

From Visual Signs to a Grand Narrative: A Semiotic Synthesis of Children's Post-Narratives of War

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ABSTRACT

This study synthesizes the findings of three preceding semiotic investigations of children's poster narratives depicting the Marawi Siege. It specifically examines the grand narrative emerging from the cumulative findings and identifies the semiotic principles that explain how children construct and communicate meaning through visual representations of armed conflict. Using a qualitative, interpretive, social-semiotic synthesis, the study treated the visual signs, thematic interconnections, and abducted meanings established in the preceding investigations as interconnected analytical layers. The synthesis reveals a grand narrative that moves from peace, disruption, destruction, and displacement toward sanctuary, resilience, cultural belonging, and hope for peace. The narrative demonstrates that children's representations of the siege extend beyond accounts of violence and victimization to include their reconstruction of meaning through faith, family, community, and cultural identity. The study further establishes an interconnected set of semiotic principles consisting of the Principle of Truth Sign, Color as a Semiotic Resource, the Meaning Potential of Children's Poster Narratives, and the Role of the Sociocultural in Reading Children's Poster Narratives. Together, these principles demonstrate that children's poster narratives function as experiential, visually constructed, and socioculturally situated forms of meaning-making. The study concludes that synthesizing visual signs, thematic relationships, and abducted meanings provides a higher-order understanding of children's experiences of armed conflict and highlights their capacity to communicate not only trauma and loss but also resilience, belonging, and aspirations for peace.

KEYWORDS

children's poster narratives; Marawi Siege; social semiotics; visual semiotics; grand narrative; armed conflict; meaning-making; cultural identity; resilience; peace

INTRODUCTION

Children's drawings can serve as an important means through which children represent, interpret, and communicate experiences that may be difficult to articulate verbally. As visual texts, drawings do not merely reproduce objects or events; they organize colors, figures, spatial arrangements, lines, symbols, and other visual resources into meaningful representations. This capacity becomes particularly significant in contexts of armed conflict, where children's experiences may involve displacement, destruction, fear, loss, and disruption of familiar social and cultural environments. At the same time, children's representations of conflict may extend beyond narratives of victimhood by revealing how

they understand and make meaning of experiences of violence through culturally and socially available resources.

The semiotic investigation of children's drawings of the Marawi Siege has developed progressively through a series of studies. The first study established the visual repertoire represented in the drawings of child survivors by identifying recurring images, including social actors, shattered places, battle aircraft, and weapons. It further demonstrated that visual details such as color, position, size, number, shape, strokes, and facial expressions contribute to the construction of meaning. Building upon this foundation, the second study examined the interconnections between visual images and themes, demonstrating that visual representations acquire significance through their relationships with broader thematic meanings and through the processes by which children construct their representations of the reality of war. The third study advanced the inquiry by abducting meanings from the relationships among visual images, themes, and children's experiences. Four principal meanings emerged: the masjid as an image of sanctuary, religion as a source of resilience, peace as the absence of war, and kambangsa amidst danger. These meanings were subsequently brought together into a grand narrative of the child survivors of the Marawi Siege.

These studies consequently represent a progressive movement from visual signs to thematic interconnections and, subsequently, to abducted meanings and grand narrative. However, the cumulative theoretical implications of this progression have not yet been systematically synthesized. In particular, there remains a need to examine how the findings of the three investigations collectively constitute an overarching narrative and what semiotic principles may be derived from their convergence.

This constitutes the scientific novelty of the present study. Rather than conducting another independent analysis of the children's drawings, this research undertakes a qualitative, interpretive, social-semiotic synthesis of the findings of the three preceding investigations. The visual signs, thematic relationships, and abducted meanings established in those studies are treated as interconnected analytical layers and are synthesized to identify recurring patterns, overarching meanings, and higher-order semiotic principles. Thus, the present study represents the fourth analytical stage of a continuing research trajectory.

The significance of this synthesis lies in demonstrating that children's narratives of armed conflict cannot be reduced to representations of destruction and victimization. When the preceding findings are considered collectively, they reveal a more complex narrative trajectory in which experiences of peace and familiarity are disrupted by violence, displacement, fear, and destruction, while meaning is reconstructed through family, community, religious faith, sanctuary, cultural belonging, and the aspiration for peace. The children's drawings therefore provide not only representations of what happened to them but also evidence of how they interpreted and reconstructed meaning from those experiences.

