

ESA (European Sociological Association) Conference in Thessaloniki

29-08-2012

During the ESA – conference of the section devoted to **Ethnic Relations, Racism and Antisemitism** Evelien Gans presented her paper on post-war antisemitism in the Netherlands: *'They have forgotten to gas you!': an after-war Dutch antisemitic abuse - The phenomenon of turning the Holocaust against the Jews*

Abstract:

This paper will elaborate on the antisemitic curse 'They have forgotten to gas you', which became a regular antisemitic insult in the Netherlands soon after the liberation. It is an anti-Jewish stereotype of the post-Holocaust era in which the Jew is seen as someone 'to be gassed'. In fact, the antisemitic insult is a perverse starting point for the identification of Jews with the Shoah: perverse because it does so not in a reflective and historical but in a stereotypical and antisemitic way. It arose in the period that much had been published in the papers about the bewildering facts and fate of the Jews in the concentration camps. The cursing went on in any case up till the sixties. Several Jews went to court, and in most cases the offenders were punished. The abuse 'they have forgotten to gas you' was taken more seriously by Jews themselves and punished more severely by the court than the simple insult 'filthy Jew'. Halfway the sixties, however, the judges seem to have started to pass contradictory judgments.

The abuse occurred most of the time during rows on the street, during parking- and traffic problems, against Jewish employers and neighbors. It seems to have been, mainly, an example of lower (middle) class antisemitism. (Higher class people kept their prejudices mostly to themselves, to their diaries or behind closed doors). Often the rude outburst was caused by social-economic resentments, fed by old stereotypes like the Rich Jew – arrogant, powerful and materialistic. But the point of attachment was new: the Shoah or Holocaust which was, during these emotional confrontations, no reason for empathy, but for aggression. In this respect it was, in analytical and theoretical respect, a first manifestation of what has been called secondary antisemitism: the Shoah was turned against the Jews – a phenomenon which has become a more general pattern since. This paper will also give rise to questions like: originated a similar insult in other European countries as well, and if so, what were the reactions of both Jews and Gentiles? And: is it a general historical, sociological and psychological mechanism that the majority transforms possible feelings of empathy and guilt towards a persecuted or repressed minority into hate and aggression? What is, in this context, the function of stereotypes?