

YIISA: THE YALE INITIATIVE FOR THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF ANTISEMITISM

YIISA

WORKING PAPER SERIES

Yale Initiative  
for the  
Interdisciplinary  
Study of  
Antisemitism



Memetics and the Viral  
Spread of Antisemitism  
Through "Coded  
Images" in Political  
Cartoons

Yakov Kirschen  
Political Cartoonist  
NIEM Fellow

SERGIUS BECHTOLD  
Charles Schreyer Swartz  
Yale University

**Abstract**

**This paper proposes a new criteria to identify Antisemitism in political cartoons by examining the presence of Antisemitic image-codes within them.**

**As a viral belief system, Antisemitism has historically used image-based memophores to spread its constituent memes and to replicate itself in the minds of potential hosts. The portrayal of the Jew as a powerful demonic enemy of society serves as an important unifying force needed by mass movements in their quests for power.**

**As evident from contemporary cartoons around the globe, use of these memetic image-codes in political cartoons has expanded beyond the groups known for transmitting Antisemitic images. A cartoonist infected by these viral image-codes of Antisemitism will then insert them into his own cartoons.**

**Dehumanizing codes answer the question of “Who are the Jews?” in such a way as to deprive Jews of the empathy normally felt for human beings. Dehumanizing codes depict Jews as being demonic vampires and vermin.**

**Stereotyping codes address the question of “What are Jews like?” Stereotyping codes depict Jews as ugly, sinister, controlling the world and the media, as money hungry and brutal, blood-spilling murderers of everyone from Jesus to Palestinian babies in Gaza.**

**After the Holocaust proved the victimhood of the Jewish people, Antisemitism and the Antisemitic memes of the image-codes needed to evolve into a holocaust-resistant form which would deny Jewish victimhood. Moral Inversion Codes invert the horrors by depict the victims as the perpetrators. Thus the Jew becomes the Nazi or the terrorist suicide bomber, rather than their victim.**

## **CONTENTS**

**Abstract**

**Preface**

**Introduction:**

**1. The Function of Anti-Semitic Propaganda**

**2. Image codes and Political cartoons**

**3. Memetics**

**4. Memetics and Antisemitism**

**5. Contemporary Cartoons and Infected Cartoonists**

**6. Code Origins and Codification**

**7. Codes from Generation to Generation**

**8. Code Families**

**9. The Star and the Codes**

**10. A Representative Sample**

**9. Conclusions**

## Preface

“For more than forty years I have been putting ideas into people’s heads. It’s what I do. I’m a political cartoonist. Some of my cartoonist colleagues define the purpose of our work as showing “the truth”, others as “expressing our opinion” but the fact is that what we do is to attempt to put our own ideas into other people’s heads ...and we use cartoons to do it.

When a portion of the cartoonist’s readership cries foul about a cartoon, he defends his work as being a valid political statement. But effective cartoons can go far beyond being “just” political statements. A cartoon can use the power of graphic signals, which are embedded with subliminal messages, to transmit deeper, more visceral meanings than any verbal description of the cartoon might imply.

The intense political focus on Israel and the frustrating search for peace in the Middle East have become favorite topics for editorial cartoonists. Inevitably, when a portion of the cartoonist’s readership cries “Antisemitism”, the cartoonist attacks his critics as “right-wing defenders of Israel” ...and defends his work as a valid political statement.

The rich and extensive use of Antisemitic cartoons by the National Socialist Party as part of their strategies in the prelude to the Holocaust gives today’s debate an added importance and, perhaps, urgency. It is in light of the extensive use of Antisemitic cartoons by the Nazis that I undertook, both as a fellow of the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Antisemitism and as a political cartoonist dedicated to freedom of expression, to address the contemporary controversy and to examine the question of how to distinguish between valid political commentary and Antisemitism in contemporary political cartoons.

At the beginning of the study it became apparent that the cartoons which are the most undeniably Antisemitic can be recognized even if they are in a language which the observer can not read. The graphic images themselves speak clearly without the words of the cartoon. Many of the same powerfully communicative images appear over and over again in the work of different cartoonists. They are like a familiar cast of characters. It is the intent of this paper to explain what the examination of this set of Antisemitic graphic images has revealed.”

## **Introduction**

**Anti-Semitic propaganda is a valuable tool for aspiring mass movements and totalitarian regimes. By proclaiming the existence of a powerful, secretive, demonic enemy they build a shared hatred as a unifying force for recruitment of adherents. Totalitarian governments including those of Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Revolutionary Iran and radical organizations including Hamas, the PLO, Hizbullah, White Supremists, and Black Muslims have all defined Jews as a threat which only they can confront.**

**These 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century purveyors of shared hatred of Jews have all done it with the aid of Antisemitic political cartoons which use an identical set of graphic images to convey an assortment of viral beliefs. The power of graphic images to communicate is enhanced by their use in political cartoons which speak in metaphors. Their ability to spread virally has now expanded because of the digital age and their appeal enhanced because of a growingly “post-Literate” society.**

**These image-codes can be divided into three distinct families. The first two families were codified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are taken from ancient and medieval libels along with newly developed 20<sup>th</sup> century codes. The Dehumanization Codes deny to Jews the natural empathy felt for fellow humans. Its codes spread the beliefs that Jews are vermin, blood drinkers, or demons in league with demonic forces. The Stereotyping Codes portray Jews as rich, ugly, money-grubbing, powerful, and secretly controlling the Banks, the Media, and the World. Combined, the two families of codes teach that Jews are rich, ugly, demonic, powerful and enemies of the social order.**

**The Holocaust proved the Jews to be victims and powerless. The environment in much of the west then became hostile to open Antisemitism. From a memetic point of view Antisemitism can be seen as a virus, which to survive developed a Holocaust-resistant strain. The Moral Inversion Codes simply repackage the horror by inverting it. Jews are portrayed as the perpetrators rather than the victims; Jews as Nazis. This new and virulent strain is now infecting cartoonists and their cartoons in pandemic proportions.**

**This paper describes the identification and examination of Antisemitic image-codes embedded in contemporary political cartoons.**