The present study addresses the following problems: (1) What overarching grand narrative emerges from the cumulative findings of the three preceding semiotic studies of children's drawings of the Marawi Siege? and (2) What semiotic principles can be derived from the cumulative findings to explain children's visual meaning-making in the context of armed conflict? Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to synthesize the findings of the preceding semiotic investigations of children's drawings of the Marawi Siege in order to derive an overarching grand narrative and articulate the semiotic principles that emerge from the progression from visual signs, to thematic interconnections, to abducted meanings, and ultimately to higher-order narrative meaning.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a **qualitative, interpretive, social-semiotic synthesis design**. Rather than generating a new corpus of children's drawings, the study synthesized the findings of three preceding semiotic investigations conducted on children's poster narratives of the Marawi Siege. The three preceding investigations progressively examined (1) the visual images represented in the children's drawings, (2) the interconnections between visual images and themes, and (3) the meanings abducted from the relationships among visual representations, themes, and children's experiences. The present study constitutes the fourth analytical stage, in which these cumulative findings were examined as interconnected analytical layers to derive a higher-order grand narrative and a set of semiotic principles. This design is consistent with the stated purpose of the study to move from visual signs, through thematic interconnections and abducted meanings, toward an overarching narrative interpretation.

Sources of the Synthesized Data

The analytical corpus consisted of the findings reported in three preceding studies by Abdussalam: **Abdussalam (2024a)**, which examined the visual images represented in the drawings of child survivors of war; **Abdussalam (2024b)**, which examined the interconnections between visual images and themes in children's narratives of war through drawing; and **Abdussalam (2024c)**, which examined the meanings abducted from children's drawings of war through storytelling. These three studies served as the primary source materials for the present synthesis. Their findings were treated as cumulative rather than independent, reflecting the progressive development of the research trajectory from visual signs to thematic relationships and subsequently to abducted meanings. The three source studies are documented in the reference list of the present paper.

Analytical Framework

The synthesis was guided by a **social-semiotic perspective**, particularly the view that meaning is produced through the interaction of visual signs, their configurations, and the social and cultural contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social-semiotic approach provided the broader conceptual basis for examining visual meaning-making. The analysis also considered the children's verbal explanations accompanying their drawings because the preceding investigations established that visual representations cannot always be adequately interpreted without attention to the children's own accounts of what they intended to communicate.

The analytical framework consisted of three interconnected layers derived from the preceding investigations:

1. **Visual-sign layer** – recurring visual elements, including people, buildings, weapons, aircraft, colors, spatial arrangements, shapes, strokes, and other visual features represented in the children's drawings;
2. **Thematic-interconnection layer** – relationships between individual visual signs and broader themes concerning war, displacement, family, religion, community, safety, and peace; and
3. **Abducted-meaning layer** – higher-order meanings derived from the relationships among visual signs, themes, and the children's narrated experiences.

These layers were subsequently synthesized to identify overarching patterns and formulate the grand narrative and semiotic principles of the present study. This analytical

progression follows the structure established in the preceding investigations and described in the Introduction.

Data Analysis Procedure

The synthesis was conducted through four sequential analytical procedures.

First, extraction of recurring findings was undertaken by identifying the major visual signs, themes, and abducted meanings reported across the three preceding investigations. Particular attention was given to findings that recurred across studies or demonstrated clear conceptual relationships.

Second, thematic mapping was conducted by examining the relationships among the extracted findings. Visual representations were considered in relation to the broader themes in which they acquired meaning. For example, representations of the masjid, family, religious symbols, destruction, displacement, and peace were examined not as isolated signs but as interconnected elements within the children's narratives.

Third, abductive synthesis was undertaken by examining how the visual signs and thematic relationships collectively supported higher-order interpretations. The abducted meanings established in the third preceding investigation—including the masjid as sanctuary, religion as a source of resilience, peace as the absence of war, and *kambangsa* amidst danger—were treated as interpretive bridges between the lower-level visual and thematic findings and the higher-order narrative.

