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Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a site of memory

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Chapter 2: The Construction of an *In Situ* Memorial Site: Framing Painful Heritage

The symbolic center of the memorial complex at the Hollandsche Schouwburg is situated at the rear of the open courtyard. In the middle of the stage of this former theater, a large pylon is placed atop a base in the form of a Magen David or David's Star. Behind this memorial needle stands an inscribed stone wall dedicated to the memory of victims that were deported during the Nazi occupation. These sculptural



Figure 2. 1. Courtyard. Photograph David Duindam

elements are surrounded by crumbled and eroded brick walls that, in contrast to the pylon and inscribed wall, provide a sense of authenticity (see figure 2.1). The visitor now stands at a site where an essential part of the persecution of the Jews took place. Where the pylon and grey wall are markers that remain external to the visitor's experience, the brick walls create a semi-enclosed and affective space which may be entered in order to somehow make contact with an absent past. The staged authenticity of the walls is evoked by the bare and rough bricks pointing towards the sky and is further reinforced by traces of bricked-up doors and other openings, suggesting that these walls have had previous lives. There is no enclosing roof: the top of the walls are unevenly finished and blackened by erosion. Most of

this courtyard has clearly been designed after World War II; however these walls appear authentic, as if they stood the test of time and now serve as silent witnesses to the tragic events that previously unfolded within this space.

The suggestion of the walls' authenticity enables and even facilitates an affective experience: what visitors see resonates with their expectations, in this case, absence staged through the trope of the ruin, a technique more often employed at Shoah sites.¹ The result is convincing because of the building's history: persecuted Jews awaited deportation within these very walls that are now stripped back to their material essence. However, as literary scholar James Young points out, the ruin can be a problematic form of representation at sites such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum where the debris of gas chambers represent victims through the intended destruction of evidence by the Nazis.² Ruins have a long tradition in the Western world and are intricately related to modernity's historical self-awareness. The aestheticizing quality of ruins begs the question of whether they can truly represent human suffering. They are paradoxical by nature and oscillate between a radical rupture with the past and a sense of continuity, absence and presence; both fragment and whole.³

Visitors often ask if the walls are original to the theater. Some wonder if the building was bombed, destroyed or burned down during the occupation, while pointing at black erosion above. Others realize that the walls are designed to be part of the memorial, because of the regularity of the crumbling. Both reactions demonstrate a familiarity with the ruin trope at similar sites and relate it to the issue of authenticity. To answer the question is rather complex: the current brick walls are only partially the original walls of the former stage. The ruinous character was not a direct consequence of warfare violence, but rather of its aftermath. Subsequent to the building being used for the assembly and deportation of more

¹ For a discussion of the 'geënceneerde leegte' (staged emptiness) of the Anne Frankhuis, see Rob van der Laarse, *De oorlog als beleving: over de musealisering en enscenering van Holocaust-erfgoed* (Amsterdam: Reinwardt Academie, 2010), 25. For the notion of absence employed at former camp sites in the Netherlands, see Roel Hijink, *Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering: de monumentalisering van de Duitse kampen in Nederland* (Dissertation. University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 2010), chapter 6.

² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, chapter 5, in particular p. 132.

³ Literary scholars Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle therefore argue that the 'beholder defines the ruin, and the ruin could not exist without such creative appropriation.' Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 7. Also see Aleida Assmann, Monika Gomille, and Gabriele Rippl, eds., *Ruinenbilder* (Munich: W. Fink, 2002). For James Young, this openness to multiple interpretations can be problematic in the case of former concentration camps, since 'their simple reality as ruins unfortunately works to corroborate all historical explanation—no matter now insidious or farfetched.' James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 175. In chapter 4, this openness to multiple interpretations is argued to be an opportunity for the visitor to inscribe him- or herself into the narrative of the site rather than a dangerous source of misinterpretation.

than forty-six thousand Jews, it was sold in 1944 to two businessmen who reopened the theater shortly after the liberation of the Netherlands. A group of concerned citizens argued this was an insult to the memory of the victims of Nazi terror. A committee was formed that successfully collected funds to purchase the theater and donate it to the city of Amsterdam. The city government however was unable to find an appropriate destination; as a result, the theater stood empty for almost a decade. When in 1958 a final decision was made, the building had to be largely demolished. The architect used the original walls as far as they accommodated his design. Some parts were reconstructed using original bricks salvaged during demolition.

