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Cartoons and the new anti-Semitism

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the use of the Star of David symbol in cartoons published in the three months following the May 31, 2010 Gaza flotilla incident reflects a global new anti-Semitism. The objective is to identify and examine how particular signifiers in editorial-style cartoons are used to communicate an anti-Semitic message. Over the three-month period immediately following the flotilla incident the mechanical and automatic retrieval method, Google Alerts captured cartoons published internationally on the Internet each day. Roland Barthes' theory of systematic semiotic analysis was employed to examine visual aspects of cartoons for signs which connoted anti-Semitic messages against a framework of criteria drawn from a synthesis of recognised definitions of anti-Semitism. The research supports claims that a new anti-Semitism has spread into the consciousness of mainstream culture. The research suggests that criticism of Israel via the medium of cartoons can cross the line from legitimate criticism to established anti-Semitic manifestations.

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Notes on spelling and terminology

Anti-Semitism: The thesis applies the spelling, anti-Semitism or Anti-Semitism where appropriate. Where quotations and titles of works render the term differently, typically without the hyphen (Antisemitism), the quoted text's spelling is retained.

Cartoon: This term encompasses political cartoons, editorial cartoons and satirical cartoons, in any static form of two-dimensional visual art, photography, illustration or composite.

Gaza Strip: The geographic territory officially known as the Gaza Strip is rendered Gaza, following colloquial usage.

Jews: To limit lengthy descriptors such as "Jewish people", the term Jew or Jews is generally applied. It is acknowledged that the terms, Jew and Jews may have colloquially derogatory usage. This is not the intention and apologies are offered in advance.