Fourth, grand-narrative construction and principle formulation were conducted by organizing the cumulative findings into an overarching narrative trajectory and identifying the semiotic principles that explain the construction and interpretation of meaning. The resulting narrative was examined for its sequential and conceptual movement from peace and familiarity, through disruption, destruction, and displacement, toward sanctuary, resilience, cultural belonging, hope, and the aspiration for restored peace. The synthesis subsequently yielded four interconnected principles: **the Principle of Truth Sign, Color as a Semiotic Resource, the Meaning Potential of Children's Poster Narratives, and the Role of the Sociocultural in Reading Children's Poster Narratives.**

Interpretive Validity and Reflexivity

To minimize unsupported projection onto the children's drawings, interpretations were grounded in the findings and children's verbal accounts established in the preceding investigations. Particular attention was given to the contextual meanings assigned by the children themselves, especially where visual features could potentially have multiple interpretations. Thus, colors, objects, figures, and spatial arrangements were not treated as possessing fixed or universal meanings. Instead, their meanings were interpreted in relation to the children's explanations, experiences, and sociocultural contexts. This approach is consistent with the preceding studies' emphasis on the children's narratives as essential sources for interpreting their visual representations.

Scope and Limitations of the Synthesis

The present study is limited to the cumulative findings of the three preceding investigations and does not claim to represent all children affected by armed conflict. The resulting grand narrative and semiotic principles are therefore situated within the particular corpus, participants, historical circumstances, and sociocultural context of the Marawi Siege. The purpose of the synthesis is not to establish a universal model of children's responses to war but to articulate a higher-order narrative and semiotic framework emerging from this specific research trajectory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the preceding semiotic investigations reveals that the children's drawings collectively construct a grand narrative of disruption, loss, survival, resilience, faith, cultural belonging, and hope. This narrative represents a movement from an initially peaceful and familiar world toward the experience of armed conflict and its consequences, and ultimately toward the children's reconstruction of meaning after the disruption. Rather than presenting war as an isolated event, the drawings collectively portray it as a process that transforms the children's understanding of their homes, families, community, faith, and future. The grand narrative is therefore not merely a summary of the images represented in the posters; it is an interpretation of the larger story that becomes visible when the children's visual representations and narrative accounts are considered collectively.

This finding constitutes the logical culmination of the three preceding studies. The first investigation identified the recurring visual signs through which the children represented their experiences, including social actors, shattered places, battle aircraft, and weapons. The second moved beyond the identification of individual signs by examining how these visual elements were interconnected with broader themes. The third proceeded to abduct meanings from these relationships and identified the masjid as sanctuary, religion as a source of resilience, peace as the absence of war, and kambangsa amidst danger. The present study takes the findings of these investigations one analytical level further. Instead of treating the identified signs, themes, and abducted meanings as separate findings, it considers how they collectively tell a larger story about what the children experienced, how the siege transformed their world, and how they attempted to make sense of that transformation.

At the beginning of this narrative is the children's representation of Marawi before the siege. The peaceful city, family life, play, natural surroundings, and familiar community establish a baseline against which the later representations of war become meaningful. Peace is consequently not presented as an abstract condition but as a lived experience characterized by familiarity, security, social relationships, and the freedom to engage in ordinary childhood activities. The subsequent appearance of militants, weapons, aircraft, bombs, burning structures, and destruction marks the rupture of this familiar world. The contrast is significant because it establishes the central narrative tension: the children are not simply depicting the presence of war; they are depicting what war took away from them.

The narrative then moves toward the experience of violence, displacement, and loss. The children's representations of bombing, gunfire, burning homes, destroyed buildings, bloodshed, death, and fleeing families demonstrate that the consequences of the siege extended beyond the battlefield. War entered the spaces ordinarily associated with childhood—homes, neighborhoods, schools, and communities—and consequently altered the children's understanding of safety and belonging. The children's representations of flight further emphasize this disruption. Families are shown escaping through different routes and circumstances, while others are represented as unable to escape. Displacement consequently becomes more than physical movement from one place to another; it becomes a disruption of the relationship between children and the places they previously understood as home.