The walls are thus materially authentic and integrated as such into the memorial inaugurated in 1962.⁴ As part of this design, they stress the material historicity of the site and provide a counterpoint to those sculptural elements that are manifestly not authentic, such as the pylon and the grey memorial wall. Where these elements suggest a radical break with the past through representational substitution, the walls both embody and signify a material and spatial continuity with that very same past. The Schouwburg, like other *in situ* memorials, is an assemblage of both the embodiment and mediation of the past in the present. They are not two exclusive categories: the case of the walls – partly authentic, partly reconstructed – demonstrates that the current site is both a remnant and a rearrangement of the past. Here, past and present have a reciprocal rather than unidirectional relationship. The figure of the ruin turns the concept of heritage as a selection of the past around: the present as a material rearrangement of the past, even if this past is radically transformed.⁵

This chapter addresses the postwar development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg from a site of painful heritage into the first national Shoah memorial in the Netherlands.⁶ In order to understand this process, we will examine how the debate over the use of this theater in local and national newspapers influenced the

⁴ Nicole Ex introduces a pragmatic taxonomy of authenticity for practices of art and architectural restoration. She identifies seven different forms: material, conceptual, contextual, functional, ahistorical and historical. Nicole Ex Wetering, Ernst van de, *Zo goed als oud: de achterkant van het restaureren* (Amsterdam: Amber, 1993), 93–129. If we follow this classification, these walls are exclusively materially authentic. Her taxonomy deals with the restoration of intentional works of art, not with *in situ* memorials, but nevertheless demonstrates the diversity and complexity of this term. I prefer to use the term ‘staged authenticity’, or a temporary authenticity effect that is accomplished mainly by the location and several materially authentic elements which enables a sense of being-there. See chapter 1 for an in-depth discussion of indexicality as an alternative approach, and chapter 4 for an analysis of how this is deployed as an essential source in the current presentation.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of presentism in certain conceptualizations of heritage, see chapter 1.2.

⁶ This chapter partly overlaps with a chapter I co-wrote with Esther Göbel. David Duindam and Esther Göbel, “Theater van onmogelijke herinneringen. Van ‘schandvlek’ tot herdenkingsplaats,” in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 162–89.

decision-making process. Here we follow the observations of two memory scholars. James Young argues that every case must be studied in its own local context since there is no universal definition of Shoah memorials.⁷ Furthermore, Peter Carrier investigates the messy procedures that involve the construction of what he calls dialogical monuments.⁸ The outline of the chapter is threefold: first, the early postwar memory discourse in the Netherlands is discussed. In these early postwar years, emphasis was placed on national unity with little room for critical self-reflection. The question is how the persecution of the Jews was framed in this period of national reconstruction. Section two investigates the collection of funds to acquire the Hollandsche Schouwburg to prohibit impropriety. This issue was framed in the national unifying memory discourse, alienating Jewish institutions and individuals. The final section examines the toilsome debate over the destination of this former theater. In the 1950s, several plans were debated, such as the establishment of a historical museum, a church or university hall, and, most prominently, the founding of an Israel Center. None of these plans mustered enough support from important Jewish institutions and it took until 1958 before the city government decided to construct a memorial dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims of the war. Gradually, the discourse of unity was unraveled and the Hollandsche Schouwburg became a site where the exceptionality of Jewish suffering during the Nazi occupation was first expressed. Many Jewish individuals and institutions continued to feel and act ambivalent in regards to this site, as will be demonstrated in chapter 3.