## 1. The Function of Anti-Semitic Propaganda

During the twentieth century, two major European antidemocratic mass movements employed the use of Antisemitic propaganda in political cartoons; one to the extreme left, the other the extreme right (i.e. the Stalinist Soviet State and Hitler’s Nazi movement). This brings to the forefront their shared motivation for promoting Antisemitism. In order to gain acceptance and purpose within a population, all mass movements must find a function and role to play. As Erich Hoffer observed:

*“The technique of a mass movement aims to infect people with a malady and then offer the movement as a cure... mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil.”<sup>1</sup>*

Both Stalin’s Communist party and Hitler’s Nazi movement demonized the Jewish people. The goal of the propaganda distributed was to build a unifying, shared hatred in the public’s mind. This shared hatred and obsession with eradicating the ‘devil’ amongst them gave purpose to the Nazi and Communist parties. These mass movements created the ‘Jewish problem’, a problem to which only they could offer a solution.

*“Jews are a valuable hostage given to me by the democracies. Antisemitic propaganda in all countries is an almost indispensable medium for the extension of our political campaign. You will see how little time we will need in order to upset the ideas and the criteria of the whole world, simply and purely by attacking Judaism”*

*Adolf Hitler:*

*The Voice of Destruction: Conversations with Hitler (1940) page 236  
Hermann Rauschning*

## 2. Image codes and Political cartoons

Graphic images are a means of human communication that precedes written alphabets by thousands of years. Prehistoric cave paintings still “speak to us”. We close our eyes at scary moments in Horror movies to prevent the powerful images from being “burnt into our memories”. Religions have banned the use of “graven images”. Others eagerly made use of their communicative power through the use of icons, statues, and idols. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century graphic images were widely used to efficiently and effectively infect the masses with a viral hatred of Jews. In the pre Holocaust pages of Nazi newspapers and in post-WWII pages of Soviet humor magazines, cartoons were used to focus the attention of readers on this common enemy. These cartoons spoke through a specific set of graphic codes rich in anti-Jewish meaning. However, the fall of Stalinism and Nazism did not spell the end of these powerful graphic codes. They continued to live, embedded in

---

<sup>1</sup> Erich Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass movements* (1951)

cartoons spread by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Russian Fascists, Neo-Nazis, and White Supremists. These aspiring mass movements, eager to attract followers, utilized the spread of Antisemitic beliefs through graphic images to further their grasp on the public.

Even today, cartoons from openly Antisemitic regimes such as Iran and Syria regularly make use of a specific set of Antisemitic image-codes. The purpose of the codes is to define Jews, Judaism, and the Jewish People as a powerful force corrupting and secretly controlling human society. This in turn, creates the imaginary threat, real to the population, which only the “movement” can defeat.

The widespread use of these codes has now virally entered the consciousness of political cartoonists in democratic societies throughout the world, the Antisemitic codes embedded in cartoons presented as valid political comments. These meme-carrying images are a graphic vocabulary of the same anti-Jewish libels which were originally codified and mass distributed by Hitler’s Nazi movement and later employed by Stalinist Communism.

As evident from cartoons around the globe, use of these image-codes in the metaphors of political cartoons has expanded beyond the groups known for transmitting Antisemitic images. The principal of memetics explains the vast and far reaching presence of these image-codes today.

### **3. Memetics**

A computer virus is a software program. The word “virus” is derived from ‘viral’ because of a virus’s shared characteristic with all other viral entities; the ability to replicate or reproduce itself. “Computer viruses” spread copies of themselves from one computer to millions of other computers. Just as viruses spread, beliefs, ideas, and notions can also spread, moving from one person to many others. Successful beliefs are replicated as they proliferate through a population, in effect spreading copies of themselves from one brain to millions of other brains. Replicating beliefs that spread throughout a human population have been called “brain viruses” or “memes”. Meme is derived from Greek meaning “to imitate or mime”.

*Memetics provides new insight into the way our minds, societies, and cultures work. Rather than look at the development of culture as a sequence of ideas and discoveries that build upon one another, what would it be like to look at culture as a meme pool, where the ideas in our heads are shaped and transported by various forces including mind viruses? Are they helping or harming us? Can we control them? Can our enemies create new ones and infect us with them?*

*Page 64: Virus of the Mind: The New Science of the Meme (1996) By Richard Brodie*

Memes spread through a population similarly to a biological virus. Sweeping cultural changes and spreading belief systems can be understood if they are examined as epidemics.

*Returning to the abstract model of epidemia, it becomes evident that this model can be applied to phenomena that have nothing to do with disease: the circulation of objects, money, customs, or the propagation of affects and information. Fashion, the circulation of violence and even rumors, those contagions passing from mouth to ear, are all epidemics.*

Guillaume, M. (1987) ‘The metamorphoses of epidemia’, in M. Feher and S. Kwinter (eds.) *Zone 1–2: The Contemporary City*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 60.

Although memes are frequently transmitted by “word of mouth”, they can be dispersed through other mediums as well. There are two general types of memophores (i.e. conveyors of memes); auditory and image-based. Auditory memophores includes jingles, sayings, and nicknames whereas image-based examples include idols, icons, paintings, and cartoons.

#### **4. Memetics and Antisemitism**

As a viral belief system, Antisemitism has historically used image-based memophores to spread its constituent memes. In the past these memophores appeared in woodcuts, etchings, paintings, murals and stained glass windows. Image-codes taken from these medieval works can be found, alongside newly created image-codes being used by 20<sup>th</sup> century mass movements in cartoons which were mass produced in newspapers and magazines and presented as valid political commentary.

What was considered mass production in the age of 20<sup>th</sup> century mass movements is dwarfed by the potential “viral” distribution afforded by our 21<sup>st</sup> century digital reality. The most successful distribution systems of information at present are computer viruses and spam email. Second to those is the forwarding of content by users to a list of his/her friends and contacts, commercially exploited as “viral marketing”.

