

The Imaginative Geographies of Emad Hajjaj's Arab Spring Cartoons

Cayton Moore and Darren Purcell

*Department of Geography and Environmental Sustainability,
University of Oklahoma, 100 East Boyd St, SEC 510,
Norman, OK 73019-1007 U.S.A.*

The power of political cartoons has been examined by political geographers but rarely have non-Anglo-European cartoonists been their focus. This paper examines selected editorial cartoons of the Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj created during the Arab Spring. Specifically, we examine how they fit in the processes of constructing imaginative geographies and geographic imaginaries. More importantly, invoking Bhaba's (2004) concept of enunciation, we demonstrate how Hajjaj's cartoons facilitate processes that ask readers from the region to engage with cartoons that play with space in ways that recognize how colonial geographies are perpetuated and simultaneously destabilized through the blending of colonizer-colonized geographic imaginaries in various discourses. The analysis is conducted with a corpus of cartoons selected to highlight forms of cartographic practices that show how Hajjaj uses colonial understandings of the Arab World, and yet reworks them to criticize many political developments during the period.

Keywords: humor, popular geopolitics, political cartoons, geographic imaginaries, Emad Hajjaj

Introduction

"I don't care a straw for your newspaper articles, my constituents don't know how to read, but they can't help seeing them damned pictures" William W. Tweed (a.k.a Boss Tweed). Quoted in McNamara 2020

The power of editorial cartoons (often referred to as political cartoons) is perhaps best underscored by William Tweed's quote, who understood that cartoons were effectively communicating his corruption and embezzlement, contributing to his downfall in the public eye and eventual conviction for his crimes in 1873. Editorial cartoonists still make commentary about a range of issues, and still earn the scorn and threats from politicians. Globally, it can be risky to be an editorial cartoonist. Our research examines the works of Emad Hajjaj, a Palestinian-Jordanian cartoonist whose work has caused him to be jailed by Jordanian authorities. He is best known for his commentary on Jordanian life and politics through the character Abu Mahjoub and his eponymous series. Hajjaj's usual publication outlets vary widely from Jordanian

papers and news magazines Alrai, Al-Ghad, and Al-Arab Al-Youm to Arabic language outlets with regional readership like Al-Quds Al-Arabi and Al-Dostour, giving Hajjaj a regional reach and through social media, likely global across diaspora communities. By publishing in pan-Arab newspapers like Al-Quds Al-Arabi, Hajjaj reinforces boundaries of Al-Watan Al-Arabi (The Arab world/homeland) as a geographic unit of some distinction. This reach is what makes Hajjaj's cartoons relevant in capturing a snapshot of the Arab World in terms of political cartoons and their geographic imaginaries. The focus of this research is Hajjaj's use of cartographic and landscape elements in his cartoons that challenge Western stereotypes and understandings of events in the Arab World while simultaneously mapping an Arab World that many non-Arabs would not recognize. Through creative depictions and rearrangements of states in satirical ways, challenges to dominant geographic imaginations (Said, 1978) are created through the cartoonist's expression of his imaginative geographies in order to foster new geographic imaginaries (Gregory 2009; Watts 1999), processes we outline below.

To build the case for Hajjaj's cartography as imaginative counter-geographies to existing Orientalist imaginations, we will begin with a discussion of the terms geographic imaginaries, imaginative geographies, and geographic imaginations. We then move to outlining extant scholarly work on Hajjaj, as well as the work on Arab political cartoons and humor more broadly. We then introduce the popular geopolitical framework that we believe enhances the current body of work on both Hajjaj and the geopolitics of humor and satire. This will be accompanied by a discussion of Orientalist and post-colonial geographic imaginaries of the Arab world through scholars like Said, Bhabha, and Gregory. This sets up the analytical framework for the analysis promised in this paper examining the interface between Hajjaj's representations of the Arab World and implicit geographic imaginaries that he references contextually. Entering the analysis section, we will describe the corpus construction before exploring a selection of tropes and geographic imaginaries that the analysis of the cartoons brought to light. Finally, we will discuss the implications and impacts of the aforementioned analysis and its relevance to the bodies of work that this manuscript contributes to.

The Importance of Imaginations and Imaginaries

In the increasingly media-saturated environment much of the world inhabits, mental maps have never been easier to fill. This reflects the ease with which information can cross boundaries and an increased reliance on global economic and information flows. However, much of the information we encounter is experiential, and rarely does information flow equitably. One result of this information landscape is what Edward

Said dubbed the geographic imagination. This is the perception of a place as seen in texts, images, and other discursive outlets, a form of mental map that organizes those spaces we perceive as belonging to us and those that do not (Said 1978). Examples of geographic imaginations in action include the portrayal of the Arab world in American film as a homogenous desert inhabited by little more than camels and thaub-wearing tribesmen. These images are powerful, creating and reinforcing stereotypes that are incorporated into everyday media for further replication. Education and popular culture creates these imaginaries about places beyond our domestic sphere by altering the way we arrange places and their characteristics into a form of mental map. The Orientalist geographic imagination is often preoccupied with the distinction between places of the self and the other and is sprawling, consisting of hundreds of variants on the east-west dichotomy that have been reinforced for centuries. As a result, the geographic imagination (that is, the Orientalist geographic imagination laid out by Said) can be cumbersome to study today when myriad discursive regimes exist, often paradoxically alongside one another. Instead, it is more helpful to speak in terms of imaginative geographies and geographic imaginaries, terms that break down the discursive components of the geographic imagination. Imaginative geographies comprise the representations of a place depicted in speech, text, and media, offering generalizations of a place and its inhabitants (Gregory 1995).

If, by the process of replication and reinforcement, aspects of an imaginative geography become embedded as common knowledge, they are then referred to as geographic imaginaries, which implies the plurality of discursive imaginings that are present and subconsciously active for anyone at a given time (Gregory 2009; Watts 1999). When examining the intersection of media and geographic sensemaking, we are most often talking about how the media proposes an imaginative geography created by the author and how it interacts with or becomes one or more geographic imaginaries.