Yet the grand narrative does not end with destruction. Its subsequent movement toward sanctuary, faith, family, community, and cultural belonging demonstrates that the children did not represent themselves solely as victims of the siege. The drawings reveal attempts to locate sources of safety and meaning within the disrupted environment. The masjid

emerges as a space of refuge; religious imagery becomes associated with reliance upon God; family and community remain sources of affection and belonging; and kambangsa provides a culturally grounded understanding of solidarity and collective protection. These elements transform the narrative from one solely concerned with the consequences of war into one concerned with how children survive and reconstruct meaning in its aftermath.

The significance of this movement is particularly evident in the children's representations of hope. Despite the prominence of destruction and loss, some drawings retain images associated with peace, family, nature, and the future. The smiling sun described by one of the child artists is especially revealing. The child's explanation that the sun represents continued happiness, acceptance of Allah's will, and hope of returning to their home demonstrates that the visual narrative cannot be reduced to trauma. The sign simultaneously acknowledges destruction and expresses the possibility of recovery. Thus, the children's representations contain both the memory of what was lost and an imagined possibility of what may be restored.

The final movement of the grand narrative is therefore toward hope and the restoration of Marawi as a place of harmonious communal life. The peaceful images that appeared at the beginning of the narrative re-emerge toward its end, but their meaning is no longer identical. Before the siege, peace was an ordinary condition experienced without necessarily being consciously recognized. After the siege, peace becomes something the children have experienced as absent and therefore consciously value and desire. The return to images of a peaceful Marawi consequently represents more than nostalgia; it expresses an aspiration for recovery, reconciliation, and a future in which the city and its people can again live harmoniously.

In this sense, the grand narrative demonstrates a movement that may be understood as peace → disruption → destruction → displacement → sanctuary → resilience → hope → peace. This circular movement is significant because it suggests that the children's conception of peace is transformed by their experience of war. They begin with an ordinary experience of peace, encounter its violent disruption, and eventually reconstruct peace as a consciously valued aspiration. The narrative therefore captures not only what the children saw during the siege but also how their understanding of their world was altered by it.

The grand narrative created from the cumulative findings of the preceding studies is presented below entitled ***The Story We Tell: From Our Marawi to the Marawi We Hope For:***

"Before the war, Marawi was our home. It was where we played, laughed, went to school, stayed with our families, and spent time with our friends. We knew the places around us. We saw the trees, flowers, the lake, and the bright sun. Everything felt familiar. We did not have to think about whether we were safe because Marawi was simply where we belonged. It was our home.

Then, one day, everything changed.

We heard the sounds of guns and explosions. We saw aircraft in the sky and weapons being used around us. Buildings and houses were damaged and burned. Places that we knew became frightening. The streets where we used to walk and play were no longer the same. Some people were hurt, and some did not survive. We saw families trying to leave, carrying what they could and looking for a place where they would be safe.

We had to leave our homes, but leaving was not easy. Some families travelled by vehicles, some walked, and some had to find other ways to escape. We left behind the places we knew and the lives we had before the fighting. We did not know when we could return, or whether our homes would still be there when we did.

When the places around us became dangerous, we looked for places where we could feel safe. The masjid became one of those places. It was not only a place where we prayed; it was also a place where we could find shelter and comfort. We stayed close to our families and to

other people from our community. When everything around us seemed uncertain, being together reminded us that we were not alone.

We also held on to our faith. We prayed and trusted Allah even when we did not understand why these things were happening. We learned to accept what had happened while still asking for better days. Our faith helped us remain strong when we were afraid and gave us something to hold on to when so much had been taken away.

We remembered that we belonged to one another. Kambangsa reminded us that we were part of a community that shared the same place, identity, and experiences. Even when the city was divided by danger and displacement, our connection to one another remained. We carried our home with us through our families, our faith, our culture, and the people who stood beside us.

And we still hoped.

We hoped that one day the fighting would end. We hoped to see our homes again. We hoped that Marawi would become peaceful once more. We hoped that we could return to the things we used to do—to play, to laugh, to go to school, to be with our families, and to see our city alive again.

The sun still rises. We can still imagine happiness. We can still imagine going home.

Maybe Marawi will not be exactly as we remember it. But we hope that one day it will be peaceful again—a place where families can live together, children can play without fear, people can pray safely, and our community can be together again.

We lost the peace we once thought would always be there. Through the war, we learned what it meant to lose our home, our safety, and our ordinary childhood. But we also learned to hold on—to our families, our faith, our culture, and one another. And as long as we can still imagine a peaceful Marawi, we can still hope to return home.”

