Guardian*, highlighting how symbols and metaphors address themes like corruption and social justice.

Their content analysis revealed that cartoons serve as a potent medium for political commentary, employing culturally resonant imagery to communicate effectively. Similarly, Mendoza (2016) examined editorial cartoons from newspapers and online platforms, adopting a visual semiotic approach to uncover the socio-political narratives conveyed through symbols and caricatures.

In the Jordanian context, semiotics has been explored in various dimensions. Al-Bzour (2011) focused on semio-translation in Jordanian political cartoons, addressing the linguistic and cultural gaps that arise during translation. His findings highlighted the pragmatic aspects, such as implicature and speech acts, crucial for capturing the nuanced meanings in cartoons.

Hajjaj (2018), on the other hand, delved into body language in Jordanian cartoons, analyzing gestures, posture, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication tools. This study revealed how visual elements convey power dynamics and emotional depth, enriching the interpretive framework for cartoon analysis.

Beyond cartoons, semiotics has been applied to global socio-political contexts. Pacheco (2021) analyzed Indian artist Paresh Nath's cartoons, focusing on US-Russia relations during the Obama and Trump administrations. Using Van Leeuwen's framework, the study explored the interplay between text and visuals, revealing nuanced depictions of foreign policy dynamics. Similarly, Tehseem and Bokhari (2019) examined comic-cartoon narratives in Pakistan, particularly those addressing socio-political issues. Their work underscored how satire in comics fosters public engagement and critiques societal norms, emphasizing the role of social media in disseminating such content. The global relevance of cartoons as a medium for awareness is evident in studies on the COVID-19 pandemic. Sattar et al. (2020) employed Fairclough's discourse analysis and Barthes' semiotic framework to analyze newspaper cartoons depicting the pandemic's impacts on education and the economy. Their findings revealed ideological variations in how newspapers represented the pandemic, reflecting public sentiment and societal challenges. Similarly, Robingah (2020) examined *Cartoon Benny*, showcasing its role in raising awareness about the pandemic's socio-economic effects. The versatility of semiotics extends to broader linguistic and communicative contexts. Johnson and Wood (2017) analyzed the use of indexical and iconic signs in *Calvin and Hobbes*, revealing how these elements evoke emotional connections and provide cultural familiarity. Nöth (2019) explored the role of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism in language, demonstrating their applications in poetry, advertising, and political speeches.

His findings highlighted how these semiotic elements transcend traditional communication to convey complex ideas effectively. Complementing this, Ciecierski (2021) investigated indexical expressions in language, focusing on their contextual usage and social implications. His work emphasized indexicality's critical role in enabling nuanced human communication.

These reviewed studies demonstrate the rich potential of semiotic analysis in understanding diverse forms of communication. From cartoons and films to political speeches and editorials, semiotics offers valuable insights into how signs construct meaning, influence perceptions, and shape public discourse. By focusing on the interplay of indexicality and iconicity, this research builds on these foundations, aiming to deepen the understanding of semiotic strategies in visual and textual communication.

RESULTS

The analyzed cartoons on Shireen Abu Aqleh collectively use semiotic elements—iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism—to portray her assassination and its socio-political implications. Each cartoon, while unique, contributes to recurring themes such as freedom of the press, resilience, mourning, and the suppression of truth.

1) Representation of Shireen Abu Aqleh's Identity

Most cartoons prominently depict Shireen in her press jacket, often holding a microphone or standing in a journalistic posture. These visual representations serve as iconic reminders of her role as a journalist, with elements such as wings (Cartoon 1) symbolizing freedom and empowerment. The Palestinian flag appears repeatedly, symbolizing her identity and the national struggle.

2) The Dangers Faced by Journalists

Several cartoons emphasize the perilous environment in which Shireen worked. For instance, sniper points targeting her (Cartoons 11 and 14) and blood-stained tools like microphones (Cartoon 3) symbolize the direct violence faced by journalists. These elements overlap iconicity and indexicality, pointing not only to her profession but also to the broader threats to press freedom.

3) Mourning and Cultural Identity

The use of black backgrounds, tears, and Al-Aqsa Mosque (Cartoons 2 and 12) connects Shireen's assassination to collective mourning within the Palestinian context. In many instances, these symbols evoke both personal grief and national resistance. The visual depiction of her shroud colored in the Palestinian flag (Cartoon 10) intertwines her martyrdom with the identity of the Palestinian people.