Imaginative geographies and geographic imaginaries require maintenance and upkeep through repetition and embedding of the discourse in everyday life. This process is called enunciation by Homi Bhabha and is how many of the Orientalist tropes that Said wrote about in the 1970s have persisted through to today (2004). In the geopolitical context, this reproduction process is the same one that creates notions of friend or foe on the global stage. It becomes necessary to reiterate differences between the self and other if the other is to be perceived as a threat (Gregory 1995). This continued process of reaffirming discourses that enforce power inequalities produces the “The Colonial Present”, wherein power relations of imperialism are perpetuated despite beyond

the end of formal colonialism (Gregory 2004). Geographic imaginaries are a powerful tool in producing the colonial present and their maintenance produces artifacts reflecting the constant negotiation of ideas and identities in discourse. These comprise the texts and contexts that discourse analysis concerns itself with.

One such artifact of popular culture contributing to geographic imaginaries is the political cartoon. Political cartoons are nearly ubiquitous in print media as well as digital news publications, making them worthwhile to investigate the popular reproduction of discourse. Political cartoons are deeply embedded in the worldview of the cartoonist, even as they subvert common understandings of world events at large. This allows for insights into the imaginative geography that cartoonists deploy to frame the contemporary world geopolitically. Political cartoons are often satirical and require examination of the semiotic and iconic, both dependent on social contexts, utilized here to parse out how cartoons relay a cartoonist's particular imaginative geographies.

Scholars such as Lewis (2008) suggest that often, editorial cartoons follow the rules of satire more so than humor, since they can elicit little humorous response while effectively conveying the idea and are rarely self-contained as they mine extant social discourse (like geographic imaginaries) to make their points (Lewis et al. 2008). Satire is a means of shifting perspective on a subject by altering its form in media, such as through caricature or through metaphor and allegory (Knight 2004). To present an alternative perspective, satirical cartoons require the reader to have requisite knowledge of the cartoon's subject, such as an awareness of prevailing geographic imaginaries. This makes political cartoons ripe for examining the construction of the cartoonist's imaginative geographies and their articulation to audiences.

Satire in political cartoons is often subversive, but the question as to whether these cartoons speak truth to implicit Orientalist imaginaries is worth investigating. To this end, we can observe how cartographic imagery contributes to or runs counter to discursive regimes that govern geopolitical thought. The process of a reader interpreting political cartoons provides a glimpse of the artist's imaginative geography through what the cartoonist chooses to comment on, and how they do so with visual and cartographic cues. This involves the examination of implicit and explicit visual and textual cues in relation to discourses (such as maps and other discursive resources) as well as current events, especially when the cartoonist creates a gap between the audience's geographic imaginaries and the cartoonist's representation of an issue. The information presented by the cartoonist is a selectively curated

perspective that the audience must then interpret using their own knowledge. The cartoonist makes certain assumptions about the audience's knowledge about an issue and then frames commentary within that knowledge base. This framing process informs the core methodological question of this study: whether it is possible to parse imaginative geographies from political cartoons and more broadly, visual satire, by studying what requisite knowledge and contexts are necessary to understand the cartoonist's work.

A geographic imaginary is a form of context, a collection of relevant information or understandings about a situation, in this case the Arab World, that is then used to understand the meaning of a cartoon. Geographic imaginaries are derived from formal education, media consumption, and experience. Prevailing discourses about a region, such as Orientalism, influence these imaginaries with the inclusions of stereotypes and myths (Gregory 1995). We focus here on Hajjaj's ability to convey a particular imaginative geography as it intersects with geographic imaginaries, those common conceptions of the Arab World held by many in Europe and the United States. By evoking these imaginaries, Hajjaj creates space for his readers to challenge their comprehension of the cartoon's subject and reinscribe their mental map.

The most explicit outlet for Hajjaj's imaginative geographies is the use of maps and other cartographic elements in his cartoons. Cartography and its impacts on geographic imaginaries have long been seen as both historical tools of empire and contemporary tools of hegemony (Culcasi 2010, 2012; Gregory 2004; L. Khoury and Da'Na 2012). Maps of the Arab world are still haunted by the borders drawn in the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the subsequent discursive palimpsest creates an unequal power dynamic, with both imagined and expressed geographies dominated by Euro-American interests. We investigate cartographic elements in Hajjaj's cartoons as they interact with imaginaries surrounding the Arab World, as the mapping of the Arab world has long been a geopolitical tool which Arabs found themselves dispossessed of. This drives our core argument that the editorial cartoons can be read as a discursive site wherein Hajjaj exercises geopolitical agency often denied to Arabs against dominating geographic imaginaries. This is achieved by adopting elements of the visual language of the colonizer through the discursive process of enunciation. Political cartoons are a relevant form of popular media that can carry geopolitical messaging like most other forms of media. This broad appeal and production outside the normal apparatuses of geopolitical power, such as governments and academia are what makes the study of these cartoons worthwhile as a site of interest for popular geopolitics (Dodds 1996, 2007; Ridanpaa 2009, 2012).

Emad Hajjaj and Political Cartoons in the Arab World

Extant literature on political humor in the Arab World is broad, especially studies that position humor as a form of subversive politics (Anagondahalli & Khamis 2014; Damir-Geilsdorf and Milich 2020; Shehata 1992). Similarly, a more focused literature about political cartoons in the Arab World exists, ranging from studies of cartoons as artifacts of conflict to some limited analysis of the humor itself (Al Kayed et al. 2015; Najjar 2007). More recently, Hajjaj's work was the subject of analyses emphasizing his Abu Mahjoub series' engagement with Jordanian politics (Al-Masri 2016; Al-Momani et al. 2017). These studies examine Hajjaj's work as it exists in a social context either in terms of the message conveyed or those specific contexts leveraged. What we contribute is a focus on the body of Hajjaj's non-Abu Mahjoub work, specifically geographic imaginaries and their contribution to popular understandings of geopolitics.