The narrative above represents the culmination of the preceding semiotic analyses. Its significance lies in its ability to move beyond individual signs and themes toward a coherent account of the children's collective experience. The narrative begins with the beauty and familiarity of Marawi, records the rupture brought about by the siege and the resulting violence and displacement, recognizes the suffering and loss experienced by the children and their families, and ultimately identifies faith, family, community, kambangsa, and hope as resources through which the children negotiate the aftermath of conflict. Its concluding image of a peaceful and harmonious Marawi consequently returns the narrative to its point of departure, but with a fundamentally altered meaning: peace is no longer simply the background of childhood; it has become the desired condition of survival and recovery.

This interpretation also gives greater significance to the three preceding studies. Their findings are not merely sequential publications addressing related aspects of the same corpus. Together, they constitute an accumulating analytical process in which the visual signs identified in the first study provide the material from which the themes of the second study emerge, while the thematic relationships provide the basis for the abducted meanings established in the third study. The present study demonstrates that these meanings can be synthesized into a grand narrative that captures the broader experiential and cultural significance of the children's drawings. In this respect, the present study is a continuation of the earlier investigations rather than a repetition of them.

Most importantly, the grand narrative indicates that the children's representations of war contain both testimony and reconstruction. They testify to destruction, displacement, fear, and loss, but they simultaneously reconstruct meanings of faith, belonging, resilience, and hope. The drawings therefore function not simply as records of what happened but as visual accounts of how the children understood what happened to them. This interpretation is consistent with the social-semiotic view that meaning is produced through the

interaction of signs, their configurations, and their social and cultural contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). It also reinforces the earlier studies' finding that the children's own narrative accounts are essential to interpreting their visual representations because they provide access to meanings that cannot necessarily be established from visual form alone.

The grand narrative thus provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis of how the visual signs, thematic interconnections, and abducted meanings converge and, ultimately, for the formulation of the semiotic principles emerging from the entire research trajectory.

Furthermore, the synthesis of the preceding findings further yielded a set of semiotic principles that explain how meaning is constructed and interpreted in children's poster narratives. Rather than constituting isolated propositions, these principles form an interconnected framework for understanding children's visual meaning-making. At its overarching level is the Principle of Truth Sign, which positions children's drawings as expressions grounded in their lived and understood experiences. Embedded within this principle are three closely related premises: Color as a Semiotic Resource, the Meaning Potential of Children's Poster Narratives, and the Role of the Sociocultural in Reading Children's Poster Narratives. Together, these premises explain why children's visual representations can function as meaningful accounts of experience and how such meanings may be appropriately interpreted.

The **Principle of Truth Sign** provides the overarching foundation of the framework. It proceeds from the premise that children, as the creators of the poster narratives, are primary sources of meaning concerning their own experiences. Drawing provides children with an accessible means of selecting, organizing, and representing aspects of their lived realities through materials, colors, patterns, size, position, and other visual resources. In this sense, the truth represented in children's drawings is understood not as a photographic reproduction of reality but as an experiential truth—a representation of how children encountered, understood, and communicated their experiences. The children's verbal explanations further strengthen this principle by providing direct accounts of the intentions and meanings behind their visual choices.

Truth must be at the core of any theory of meaning and in this study, the children, as participants, are the sources of truth. It is in the nature of a child to express himself. In drawing, children carefully select their materials such as crayons, colors, patterns, as well as the size and position of what they wish to draw. Also, a child's drawing provides a great deal of information about his or her personality. During the course of the children's daily lives, they encounter many facts and practices from which they draw inspiration to. In contrast to adults, who tend to think deeply about everything, children do not assess their artwork based on what others are likely to think. It is typical for children to just draw whatever comes to mind when drawing; this is what makes their artwork so interesting and a source of truth signs. Drawing is an easy, readily available, and accessible method of physiological analysis for children since they enjoy it and do it often. Hence, drawings of children are also rich data in pursuit of deciphering meanings which are truthfully illustrated. It is said that in the pursuit of intentional meanings, it is impossible to accept knowingly false meanings because meaning is only accepted by consciousness when it appears to be true; otherwise, the meaning process cannot be completed.

