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TALES BEHIND SINGLE FRAMES: NARRATIVE ATTRIBUTES OF EDITORIAL CARTOONS

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ABSTRACT

Common knowledge tells that the editorial cartoons, the single-framed caricatures appearing mostly in newspapers, are largely critical of the evils in society and do not, in any way, resemble the graphic narratives with literary value. Accordingly, they are merely poignant in driving home a critical stand relative to crucial, societal issues. A closer look at editorial cartoons, however, could reveal otherwise. Using ten editorial cartoons collected from various newspapers, this study gauged those cartoons against the basic elements of the story such as character, setting, plot, and conflict. Consequently, these caricatures clearly yielded narrative implications despite being single-framed; they possess those story elements, after all. This, then, qualifies the editorial cartoons as partly narrative, deserving a place in literature and not just to be confined to visual arts and journalism.

**Key Words:** editorial cartoons, narrative implications, attributes, single frame, caricature

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1. Introduction

Editorial cartoons have been forming part of national and regional dailies worldwide to include other print media like magazines, newsletters, journals, and even campus papers. Seeing print massively on the editorial pages of different newspapers on a daily basis, they prove to have been worthwhile indeed, implying relevance through their quick and vivid interpretation of issues and their warm acceptance to readers.

Also known as political or opinion cartoon, the editorial cartoon is a single-frame caricature functioning as an illustrated or comic strip version of the editorial (Schrank 116). It carries a social or political message usually relating to current events or personalities. Since its advent, it has been generating ideas, shaping public opinion, providing an attraction in the editorial page, documenting history, and championing the press freedom.

Although they may differ in techniques, viewpoints, and styles, editorial cartoonists similarly draw people's attention to important political, social, and other important issues by way of using caricatures to express their thoughts and opinions on various matters in a manner that readers apparently find both understandable and entertaining. This is their way of commenting on specific topics, of constructing

arguments, rendering editorial cartoons as though they are texts (Matthews 7). Since they appear as illustrated artifacts, cartoons provide readers with a more captivating form of document.

This study then aims to create awareness that, though the editorial cartoon is usually a hand-drawn image occupying one visual frame—sometimes with an accompanying written text like labels, description, dialog, or narration—it possesses narrative qualities that enable viewpoints to take shape. By doing so, we reinforce this graphic communication device, and its continued existence and utilization in print media could prevail. This is not just saving the cartoonist and his work; it is also a way of championing press freedom.

This paper then theorizes that newspaper editorial cartoons reveal narrative attributes, thus creating tales or stories, contrary to typical single-framed graphic materials. Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm Theory supports it.

## **2. Supporting Theories**

Treatment of editorial cartoons has always been visual, sometimes linguistic, not as narrative artifacts. Some scholars have already conducted studies akin to this as cited in literature review. Morris (1993) was particular with how rhetorical analysis can study together both the language-based and the visual-based elements of editorial. The whole idea assumes that art is a language and the success of linguistic models proves visual communication should this metaphor (196). Morris then argues that rhetorical elements in verbal communication can be applied to visual communication, an idea which this study adopts in looking at the narrative aspect of editorial cartoons. He applied linguistically-based rhetorical theory to the study of editorial cartoons as visual and linguistic artifacts (Matthews 32).

Medhurst and DeSousa did another rhetorical conceptualization of editorial cartoons in 1981. Having developed "a classificatory scheme for recognizing and analyzing the elements of graphic persuasion" in editorial cartoons, they came up with a basis for analyzing the rhetorical elements of the same (198-199). Ideas such as these that highlight the necessity to explore editorial cartoons as visual-rhetorical documents gave birth to this study although its focus is on the cartoons' narrative propensity. The bulk of support that it draws comes from the narrative paradigm theory.

Fisher defines this communication theory as "the theory of symbolic action—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (2). Cognizant that symbols create and express stories to mirror human experience, narrative paradigm is therefore an appropriate rhetorical tool to analyze storyline artifacts. This theory was a reaction against the traditional paradigm of the rational world which believes that people are thinking beings, what they judge to be rational is determined by knowledge, and the world is a set of logical puzzles. This, to Fisher, is a limited model, and he thus introduced a paradigm of "narrative rationality" and coherence (fidelity and probability). The old model needed expertise to judge the soundness of formal arguments. But armed with common sense in Fisher's model, a person can judge a good story as basis for belief and action (Griffin 304).

Claiming that by nature, people are storytellers, Fisher also believes that people interpret stories by using "good reasons" which he referred to as historical events, past events in one's life, culture, and characters involved. The proof of comprehension is when people form a mental representation about a text (Zwaan 15). This is a mental representation of people, objects, locations, events, and actions revealed in the text.

It is quite easy to draw some support from this theory given the editorial cartoons to study. These caricatures undoubtedly communicate, and as such, it is not difficult to claim, like this study does, that tales are embedded in cartoons since, according to Fisher in this theory, all communication forms are narrative, a form of storytelling, a report of events. In fact, the idea that editorial cartoons are more narrative than rational also finds explanation from this theory which firmly holds that life, be it real or framed graphics, is best viewed as stories shaped by character, history, and culture.

