



Faizati's Editorial Cartoons: A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract. Editorial cartoons are effective means of discussing many societal issues, and they reflect the majority viewpoints prevalent among members of the general public at a given moment. The aim of this paper is to interpretate and understand the semiotic elements of Malaysian cartoonist Faizati. The selected cartoons for this analysis address the conceptual depiction and conceptualization of females in Malaysia as a social issue. The findings of this study will aid in comprehending the meanings and determining the true depictions behind her cartoons. The Semiotic elements of cartoons will be adopted from William Fetsko are symbolism, exaggeration and distortion, stereotypes, and humor and irony as the most prominent used by Faizati. The results of this study would provide insights into understanding the meanings and determine the depictions behind her cartoons on representation Malaysian women.

Keywords: Editorial Cartoons, Semiotic, Malaysia, Females, Faizati.

1 Introduction

A picture is said to be worth a thousand words [1]. As a result, editorial cartoons serve an important role in monitoring the country's and the world's political, social, and economic developments through situations produced by the cartoonist based on his or her surroundings [2]. The term "editorial cartoon" is sometimes used to refer to a "political cartoon" or a "newspaper cartoon." Cartoons, according to Osuagwu [3], are employed in the media as a strategy for grabbing attention and facilitating meaning understanding in editorials. An editorial cartoon is distinguished from other cartoons by its currency and meaning. According to Mendoza [4], an editorial cartoon is a drawing, symbolic or representational, which makes a critical, witty, or humorous point. An editorial cartoon, as an art form, may be traced back to the Reformation era as a tool of debate and satire.

Editorial cartoon is linked to freedom of expression since it allows the cartoonist to communicate their thoughts on a subject. The subjects addressed in editorial cartoons are frequently tied to contemporary societal concerns such as social and political challenges [5]. Cartoons are a collection of elements that each person interprets differently. This means that any object may be used to illustrate and satirize societal

evils, as well as give insight into social patterns and account for how certain events create specific shared meanings for a specific social group.

Since 2018, Malaysian cartoonist Faizati Mohd Ali has been posting the majority of her work on social media channels on her profile "By Faizati." Her creative work has previously appeared in local humour publications such as *Gila-Gila* and *Gelihati*. For the time being, she mostly makes cartoons to express herself and to respond to societal topics that she is passionate about, such as gender inequity, social injustice, and prejudice.

Sisters In Islam published her debut cartoon collection "*Menghayun Buaian Menggoncang Dunia*" in 2019. She recently took part in the 'Asean Human Rights Cartoon Exhibition' organised by another Malaysian cartoonist Zunar and partnered with UNFPA Malaysia on a series of cartoons addressing various issues affecting women and children.

Malaysian females, according to Cecelia Ng, Maznah Mohamad, and Tan Beng Hui [6], are limited by Asian language, which has been utilized to promote a highly tight prescription of female behaviors and duties. Inherent in the discourse is the symbolic concept of women maintaining the nation and honor, which is critical in their job of keeping the family unit intact. This study will examine the portrayals of females in editorial cartoons, Faizati's expressions will be studied to indicate the conceptual depiction and conceptualization of females in Malaysia.

2 Problem Statement

The knowledge gap addressed in this study is identifying the semiotic components buried in Faizati cartoons published on her Facebook page "By Faizati" between 2019 and 2023. According to Lauerbach [7], readers should be familiar with cultural codes since the meanings of visual and verbal indicators are directly tied to these codes. This suggests that viewers may struggle to understand the concepts communicated by editorial cartoons. Understanding semiotic components may aid cartoonists in developing stronger arguments and becoming more persuasive in their work. This definition then outlines the efficacy of editorial cartoons' visual language in communicating societal trends.

3 Literature Review

Editorial cartoons have historically questioned and backed policies, legitimised ideals and illegitimized opposing 'values,' and most notably 'naturalised' ideology. Cartoons, as satire, will even allow beliefs that are too obscene, socially inappropriate,

or politically perilous to be spoken or written in prose. As naturalistic regions, editorial cartoons rely significantly on the audience's social and cultural memory, as well as innate grasp of symbols, to offer both humour and meaning. In other words, he or she appropriates and recreates situations that his or her audience understands [8]. The point of focus, female representations, will provide as another cartoonist of how cartoons might be handled as semiotic system elements.