4) Journalism as Resistance

Cartoons such as 16 depict Shireen wielding a slingshot with microphones as ammunition, symbolizing her commitment to using journalism as a means of resistance. Similarly, the camera and pen, often portrayed as broken or bloodied (Cartoons 17 and 18), highlight the sacrifices journalists make to uncover and report the truth.

5) Suppression of Truth

The cartoons consistently address the suppression of truth. For example, sniper imagery in multiple cartoons (e.g., Cartoon 11) directly critiques the targeting of truth-tellers. The phrase "Assassination of the Free Press" (Cartoon 14) and the depiction of the word "truth" stained with blood (Cartoon 13) underline the broader consequences of Shireen's assassination on press freedom.

C. Resilience and National Identity

The Palestinian flag, cactus plants (Cartoon 18), and symbolic lettering (Cartoon 12) evoke themes of endurance, patience, and collective identity. These elements portray Shireen's story as part of a larger narrative of resistance and resilience in Palestine.

Examples of Individual Cartoons

- Cartoon 1: Shireen is depicted with wings flying over Al-Aqsa, symbolizing her elevation to martyrdom and her role as a beacon of freedom.
- Cartoon 3: A bloodied microphone in Shireen's hand critiques the violence journalists

endure and calls for the protection of the press.

- Cartoon 10: Two figures, one Muslim and one Christian, carry her shroud in the colors of the Palestinian flag, emphasizing unity and collective mourning.
- Cartoon 16: Shireen wields a slingshot with microphones as ammunition, symbolizing her innovative use of journalism as a tool of resistance.
- Cartoon 18: Shireen is shown on an Al-Jazeera camera surrounded by a cactus plant, signifying resilience in a harsh environment.



Figure 1: cartoon number 1



Figure 2: cartoon number 3



Figure 3: cartoon number 10



Figure 4: cartoon number 1c



Figure 5: Cartoon number 18

The analysis of 18 political cartoons surrounding the assassination of journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh reveals significant insights into the use of semiotic elements—iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism—to communicate complex socio-political messages. These cartoons collectively highlight the pivotal role of visual media in addressing themes of identity, resistance, mourning, and oppression.

The cartoons prominently represent Shireen Abu Aqleh's identity and legacy through her depiction in a press jacket or holding a microphone, serving as a direct and recognizable icon of her profession. Her representation is intertwined with indexical elements, including blood, sniper targets, and broken journalistic tools, all of which symbolize her tragic death and the broader implications for press freedom. Journalism emerges as a tool of resistance, with some cartoons portraying microphones and cameras as weapons against oppression, emphasizing Abu Aqleh's enduring influence. These elements overlap iconicity and indexicality, using journalistic tools to symbolize resilience and advocacy.

Mourning and cultural identity are key themes, with the Palestinian flag, black mourning colors, and symbols such as Al-Aqsa Mosque recurring throughout the cartoons. These covert symbols connect Abu Aqleh's death to the larger Palestinian struggle, while indexical elements like tears and black backgrounds underscore collective grief and cultural identity. The cartoons also critique violence and oppression through visual representations of Israeli soldiers, sniper targets, and blood, which symbolically and indexically highlight systematic violence in conflict zones.

A unique aspect of some cartoons is their depiction of interfaith unity, such as Muslim and Christian figures carrying Shireen's shroud, emphasizing shared humanity and collective mourning amidst societal divisions. Religious attire and the Palestinian flag serve as covert symbols of cultural and spiritual unity. Additionally, many cartoons address the suppression of truth, with sniper imagery and phrases such as "Martyrdom of the Truth" pointing to the systematic silencing of voices like Abu Aqleh's.

Themes of resilience and patience are represented by symbols such as the cactus plant and the Palestinian flag. These elements highlight endurance and perseverance, connecting personal sacrifice to collective resistance. The fusion of these symbols with journalistic tools underscores the intertwined narratives of advocacy and struggle.

The findings reveal a powerful interplay between iconicity and indexicality, with visual and textual elements overlapping to evoke strong emotional responses. By portraying Abu Aqleh's life and death within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the cartoons connect her story to broader political and cultural struggles. Visual representations such as her microphone, blood-stained roads, and the Palestinian map communicate her role as a journalist and the collective impact of her assassination. These cartoons also critique oppressive power dynamics through recurring imagery of soldiers, sniper points, and blood-stained words, emphasizing the dangers faced by journalists. Symbols of media, such as the Al-Jazeera camera, underscore the critical role of journalism in exposing injustice and advocating for accountability. The visual tools used in these cartoons highlight the transformative potential of media to inspire action and change.