*“Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions”*

*Wilson, R.F. (2000/2005) ‘The six simple principles of viral marketing’, Web Marketing Today, [http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm]*

When a contemporary professional cartoonist draws a cartoon it may first be replicated on newspaper printing presses. However, on the Internet the cartoon can be distributed virally, without cost or limit, to millions of viewers. Like a chain letter, an emailed page of jokes, a Youtube video, or a computer virus it is replicated by being forwarded, re-

forwarded, and re-forwarded once again. Each replicated copy carries the same impact and message of the original. Viral distribution has revolutionized the way information and memes move throughout the world. What once might have only circulated around a small city, state or even country now can freely cross international boundaries and leap across continents.

Image-based memophores are more important than ever. We used to speak of literate and illiterate but digital society seems to be post-literate. People can read, but reading has become a chore. Increasingly, the content being virally forwarded is largely photographs, videos, and cartoons.

*(Communication) is moving toward a mixed model of written/audio and visual communication that focuses, where possible, on visual communication more than on written text or audio. Users prefer to watch more than to read.*

*Page42 ECulture: Cultural Content in the Digital Age 2009 By Alfredo M. Ronchi*

Visual content is the new medium of choice. Keeping up with modern preferences, vehicles carrying Antisemitic memes have moved from woodcuts and paintings to being almost exclusively transmitted through cartoons. Perfectly repackaged for viral distribution.

## **5. Contemporary Cartoons and Infected Cartoonists**

Most cartoons speak in metaphors. The immense power of the metaphor is its ability to set the terms and backdrop of the discussion. The graphic codes of incitement created by 20<sup>th</sup> century mass movements and taken from medieval works of art can increasingly be found in contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century editorial cartoons. They are hidden in plain view, posing as metaphors and defended as valid political comments. The image-codes, primarily metaphors, are used in political cartoons which are also largely metaphorical. Their power to virally transmit is enhanced by use of the metaphor form. A response to an allegation presented as a metaphor, such as a political cartoon, is framed in terms of the acceptance or rejection of the metaphorical premise. The viewer is restricted to the framing of the metaphor regardless of its irrelevance to a proper or wider discussion of the topic.

*Metaphors produce ideological effects because they are selective accounts of experience. Understanding X in terms of Y emphasizes only some features and discounts others. It organizes our imagination about X in one way rather than another. We model X according to the features and relationships between elements found in Y, although we might have modeled it on a completely different set of elements and relations*

*Cultural Software A Theory of Ideology J. N. Balkin Yale University Press (1998)  
Page 245*

Viewed memetically, these image-codes transmit Antisemitic memes to the viewer. These memes attempt to replicate in the brains of viewers, just as a software virus attempts to replicate in the memory of each new computer it comes into contact with. In the digital world, people forwarding “infected” cartoons to others can be understood as people being used as hosts by the meme-bearing codes to spread their message.

*Memes “use” people for the purpose of their own propagation. We should not understand such anthropomorphic language literally: memes no more than genes have wants, desires, purposes, or interests. Rather, this is merely a shorthand way of describing how natural selection works on units of cultural transmission.*

*Cultural Software A Theory of Ideology J. N. Balkin Yale University Press (1998)  
Page 61*

In contemporary use, Antisemitic memophore image-codes are incorporated into cartoons both with and without willful intent to “infect” the viewer. Users with intent include contemporary antidemocratic movements such as the Iranian Islamic Republic, Hamas, al Qaeda, Hizbullah, and Arab dictatorships. Whereas contemporary cartoonists from countries such as the United States or Australia, unwittingly produce cartoons containing image-codes which transmit hidden Antisemitic memes.

A cartoonist infected with these viral meme codes of Antisemitism will use these memophores in his cartoons (such as the “devourer of children”, “blood-drinking”, or “money-hungry” memophore). A 21<sup>st</sup> century cartoonist who is infected may have no more control over his compulsion to insert infectious Antisemitic image-codes in his drawings than a person with a cold can control his sneezing out of germs potentially infecting other human hosts. Such a cartoonist may become a serial creator of Antisemitic cartoons while sincerely believing that he is creating fair and honest work.

*Memes are like symbionts that alter the behavior of their hosts, much as the rabies virus alters the behavior of a dog by making it more aggressive, increasing its salivation, and preventing it from swallowing. Just as the genes in the rabies virus make use of the host to spread their genetic information, memes use their hosts to spread their own memetic information.*

*Page 62 Cultural Software A Theory of Ideology J. N. Balkin Yale University Press (1998)*

Any critical study of Antisemitism in contemporary art must include the examination and the identification of the specific memophoric image-codes used and the meme/beliefs they transmit.

## **6. Code Origins and Codification**

Medieval Antisemitism was a belief system which incorporated the beliefs that Jews had sexual contact with pigs, drank the blood of abducted Christian children, were in league

with the devil, and had horns. Artists of the times used their artwork to depict hate-provoking, blood curdling images of such scenes. These inflammatory depictions were adapted and organized into a collection of codes by 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian states and mass movements and used in political cartoons. These image-codes, and the varieties and variations which they have spawned, can now be found, disguised as metaphors, in current political cartoons. Each code carries a specific Antisemitic libel.

The original image-codes, as codified by the Nazi movement can be organized into two broad categorical families based on the nature of the memes they transmit.

One family, dehumanization, houses the codes that spread the dehumanizing memes. For example, that Jews are vermin, blood drinkers, or demons in league with demonic forces. The second family, stereotyping, portrays Jews as rich, ugly, money-grubbing, powerful, and secretly controlling the Banks, the Media, and the World. These memes resonate with existing Antisemitism in the minds of potential host populations. Combined, the two families teach that Jews are rich, demonic, powerful and enemies of the social order.