According to Chandler [9], Umberto Eco stated that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign." The classic definition of a sign is "something that represents something else." Semiotic analysis studies have considered cartoons/caricatures as images that convey meanings and act as a silent means of communication. They can also convey intricate and unutterable sentiments that articles or editorials cannot express clearly. Tyumbu [10] also shown how to interpret and derive meaning from cartoons in order to better comprehend them. It also showed the semiotic employed in cartooning and contributed to the study of verbal and nonverbal codes as key communication channels, such as cartoons.

Using symbols rather than words, politicians can be lampooned and ridiculed, and minority groups stereotyped. Cartoons contribute to the creation of social representations through commonly used stereotypes, and symbols [11]. Common symbols and icons bring about common senses on issues in a society in which cultural memory reservoir functions in the making of meaning. These semiotic discourses are ideologically loaded and contain layers of hidden meanings.

4 Method

This study utilized William Fetsko [12], author of *Using and Analyzing Political Cartoons* as the main source of interpretation and understanding elements of Faizati cartoons. A comparative research approach was utilized in the study, which included content analysis (categorization of cartoons and its contents) and Chandler's [9] concepts of semiotic analysis (picture analysis).

Semiotic components were established by William Fetsko [12] as interpretation aids for the cartoon's meaning, expression, representation, and communication to its audience.

Content analysis is a useful approach for investigating and evaluating media material as well as other related graphic or visual texts, notably cartoons. This approach entails developing a content-analytical rule that was particularly built for this study, allowing the investigation to be done inside its own framework.

5 Cartoon Samples and Approach

This study analysis focuses on four semiotic elements encoded in the cartoons, as per interpreted by William Fetsko [12]. Four semiotic elements were chosen and evaluated for illustrative purposes. Faizati uses these semiotic elements to manifest approach in delivering her perspective on Malaysia's conceptual representation or conceptualization of women. The semiotic elements of the cartoons are divided into four elements: Symbolism, Exaggeration and Distortion, Stereotypes, and Humor and Irony. These elements have been widely utilized, particularly in the analysis, understanding and interpretation of editorial cartoons.

The samples comprise of six cartoons were chosen based on specific theme from cartoonist Faizati's Facebook page, "By Faizati." These editorial cartoons were selected because of their visual imageries, the theme is particularly involving her works on representations of females in Malaysia between 2019 and 2023.

The cartoons were analyzed in terms of finding out answers to the myriad ways in which visual aspects impact daily lives and attitudes by analyzing pictures. In contrast to simply aesthetic concerns, semiotic elements consider cartoons as sensory manifestations of cultural meaning.



(Cartoon 1, 2019)



(Cartoon 2, 2019)



(Cartoon 3, 2021)



(Cartoon 4, 2021)



(Cartoon 5, 2023)



(Cartoon 6, 2023)

Fig. 1. Faizati cartoons
(Sources: <https://www.facebook.com/byfaizati>)

Table 1. Presents frequency distribution of semiotic elements used by Faizati’s cartoons on representations of women in Malaysia.

Cartoon	Symbolism	Exaggeration and Distortion	Stereotypes	Humor and Irony
1	✦ ^x	✦ ^x	✦ ^x	✦ ^x
2	✦ ^x	✦ ^x		
3	✦ ^x		✦ ^x	
4		✦ ^x	✦ ^x	
5	✦ ^x	✦ ^x		
6	✦ ^x	✦ ^x		✦ ^x

6 Analysis and Discussion

This study analyzes the usages of William Fetsko’s [12] four semiotic elements to investigate Faizati’s techniques of expressing her message through editorial cartoons in a systematic way. It will also outline the frequency of those semiotic elements used by Faizati in her cartoons in Table 1. Faizati illustrates her cartoons based on predominately a reflection on social marginalization towards females. Her cartoons have Malaysian cultural significance and should be viewed through the perspective of semiotic resonance, which draws on recognized cultural symbols, commonplaces, and references to describe current affairs, between 2019 and 2023. Faizati’s cartoons typically uses symbolism, such in depicting an issue through perspective manipulation. She frequently uses familiar objects or symbols and turn it to convey complex notions of her cartoon to express a notion.