But narrative paradigm theory is very democratic, the critic being "a standard unto himself" as he need not have formal training and expertise to decide the significance of works. In evaluating coherence and fidelity, ordinary people equipped with common sense could make "competent rhetorical critics" (Griffin 305). Fisher

prescribes no specific patterns as to how critics should make choices between narrative probability and fidelity, and he provides no criteria for testing narrative probability, either.

Given this freedom, this study took the liberty to choose a basis for analyzing the narrative aspect of editorial cartoons. This led to the choice of the seasoned, universally accepted elements of the story. According to the Map of ELLSA Website posted March 22, 2004, the universally-recognized elements of narration are as follows: character, setting, plot, conflict, and theme. The same website defines character as a person, an animal, an animated or imaginary being who takes part in the flow of the story. Setting is the time and place in which the story happens, to include descriptions of buildings, landscape, scenery, or weather condition. The plot is a series of events involving character actions that build up to a climax. The struggle between people and things in a story is called conflict. The protagonist struggles against the antagonist, which could be in the form of a person, nature, society, or something within like feelings or illness. The central idea or belief the story conveys is called theme.

Explaining the relationship between a method drawing on rhetoric and an analysis of visual texts like what this study does with editorial cartoons, Foss argues that “A rhetorical perspective on visual artifacts constitutes a particular way of viewing images—a set of conceptual lenses through which visual symbols become knowable as communicative or rhetorical phenomena” (306). This calls for a distinction made between mere graphic-narrative qualities of the cartoons and those that strongly suggest critical concepts. The analysis then does not limit to the identification of the cartoons’ attributes; it further determines what viewpoints, insights, and opinions the cartoons express.

This, in a way, is a quest for the cartoon’s literariness—finding literary qualities from graphic commentaries. This is necessary as a visual illustration may just be expressive of beauty, but not of concepts or opinions. Unraveling the cartoons’ attributes responsible for the poignant hammering of visual criticism into our collective minds could underscore the impact of editorial cartoon as a unique journalistic genre, as a visual literary artifact. Within the matrix of the rationale and theoretical background of the study, the researcher conducted this study.

### **3. Problem Statement**

This study analyzes the graphic-narrative attributes of selected editorial cartoons expressing critical viewpoints on Philippine societal issues. Specifically, it describes the cartoons’ narrative implications signified.

### **4. Scope of the Study**

This study dwells on carefully chosen editorial cartoons representing the identified issues that, in turn, represent the myriad of issues and events prevalent in Philippine society. Ten cartoons in all, divided into five pairs, and each pair representing one of those issues, qualified for critiquing.

The research only considered single-framed, non-animated cartoons. These are hand-drawn images occupying one visual frame, sometimes with an accompanying written text serving as labels, dialog, or narration. This research also limits itself to the term “editorial cartoon” when referring to the communication artifacts under study. This is underscored since the editorial cartoon is called by many names.

The issues in Philippine society mirrored by these editorial cartoons, despite their multiplicity, are limited in this study to five, namely: political, economic, religious, academic, and environmental. Two cartoons reflect each issue—one suggestive of an issue’s nationwide extent, and another one reflecting that issue’s local coverage. The researcher only chose the editorial cartoons that best express insights and viewpoints relative to these issues. Lastly, only editorial cartoons created by Filipino cartoonists, and published in Philippine newspapers, qualified for this research.

### **5. Related Literature**

Editorial cartoons are communication artifacts that present funny caricatures but with serious critical undertones. That they are graphic images is beyond question, and there is no argument that they are, by virtue of their appearance. But to say that they are also narrative is another story.

Explaining the process of editorial cartooning, Davies (6) sums it up: “Every day, editorial cartoonists troll the news in search of social and political ironies, then create images that encapsulate those metaphorical 1,000 words and pour them painstakingly into a single picture”. As a critical artifact, the editorial cartoon is not limited to critiques of government, but of all powerful societal institutions and figures as well. Lamb explained that many editorial cartoonists envision their societal position as an enemy of “those in power who use that power for their own personal benefit at the expense of the rest of us.” Editorial cartooning then should “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted” (42). As it constructs arguments from an outsider’s perspective consistent with this study’s recognition, the editorial cartoon assumes a negative viewpoint as it sees an unjust and immoral world needing some reform.

Historically, it was Benjamin Franklin who published the first editorial cartoon in an American newspaper, featuring the well-known “Join or Die” caption below a snake severed into labeled colonies. As cartoons evolved, they also captured vignettes of history, hence their narrative potential that this study assumes they possess. Of late, editorial cartoons are not just viewed as independent graphic materials but are closely linked to their linguistic, even narrative nature glued in alliance with literature, with their subsequent literariness. They are acknowledged as possessing the dual tendency of being both visual and linguistic (Matthews 32) the fact that, from whatever angle, they showcase the characteristics of literature and visual arts exactly akin to the pursued attributes of this research.

