

# It's not Art, it's Antisemitism!

## A brief introduction to anti-Semitic imagery

### Long history

The mural-like banner „People's Justice“ by Taring Padi, which was installed at Documenta 15, then covered and finally taken down, dates from 2002. The anti-Semitic tropes employed in the artwork are however much older and cannot be separated from centuries'-old tradition of anti-Jewish imagery:

### Demonization

One figure shows an anti-Semitic stereotype of an Orthodox Jew, with a black hat, sidelocks, a large nose, pointy teeth, who has bloodshot eyes and grins maliciously. Such demonization of Jewish people already existed in the Middle Ages. Anti-Judaic motives were used to foster hatred between Judaism and Christianity. Martin Luther, for example, described Jews as bloodthirsty, vengeful, greedy for money and murderous. Jews were accused of poisoning wells in order to kill Christians or of murdering Christian children to drink their blood for ritual purposes. To this day, conspiracy theories worldwide refer to these old antisemitic myths.

### Dehumanization/insult

A second figure of a soldier wearing a scarf with a Star of David and a helmet bearing the word Mossad is depicted not with a human face but that of a pig. Anti-Semitic tropes are clearly evident here too: In Judaism, like in Islam, the pig is the symbol of impurity par excellence. Anyone who draws Jewish people as pigs is therefore dehumanizing and insulting them in a deliberately anti-Semitic way.

### Victim blaming

One of the aforementioned figures on the banner wears a black hat with a runic Nazi "SS" insignia. The other one, a soldier-like figure, wears clothing resembling a Nazi uniform, a scarf with a Star of David and a helmet bearing the word Mossad (Israel's secret service). The message conveyed insinuates that Israeli Jews are as bad as Nazis were back then. Yet, equating Jewish people with the Nazi criminals, who systematically murdered more than six million Jews in Europe, is employing a perpetrator-victim reversal and relativizes the Holocaust. The depiction, as portrayed on the banner, is an anti-Semitic classic that spread from Germany to the world after 1945.

### Antisemitism and the (modern) critique of capitalism

The anti-Semitic figures in the artwork are embedded in an overall anti-capitalist image. A common anti-Semitic trope links Jews to the personification of hated forms of capitalist exploitation: A capitalism not of productive labour and industry, but of parasites and overarching power – money and finance, speculators and bankers symbolizing merchants of greed and malice.

### Cultural revisionism

It is now often argued that the images subject of discussion were not intended to be Anti-Semitic but had to be seen in light of the artists' specific cultural context. Such statements are on one hand trivializing anti-Jewish hatred and on the other hand employ cultural revisionism. To deploy imagery that insults, dehumanizes and demonizes Jewish people is always antisemitic – worldwide. Moreover, arguing that people from the so-called "global south" do not know any better due to their cultural background needs to be called out as one thing: racist.