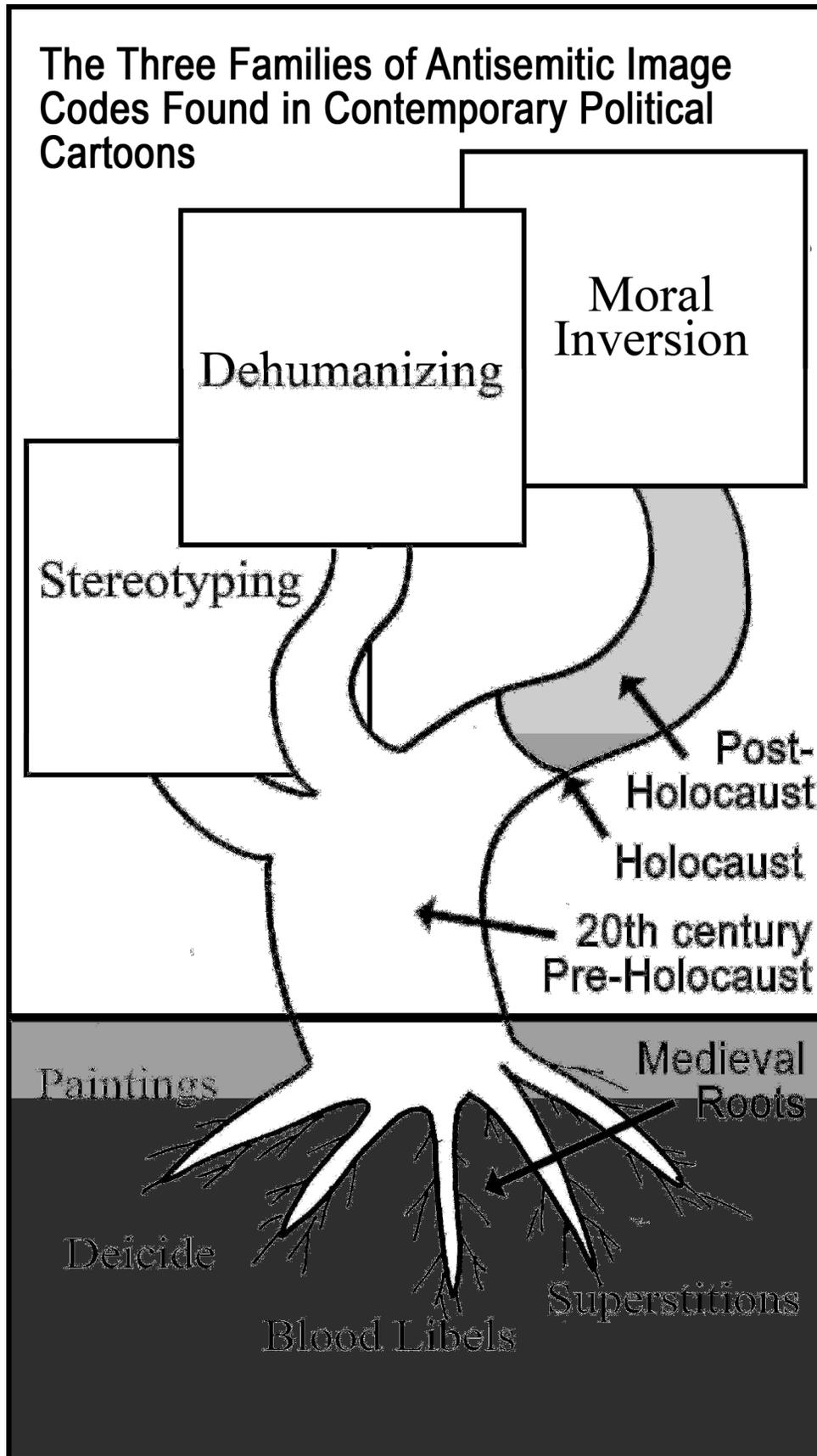
The Holocaust forced the codes to evolve. Images of the extermination of European Jewry, the horrendous piles of skeleton-thin bodies, photographs of men and women standing in line, stripped naked, waiting to be shot and thrown into an open pit circulated around the world. The Jews were unarguably targeted and powerless victims of the Nazi Holocaust. The environment in much of the west became hostile to open Antisemitism. In response, like any successful viral entity, the virus of Antisemitism adapted to the new conditions and evolved a new “Holocaust-Resistant” strain. This new strain is now infecting cartoonists and their cartoons in pandemic proportions.

The Holocaust-resistant codes do not deny the Nazi Death Camps or the Holocaust. They simply repackage the horror by “inverting” it. Jews are presented as the perpetrators rather than the victims. The new codes carry memes including “The Jews are acting like Nazis”, “The Jews perpetrated a Holocaust”, “The Jews operate an Auschwitz-type death camp”, “The piles of skeletal victims are not Jewish but rather the victims of Jews”, and “The Jews are Nazis”. These new and infectious “Holocaust-Resistant” codes are here after collectively referred to as “Moral Inversion” codes.

The Moral Inversion codes are new, fresh, and rapidly spreading their memes. Moral Inversion has taken its place along side the two earlier Pre-Holocaust families of codes. While the Pre-Holocaust codes have become dated and to some extent politically incorrect, Moral Inversion codes are easily swallowed, readily believed, and increasingly part of accepted wisdom

The Arab destruction of centuries-old Jewish holy places has given birth to a new strain of Moral Inversion codes. Parallel to the Holocaust-resistant Moral Inversion codes, these new memophores carry the inverted belief that it is the Jewish state destroying holy places and Islamic holy sites victimized.

### **Diagram 1**



## **7. Codes from Generation to Generation**

The following three figures illustrate the ability of the image codes to survive and remain potent through the passage of time and to sustain themselves through radical changes in society. Each of the following figures is a sample of a single Antisemitic image-code as it remains active, continuing to replicate and infect from an instance of its appearance in:

1. Pre Holocaust Nazi cartoons
2. Post-Holocaust Soviet cartoons
3. Contemporary Work.

The first two examples are of Zoomorphic image codes. The first is the Vulture code and the second the Spider code. The third example shows instances of the pairing of the Money Hungry and Hook Nosed codes as they move from Pre-Holocaust Nazi period to the post-war Soviet era and finally to contemporary work.