Contextual underpinnings of humor can be brought into conversation with contemporary work dealing with geopolitical codes in popular geopolitics. These codes allow various apparatuses of geopolitical power (heads of state, diplomats, think tanks, etc.) to organize geographic imaginaries into a system of allies and enemies, selves and others, and are observable in the policy documents and agreements seen in formal and practical geopolitical practices (Dijkink 1998; Saunders 2019; Toal 1996). These codes permeate the popular imagination through interfaces such as the US State of the Union address, used to inform not just citizens, but the world, of geopolitical priorities (Flint et al. 2009). This interface and communication of codes are both reflective and productive of geopolitical imaginaries. One example is the construction of a "just war" against a distant other in Iraq and Afghanistan, described by the Bush administration as a "clash of civilizations", reflecting the ideas of Samuel Huntington, who had constructed a world of mutually exclusive "civilizations" destined for conflict (Flint and Falah 2004; Huntington 1996). Those same wars were productive of new imaginaries, as support for the war produced a domestically justified extraterritoriality to American security concerns, where one of the primary forms of resistance were newspaper reports and political cartoons (Falah et al. 2006). The policy actions that these codes are associated with disseminate themselves through both formal and popular geopolitical channels.

The way Arabs are portrayed in film indicates just how popular culture is often in tune with dominant tropes, as the stereotypical Arab developed new layers of coding from backward nomad to senselessly wealthy oil sheikh, to terrorist, each contributing new connotations relevant to the US-Arab relationship (Shaheen 2001). All of these are based in Orientalist stereotypes as articulated by Said (1978), but the

geographic imaginaries reflect a process of othering Arabs. Engaging with geographic imaginaries through popular geopolitics is not simply a translation of the formal and practical realms to the general population but has the ability to grant agency to the marginalized to produce imaginative geographies, such as Black Panther's creation of a liberating, though decidedly neoliberal, afro-futurist society in the heart of Africa (Saunders 2019).

Humor, Discourse and Political Geography

Humor's ubiquity in cultures makes it a valuable lens for analyzing the everyday embodiment of geopolitics. Political cartoons, as a site of popular geopolitics have been examined with an emphasis on how visual media plays a part in fostering geopolitical imaginations (Dodds 1996, 2007; Dodds and Kirby 2013; Hammett 2011; Ridanpää 2009, 2012). That several Arab countries censor the work of comedians and political cartoonists is a tacit recognition of the subversive potential of humor and satire to challenge governments, social norms, and geopolitical imaginings supported by the state (Shehata, 1992). More recent scholarship emphasizes the affective embodiment of humor at a personal scale as a coping mechanism or a means of social negotiation (Eriksen 2019; Clark 2019) and a means to avoid normalizing the violence around them (Fluri 2019).

We lean heavily in this study on Strukov's assessment of discourse in popular geopolitics as distinct from traditional relationships between the gaze and power (2018). Said and Foucault both consider the gaze as productive of power either in itself or as a tool of the dominating party (Foucault 1979; Said 1978). Strukov addresses Foucault's approach to the gaze specifically by offering an alternative framework inspired by Bhabha wherein imaginaries of difference are spatialized as opposed to internalized, so that while power relations have an "orientation", they are better understood as being between locations of culture, and that these locations are observed, and differences defined and maintained through the gaze (Bhabha 2004; Strukov 2018, 65-6). This process of defining difference between locations of culture is termed enunciation, and is an iterative practice performed as subversion or domination of culture (Bhabha 2004). Enunciation is linked to Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, wherein the relationship between colonizer and colonized is not defined strictly by domination by the former and compliance by the latter. Instead, there is ambivalence, or fluctuations in the relationship. The colonized is not always in strict opposition to the colonizer, while the colonizer in trying to enforce mimicry of their own culture invites encounters such as mockery and disturbance in the relationship (Bhabha 2004). Ambivalence breaks down the either/or paradigms for postcolonial

discourse, such that the borrowing of tropes used by the colonizer does not mean that colonizing discourse is being reinforced whole cloth. Enunciation is a product of ambivalence in that ambivalence disrupts discourse in the colonizer-colonized relationship, necessitating reiteration to maintain discursive power. In this framework, stereotypes constitute a form of knowledge that attempts to solidify the enunciation of difference, though it paradoxically requires consistent utterance to continue existing. Cartoons reliant on these stereotypes can require enunciation in order to create incongruity, which can reproduce and subvert previously held stereotypes by defining new categorizations of difference or similarity (Which replaces the self versus other dichotomy).

In the vein of Bhabha's work, other postcolonial literature has made it clear that Orientalist geographic imaginaries exist and hold substantial power, with America situated as a cultural and geopolitical hegemon (Gregory 2004). This hegemony over discourse by a dominant party limits the space for subversive discourse because of the sheer volume of enunciation events (film, speeches by NATO leaders, etc.) emanating from one location which advances a narrative until it becomes common sense. We base the analysis on the assumption that an asymmetrical power relationship between the United States and the Arab World exists. This relationship defines the geographic region Arabs inhabit through domination of discursive channels and the limited ability to define difference on their own terms (Makdisi 2010). The corpus that we curate reflects efforts by a cartoonist to resist the dominant imaginary supported through U. S. discursive practices (Culcasi 2010; Davison 1960).