Possessing that narrative potentiality, editorial cartoons then can independently narrate vignettes of both fictional and non-fictional tales, hence this study’s interest in their narrative qualities. McMurtry (1991) did a similar thing by documenting significant historical milestones of the year 1991. A newspaper cartoonist of high caliber, he collected his celebrated works for that year and published them into a book that, undoubtedly, proves to be an excellent historical record—substantial, attractive, and enlightening indeed. Such a unique historical documentation is private to and monopolized only by editorial cartoonists, hence their peculiar and significant role as visual historians.

Besides documenting history, editorial cartoons likewise do well in capturing and revealing people’s lives, or one’s biography or autobiography in literature otherwise known as non-fictional narratives this research aims to unearth. In a published work edited by McIlroy (1984), the political career of John George Diefenbaker, Canada’s populist Prime Minister, was fully documented. The editor had culled several cartoons drawn by different cartoonists in various newspapers, and arranged them in such a way that the political life of this great man, plus the issues and reactions surrounding it, was revealed. It was, indeed, a manner that only editorial cartoons could lucidly chronicle, and could not be visually exposed with ease even by captioned photographs, or by an excellent prose.

Arinto (1973), analyzing the journalistic essays of Kerima Polotan, suggested that all literary forms (and it must include journalistic genres such as editorial cartoons, the objects of this study) should be examined for their themes, milieu, style, and structure (7). Such a suggestion is precisely put to use by Leonila Liberato, an English teacher who believes that lessons and valuable information can be drawn from editorial cartoons. She developed a study guide in critical reading through the use of cartoons. In fact, this won for her a laptop prize in the Inquirer in Education (IIE) Lesson Plan Contest. Believing, like this study does, that many people are visual learners, she argued that through editorial cartoons, students become acquainted with current issues happening around and eventually develop higher thinking skills.

As an application of fantasy theme analysis, (Benoit et al., 2001) used it and Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory to study the rhetoric of editorial cartoons on the Clinton- Lewinsky-Starr affair. Here, the editorial cartoon is seen “as a form of multi-step flow of information” that “flows in all directions between all agents creating a web of interaction and making possible a unified rhetorical vision” (379). In his study of editorial cartoons, Bostdorff (1987) grounded their arguments in a specific theory of rhetoric. Utilizing the ideas of Kenneth Burke, he examined “perspective by incongruity,” the “burlesque attitude” and the “fusion of form and attitude” in cartoons (43). The editorial cartoon’s narrative nature, which is focused on in this study, must have been subjected to scrutiny albeit spared of direct appraisal.

**6. Method of Inquiry**

Broadly, this study is a qualitative textual analysis. Concerned thus with non-statistical method of inquiry, as qualitative studies are, it draws on an inductive process in which themes and categories emerge through analysis of collected data. Its samples are rather limited, like what qualitative methods prescribe, and are purposively selected in the form of ten editorial cartoons that dwell on five societal issues.

From the three main methods used in qualitative studies, namely: observation, document analysis, and interview, this study chooses document analysis, a technique that manifests descriptive data, develops categories, codes contents, and conducts category counts. Narrowed down to rhetorical analysis, which is a form of documentary analysis, this study opts to use the analytical-descriptive method that breaks given subjects into relevant parts for adequate, critical interpretations.

**6.1 Sources of Data:**

This study sources its data primarily from local and national newspapers, and secondarily from related literatures and studies available both in libraries and in various websites. The newspapers from which the editorial cartoons were taken have been published from the year 2000 up to the present, the span of time that ensures contemporariness of issues.

Moreover, data for this study are sourced exclusively from the papers circulating locally and nationally, consistent with the study’s scope. From these papers, relevant editorial cartoons that have been drawn by Filipino cartoonists are chosen. Although editorial cartoons generally cover numerous issues, the latter in this study are reduced to five, namely: political, economic, religious, environmental, and academic, these being representative enough of the multifarious societal issues editorial cartoons can dwell on. Two cartoons sampling an issue’s national and local application represent each of these five issues, making a total of ten editorial cartoons to critique.

In choosing the cartoons, attention was paid to generalizability, meaning the samples of analyzed cartoons have to be representative of all, if not most, of the editorial cartoons published during the last decade. They are chosen based on the presence of potential narrative attributes in them. Online sources are tapped, especially those that allow users to search for editorial cartoons based on subject. These databases, from January 1, 2000 through August 31, 2012, are searched using the following keywords: "journalism," "cartoonist," "political cartoons," "Philippine editorial cartoons," "press," "media," and "blog." Hard copies of local and national newspapers were also browsed to find the most appropriate cartoons.

**7. Data-gathering:**

With all the needed editorial cartoons in, first thing to do was to sort them out into five pairs based on the issues they represent. These cartoons were analyzed to find out their narrative implications signified.

To analyze the narrative characteristics of editorial cartoons, the universally-accepted elements of the story were utilized, namely: characters, setting, plot, conflict, and theme. Character examines the persons appearing in the cartoons. Setting invites attention to the time and place in which the “story” in the cartoon happens. Plot focuses on the chronicled events involving character actions that lead to a climax. Conflict reveals the struggle between people and things in a story. The theme bares the central idea, principle, or belief that predominates within the story.