Figure 1

- The “Jew as a Vulture” code  
1. In a Nazi Cartoon  
2. In a Soviet Cartoon  
3. In a contemporary Cartoon



"The Vulture"  
(from *Der Stuermer*)



"The Vulture"  
(from *Zarya Vostoka*, 1980)



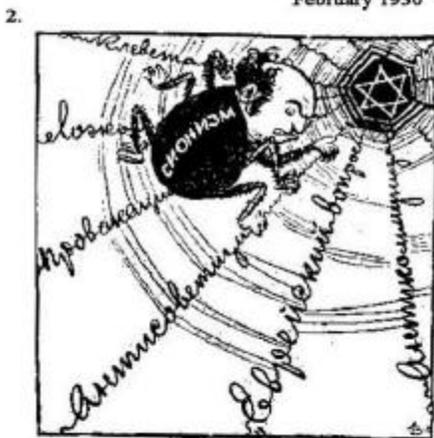
February 26, 2007 Jordan

Figure 2

The “Jew as a Spider” code  
1. In a Nazi Cartoon  
2. In a Soviet Cartoon  
3. In a contemporary Cartoon



**Die Ausgefangten**  
Der Stürmer (Nazi Germany)  
February 1930



Soviet Moldova (Soviet Union)  
August 27, 1971



Al-Hayat Al-Jadida  
October 21, 2001

Figure 3

- The “Money Hungry” and “Hook Nosed Jew” codes
1. In a Nazi Cartoon
  2. In a Soviet Cartoon
  3. In a contemporary Cartoon

1.



Der Stürmer, 1938, Vol. 4.  
“Roosevelt against High Finance”

2.



Vechernya Moskva, 1973. “The Modern Prayercoat”

3.



Chicago Tribune May 30, 2003

## **8. Code Families**

There are three broad families of codes:

1. The Dehumanizing Family
2. The Stereotyping Family
3. The Moral Inversion Family

See Figure 4

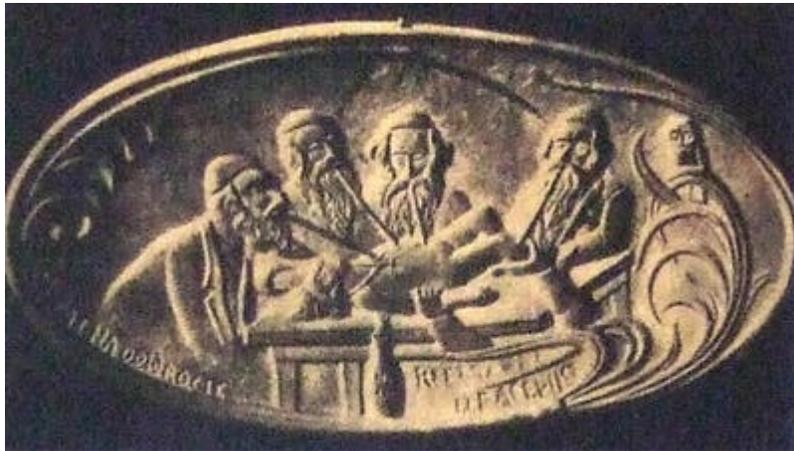


## 1. The Dehumanizing Family of Codes

Dehumanizing codes answer the question of “Who are the Jews?” in such a way as to deprive Jews of the empathy normally felt for human beings. There are two sub-families within the Dehumanizing Family of codes: Zoomorphic codes and Demonization codes. The Zoomorphic codes are metaphorical. They transmit the belief that Jews are like spiders, snakes, rats, vultures, and other animals which the viewer already views negatively. The Demonization codes portray Jews as clawed demons, horned devils, cannibals, baby eaters, devouring mouths, and blood drinkers and blood sucking vampires.

The images in Figure 5 and Figure 6 transmit the ancient “blood libel” message that Jews are vampire drinkers of blood. The first (Figure 5) is a photograph of a Polish wood panel carving from about 1900. It depicts a group of Jews sucking the blood (through straws) from the child who is their victim. The blood sucking image code is used again in a contemporary cartoon more than a century later by an Indian artist (Figure 6).

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



## **2. The Stereotyping Family of Codes**

Stereotyping codes address the question of “What are Jews like?” These codes transmit the belief that there are a set of traits and characteristics that are common to all Jews. They then define those “Jewish” characteristics and present them in graphic imagery. Stereotyping codes depict Jews as controlling the world, the media, as money hungry and brutal, blood-spilling murderers of everyone from Jesus to Palestinian babies in Gaza.

One of these image codes, the Hook Nose code, carries the meme that Jews can be identified by their uniquely big noses. Another, the Money Hungry code, carries the belief that Jews are motivated by their avarice, greed, and simple love of money. In Figure 7 below, a 2003 cartoon below from the Chicago Tribune, Dick Locher, a Pulitzer Prize recipient, addresses the question of how to bridge the gulf in Middle East negotiations. The cartoon features the Jew with a huge beak-like nose being tempted to follow a trail of dollar bills.

Figure 7



### 3. The Moral Inversion Family of Codes

The historic Holocaust and the contemporary targeting of Jews and Jewish Institutions by terrorist organizations are an impediment to the portrayal of the Jew as the powerful “devil” referred to earlier as the unifying force needed by mass movements in their quests for power. Memetically, Antisemitism and the Antisemitic image-codes needed to evolve into a form which would deny Jewish victimhood. Moral Inversion Codes depict the victims as the perpetrators. Thus the Jew becomes the Nazi or the terrorist suicide bomber, rather than their target and victim!

In Figure 8

In a cartoon from Brazil:

Arabs and a Muslim mosque inside of a “Jewish Prison Camp” with the Israeli guards dressed as Nazis and German writing on the gate.

Figure 8



In Figure 9  
The Nazi code in a cartoon from Lebanon

Figure 9



## 9. The Star and the Codes

The six-pointed star has been a Middle Eastern, occult, and kabalistic symbol for centuries but the use of the six-pointed star to represent Jews and Judaism is relatively new. It has only been since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that the “Star of David” began to be used as a Jewish symbol. Today, the Jewish Star carries a much broader meaning than the simple identification of a religion or church. It represents Jews, the Jewish People, and Judaism. But it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Jewish Star became the unique, universal and ubiquitous symbol representing Jews, the Jewish People, and Judaism. This, in no small part, is due to the intensive use of the graphic symbol by the Nazis.