The Arab World According to Emad Hajjaj: Sites of Enunciation and Agency

We have chosen to emphasize Hajjaj's editorial cartoons, as they are more likely to contain cartographic representations and have not been a primary focus of other studies of Hajjaj's work. The corpus consists of a selection of 56 Arabic-language political cartoons archived on Hajjaj's personal website and blog (<http://http://www.hajjajcartoons.com/>) and spans the years 2011 through 2014, the peak of the Arab Uprisings. As expressions of imaginative geographies, each cartoon was selected because it contains elements conveying the regions of the Arab World or Middle East, via cartographic depictions of states, regions, or cities.

The discourse analysis methods leveraged for this study which emphasizes images and texts as sites of articulating discourses (such as imaginative geographies and geographic imaginaries) as opposed to studying institutional practices and assemblages (Rose 2016, 186-219). An emphasis on the social modality of the text and image, as opposed to the manner in which the audience uses the text for discourse, supports

tracing the requisite audience knowledge that cartoonists rely on to make a point. These tropes can be observed across the corpus of cartoons, supporting conclusions about the geopolitical frame that Hajjaj is working within either to support or subvert particular imaginaries.

The visual analysis involved individually examining cartoons, focusing on the prerequisite knowledge or imaginaries required for a political cartoon to be understood. This method allows us to parse out Hajjaj's imaginative geography as it interacts with, subverts, or replicates popular imaginaries in these cartoons, with particular attention paid to often problematic Orientalist imaginaries that even a Palestinian-Jordanian cartoonist might employ. Examining these discursive currents at the site of the image allows a glimpse of geographic imaginaries as they are translated and constructed in the space between the creator and audience.

The Subject Matter: Who Gets Cartographic Representation?

Unsurprisingly, the first piece of requisite knowledge for interpreting Hajjaj's cartographic representations is recognizing the outline of state boundaries. The corpus contains a variety of representations, leveraging the shape of Arab World states, ranging from anthropomorphizing map features to composites of people and objects within a cartographic silhouette. Some representations consist of a map that comprises most of the frame, with particular states highlighted, enlarged or otherwise brought to the reader's attention against the backdrop. They may also be disembodied from other cartographic elements entirely or arranged in new and creative ways that recontextualize these states for the purpose of the critique.

The selection of states for representation is the most explicit means by which Hajjaj reinforces and enunciates a particular cartography of his subject matter. Ten cartoons (nearly 20% of the corpus) portray "The Arab World/The Arab Homeland" (al-waṭan al-'arabī). Its borders coincide with Arab League membership, including Somalia. In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the Arab World as a subject is notable. A timely revitalization of pan-Arabism accompanies had the potential to diffuse across borders (Gelvin 2015). The inclusion of states such as Mauritania and Somalia, that may be seen as peripheral members of the league, constitutes an explicit choice for representation, but one that is likely based on Hajjaj's presupposed knowledge about the Arab League. This bordering becomes salient when one considers how broad Hajjaj's audience is through newspapers and magazines alone, not counting his presence on social media (Al-Masri 2016). This understanding of the Arab homeland as congruent with the Arab League boundaries is distinct from other competing regionalizations offered by hegemonic observers (i.e. the United States), such as "The Greater Middle East," "MENA", or even smaller divisions such as The Levant, Mashriq, or Near East.

While not necessarily a subversion of presupposed geographies for Arab and non-Arab audiences, the included states constitute a baseline for commentary on the region, even when some actors (e.g. Mauritania and Somalia) are rarely the subjects of cartoons themselves. This defining of the Arab World and the consistency with which Hajjaj utilizes it across the corpus comprise a form of counter-enunciation that draws regional boundaries on the grounds of transnational cooperation as opposed to American strategic interests.

Furthermore, the default representation of the Arab World is borderless in Hajjaj's cartoons, which cements the idea of the Arab World as a unified subject of commentary or criticism. It only makes sense that regional issues worth creating cartoons about might be transnational. Leveraging the entire Arab World in a cartoon reinforces the real space that Arabs occupy as a site of connected political interests, transcending state boundaries. This sweeping involvement of the Arab world cartographically may resemble some generalizations of popular Orientalist geographic imaginations, making Arab culture a unitary, cohesive unit, but Hajjaj uses these cartoons to enunciate as an Arab, regional solidarity as opposed to an external grouping of convenience.

The first example of an event treated as a transnational concern for the Arab World is a 2011 cartoon titled “ميدان التحرير” (trans. “Tahrir Square”) depicting the aforementioned Arab World as a figure shouting with upraised fists constructed from a map meant to resemble Cairo's Tahrir Square, the roundabout at the heart of the figure in Egypt, overlaid into the Arab League outline (Figure 1). The message is that the entire Arab World could become a site for popular resistance like Tahrir Square. However, Hajjaj's imaginative geography maintains Tahrir Square within the relative location of Egypt in the larger Arab League outline. The loss of discrete detail as roads emanate from Egypt may be an artistic device to avoid cluttering, but the figure's fists still are positioned where the other major players in the Arab Uprisings- Tunisia and Syria, would be relative to the map. This ordering still cements a notion of a periphery, where uprisings have not been exported yet. In this world, Tahrir Square is literally embodied as a site of resistance in the Arab World, as constituting a hub for a network of transnational resistance. For the cartoon to work, requisite knowledge about the site of Arab uprisings in February 2011 contextualizes the focal points of the cartoon.