**8. Presentation and Analysis**

The narrative implications expressed by the editorial cartoons are shown in this descriptive table that follows.

NARRATIVE IMPLICATIONS SIGNIFIED

SOCIETAL ISSUES	NARRATIVE IMPLICATIONS			
	CARTOON	NARRATIVE IMPLICATION	CARTOON	NARRATIVE IMPLICATION
POLITICAL	A. Scramble for the	Squabble for	B. The Chase	Flight from an iron

	Throne Source: <i>Bulatlat</i>	the chair	Source: <i>Bicol Mail</i>	fist
ECONOMIC	C. Misplaced Priority Source: <i>Pinas.net</i>	Care for the giant babe	D. Quo Vadis, Philippine Economy? Source: <i>SunStar Davao</i>	Car's stoppage at a broken bridge
RELIGIOUS	E. Risky Waters Source: <i>SunStar Davao</i>	Paddling with the sharks	F. The Clash Source: <i>Sunday Punch</i>	Monster-sword man clash
ENVIRONMENTAL	G. Petron Oil Spill Source: <i>Cagle Cartoons</i>	Skeleton on widespread oil spill	H. Flood Menace Source: <i>Northern Watch</i>	Preventing a wall's collapse
ACADEMIC	I. Too Huge Source: <i>SunStar Davao</i>	Forcing a huge boy in	J. K+12 Handicap Source: <i>Northern Watch</i>	Crossing the ravine

The narrative implications signified in editorial cartoons, or any form of communication (Fisher 2), are figured out in this study using the universally accepted story elements according to the Map of ELLSA Website posted March 22, 2004.

**POLITICAL ISSUES**

Five people comprise the characters in this cartoon—four men and a lady. Based on the way they were caricatured, the only lady in the group, the one clutching the chair, is former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and the men who squabble to snatch that chair from her are Manny Villar, Erap Estrada, Eddie Villanueva, and Gilbert Teodoro, former presidential aspirants who had all ambioned to replace her.



**Figure 1: Scramble for the Throne.** (Source: Bulatlat)

Not much is shown regarding the time and place (setting) in which this cartoon is presented. There is just a special chair close by which is hugged tightly by the lady, while the men in the background are rushing towards it and its supposed occupant. Apparently, this cartoon has been set during the incumbency of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The underlying tale here starts when President Arroyo assumed the highest position in the land in year 2001 to become the 14<sup>th</sup> president of the Philippines. When her reign expired, she ran for re-election and won. But her victory was greeted with protests due to alleged massive election fraud. Moreover, her administration was tainted with grave corruption, abuse of power, and other forms of irregularities. Hoping to end her regime, potential aspirants challenged her at the polls, each of them eager to grab the presidency. But, as visualized in this cartoon, Arroyo clings to it, resolved to never let go or allow others to snatch that chair from her.

Struggles between forces are at work in this cartoon, creating the conflict. There is that external conflict between Arroyo and her political rivals threatening to rid her of power. Then there is that conflict among the aspirants themselves who, driven by personal interests, could not create a single force against the

incumbent president but are rather divided for being at odds with one another. Lastly, there is that internal conflict between Arroyo and the consequences of her alleged graft practices that boomeranged to her administration.

Amid the many aspirants, on the part of the incumbent president at the time, she was never letting go of that position she had held for years, no matter how chaotic the scramble for it would turn out to be.



**Figure 2: The Chase** (Source: Bicol Mail)

The cartoon is peopled with seemingly violence-prone characters. That they are equipped with weapons clearly suggests they espouse violence, or are prepared for it. The first one carries firearms, so does the man behind him who is obviously his supporter. These guys are trying to escape, running for their lives.

Since they are armed, it is likely that if cornered, they will fight back, even to the death if need be. But chasing them is a man of excessive power, equipped with an iron hand that could crush them to death. Try as they do to elude him, it appears that they can never escape from his wrath, powerful as he is. But he doesn't look like a bad guy; he appears, in fact, to be against criminals, pursuing those who break the law and impair peace and order.

Geographically, the cartoon is set in Masbate. But as to what particular place there, it's not indicated. In fact, while the two men are trying to escape, the man chasing them seems to be floating in the air, hence his great speed and the impossibility of the two to elude him. As regards time, this cartoon is set during the presidency of Benigno C. Aquino III, the president to whom the character representing the government in the cartoon resembles.

Masbate's clans of politicians had managed to establish political dynasties over the years that, for almost every key political position, they have blood relatives to field. To maintain their clout and influence, they resort to bribery, corruption, and irregularities. And to stay in power, they have to espouse all sorts of election fraud, or even violence, necessitating them to employ guns and goons that could combat their rivals. Time came when Benigno Aquino III assumed the presidency. He aimed for good governance, part of which is to hunt these powerful politicians and their private armies. This had placed these people in hot water as authorities pursued them, prompting them to run from the arm of the law.

Conflict arises between powerful political rivals. But since they are resorting to the use of armed goons to ensure victory particularly on the part of the influential incumbents, the government intervenes by imposing the rule of law, utilizing the armed forces to run after them.