In addition, the children's detailed illustrations of their experiences of Marawi Siege is another evidence that the poster narratives are full of truth signs illustrated by the children. As a matter of fact, as previously discussed, the children's accounts of the Marawi Siege include minute details that are almost impossible to be mistakenly illustrated by a young participant, this includes the scenarios of fleeing, the facial expressions of the civilians, and even small details such as the number of dead people on the streets. The details are

products of the children's honesty and straightforwardness coupled with their understanding of the goal of telling their experiences through drawings. Furthermore, these details help the researcher to come up with the children's narrative of Marawi Siege as a result of the overall composition of the collected posters.

Drawing is an outlet for communication, and children's artwork represents a view of their personalities, and serves as a window to their lived realities. Children commence their drawing process from the moment they are big enough to hold a crayon or pencil and put it to paper. For little ones drawing represents a natural activity, usually with much enjoyment. They draw in order to express emotions, because they are not yet in possession of the ability to express different feelings through words. Through their art, they are able to express their fears, joys, dreams, hopes and nightmares through drawings, and also give adults leads about their relationships to the world and to other things. While most would be dismissive of children's art and relegate it to the area of children's play, drawings made by children are rich and thick in meanings.

The first premise, **Color as a Semiotic Resource**, recognizes color as an active resource in the construction of meaning rather than merely a decorative feature of children's drawings. The preceding findings demonstrated that children's color choices were associated with particular experiences, emotions, objects, and situations. However, the meaning of a color is not necessarily fixed or universal. Its interpretation depends upon its use, context, cultural associations, and the child's particular experience. Thus, color possesses meaning potential that becomes more specific when considered within the broader visual and sociocultural context of the poster narrative.

The findings of this study show that color is a rich source of semiotic studies. Just as like ideas have been expressed by color for a long time, for instance, as part of medieval color symbolism, black stood for penance, white for purity and innocence, red for fire, and so on. Despite the strict regulation of colors in some cultures, color's intellectual function does not always operate within those limited domains. There are works that have been undertaken in a variety of ways as a first attempt to examine the possibility of a broader, more widely applicable language of color, and thus a language that could be accepted by individuals from a broader socio-cultural group. As a point of discussion, in this study, black is mostly associated to the militants. However, this choice of color of the participants does not speak of black as a cultural symbol of the Meranaws, but instead this choice is merely due to the realistic representation of the children's experiences in their poster narratives. Nonetheless, it is yet worth to point out that in some narrations, participants also associate black to danger and fear, as a result of their encounter with the militants, be it an actual encounter or thru other sources.

On top of that, alike with how language enables the realization of speech acts, color also does the same with color acts. Aside from impressing or intimidating others, color can be used to warn others of obstructions or other hazards by painting them orange or neon for example, as well as even subduing them. In fact, as a result of the Marawi Siege, the constituents of Marawi have strongly associated black with the militant group that if a black flag is put in public nowadays, people will surely be cryptic about it. Also, it is remembered that when participants are asked about the use of green as a color associated to the military, they also add their feelings of intimidation towards the military. This feeling of intimidation is enclosed along with the participants' choice of color, hence, realizing the color act.

With this, in parallel with the study of Kandinsky (1977), as narrated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the researchers also find two sources of making meaning with color in this study, which is termed as affordances by the mentioned researchers. First, identifying

a color's association or source is the first step. It describes where it comes from, its cultural and historical context, and where it has been used in the past. Almost any color has a connection to something, whether it is a substance, an object, a particular clothing item, a time period, a region, or a combination of all of them. It should be noted, however, that color's symbolic meanings within a socio-cultural context can be significant in communicative uses. Similar to understanding why, Filipinos, Meranaws in particular have started associating black with negative emotions such as fear and danger. In theory, colors seem to offer limitless benefits, but in reality they are not, and when the context of production and interpretation is taken into consideration, as is the purpose of this study, a plausible interpretation can usually be agreed upon.

Lastly, another characteristic is color's distinctiveness. In essence, these distinctive features are visual qualities, rather than acoustic qualities, which cannot be systematized as structural oppositions, but rather as values on a spectrum of scales, like phonology. A light to dark scale, a saturated to desaturated scale, a high energy scale, and other, can all be used. Moreover, these colors serve not only to distinguish one color from another, but also as meaning potentials, reminiscent of Jakobson and Halle (1956). A color's utilization can be analyzed as a combination of values from each scale, thereby creating a composite meaning potential.