The network metaphor for Hajjaj's ordering of space occurs again three years later with his character Abu Mahjoub praising a simulacrum of the Arab World made up of social media logos, declaring: “My beloved homeland, the greatest homeland” with his phone in hand, a torch (Hajjaj's calling card for revolution in cartoons) emanating from it (Figure 2). The line is from a song by Egyptian composer Mohammed

FIGURE 1
Tahrir Square



Abdel Wahab to celebrate the United Arab Republic, the coalescence of Syria and Egypt into a single state built on Pan-Arabism. As such, the song became an anthem for Pan-Arabists (Mehrez 2010, 128). Notable here is the silhouette of the Arab World in gray, negative space. It is present either to signal that the logos represent the Arab World, something that may be lost to some readers due to the abstraction of the shape created by the logos. The social media logo map may be seen as parallel to an Arab homeland, connected via social media. During the uprisings, it would seem that the swell in pan-Arab pride online might have transcended borders, and the action occurring on social media seemed to replace realities on the ground. This cartoon subverts cartographic representations as Hajjaj exercises cartographic agency by playing with space, creating new cartographies within the corpus by emphasizing electronic connectivity over political boundaries in the construction of Arab identity. The resulting image then comprises a visual reference of the Arab world for the reader juxtaposed with a caricature of that same space being elevated to share the official status of the Arab League. There exists no one-to-one correlation between logos and states, only al-wa an, a suggestion of a network of individuals who share a language and a sentiment expressed by Abu Mahjoob (Figure 2).

This combination of themes is also seen in “Update!” (Figure 3) for the Arab World (Hajjaj 2013). Network lines are overlapped with red nodes resembling the notification bubbles of Facebook. The cartoon asks

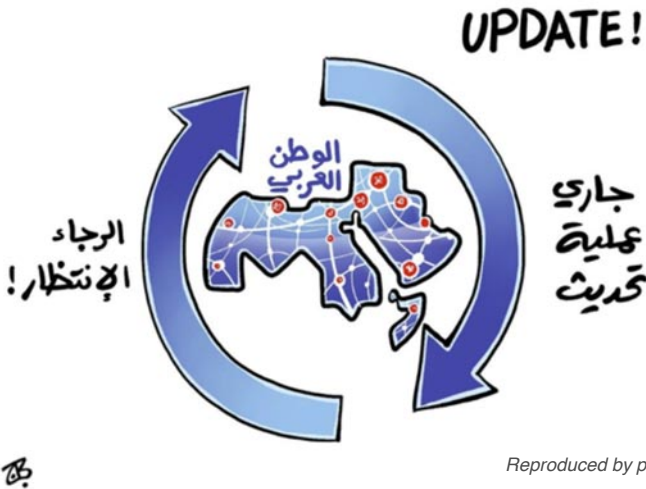
FIGURE 2

My beloved homeland, the greatest homeland



FIGURE 3

Update



the reader to please wait for new updates. The portrayal of the Arab World as an app in the midst of updates is a metaphor for the challenges to regimes in the Arab League space. This reinforces the compression of time and space as a result of communication technologies (Harvey 1990). It becomes easier to possess a pan-Arab geographic imaginary when borders were transgressed by coverage of the uprisings through outlets like al-Jazeera and through social media, despite attempts by regimes to impose media blackouts.

In Figure 4, Hajjaj provides a map of his established Arab World,

with a sign saying “This region has existed 123 days without wars”, while a caricature of President Barack Obama arrives on a warship to press the button on the side of the sign, resetting the number to zero. If one assumes that the region is frequently war torn, then the existence of the sign declaring four months conflict-free is surprising. Alternatively, if the reader finds that characterizations of the Arab World as war torn are overblown or inaccurate, the sign can be seen as supporting the notion that peace is uncommon, necessitating a count of peaceful days. This view also sets up an agent to blame for such a characterization (the United States), as Obama, an external agent, is about to reset the count. The parties at play are clear in Hajjaj’s geography. An Arab World locked together as a show of solidarity against US intervention that threatens a ground-reality or hopeful imaginary for the region. This is among the most explicit plays on the discursive relationship between the modern Orientalist geographic imagination and new enunciations of a different imaginary by Hajjaj in the corpus. The arrangement of the Arab World as a unitary actor is crucial to the cartoon’s function, which would lose some of its subversive power if it portrayed only a solitary Arab state experiencing conflict, such as Syria, Libya or Yemen. This highlights the crucial function of enunciation, which is the disambiguation of the colonial imagination and its subversive repurposing by the colonized.