These powerful figures and their armed supporters know they are pursued by the law for violating Comelec rules, yet they keep employing unlawful means to perpetuate their stay in power, and this prompts government authorities to constantly chase them and subject them to iron rule, hence their constant flight from it.

### **ECONOMIC ISSUES**

Three people serve as central figures in this cartoon. One is labeled WB (World Bank), another is marked P-Noy, and the third one is named Foreign Debt. WB looks a little old, all smiles as he carries a sack of money marked "One billion dollar loan from the Philippines." He waves his hand and slowly walks away. P-noy is all smiles, too, bidding the visitor goodbye in a show of hospitality, kindness, and generosity. His pockets, drawn out and emptied, indicate that he has gone penniless. To his left, a huge baby labeled "Foreign Debt"

and consuming a lot of milk lies down in a crib, apparently dependent upon him, waiting for his undivided attention.



Figure 3: *Misplaced Priority* (Source: Pinas.net)

The setting in place is unclear though, in real life, the transaction must have taken place in the country, particularly in Manila. Time, too, is obscure though, in reality, this had happened when European economy was reportedly in bad shape needing World Bank's intervention and help, such as in the form of loans. This is also set during P-noy's presidency.

Reports came out once that the European economy turned bad, particularly that of Spain and Greece. Billions of dollars were needed to salvage their collapsing economy. Pleas were then forwarded to the international community, to the well-off countries in particular, to come to Europe's rescue. Some had responded positively, lending out their dollar reserves. The Philippines, a third world country burdened with huge foreign debts, surprisingly joined the rescue effort, lending 1 billion US dollars for the purpose, thanks to the generosity of President Benigno Aquino III. But this was not a welcome gesture to most of his countrymen back home knowing that the country is short of money even to pay for the interests alone of its debt obligations. Such gesture then was greeted with criticism as a mere act of showing off.

Conflict exists between P-noy's action of lending a big amount, and the country's need of much money for basic services and debt repayments. These are rather conflicting situations, bringing opposing forces face-to-face with each other—the president and his very own people, divided over the issue of which expenditure should be prioritized. To them, shelling out such a big amount is a misplaced priority since the country is more in need of that cash than Europe or any other nation. Nothing wrong with extending loans designed to help others if the government has more than enough monetary reserves. But since there is none, and he has this giant babe to care for, the president's "generous" action is deemed inappropriate, disgusting, and stupid.

This editorial cartoon points out that, despite the enormous foreign debt (gigantic baby) that the president must attend to and allocate budget for, he still lent a big amount of money to World Bank, even if it means draining his pockets of needed cash, ironically all smiles as he does so.



Figure 4: *Quo Vadis, Philippine Economy?* (Source: SunStar Davao)

Only one character appears in this cartoon. He is driving a car labeled Philippine economy and has obviously gone far in his journey. Along the way, he comes upon a narrow road leading to a wooden bridge



which happens to have been cut off, the remnants hanging from both sides of the cliffs. This man, caricatured to resemble President Benigno Aquino III, scratches his head in utter hopelessness, doomed to make no headway unless the bridge is fixed. No matter how urgent his trip is, he is left with no choice but to stop and ponder on what to do next.

Time-wise, this cartoon is set during the administration of President Benigno Aquino III, particularly that time when dollar remittances of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) from the Middle East had, for some reasons, slowed down, almost paralyzing the country's economy. Moreover, it is set on a road passing through a bridge that has been totally cut off thus preventing the vehicle from crossing to the other side.

This car must have been on the road for quite a long journey, managing to move on amid the bumpy and dusty trip. Symbolizing the Philippine economy, this car had been driven by the country's chief executive, as always, every time a newly elected president assumes office. Somewhere along the way, during P-noy's trip, this car he had to drive was forced to stop just because a vital bridge linking a steep cliff to another was badly damaged, making it impossible for the car to cross to the other side. Representing dollar remittances of OFWs from the Middle East, which have been hampered by certain problems, this damaged bridge deprived the economy (car) of forward movement, giving the driver so much headache.

The struggle exists between the driver's obligation to get the car moving, to hurdle all sorts of heights and depths, and the bridge's wreckage that prevents crossing to the other side and back. The country's economy ought to advance under the president's leadership, but being dependent upon dollar remittances which, at the moment, Middle East OFWs could not consistently remit, the economy suffered a lot, almost to the point of collapsing in the face of economic crisis.

Though eagerly desirous to cross the bridge on account of duty, the car's driver is handicapped to do so as the bridge is utterly damaged and cannot get anyone to the other side and vice versa. All that the driver can do is stop in disgust until such time that the bridge is restored.

#### **RELIGIOUS ISSUES**

One important character in this cartoon is a religious figure, as hinted by his cloak, boarding a small wooden boat, and rowing his way around in an effort to spread his advocacy for something. The boat he is boarding stands for Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), implying that he belongs to this religious organization. Sailing in dangerous waters, his face is terrified, conscious of the hostile environment he is in.