Overall, the cartoons analyzed in this study illustrate the power of visual art as a medium for political commentary and advocacy. Through the strategic use of semiotics, they convey multifaceted messages about freedom, resilience, oppression, and cultural identity. This analysis demonstrates how visual narratives can resonate deeply with audiences, encapsulating complex socio-political realities in a poignant and impactful manner.

The following table shows the results of the analysis and details of the 18 cartoons in this study:

Table 1: Results of the analysis and details of 18 cartoons

Cartoon No.	Representamen	Object	Interpretant	Key Semiotic Features
1	Abu Aqleh with wings, press jacket, microphone, Al-Aqsa, and Palestinian flag	Abu Aqleh's assassination and aftermath	Attack on freedom of press, erasure of Palestinian history	Icons: Abu Aqleh, wings. Indexicality: Palestinian flag, black mourning. Overlap: wings as freedom/iconic and martyrdom/indexical.
2	Abu Aqleh with blood, Al-Aqsa in black and white, 'Martyr' written	Assassination of Abu Aqleh	Mourning, violence against women, intention of violence	Icons: blood, Abu Aqleh. Symbols: blood writing. Indices: black background, Al-Aqsa. Overlap: blood as both violence and identity.
3	Bleeding microphone, Abu Aqleh's hand	Danger to journalists	Call to protect press freedom and highlight journalists' sacrifices	Icons: microphone, blood. Indices: written text. Overlap: microphone as profession/iconic and danger/indexical.
4	Abu Aqleh with microphone, gun behind her, barren land, Al-Aqsa	Conflict zone for journalists	Highlighting risks journalists face and importance of their role	Icons: Abu Aqleh, gun. Symbols: barren land. Indices: Al-Aqsa. Overlap: gun as violence/iconic and threat/indexical.
5	Abu Aqleh in press vest, bleeding, 'Breaking news in blood' caption	Assassination of Abu Aqleh	Risks of journalism in conflict zones	Icons: Abu Aqleh, blood. Symbols: blood words. Indices: black background. Overlap: bleeding body/iconic and her story/indexical.
6	Bullet silencing Abu Aqleh, black background	Silencing Abu Aqleh	Commentary on suppression of free speech	Icons: Abu Aqleh, bullet. Indices: black mourning. Overlap: bullet as violence/iconic and silencing/indexical.
7	Abu Aqleh with camera, dove of peace	Journalism and pursuit of peace	Symbolic connection between journalism and peace	Icons: Abu Aqleh, dove. Indices: camera gaze. Overlap: dove as peace/iconic and aspirations/indexical.

8	Shroud of Abu Aqleh carried as camera, Palestinian flag	Death of Abu Aqleh	Mourning, Palestinian resistance, and collective accountability	Icons: shroud, flag. Symbols: soldier fleeing. Indices: flag as identity. Overlap: shroud/camera fusion.
9	Palestine map as press jacket, blood dripping	Death of Abu Aqleh, violence in Palestine	Press and identity merging, ongoing violence	Icons: map, blood. Symbols: writing. Indices: map as Palestine. Overlap: map as identity/iconic and press/indexical.
10	Two men carrying shroud colored in flag, bees	Shireen's shroud, martyrdom	Unity amid diversity, criticism of controversies	Icons: shroud, flag. Symbols: bees. Indices: unity. Overlap: flag as identity/iconic and resistance/indexical
11	Shireen in sniper target, 'Occupation and assassination of truth'	Suppression of truth in conflict zones	Challenges to press freedom and journalist safety	Icons: sniper, Abu Aqleh. Indices: text about targeting press. Overlap: sniper point as targeting/iconic and threat/indexical.
12	Arabic letters forming 'Palestine' with symbolic elements	Palestinian identity	Grief, resilience, cultural significance of Palestine	Icons: letters as symbols. Symbols: flag, Al-Aqsa. Indices: national identity. Overlap: letters as visuals/iconic and meaning/indexical.
13	Israeli soldier, stained 'truth' with blood	Suppression of truth, conflict in Palestine	Violence against truth and journalists	Icons: soldier, word 'truth.' Symbols: blood. Indices: conflict context. Overlap: stained truth/iconic and suppressed truth/indexical.
14	Shireen in press gear with sniper target	Assassination of Shireen	Risks journalists face in conflict zones	Icons: sniper, Abu Aqleh. Indices: text about targeting press. Overlap: sniper as violence/iconic and targeting/indexical.
15	Israeli soldier with Shireen's microphone	Assassination as a crime	Press freedom under attack, violence in conflict zones	Icons: soldier, microphone. Indices: text about assassination. Overlap: microphone as profession/iconic and voice/indexical.
16	Shireen with slingshot, microphone as ammunition	Shireen's resistance through journalism	Journalistic tools as resistance	Icons: slingshot, microphones. Symbols: written words. Overlap: slingshot as action/iconic and journalism/indexical.