*“The most prominent symbol of Judaism throughout the Early Middle Ages was the Torah Shrine. While the Menorah often appeared together with it, the Ten Commandments on tablets, the hands of the Kohanim giving the priestly blessing and even the Temple were more significant than the Star of David and the Menorah. But Clearly at the end of the 19th century with the birth of a new more secular definition of Judaism and as a Jewish nation emerged, symbols were sought which would be easily identifiable, did not have excessive religious connotations (although some was necessary) and which could harken back to political/national settings without a religious emphasis. The Menorah, which had been a symbol of the Maccabean revolt (the Maccabees were a favorite of the early Zionists and nationalists although the symbol was clearly associated with the Temple), was chosen, and the rather abstract and ignoble “Star of David” whose checkered past was known to only a few scholars, but whose international and universal themes had already emerged as significant among late 19th and early 20th century thinkers.”*

*(page 286) “Nationalism, Zionism and ethnic mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond” by Michael Berkowitz*

As a symbol, the “Jewish Star” is agglutinative that is, when “Glued on to” other symbols it forms a derivative or compound symbol to expresses a single definite meaning. For example a Jewish Star on a spider or an octopus forms a compound code which transmits the dehumanizing zoomorphic message that the Jewish People, the Jewish State, Judaism, and by extension the Jewish shopkeeper down the block are spider-like or octopus-like. See Figure 10 and Figure 11 below.

Figure 10

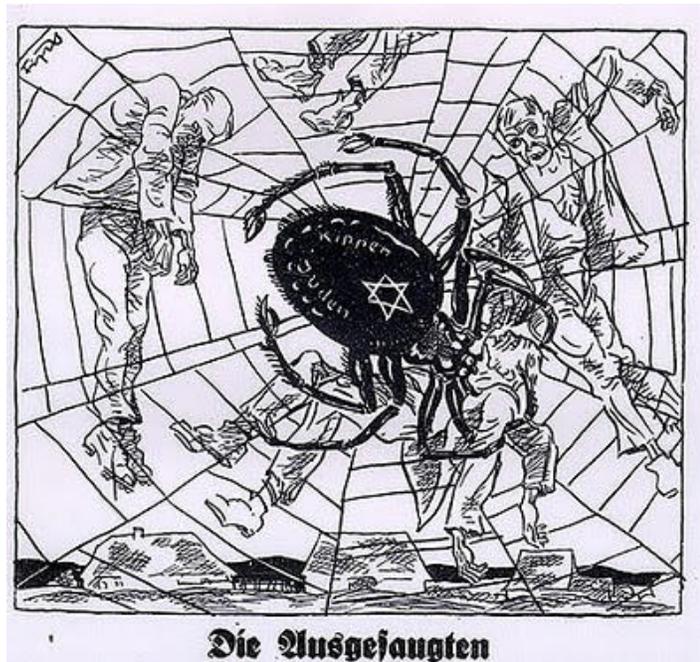
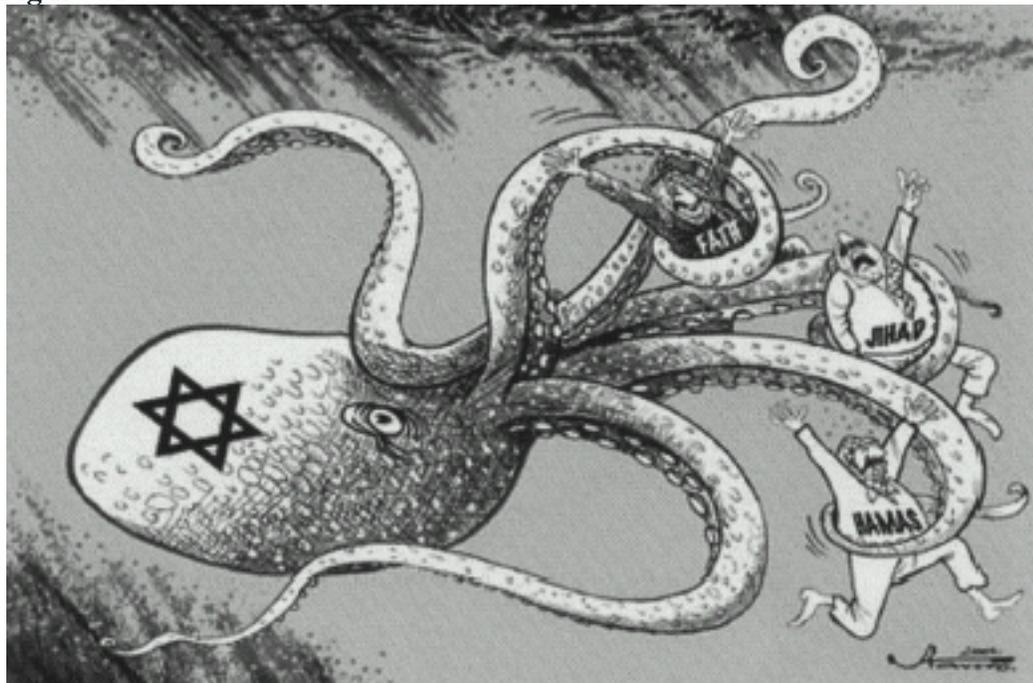