Hajjaj expands his act of playing with cartographic space by taking

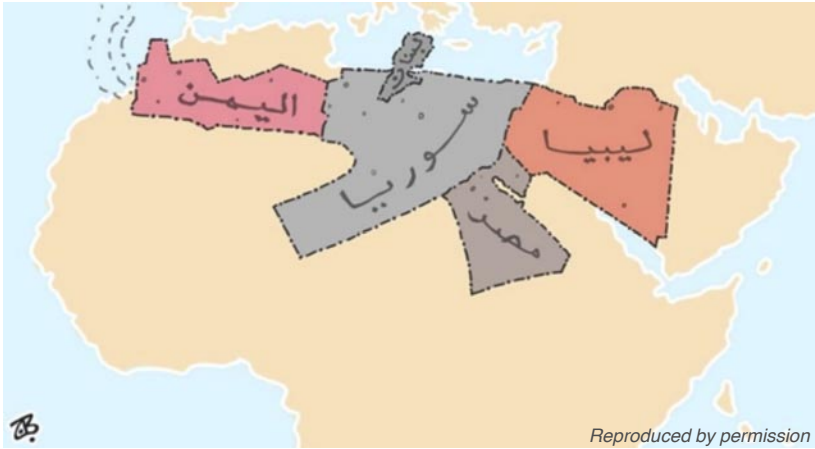
FIGURE 4

This region has existed 123 days without war



Reproduced by permission

FIGURE 5
AK-47



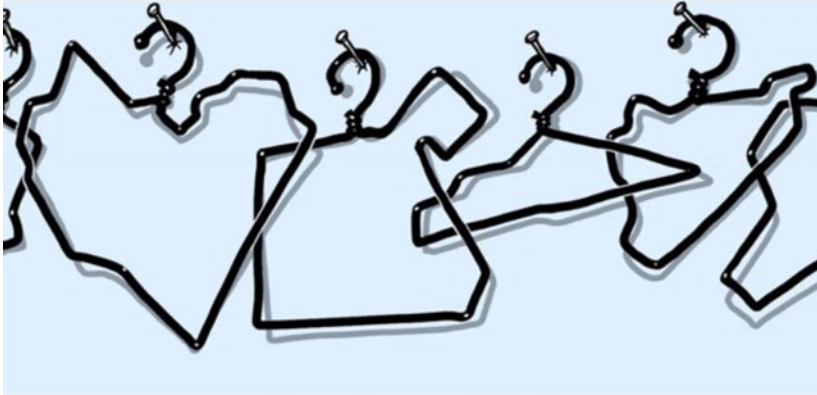
creative license to arrange states and render a map unrecognizable to a reader, as shown in Figure 5. Here Hajjaj arranges specific countries into the shape of an AK-47 situated over north Africa. Understanding the grouping is incumbent on the reader without any guiding text or title beyond the state labels. All these states saw conflict during the uprisings, but the scale and nature ranged from all-out war in Syria to police violence against protestors in Egypt. The cartoon reinforces geographic imaginaries, fostering perceptions of endemic conflict through an arrangement of states incongruous to the reader's mental map. Such an arrangement would be meaningless without geographic knowledge of the region as Hajjaj selects his subjects and imposes a new arrangement of those states on top of the commonly accepted map of the region, supplanting the latter "real" map in favor of his imaginary.

Other creative arrangements reinforce a notion of a unitary Arab World. In a piece titled (m'allaqat) 'arabiyyah, (Figure 6) wire coat hangers in the shape of Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq are nailed into a wall. Displaying outlines of selected states where the Arab Uprisings occurred, the title references the m'allaqat, seven poems hanging on the Kaaba in Mecca, considered the epitome of pre-Islamic Arabic-language literature. These new m'allaqat (things that are hanging), in this case wire coat hangers, are ubiquitous items but the pun nonetheless hints at shared pan-Arab heritage. The humor exists between the esteemed position that the poems hold in the cultural imagination and the "new" coat hanger art sure to capture the imagination. In this case, this centering of these states as lynchpins to a new pan-Arab identity in the vein of the m'allaqat is only salient because of the visual pun, where the pan-Arab idea is no longer signified by an elevated cultural history,

FIGURE 6

M'allaqat 'arabiyyah (Things that are hanging)

!! معلقات (عربية)


Reproduced by permission

but through art with a mundane object. The disembodiment of these states alter one of the fundamental units of analysis in examining geographic imaginaries- the individual's mental map. Hajjaj demonstrates agency over popular geopolitical imaginaries and the power to map by offering a world that is (in)congruous to major discursive regimes.

History and Landscape: Whose Cultural Imaginaries are Being Leveraged?

Other cartoons by Hajjaj are clear examples of the enunciation process, where tropes invoking the Orientalist imaginary are presupposed to be known by his audience. As states subject to a colonial gaze, ambivalence necessitates mimicry or reproduction of the colonizer's discursive resources, even in the critique and subversion of colonial discourse. The cartographic features of Hajjaj's cartoons are less a direct borrowing of, or answer to, Orientalist tropes. Rather, the cartoons exist in a social environment where they leverage satire's capacity to make readers reevaluate their geographic imaginations.

Occasionally there is a lack of map fill altogether in the form of negative space, as found in the aforementioned *M'allaqat* cartoon (Figure 6) and world of social media logos (Figure 2). Here, Hajjaj uses negative space as a visual cue preceding the act of playing with space, either by constructing a new map of social media logos or deconstructing the map

FIGURE 7

Violence in Jisr al-shughour, Syria bleeds into an unconscious Arab world, reaching for help



Reproduced by permission

and placing states in new creative arrangements. This destabilizes the mental map of readers by removing or decentering cartographic sense, so that instead of the grayscale map, we look at a collection of logos or disembodied hanger shapes on a wall that we do not immediately associate with the Arab World. This disorientation associated with negative spaces contributes to spatial orderings that can reinforce alterity. For example, when a grayscale Arab World is being bled upon by Syria on a television screen, reaching out for help, the visual arrangement of colored and monochrome elements creates a sharp distinction between parties that is isolating, even when the countries at play are all constituent pieces of the Arab World (Figure 7).

Similarly, darkness can function much like negative space when used as map fill. In juxtaposition with a light source, darkness as seen in the corpus can signal Tunisia as a bearer of light for the Arab World, by bringing the country to the visual forefront by turning the country's outline into a torch bearing woman, referencing popular artistic representations of liberty or freedom such as Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People (Figure 8). This tactic is used to elevate Tunisia twice, almost three years apart, but in the latter, the darkness is not just effective negative space, but is anthropomorphized, with shifty eyes that harken back to some less than flattering stereotypes of Arab men, especially in animation (Figure 9). They are juxtaposed with a woman carrying a ballot box, clad