17	Shireen on execution platform, pen and camera	Risks to journalists in conflict zones	Journalism as a sacrifice in pursuit of truth	Icons: Shireen, tools. Indices: execution platform. Overlap: camera as journalism/iconic and loss/indexical.
18	Shireen on Al-Jazeera camera, cactus plant	Media's role in Palestine	Patience and struggle of Palestinians and Al-Jazeera's commitment	Icons: camera, cactus. Symbols: flag. Indices: journalism in conflict. Overlap: cactus as resilience/iconic and patience/indexical.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the cartoons highlights the effective use of semiotic elements to communicate the societal and political complexities surrounding Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination. These visual narratives seamlessly blend iconic and indexical signs to construct multi-layered meanings that resonate with diverse audiences. Iconic representations such as Shireen's image, her microphone, and the depiction of her soaring above Palestine symbolize liberty, empowerment, and the challenges faced by journalists. Meanwhile, indexical elements like the color black, blood, and textual references anchor these visuals in the specific context of mourning and the Palestinian struggle. The interplay between iconicity and indexicality enriches the cartoons' messaging, as iconic depictions of Shireen emphasize her identity and role as a journalist, while indexical signs such as bullets, blood, and the Palestinian flag connect her story to broader narratives of resistance and conflict. For instance, the integration of textual elements like "Shireen Abu Aqleh" and "Palestine" bridges the symbolic and real-world contexts, adding depth to the portrayal of her legacy and the Palestinian cause.

The cartoons also emphasize unity within the Palestinian context through symbolic representations. One striking example is the visual depiction of Islamic and Christian figures carrying Shireen's shroud adorned with the Palestinian flag, symbolizing collective mourning and national solidarity. This convergence of identities underlines the shared purpose and unity within a diverse community. Political cartoons, as noted by scholars, excel in simplifying complex socio-political issues while delivering emotional and impactful narratives.

Moreover, the layers of semiotics in these cartoons effectively convey the complexities of conflict and loss. Symbols such as Arabic letters forming "Palestine," a crying eye, and a hand holding a flag evoke strong emotions of identity and struggle. These elements combine iconicity and indexicality to connect individual pain to the collective experience of the Palestinian people. The analysis further illustrates how the cartoons contextualize the role of journalism and the suppression of truth in conflict zones. Depictions like an Israeli soldier silencing a journalist with a microphone symbolize the targeted threats to press freedom and the broader dangers journalists face. This amalgamation of visual and textual signs underscores the vital role of journalism in resisting oppression while highlighting the risks and sacrifices inherent in the profession. In sum, the cartoons utilize a rich blend of iconic, indexical, and symbolic elements to explore themes of identity, unity, resilience, conflict, and press

freedom. Through this layered semiotic approach, they effectively communicate the emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of Shireen Abu Aqleh's legacy and the broader Palestinian struggle.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has highlighted the overlapping roles of indexicality and iconicity in political cartoons, offering valuable insights. However, its limitations suggest several potential directions for further investigation. A key limitation is the relatively small sample size of analyzed cartoons, constrained by available time and resources. This limited scope may not fully represent the diversity of how indexicality and iconicity are employed across political cartoons. Future studies could address this by examining a larger and more diverse dataset, encompassing cartoons from various cultures, regions, and time periods, to provide a more comprehensive analysis of these semiotic elements.

Additionally, while this research focused on the portrayal of social and political issues following Shireen Abu Aqleh's assassination, future studies could explore the use of indexicality and iconicity in political cartoons addressing other significant events or figures.

Such work would expand the contextual understanding of these semiotic tools, revealing how they shape discourse in varied circumstances.

Finally, this study concentrated on the interpretant, or the message derived from the images. Future research could investigate audience responses and interpretations, perhaps through reception studies or surveys. This approach would offer deeper insights into how viewers engage with and understand political cartoons, helping to evaluate the effectiveness of indexical and iconic signs in conveying social and political messages.

By overcoming the limitations of this study and pursuing these suggested research paths, scholars can further advance our understanding of the intricate relationship between indexicality and iconicity in political cartoons and their broader impact on public discourse.

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