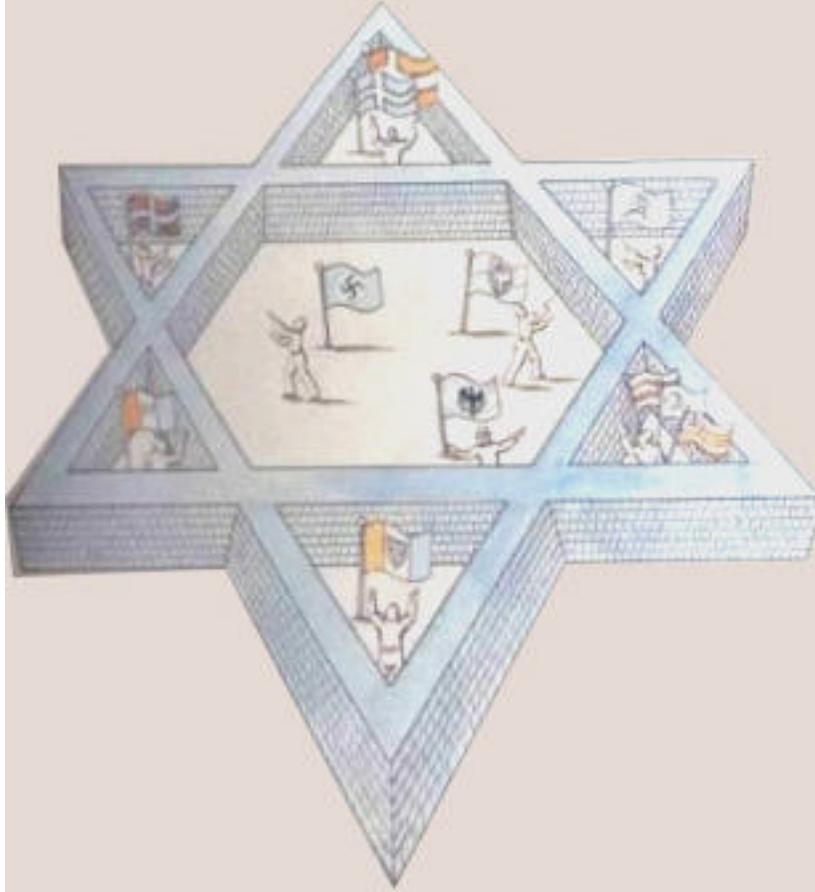
Figure 11



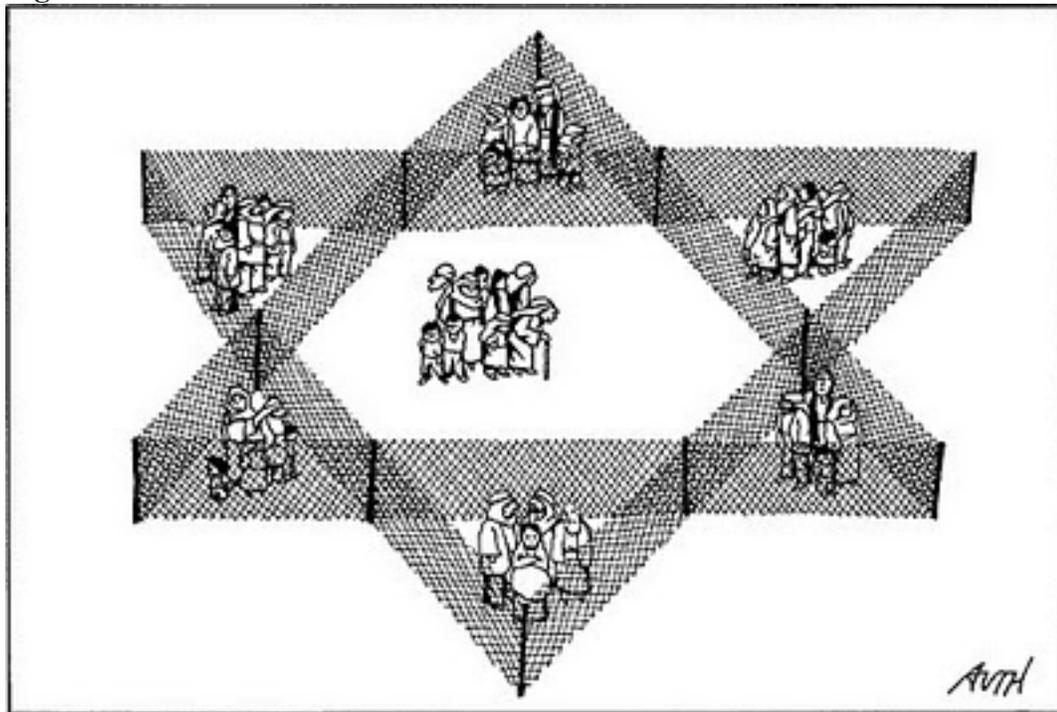
- **Death Star code:** In addition to its use in conjunction with other symbols, the “Jewish Star” appears independently as a specific code. The “Death Star” code portrays the star (and hence the Jews, the Jewish State, the Jewish People, and Judaism) as murderous, imprisoning, agent of death, strangling, back stabbing,

etc.) See Figure 12 from 1930’s Nazi propaganda and Figure 13 from the 2003 Seattle Times.

**Figure 12**



**Figure 13**



- **Clusters:** In contemporary political cartoons, the codes often appear in clusters, delivering a set of subliminal messages. See Figure 14 below; a cartoon distributed by the Arab media (with an explanation of the individual codes clustered within).

**Figure 14**



- a. The star is a “glued on” symbol to indicate that the eater is “the Jews” (or the Jewish State, the Jewish people, or Judaism)
- b. The glass of blood is the “Blood Drinkers” libel code.
- c. The dead baby on the plate is the “Infanticide” code.
- d. The child is about to be eaten. The “Baby Eaters” code.
- e. The American Flag fork in the hand of “the Jew” communicates the Jewish “World Domination” code.

### **10. A Representative Sample**

The meme carrying Antisemitic image-codes have survived and replicated themselves in cartoons for more than eighty years and through major social changes. It is equally important to note their viral spread to varied artists of our digital age. Below (Figure 15) is a representative sample of contemporary instances of the Devouring Mouth image-code which carries the message that Jews devour everything in their path. The Devouring Mouth image relays a basic childhood image of a cannibalistic fiend.