1. National Framing and Silent Memories: The Persecution of the Jews as Part of Collective Suffering

It has been argued that the memory of the persecution of the Jews was either forgotten or repressed until the 1960s, when the persecution of the Jews gradually became a more articulated part of the hegemonic narrative of WWII, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. The publication of major historical studies and the internationally covered Eichmann trial in 1961 are frequently mentioned as important catalysts on both national and international levels.⁹ This seems also true

⁷ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, viii.

⁸ Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures*, chapter 8.

⁹ See Jan Bank, *Oorlogsverleden in Nederland* (Baarn: Ambo, 1983); Frank van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz. Herinneringen, beelden, geschiedenis* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1995), chapter 1; for an international comparison of Belgium, France and the Netherlands, see Pieter Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 13; for a study of the awareness of the Holocaust in American culture before the 1960s, see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); for a study of the Israeli case and the seminal role of the Eichmann trial, see Tom Segev, *The Seventh*

for the Dutch memorial policy, since the first public memorial dedicated to the memory of Jewish victims with a national bearing was inaugurated at the Hollandsche Schouwburg only in 1962. However, if one looks at the production, publication and reception of books, movies and historical studies that address the persecution of Jews in those early years, it is difficult to uphold this argument. The persecution of the Jews was not forgotten, but on the one hand framed in a national discourse of collective suffering and on the other silenced by a considerable part of the Jewish community.

Memory scholar Aleida Assmann argues that after a military conflict, memory politics tend to prioritize actively fallen victims (soldiers and resistance fighters) over passive ones. 'Traumatic experiences of suffering and shame are only admitted to memory with difficulty, since they are hard to integrate into a positive individual or collective self-image.'¹⁰ The first years after liberation were dedicated to national reconstruction of the Netherlands. The dominant narrative of the occupation involved a black-and-white story of the resistance fighting Nazis and their henchmen. According to historian Pieter Lagrou, this happened in France, Belgium and the Netherlands: 'glorification of the contribution of the resistance movements was the only basis available for a true national myth'.¹¹ There was little to no room for memories that endangered this national myth, such as a self-critical assessment regarding the massive deportation of Jews in the Netherlands, which outnumbered that of other Western European nations under Nazi occupation.¹²

The construction of memorials was an essential instrument of postwar memory politics. Most war-memorials were the result of local and private initiatives. The government exercised control through a network of committees that

Million. The Israelis and the Holocaust (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); for an international comparison of Germany, the US and Israel, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and memory in the global age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), especially chapter 5.

¹⁰ Translation by the author, original quote: 'Traumatische Erfahrungen von Leid und Scham finden nur schwer Einlass ins Gedächtnis, weil diese nicht in ein positives individuelles oder kollektives Selbstbild integriert werden können.' Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: Beck, 2006), 75. In Israel, for instance, survivors of the death camps were treated as slaughtered lambs, whereas the ghetto fighters from Warsaw were glorified as national heroes. See Segev, *The Seventh Million*; Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 26. The specific national contexts were disparate. In the Netherlands for instance, the resistance, in particular the Communist Party was unable to obtain a real political power base, different from France and Belgium. For a discussion of black-and-white historiography and the postwar myth, see J. C. H. Blom, *In de ban van goed en fout? Wetenschappelijke geschiedschrijving over de bezettingstijd in Nederland* (Bergen: Octavo, 1983); H.W. von der Dunk, *In het huis van de herinnering. Een cultuurhistorische verkenning* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), 303–305.