**Figure 5: Risky Waters** (Source: SunStar Davao)

Those figures that are terrorizing him are the sharks slithering underneath the still waters, posing so much danger as their fins cut across the water surface. At any moment, they could attack the intruder and devour every bit of his body. That's how risky their presence is, labeled by the artist as "democratic ideals." Yet his paddling among them proved necessary for his advocacy to push through.

This cartoon came when the controversial Reproductive Health Bill was still being debated in conferences, in rallies, in the halls of Congress, in churches, and in universities, prior to its final approval as a law. That time, The Catholic Church fiercely opposed the bill, doing everything it can to have it junked by lawmakers and other significant sectors in Philippine society. The setting is in a wide expanse of water that is

infested and teeming with ferocious sharks. The religious man risks his life in here, menaced by the sharp jaws and savage instincts of democratic ideals, particularly of the secular minds.

RH Bill was once hatched by its proponents among the country's lawmakers. With its promise of addressing many of the country's population-related problems, they succeeded in convincing the government, whoever was in power, that its advocacy makes sense. And so, previous presidents could not help but express their support and willingness to approve should it get approval from both Congress and the Senate. But the bill was soon faced with intense opposition particularly from the Church, the foremost crusader against it. Yet the Church was not also spared from antagonistic forces; in fact, the growing support for democratic ideals spawned across the archipelago that soon, the Church's stand became the object of their ridicule. The bill was just gathering support from various sectors of society who came to observe over the years that the Church is only good at criticizing it but has nothing to offer in resolving the rapid population problem and its consequences. Seeing the wisdom of that controversial bill, lawmakers unanimously approved it until it finally became a law upon the president's signing of it.

Conflict in this cartoon is external, raging between the avid supporters and the fierce opponents of RH Bill. The battle is anchored on nagging issues such as the rapid and unabated population growth, and the inhuman practice of abortion and other related issues. Debates over these had generated animosity at times, resulting in too much confusion and misunderstandings among people, not to mention the huge budgets that were allocated by both sides at the height of their campaigns.

Indeed, pushing for the rejection of RH Bill on the part of CBCP entailed not just a tiresome effort but also an undaunted courage in facing a number of risks that have to be confronted to ensure campaign victory.



**Figure 6: *The Clash*** (Source: Sunday Punch)

Three characters are featured in this editorial cartoon—a gambling lord who is also labeled “traditional politician” (TRAPO), a devil-like flame of fire that exited from a bottle that the gambling lord carries, and a church official who is attacking the fire with his sword.

The gambler, leaning against a mound, looks so intoxicated with the content of the bottle he is carrying, and obviously owns, putting him to sleep. This bottle is labeled STL, a kind of gambling that is rampant in some parts of the country. Unfortunately, this bottle releases a flame of fire that forms into a devil, a hideous creature poised to devour his targets, to sow panic, to bring destruction to everyone. But another character, a Catholic Church official, courageously attacks from somewhere, armed with a sword that symbolizes a pastoral letter. These characters interact with one another and are into a suspenseful and thrilling action.

Setting in place is apparently less significant to the cartoonist in so far as stressing his point is concerned. It is just a wide space where no one is around except the characters mentioned. But of course, this must be in the Philippines where the issue has surfaced. It is set in time when clandestine gambling activities in the country like *jueteng*, STL, etc, are rampant.

For a number of decades now, numbers games have penetrated into the consciousness of community folks everywhere in the country. Out of fun, and out of that desire to get rich fast, a lot of people had participated in those activities until these games turned into big gambling networks that soon became

widespread. Authorities tried to intervene, declaring many of these games as illegal. Those who were caught were penalized.

But since the gambling operators consisted of powerful and influential figures in society who could merely bribe their way out when apprehended, the gambling operations continued. As a result, though, the lives of gamblers who have been hooked into the addictive vice are made miserable. Families run out of money for food, for the education of children, for health care, and for other ends. To some extent, marriages fall apart, and ailments rise, not to mention theft and robbery that constant losers sometimes resort to. While these gambling activities proliferate and breed all types of evil deeds, the gambling lords, like this cartoon shows, just accumulate riches with ease. The evils that they cause wreak havoc on people's lives. Luckily, some religious figures take a stand against them, taking their operations as works of the devil that should be dismantled through certain means like the issuance of pastoral letters.

In this cartoon, there is a direct conflict between the church official and the demonic fire. They are poised to attack each other in a violent confrontation. But indirectly, the swordsman is also up against the gambling lord, who is the brain behind this evil creature. Triumph over this lord would also mean victory against this hideous monster. Conflict also exists between the gambling lord, with his evil puppet, and the people whose collective lives he destroys with his gaming operation.

Gambling operation, particularly STL, raises an evil in our midst that eventually destroys the people's lives. There is a need to fight it and its operator, but it takes courageous souls, like the church officials, to attack these powerful villains.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

The number of characters in this cartoon is rather limited to one, if not for the presence of two fishes which, in fiction, maybe considered part of a story's characters. And so one's vision is soon directed to the lone human character in this drawing. But this person is not alive but dead; in fact, what remains of her is just her skeletal body frame, sitting on an islet, her hair still intact as it is blown by the wind.