**Figure 15**



2008 (Syria)

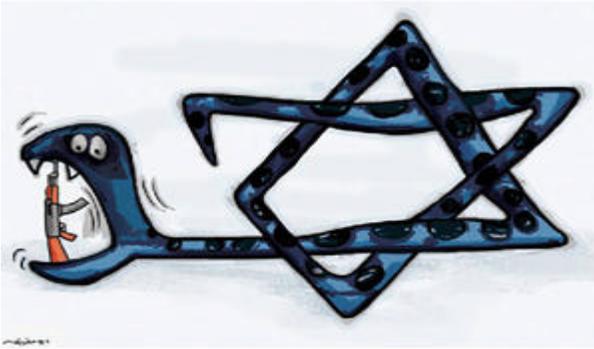


2008 (Jordan)

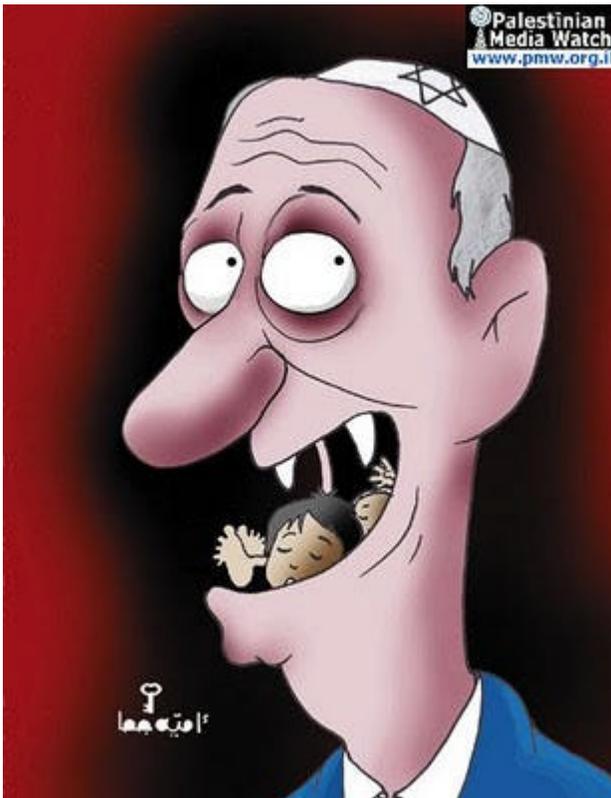


2007 (Jordan)

Memetics and the Viral Spread of Antisemitism Through “Coded Images” in Political Cartoons



2009(Jordan)



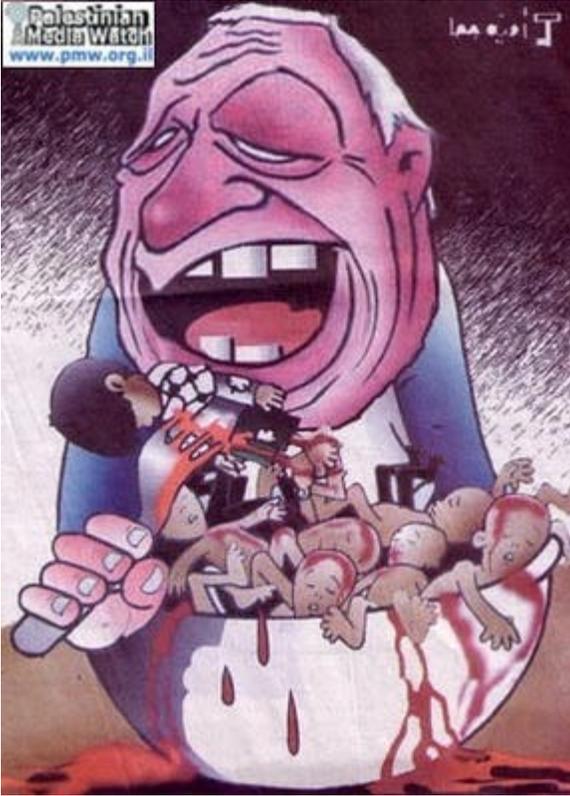
2006 (Palestinian Authority)



2007 (Palestinian Authority)



2007 (Palestinian Authority)



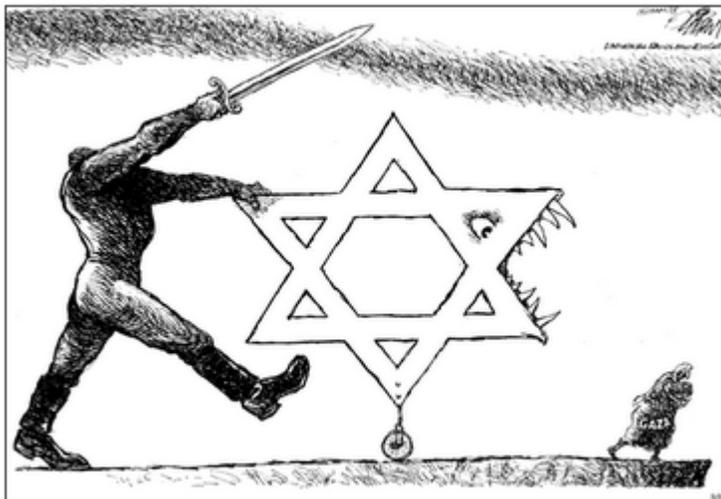
2004 (Palestinian Authority)



2004 (Palestinian Authority)



2006 (India)



2009 (USA): A sophisticated cartoon by Pat Oliphant, the most widely syndicated political cartoonist in the world. Note the use of the “Devouring Mouth” code inside the “Death Star” code with the Moral Inversion “Jew as Nazi” code coupled with the “Killing Children in their Mothers’ Arms” code. The entire cluster of codes can be absorbed subliminally as an image of the flag of Israel, with the two horizontal bars and the star between them. The wheel at the bottom of the star tricks the eye into not seeing the flag.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has demonstrated that there are simple, direct, and fair criteria for diagnosing the presence of Antisemitism in political cartoons. Given the fact that the Internet is a natural environment for viral communication and the fact of a post-literate public, we can expect a radical bloom of viral Antisemitism fueled by cartoons. The contagion of professional cartoonists in western countries by the image-codes and their resultant replication of the codes in their own work can and should be approached as society approaches any communicable disease. Basic to the defense against contagion is an identification of the viral strains and of the conditions and factors involved in the spread of the disease. Memetics and the Viral Spread of Antisemitism Through “Coded Messages” in Political Cartoons is a beginning.

With thanks to Rachel DeFilipp for assistance in the cartoon research and preparation of this working paper.