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Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Holocaust, Israel and “the Jew”: Histories of Antisemitism in Postwar Dutch Society by Remco Ensel and Evelien Gans

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The Holocaust, Israel and “the Jew”: Histories of Antisemitism in Postwar Dutch Society. Edited by *Remco Ensel and Evelien Gans*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. 598 pages. \$43.50 (paper).

This edited volume, an impressive and timely collection of essays, is the result of the research project “The Dynamics of Contemporary Antisemitism in a Globalizing Context” directed by Evelien Gans (of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation [NIOD] Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam) and co-edited by Remco Ensel, anthropologist and historian at Radboud University Nijmegen. Contributors include Annemarike Remmelaar, Katie Digan, and Willem Wagenaar, while the majority of essays are written by the editors, whose goal is to examine the history of postwar antisemitism in the Netherlands, connecting early post-Shoah manifestations with those of the twenty-first century. The time gap is bridged by a series of chapters addressing antisemitism in specific parts of the population by means of an analysis of incidents and patterns in everyday life, public debates and protests, the media, and commemorations in Dutch society.

The postwar period sounds like a logical starting point for the collection, but the editors address much more than the post-1945 period as many incidents are influenced by the history and memory of the Shoah. The writers provide insight into how Dutch society—including intellectual, educational, political, cultural, and activist circles—has tried to come to terms with its own specific history of the Shoah while exposing the continuities and changes in antisemitism more generally.

Throughout the book, contemporary and current issues are given elaborate coverage, which makes the volume one of almost fluid history, subject to change, full of topics for controversy and debate. Gans, Ensel, and their co-authors delve deeply into a variety of sources and present the dynamics of an incident and the various sides of an argument with ample documentation. In their reconstructions, the editors and writers do not avoid taking their own stand in debates: they present their overview, analysis, and

their own view of what was and is at stake. The most contemporary issues are written in a journalistic style, which is an appealing approach, leaving room for debate and inviting reflection and discussion.

The book contains four parts, beginning with “Post-Liberation Antisemitism”—a period of deep mourning for the decimated Jewish communities of the Netherlands. Antisemitism re-emerged unexpectedly after the war in interactions between survivors and non-Jews. Soon enough, right-wing antisemitism and Holocaust denial were manifest, while subtler silencing mechanisms, aimed specifically at Jewish voices, were at work in left-wing and former resistance circles.

One of the main arguments in the book is that the Shoah and Israel have become “the most important new, that is postwar—points of fixation for expressions of antisemitism” (29–30). The authors show how these fixation points can be observed as functional in many different incidents. In part two, the attitudes toward Israel and Zionism are analyzed in five separate chapters, some of which discuss Turkish anti-Zionism in the Netherlands, forms of leftist anti-Zionism, and a variety of ambivalences and mixed feelings toward Israel. The third part of the book covers the 1980s and 1990s, in which we read about “native Dutch domains,” including the world of soccer (football) fans and their antisemitic slurs, including the history of Ajax (Amsterdam’s football club) and other teams and their attitudes toward Jewishness. The world of imagery—pornographic antisemitism—is also analyzed along with debates about “Shoah fatigue” and better-known Dutch debates about freedom of speech. Debates among Dutch historians are given a separate chapter, in which secondary antisemitism, various forms of relativizing and universalizing in debating techniques, are uncovered. The last section is about migrant identities and antisemitism, focusing on the Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish communities and discussing conspiracy theories in the first decades of the current century. Migration studies and postcolonial tensions are addressed as well, and each of these chapters contains a wealth of newly found data—unusual sources such as texts of songs, poems, and religious

ceremonies are translated into English and thus accessible to a much broader audience.

There is much to discover in these chapters. Neither of the “fixation points” for antisemitism—the Shoah or Israel—is exclusively “Dutch,” as the authors show, but in their precise reconstruction of a number of incidents, we see both Dutch expressions, mechanisms, and manifestations, as well as broader trends in Western Europe, particularly since many stories, images, and stereotypes are distributed online. This makes the book relevant for a broader audience.