**Figure 7: Petroleum Oil Spill** (Source: Cagle Cartoons)

When yet alive, she must have been a goddess of the sea, she being half-human and half-fish, a creature known to many as mermaid. But she is dead due to the toxic-turned waters around her. In fact, upon seeing her dead, the two fishes before her are shocked, knowing that this could be the last thing that could happen to her. Along this shock is a terrifying realization they could be the next victims, hence their frantic panic. The mermaid, being dead, makes no action that could get some message across to viewers, but what happened to her serves that purpose.

A wide expanse of seawater soaked in oil coming from a sinking ship in the background provides the setting for this cartoon. It's an open sea whose marine life is threatened, an environment that is doomed, seemingly destined for destruction at the hands of human technology. This cartoon is set in that part of the country that was once menaced by this oil spill from a sinking cargo ship of Petron, one of the country's giant oil companies.

In this part of Philippine waters, marine creatures used to live happily, enjoying great abundance provided by nature when Petron, a prominent oil company in the country, sent an oil delivery from somewhere via a sea cargo vessel that it owns. At first, the ship sailed smoothly, moving slowly past the islands

and islets scattered across the archipelago. Somewhere along the way, however, it encountered some problems that led to its damage, causing it to stop. As it gradually capsized, the oil on board started to spill into the seawater, spreading fast across the neighboring islands. Soon, sea creatures that were caught unaware and failed to escape began to die. The contamination proved so toxic that even the mermaid died as a result, unable to combat the ill-effects of this hazardous chemical on water. When the rest of the surviving fishes saw that their goddess was dead, they frantically panicked, knowing that they could be the next victims.

In the literal and superficial sense, conflict in this cartoon is between that abandoned, sinking cargo ship and the entire marine life in the area represented by an already dead mermaid. Being a heavy vessel, this ship is likely to capsize, never to be retrieved or salvaged by its owners, bringing its hoard of destructive oil to the ocean bed from where it would spread far and wide. In a broader sense, however, conflict could be between mankind in general versus the helpless position of nature, one being the destroyer, and the other, the destroyed.

Due to the oil spill emanating from the sinking ship in this cartoon, some sea creatures in the area have been killed as exemplified by the mermaid's death, and the risk is serious it could kill the rest as well.



**Figure 8: Flood Menace** (Source: Northern Watch)

Only one character is featured in this cartoon. He is no other than Juan dela Cruz, the image who symbolizes the Filipino people in general. Boarding a metallic basin floating on floodwater, he frantically tries to prevent a pile of sacks full of soil from collapsing. The falling apart of the wall-like pile is caused by the risen waters whose current is so strong it could carry the packed sacks away.

This man struggles a lot, perspiring under the rain, doing a very heavy task yet, like it or not, he needs to fix that wall to prevent the floodwater from destroying lives and properties. He is no doubt disgusted, though, complaining over that repetitious rebuilding that he has to do, unable to find a more effective and lasting solution to the problem.

The scene depicted in this cartoon is set in a wide expanse of floodwater, bordering on the wall of soil-packed sacks that must have been put up to prevent the onslaught of flood. This scenario also suggests a rainy season being at work in that time of the year.

In the past years, flooding must have been recurrent in this particular community, destroying houses and other infrastructures in the area. To prevent further damage to properties and risks to human life, the community folks had put up an indigenous wall made of these sacks. This wall had for a while served the purpose, but when persistent flooding came due to prolonged rains extending for days and even weeks, the pile of sacks gave way. And this did not happen just once; it became a recurrent scenario every time the rains would pour. Juan could have left this alone, but he could not neglect his obligation of protecting the lives of his people. He made sure he attended to their needs that would ensure their survival. Though fed up with the cycle of rebuilding and recovery, he had no other choice but to address the present problem of mending the wall or else the floods will drown all of them.

Man versus natural disasters could be the primary conflict in this cartoon. Heavy or extended rains cause flooding, bringing headaches and suffering to the people who, in turn, are compelled to find ways on how to combat the situation. But to a certain extent, conflict may include man versus himself, or his own

doings such as the improper garbage disposal, the cutting of trees, the destruction of nature in general and many more. These forms of abuse create a monstrous effect that boomerangs to mankind, hence his untold woes.

Difficult as it is to deal with the fury of nature like this persistent flooding, Juan dela Cruz has no other recourse but to confront the destructive power of such calamity if only to ensure the people's safety and survival.

#### **ACADEMIC ISSUES**



**Figure 9: Too Huge** (Source: SunStar Davao)

Featured in this cartoon are two interesting characters doing remarkable jobs. One is a schoolboy, a pupil, and another one is an adult man representing the Department of Education (DepEd). They are into something that, although expected of them to do, differs from what is supposedly normal.