The second premise, **The Meaning Potential of Children's Poster Narratives**, emphasizes that meaning is generated through the relationship among the individual visual elements and the poster as a whole. Children's drawings therefore require interpretation from part to whole, with individual signs understood in relation to their composition, themes, and the child's accompanying explanation. The preceding study also established that verbal accounts are particularly important because some meanings, especially emotions and intentions, may not be fully visible in the drawing itself. Consequently, children's poster narratives should be approached as complex multimodal texts rather than as collections of isolated symbols. In order to understand what a child is communicating, it is essential to practice and understand the complex drawings that children create. Without practice, it can be easy to overanalyze or project on their artwork. For understanding and analyzing children's drawings, the semiotic approach, a method of analysis for understanding and analyzing this language, can be used to read the drawings from the parts to the whole, the same approach used in this present study.

In this study, it is realized that the children's accompanying verbal statements are equally relevant during the analysis. In addition to providing clarification of the content, the descriptions of the children's drawings also provide data that cannot always be seen visually. It is repeatedly observed that war was associated with negative emotions in the children's verbal statements regarding their drawings. As a result of the children's inability to portray the emotion described in their figures in their faces, this theme may have slipped by without being recognized. The children often draw smiley figures, but states that the people they draw are sad at other times. As a result of their verbal descriptions, the children's drawings also make it possible for the researcher to avoid projecting one's own values and beliefs onto the drawings by making assumptions about what they are trying to convey.

Duncan (2013) revealed that there are numerous studies that have explored children's meaning-making and drawing. Others such as Worthington (2010) and Wright (2010) advocated the work of Vygotsky (1962) and Kress (2003) as a source and basis for exploring the value of children's drawing meaning making. The findings of this study is consistent with the results obtained in a number of studies involving analyses of children's drawings (Akalın, 2008; Dülger, 2008; Ekinçi, 2008; Türkkan, 2004) which on the basis of

analyzing children's drawings, conclude that children's drawings serve as a reflection of their inner worlds. These are also in line with those reported by Cowan and Albers (2006), who examine children's drawings and poems with a semiotic approach, showing that students' products provide rich data when the semiotic approach is applied. Research on children's drawings is important, as cited by Zlateva (2019). Children's drawings are an indication of their developmental progress and provide a glimpse into their internal thinking and attitude toward the world around them, as well as a way for kids and adults to communicate in general and effectively.

Therefore, this study agrees with the notion Malchiodi (2005) that the drawings of children can be a good indicator of mental development, emotional meanings they attribute to their environment, a way of understanding and expressing their complex world that they are trying to organize on their. Lastly, in accordance with Piaget (1952), children must adapt to new information as they explore their surroundings, either by incorporating it into their prior understanding or by reorganizing their understanding in order to include the new information. In looking at the drawings, it appears that children's thinking is influenced by the environment in which they are placed, and they encounter discrepancies between what they already know and what they encounter in their new environment.

The third premise, **The Role of the Sociocultural in Reading Children's Poster Narratives**, establishes that children's meanings are embedded within the social and cultural environments in which they live. Their representations of family, religion, the masjid, maratabat, and kambangsa, for instance, cannot be adequately understood without considering the social interactions, cultural knowledge, and experiences that inform their sign-making. Children's drawings consequently reflect both individual experience and collective cultural meanings. In this perspective, interpretation requires attention not only to what a child has drawn but also to the cultural resources and social experiences through which the child has learned to make meaning.

The sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in a child's development. Human learning is largely a social phenomenon; in which the cognition function matures through the interactions with the surroundings. According to the poster narratives collected from the participants, it is prevalent among the participants that their narratives are product of their encounter and social interactions during the siege, such as with parents, peers, religion as represented in their poster narratives, and other social factors, which are all primarily responsible for the cognitive development, hence, the ability to narrate their stories of war.

