

International Conference: "The Jew as legitimation"

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During an International Conference "The Jew as Legitimation" in Amsterdam, on 29 August 2013, Evelien Gans presented a paper on 'The notion of "Jewish passivity". Explaining the Shoah: the Jew as legitimation'.

In this paper Gans showed how the original image of the Jew, in biblical times, as courageous turned in the Diaspora into its opposite. Jews as 'unbelievers' in the Christian world were not allowed to be part of the armies in the countries they lived, nor to bear arms. Most of the time they could not defend themselves against pogroms and the like by force of arms. That's how the stereotype of the passive and resigned Jew came into being. The paper focused on how this stereotype was frequently used after World War II in the accusation that the Jews had not defended themselves against the Nazi's. This happened, for example, in books and other publications after the liberation, in the wake of the Eichmann trial in 1961, in questions imbedded in a centrally drafted final examination about the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands – part of the subject of History – in 1983, and finally in recent Dutch Holocaust historiography. In the work of some Dutch known historians Jews figure as for the greater part conspicuously passive, choosing mostly not to resist and not to go in hiding – also when they had the chance to do so. This is part of a trend of leveling historiography in which the situation and dilemmas of victims and bystanders are too easily thrown together. In this context it can be interpreted as a mechanism according to which the Jews and their supposed attitude and actions (or the lack of them) serve both, more generally, as an explanation of the Shoah, and as legitimation for non-Jewish passivity and shortcomings.