As suggested by William Fetsko [12], the usage and presentation of such symbols in a cartoon reveals how the cartoonist, and maybe the general audience, perceived the thing to be symbolized. Symbols draw attention to various facets of a problem, topic, event, or public figure. A symbol’s effectiveness depends on the presumption that its meaning can be understood by its audience. Symbols encourage readers to think critically since they can function in several levels while aiming for a single dominating meaning. As per Cartoon 1, Faizati uses local folklore creatures as a recognized cultural symbolism to depict the notion of both evils yet, pointing out that the women are still in the wrong for provoking the man with not covering up her “Aurat” (women vulva), even though he has committed a larger and unlawful act. In Cartoon 5, the symbolic representation on the society’s verbal perception as a direct mockery victim blaming as it’s the female’s fault for choosing the wrong husband. This shows on the principle of symbolism bringing a message or a point of view to the forefront.

Editorial cartoons do not attempt to depict reality in its entirety. They blend graphic elements and text in a variety of unusual ways. Cartoonists commonly exaggerate or understate the relative proportions of the items they depict, generally to emphasize the strength or weakness, prominence or insignificance, danger or helplessness of some individual, group, or societal force. Object form distortion can also be used to draw emphasis to distinct facets of the notion or issue being portrayed. Exaggerated size and distorted shape are only two of the many visual elements or approaches that provide significance to the symbols in a cartoon. Facial expressions, the placement of one item in relation to another, uncommon styles of clothes, peculiar shading of particular features, all of these elements and more can contribute to the meaning or point made by a cartoon. Every feature or aspect of the greatest editorial cartoons contributes to the overall message. The distorted pictures in a cartoon can have a strong emotional impact, and they frequently expose the artist's unspoken preconceptions. As with Cartoon 2, Faizati strokes are denser depicting the exaggerated size of the father in a monstrous ghostly like figure. This exaggerated figure is in view on the how the child will view her father as he enters the room, a representation is overblown to articulate the sheer terror of the child.

By accentuating characteristics associated with a whole group, stereotyping destroys everything distinctively individual. Cartoonists frequently try to exploit our unconscious biases, but the results may be deceptive and disrespectful. It's not always clear if a stereotype is merely a means of communication or a derogatory term. When utilizing stereotyped symbols, use caution since they might evoke emotional responses. Stereotypes have the capacity to propagate negative clichés. According to Lawate [2], although insulting, it makes a solid argument that can be contested; it opens the door to conversation. Cartoon 3 depicts the prejudice stereotyping against female students as not being able to speak their mind in a school environment, thus the male teacher is drawn giving a plaster as a sign of female students staying silence in school. As per cartoon 4, even with a fully covered female, men's shadows as viewed as predators craving for an innocent female. This is a common stereotyped depiction on Malaysia men as a whole.

Humor and irony "soften" a serious matter and provides the reader with an honorable path out. The use of humor and irony is an exaggeration to mock people. An editorial cartoon must respect its dissidents sufficiently not to portray them as stupid for disagreeing. Each reader should be free to determine what the cartoon's implications are and where they stand on the topic. Fetsko [12] said that irony is a type of humor that is prevalent in many cartoons. Furthermore, he noted that a position is conveyed in such an unusual manner that it seems ludicrous. Irony makes cartoons witty and points out the flaws in the system. As with cartoon 6, the husband is confident that the wife will not divorce him given the circumstances of the government system and her children as representational of the maze she needs to go through. This expresses viewpoints in odd ways to ridicule and point out flaws in the system.

7 Conclusion

The study discovered that while editorial cartoons contain qualities that make them an unavoidable tool for capturing readers' attention, not all cartoons are humorous. Some of them are replicas of social structures, female representation, and distinctions. Faizati communicated her views and speak her inner sincerity and thoughts about the female conceptualization through existing semiotic elements. Cartoons have their styles that make them an inevitable tool for attracting readers' attention. The researcher realized that editorial cartoons could have been better explained in phrases regarding the analysis and integration of respondents' ideas. The researcher does not see the possibility of some or majority of the illustrations expressed in a single word, to discourse has been used to promote a very strict prescription of female behaviors and roles in Malaysia. Therefore, it creates awareness, thus providing a form of civic education to editorial cartoon viewers.

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