The child is not a typical young boy. He is so big for his age; he is, in fact, a giant. So huge is his size, and his height so tall that even the entire length of their school flag pole, supposedly the tallest structure in the vicinity, would not even reach his thigh. Even their school building looks like a miniature structure in comparison to his size. So to enter it, he has to drop to his knees, crawl on his elbows, and enter the door head first. That's what he is exactly doing in the picture, struggling laboriously to get inside though, as it appears, only his head could actually make it in. To succeed in this effort, the man named DepEd tries to help by pushing him in. But this man is too small compared to his size so, try as he does, this man could only push and push without accomplishing anything, unable to help him at all. Their combined efforts are to no avail.

A school campus provides the setting for this cartoon. There is the lone school building which looks rather old and dilapidated, and in front of it stands the flag pole, a typical structure among the country's public elementary and secondary schools. The time must be more or less contemporary as can be observed in the country's public school campuses.

Patterned after the public education system of the United States, which the latter introduced during its colonization of the Philippines, public school in the country had prioritized the education of the young by providing free elementary and high school education in government-owned schools. To ensure access to education, the government made sure that even the remotest barrios are provided with at least one school building, complete with elementary education.

Free of charge, then, public schools started to bloat in terms of population as years passed. Children of the rapidly-growing families everywhere flocked to these schools until the latter got so crowded with learners. While the student population rapidly grew, the teachers whose salaries the government should pay remained rather few, and so were the limited school facilities like books, chairs, and eventually classrooms. This problem got worse as the years passed by. Today, the population of students represented in the cartoon by the gigantic boy has already grown to enormous proportion such that it could not be accommodated anymore in public schools, though DepEd tries to do so.

In a way, there is conflict between the ever increasing student population and the government's inability, by reason of insufficient budget, to accommodate it in public school. As this population increases, the government incurs deficit, aggravated by corruption in the education department. Indirectly, too, this could be a conflict between the great demand nowadays for education, both locally and globally, and the extant poverty that the majority of Filipinos are experiencing. Ripples of similar conflicts could actually generate from this.

Public school may have gone too small to accommodate the overly grown student population, but due to great demand, learners must squeeze themselves into this system, and DepEd, seemingly inutile to properly resolve the problem, could only push harder to help them get in.



**Figure 10: K+12 Handicap** (Source: Northern Watch-Pangasinan)

Two characters comprise the objects of characterization in this cartoon—an adult man, and a young schoolboy. The man, in his white barong, and appearing in his middle age, embodies the looks of an educator, either as a teacher or as an official in the Department of Education. He must be holding an important position to be able to assume authority in ordering subordinates to have the red carpet rolled out. Not only does he look authoritative; he also shows a sense of pride over what he deems is an accomplishment in welcoming the learner to a first-class educational program—the K+12. The schoolboy, on the other hand, exhibits an aura of shock and disbelief, obviously aware about the handicap of what the man tries to offer. He stands ready to cross over to the other side and head for that new program. But it occurs to him, given that gap between him and the man, that a big problem exists and this is going to impair the journey he has to take into that program.

The cartoon's setting in place proves to be a breathtaking scene. It is made up of two mountains overlooking each other. Their sides are too steep, and too high, they almost reach the clouds, creating a ravine below. In between is a space, part of the sky in which birds are soaring high, floating on their wings. Clouds hover above them, almost touching them as they tower above the earth. On top of them stand the man on one side, and the boy on the other, poised to get to the other side but is hampered by the absence of a bridge.

Fresh from the ignorance of childhood, this little boy is supposedly off to school for his primary education. This has been quite a difficult journey for him, but he had to persevere since this is in preparation for his future. Along the way, however, he came upon this cliff, a steep mountain formation which he had to cross to get to the other side. Incidentally, a man on the other side was rolling down a red carpet for him to walk on. This is supposedly a special way of welcoming children to a special program called K+12. Unfortunately, there is no bridge that links the towering mountain sides on which to place the red carpet. It follows that this elegant carpet will have to hang or float in the air as it would extend to the other side, a provision that, if stepped on, would surely fail to hold the passer-by upright but would let go of him, and allow him to fall into the ravine. This the boy apparently perceives although the man on the opposite side does not seem to realize it. The boy looks terrified knowing that, should he walk on that carpet, he will surely fall.

Conflict is centered on the learners' necessity to be in school, particularly in public school, and the government's inability to adequately supply all the school-related needs such as textbooks, classrooms, teachers, and many more. As a provider of free elementary and secondary education, the government is mandated to make sure that the learners' needs are met. This, however, is something that the government fails to faithfully and consistently do in the face of economic crisis and budget deficits, aggravated by rampant corruption even in the department of education itself.

DepEd's willingness to implement the K+12 Program and the learners' eagerness to be in it are hampered by the government's lack of budget for its full implementation. That program might be deemed special, but without sufficient budget, it will be a great failure.

## 9. Conclusion

After doing an in-depth analysis, this study concludes that, indeed, editorial cartoons possess narrative constructs and attributes despite their being single-framed caricatures (as opposed to multi-framed comic strips), and even without the aid of textual narratives. It confirms that any editorial cartoon, if subjected to similar analysis, would yield vivid tales on societal issues. It attests to the idea that these caricatures, besides being critical, are also narrative communication devices.

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