The illustration of the concept of sign-making in a sociocultural approach is made possible by utilizing children's drawings in this study. It is believed that children's drawings provide the best model for thinking about sign-making. Nonetheless, Soundy (2015) discusses that aside from the effects of convention, this also applies to fully socialized and acculturated humans. Having developed as mature members of a culture, culturally produced semiotic resources are made available, as well as understanding social conventions and constraints that govern how signs are made. It is nevertheless true that adult sign makers, too, are guided by their interests, by the complex condensation of cultural and social histories as well as the awareness of present conditions. Adult sign-makers produce signs out of that interest, always converting existing semiotic materials, therefore always creating something new, and always conjoining meaning with form. Convention has the effect of limiting sign-making through constant limitations of conformity; that is, the way signifiers have been combined with signifieds over time serves as a constant constraint on how far one can go in combining signifiers with signifieds.

Convention does not negate making new meanings; rather, it limits and constrains the semiotic scope of combination.¹

Taken together, these principles provide a framework for reading the children's poster narratives as experientially grounded, visually constructed, and socioculturally situated texts. The Principle of Truth Sign establishes the experiential foundation; color provides one of the important semiotic resources through which experience is visually realized; the meaning potential of the poster narrative explains how individual signs operate within a larger visual text; and the sociocultural dimension establishes the context necessary for interpreting those signs. These principles therefore collectively extend the findings of the preceding studies by providing a theoretical explanation of how the children's experiences become visual meanings and how those meanings may be read within their particular social and cultural context.

The implications of these findings extend beyond semiotic analysis. In education, children's drawings may provide teachers and researchers with an alternative means of accessing children's experiences when verbal communication is insufficient. In psychology and child studies, the findings emphasize the importance of attending to children's own meaning-making rather than interpreting visual representations solely through adult-centered frameworks. In peace and conflict studies, the drawings demonstrate how children construct narratives of conflict that include not only violence and loss but also resilience, communal identity, religious resources, and aspirations for peace. The findings thus position children's visual narratives as potentially valuable sources for understanding how communities affected by conflict remember, interpret, and reconstruct their experiences.

Nevertheless, caution is necessary in interpreting children's visual signs. A particular color, object, figure, or spatial arrangement should not be assigned a universal psychological or cultural meaning without considering the child's explanation and the context in which the drawing was produced. The findings support contextual and abductive interpretation rather than fixed symbolic decoding. The study also does not claim that the resulting grand narrative represents all children affected by armed conflict. Because the present investigation is a synthesis of findings from three preceding studies, its conclusions remain grounded in the particular corpus, participants, and sociocultural context of the Marawi Siege. Its contribution is therefore the articulation of a higher-order narrative and semiotic principles emerging from this specific research trajectory, rather than a universal model of children's responses to war.

CONCLUSION

This study synthesized the findings of three preceding semiotic investigations of children's drawings of the Marawi Siege to establish the broader meanings that emerge across the research trajectory. The synthesis shows that the children's representations collectively construct a grand narrative of peace, disruption, loss, survival, resilience, and hope. The narrative begins with the children's experience of Marawi as a familiar and peaceful community, moves through the violence, destruction, displacement, and disruption brought about by the siege, and ultimately turns toward faith, sanctuary, family, cultural belonging, and the aspiration for the restoration of peace. The grand narrative therefore demonstrates that the children's drawings represent not only their experiences of conflict but also their efforts to reconstruct meaning from those experiences.

The study further established that the preceding investigations yielded interconnected semiotic principles for understanding children's poster narratives. The Principle of Truth Sign provides the overarching foundation, while Color as a Semiotic Resource, The Meaning Potential of Children's Poster Narratives, and The Role of the Sociocultural in

Reading Children's Poster Narratives explain how children's experiences are transformed into visual meanings and how those meanings may be interpreted. Taken together, these principles establish that children's poster narratives are experiential, visually constructed, and socioculturally situated forms of meaning-making. The findings consequently extend the preceding studies from the identification and interpretation of individual signs toward a higher-order understanding of how those signs, themes, and meanings collectively construct a narrative of children's experiences of armed conflict.

The study is limited to the cumulative findings of the preceding investigations and to the particular sociocultural and historical context of the Marawi Siege. The resulting grand narrative and semiotic principles should therefore not be treated as universal representations of all children's experiences of war. Future studies may examine whether these principles remain applicable across different conflict-affected communities and cultural contexts. Longitudinal and comparative investigations may also determine how children's visual narratives and meanings develop as they move from experiences of conflict toward recovery and reconstruction.

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