These new postwar fixation points (the Shoah and Israel) are among the crucial concepts addressed by Gans and Ensel. The other point of fixation, which has a much longer and more complex history, is the concept of “the Jew” itself as an imaginary and irrational construct, evident in anti-Jewish images, stereotypes, and expressions that are puzzling and paradoxical in their contrasts and seeming incompatibility. Together they form a reservoir of antisemitism. The authors refer to the contradiction inherent in the many stereotypes of “the Jew” as “the Janus-face of antisemitism” (44, 49). For example, the Jew is viewed as both powerful and powerless, prosperous and impoverished, cowardly and cruel, and as both inferior and superior. In the larger reservoir of antisemitism, there are many more than two opposing faces: “[t]he Jew,” historically, has been, and still is, regarded as the explanation and root cause for “all sorts of catastrophes and unwanted developments” in very different circumstances, societies, circles, and periods (41). The antisemite finds in “the Jew” the desperately needed and welcome explanation for his own unhappiness, unease, and misery. Historian Saul Friedlander coined the term “redemptive antisemitism” for this when writing about the Nazis, but it is obviously a recognizable phenomenon beyond the Nazi era as well. Since the Shoah, Jewish survivors, including their children and even their grandchildren, have aroused “feelings of rivalry and envy: envy of ‘the Jew’, who presents himself as the ultimate victim” (52). Indeed, in quite a few postwar incidents, this envy—often masking significant aggression—can be recognized. Victim rivalry is another strong theme, and again and again images of “the Jew” as the powerful player behind the scenes emerge in different forms using familiar mechanisms.

Earlier work on Dutch antisemitism includes the histories by Philo Bregstein (with Leon Poliakov), Chris Quispel, and Dik van Arkel. This volume is inspired by these works and by the broad field of international studies, and the result is a thematic historiography that gives insight into how the small postwar Dutch Jewish community dealt with their neighbors in the Netherlands. The book clearly shows persistent trends in antisemitism and demonstrates how they continue to influence postwar, multicultural, decolonizing societies.

Antisemitism is a never-ending story, with twists and turns and stubborn underlying patterns. The function of the book is sound, and the longer themes the authors identify are convincing, but such a hefty volume on antisemitism may feel overwhelming. After reading the book new questions emerge: what can we say about countering voices, about opposition to antisemitism; where do individual histories contain patterns of coping; what about trans-generational contacts and the transmission of awareness of antisemitism and the need to fight it; what are the stronger and weaker trends in antisemitism, and where are the turning points?

The book's focus is understandably on both the continuity and the transformations of antisemitism, on its relentless persistence, its adaptability, and its mutability. However, can we not also identify moments, situations, or periods in which there was a real gap, break, counter-movement, or absence of antisemitism? Dik van Arkel spoke of waves of antisemitism, and Gans and Ensel convincingly show a very large reservoir of opposed and contradictory anti-Jewish images, actions, and expressions. This concept of a reservoir of antisemitism requires further probing: under which circumstances or conditions is the reservoir opened, and when does it remain shut, like a sluice? The typical Dutch water imagery is no coincidence here. A deluge is rare, but puddles, wet feet, and the threat of a flood are common. However, while dangerous patterns can now be recognized, actual flooding is more exceptional. What is the opposite of antisemitism and where can we find it? What is the tipping point or catalyst stimulating or restricting expressions of antisemitism? We need more insight into the floodgates and the taps in order to keep the reservoir from overflowing. I am convinced that the authors of this volume can identify more of these mechanisms.

A further line of study would be to focus on the deeper historical trends going back before the late nineteenth century. Here the work of historian George Fredrickson on the comparative history of racist regimes is crucial. He showed that racist regimes included fifteenth and sixteenth century Spain and Portugal where the Inquisition drove the Jews out of the Iberian Peninsula, forcing some to flee to the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Middelburg) and some into the Dutch overseas empire (Brazil, New Netherland, Barbados, Guyana, Suriname, and Curacao). This history has had an effect on Dutch antisemitism as well.

This is a very welcome volume, fit for teaching, and suitable as a handbook. It has a keen eye for controversy and tensions, for the political framework of incidents, and for the continuities and transformations of antisemitism. It is highly recommended for use in education on the legacy of the Holocaust and on the history and contemporary dynamics of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination, and also for those who follow developments in the Netherlands.

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Jewish Life in Belarus: The Final Decade of the Stalin Regime (1944–1953). By *Leonid Smilovitsky*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014. 346 pages. \$60 (cloth).

Of the fifteen Soviet republics, Belarus (then Belorussia) suffered the most during World War Two. About one out of every four inhabitants of the area—Belarusians, Russians, Poles, Jews and