in a dress (as opposed to more conservative religious wear) as a harbinger of progress against perceived backwardness in the region. Images of western style dress worn by women in the region have been leveraged by Americans to demonstrate how Iran or Lebanon has somehow culturally backslid to become “less” western and more fundamentalist in recent decades. The requisite knowledge here is simply the stereotypes or associated tropes evoked by these images, rather than requiring a particular image on the part of the reader. The evocation of these tropes calls upon ambivalence by requiring Hajjaj to leverage Orientalist discourses to subvert them, which means that interpretation of the cartoon is dependent on the context (in this case colonial or postcolonial) that the audience brings with them. This ambiguity might enhance the subversive turn of the cartoon, as using these stereotypes explicitly can be means to bring them to the forefront and force readers to reconcile the discourse through humor. This western-dominant requisite knowledge is evoked again with darkness as the Arab World frames a drowning person with the caption “Surrounded by the ocean of constructive chaos”. “Constructive Chaos”, a term apocryphally attributed to Condoleezza Rice in 2006, describes the proposed solution to the Arab World’s problem with stable authoritarian regimes (Figure 10) (al-‘Affi 2012). In this case creative/constructive chaos described the US strategy of encouraging positive societal change by disrupting (often violently) entrenched regimes in the region in hopes that one or more revolutions would cascade across the region. The cartoon portrays a helplessness that is expected as a result of this chaos, one that does not account for the hardship of people in the areas subject to it. Hajjaj makes clear he sees the process of intervention and supporting civil unrest as causing collateral damage. The intention of constructive chaos was to overwhelm dictators, but the social status of the person drowning is unclear. The hand may even be evocative of refugees from conflict drowning in the Mediterranean, which would place them as among the most vulnerable populations in the region as opposed to the fall of dictators and oligarchs as hoped for by the United States. The cartoon is a site of enunciation to highlight the embodied impact of constructive chaos rather than the American usage of the term, scrubbed of the explicit violence against innocents required. The leveraging of this term in Arabic has garnered enough traction to be recognizable and was intended to counter discourse streams from the United States during the Arab Spring, when “constructive chaos” was once again a talking point with the overthrow of two regimes in a year. Rather than creating a new discourse around constructive chaos for his Arab readers, Hajjaj relays and reinforces the violence of the term through his enunciation and puts it in conversation with his imaginative geography of a united Arab world.

FIGURE 8

The First Anniversary of the Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia



FIGURE 9

Tunisia: Taming the Dark Beast



Bringing it Together: Prerequisite Knowledge and Geographic Imaginaries

It is possible to distill characteristics of Hajjaj's imaginative geographies from these cartoons, but they cannot comprise a whole picture, as discourse analysis cannot define a discourse as a unitary object of analysis but can analyze the rhetoric and effects that perpetuate that discourse. It

FIGURE 10
Constructive Chaos



Reproduced by permission

is similarly difficult to judge these evoked imaginaries as explicitly Orientalist or not, but it is clear these cartoons exist as cultural products of encounters between competing discursive regimes. This is evidenced by the effect Hajjaj can achieve with rearrangement of states in ways that destabilize common regionalizations and mental maps. This act of “playing with space” fulfills satire’s key function of presenting new perspectives on a topic and affords the cartoonist profound agency over the ordering of space, something historically denied to Arabs. Hajjaj operates on requisite knowledge and established imaginaries that are a synthesis of Orientalist tropes that have become normalized as well as specific cultural touchstones with subversive themes.

One example of this is the map fill of Hajjaj’s cartoons that can conjure a variety of stereotypes and inconsistencies solely based on the embodied knowledge of the reader. This synthesis constitutes a case of what Bhabha refers to as hybridity, where the insertion of subaltern voices into discursive spaces once dominated by colonial or imperial powers, it opens space to critique or dissemble the oppressive discourse (Bhabha 2004). Hybridity is a form of mimicry made possible by ambivalence where the prevailing discourse is adapted to the needs of the subaltern. This parallels satire’s process of adapting news and political discourses, altered to expose absurdity and criticize the subject. This places many of these cartoons at a discursive crossroads where requisite knowledge may entirely change the interpretation of the cartoon when it leaves Arabic language outlets. The result is the (re)production of mixed geopolitical imaginaries with which to operate, which Hajjaj leverages as an

enunciation event for his imaginative geographies, forcing a reconciliation or reconsideration of the imaginaries being satirized. Engagement with geopolitical imaginaries further have effects in enunciating positions that justify policy actions of governments by leveraging the map as a strategic asset, a notorious tool in the imperial toolbox. Hajjaj's agency to map and reorder space in popular media is a potent discursive power which offers a decolonization of geopolitical imaginaries by enunciating new cartographies of the Arab World.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Mr. Emad Hajjaj for kind permission to reproduce the cartoons we analyzed.

References

- Al-Masri, H. 2016. Jordanian editorial cartoons: A multimodal approach to the cartoons of Emad Hajjaj. *Language and Communication* 50:45–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2016.09.005>
- Al-Momani, K., Badarneh, M. A., and Migdadi, F. 2017. A semiotic analysis of political cartoons in Jordan in light of the Arab Spring. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 30(1):63–95.
- al-'Afifi, F. 2012. War of Creative Destruction: the central tendency in the globalized Arab revolutions (a study in the formation of the future). *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5(3):427–447. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2012.676320>
- Al Kayed, M., Kitishat, A., and Farajallah, H. 2015. Violation of the Grice's maxims in Jordanian newspapers' cartoons: A pragmatic study. *International Journal of Linguistics and Literature* 4(4):41–50.
- Anagondahalli, D., and Khamis, S. 2014. Mubarak framed! Humor and political activism before and during the Egyptian Revolution. *Arab Media & Society* 19(Fall 2014).
- Anaz, N., and Purcell, D. 2010. Geopolitics of Film: Valley of the Wolves—Iraq and Its Reception in Turkey and Beyond. *The Arab World Geographer* 13(1):34–49. <https://doi.org/10.5555/arwg.13.1.lh6435231vuu211>
- Bhabha, H. K. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Clark, J. H. 2019. “The state kills, we kill, everyone kills”: Cracking and framing the field with humor. *Political Geography* 68:131–138.
- Culcasi, K. 2010. Constructing and naturalizing the Middle East. *Geographical Review* 100(4):583–597.
- _____. 2012. Mapping the Middle East from Within: (Counter-) Cartographies of an Imperialist Construction. *Antipode* 44(4):1099–1118. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00941.x>
- Damir-Geilsdorf, S., and Milich, S. 2020. Forms and Functions of Political Humor in Arab Societies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. In *Creative Resistance: Political Humor in the Arab Uprisings*, eds, S. Damir-Geilsdorf and S. Milich, 9–52. Transcript.

- Davison, R. 1960. Where Is the Middle East? *Foreign Affairs* (Pre-1986), 38:(000004), 665.
- Dijkink, G. 1998. Geopolitical codes and popular representations*. *GeoJournal* 46(4):293–299. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006999221884>
- Dodds, K. 1996. The 1982 Falklands War and a critical geopolitical eye: Steve Bell and the if... cartoons. *Political Geography* 15(6–7):571–592. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298\(96\)00002-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298(96)00002-9)
- _____. 2007. Steve Bell's Eye: Cartoons, Geopolitics and the Visualization of the 'War on Terror'. *Security Dialogue* 38(2):157–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010607078536>
- Dodds, K., and Kirby, P. 2013. It's Not a Laughing Matter: Critical Geopolitics, Humour and Unlaughter. *Geopolitics* 18(1):45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.668723>
- Eriksen, C. 2019. Negotiating adversity with humour: A case study of wildland firefighter women. *Political Geography* 68:139–145. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.08.001>
- Falah, G., Flint, C., and Mamadouh, V. 2006. Just War and Extraterritoriality: The Popular Geopolitics of the United States' War on Iraq as Reflected in Newspapers of the Arab World. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96(1):142–164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2006.00503.x>
- Flint, C., Adduci, M., Chen, M., and Chi, S.-H. 2009. Mapping the Dynamism of the United States' Geopolitical Code: The Geography of the State of the Union Speeches, 1988–2008. *Geopolitics* 14(4), 604–629. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040802693929>
- Flint, C., and Falah, G.-W. 2004. How the United States Justified Its War on Terrorism: Prime Morality and the Construction of a “Just War.” *Third World Quarterly* 25(8):1379–1399.
- Fluri, J. L. 2019. What's so funny in Afghanistan?: Jocular geopolitics and the everyday use of humor in spaces of protracted precarity. *Political Geography* 68:125–130. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.08.011>
- Foucault, M. 1979. Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison / Michel Foucault. In *Discipline & Punish*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gelvin, J. L. 2015. *The Arab uprisings: what everyone needs to know* / James L. Gelvin. (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gregory, D. 1995. Imaginative geographies. *Progress in Human Geography* 19(4):447–485. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259501900402>
- _____. 2004. *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- _____. 2009. Geographic Imaginary. In *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (p. 283). Blackwell.
- Hammet, D. 2010. Political cartoons, post-colonialism, and critical African studies. *Critical African studies* 2(4):1-26. <https://doi.org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.1080/20407211.2010.10530755>

- _____. 2011. Resistance, power and geopolitics in Zimbabwe. *Area* 43(2):202–210. <http://libraries.ou.edu/access.aspx?url=http://search.ebsco-host.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=s3h&AN=60676132&site=ehost-live>
- Harvey, D. 1990. Time-space compression and the postmodern condition. In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 284–307. Blackwell.
- Huntington, S. P. 1996. The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order / Samuel P. Huntington. In *Clash of civilizations & the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Khoury, L., and Da'Na, S. 2012a) Decolonizing the Geographies of Resistance: Imperialist Cartography of the Arab World. *The Arab World Geographer* 15(3):189–225. <https://doi.org/10.5555/arwg.15.3.c116837m3110826x>
- Knight, C. A. 2004. Introduction: the satiric frame of mind. In *The Literature of Satire*, 1–10. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511485428.001>
- Lewis, P., Davies, C., Kuipers, G., Lewis, P., Martin, R. A., Oring, E., and Raskin, V. 2008. The Muhammad cartoons and humor research: A collection of essays. *HUMOR* 21(1):1–46. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/HUMOR.2008.001>
- Lorenz, J. P. 1990. *Egypt and the Arabs: foreign policy and the search for national identity*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Makdisi, U. S. 2010. *Faith misplaced: the broken promise of U.S.-Arab relations: 1820-2001*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs.
- McNamara, R. 2020. “Thomas Nast’s Campaign Against Boss Tweed: How a Cartoonist Helped End Legendary Corruption.” *ThoughtCo*, Aug. 26, [thoughtco.com/thomas-nasts-campaign-against-boss-tweed-4039578](https://www.thoughtco.com/thomas-nasts-campaign-against-boss-tweed-4039578).
- Mehrez, S. 2010. *Egypt’s culture wars*. American University in Cairo Press.
- Najjar, O. 2007. Cartoons as a site for the construction of Palestinian refugee identity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31(3):255–285.
- Ridanpää, J. 2009. Geopolitics of humour: the Muhammed Cartoon Crisis and the Kaltio Comic Strip Episode in Finland. *Geopolitics* 14(4):729-749. DOI: 10.1080/14650040903141372
- Ridanpää, J. 2012. The media and the irony of politically serious situations: consequences of the Muhammed cartoons in Finland. *Media, Culture & Society* 34(2):131–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711430754>
- Rose, G. 2016. *Discourse Analysis I: Text, Intertextuality, and Context*. In *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 4th edition, 186–219. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Said, E. W. 1978. *Orientalism*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Saunders, R. A. 2019. (Profitable) imaginaries of Black Power: The popular and political geographies of Black Panther. *Political Geography* 69:139–149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.12.010>
- Shaheen, J. G. 2001. *Reel bad Arabs: how Hollywood vilifies a people*. New York: Olive Branch Press.
- Shehata, S. S. 1992. Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak in Egyptian political jokes. *Folklore* 103:75–91.

- Strukov, V. 2018. Towards a new paradigm of resistance: Theorizing popular geopolitics as an interdiscipline. In *Popular Geopolitics: plotting an evolving interdiscipline*, eds. R. A. Saunders and V. Strukov, 63–82. Routledge.
- Toal, G. 1996. *Critical geopolitics: the politics of writing global space*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Watts, M. 1999. Collective Wish Images: Geographical Imaginaries and the Crisis of Development. In *Human Geography Today*, eds. J. Allen and D. Massey, 85–107. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.