¹² 73% of Jews who lived the Netherlands in 1941 (both native and immigrant) were murdered, compared to 40% in Belgium and 25% in France. Marnix Croes, "The Holocaust in the Netherlands and the Rate of Jewish Survival," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20, no. 3 (December 21, 2006): 474.

examined the plans before giving permission.¹³ In general, permission was granted to memorials dedicated to the ‘actively fallen’ and withheld when initiatives sought to commemorate specific victim groups, such as Jewish deportees. This policy was based on the notion that the population as a whole had suffered equally; the persecution of Jews was framed as only a part of this collective suffering.¹⁴ The unique character of the extermination of Jews on the basis of the Nuremberg race laws was rejected on principle by the government which was unwilling to discriminate between Jews and non-Jews.¹⁵ In addition to these private initiatives, the government installed twelve national monuments which ascribed to the same notion of national suffering. In 1947, a national memorial wall was inaugurated at Vught, a transit camp where both Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners had been held. The names of 329 executed, mostly non-Jewish resistance fighters were inscribed in the wall; there was no mention of the 12,000 Jews and Jehovah’s witnesses deported from this site.¹⁶ The plan to erect a national memorial at the former transit camp for Jews in Westerbork was cancelled because it would stress the Nazi terror, rather than the national spirit of resistance.¹⁷

In this same period, the Jewish Orthodox Church in Amsterdam (NIHS) was not given permission to build a memorial to the Jewish victims of the persecution. It was to be located at the J.D. Meijerplein, the former Jewish religious center of Amsterdam. The memorial would never be realized, because the responsible alderman did not want a memorial built exclusively for Jewish victims.¹⁸ Instead, the NIHS built a memorial at the Jewish cemetery of Muiderberg

¹³ See Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, chapter 2; Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 69–77; Hijink, *Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering*, chapter 2; Rob van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte. Herdenkingscultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011), chapter 1. Van Ginkel disagrees with Lagrou, who ascribes a ‘dirigiste’ memorial policy to the postwar government. The debate about the Hollandsche Schouwburg attests to Van Ginkel’s insight that an essential part of the Dutch memorial culture was not organized top-down, but was instead driven by local initiatives. In practice, it was always an interaction between individuals, governments and other interest groups.

¹⁴ Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, chapter 4.

¹⁵ Several historians argued that this, in combination with an anti-Semitic atmosphere in a few post-liberation newspapers and everyday life, led to the contradictory situation in which Jews were on the one hand treated as equals by the government and received no extra aid but were also expected to show gratitude to the Dutch population for having been rescued. They were treated as equals and simultaneously as others. See J. Presser, *Ondergang: de vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom, 1940-1945* (Den Haag: Staatsuitgeverij Nijhoff, 1965), vol. 2, p. 512; Dienke Hondius, *Terugkeer: antisemitisme in Nederland rond de bevrijding* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1990); Evelien Gans, “Vandaag hebben ze niets – maar morgen bezitten ze weer tien gulden’. Antisemitische stereotypen in bevrijd Nederland,” in *Polderschouw. Terugkeer en opvang na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Regionale verschillen*, ed. Conny Kristel (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2002), 313–53; Evelien Gans, *De kleine verschillen die het leven uitmaken. Een historische studie naar joodse sociaal-democraten en socialistisch-zionisten in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Vassallucci, 1999), 567–568.

¹⁶ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 57–104; 90–91.

¹⁷ Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, 94.

¹⁸ Bianca Stigter, “Beelden om nooit te vergeten. Monumenten ter nagedachtenis aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Amsterdam 1945-1991,” *Kunst en beleid in Nederland* 6 (1993): 41–42.

which was inaugurated in 1948. During the first ten years after liberation, some seventy Jewish memorials were constructed throughout the country, all of them at Jewish sites, mostly graveyards.¹⁹ None were located at prominent or public sites to act as exhortations towards the non-Jewish population.

The first two memorials in the public sphere that mentioned the persecution of the Jews were both in Amsterdam: the Monument of Gratitude, a stone wall with a sculptural bas-relief surface inaugurated in 1950; and the *Dokwerker*, a statue of a sturdy man unveiled in 1952. The former was an initiative of several Jewish camp survivors and an expression of Jewish gratitude. Its inscription is a textbook example of how the persecution of the Jews was framed as part of a collective suffering. '1940-1945 / To the protectors of the Dutch Jews during the occupation / acquiescent in God's will / united with you in defense / protected by your love / strengthened by your resistance / in mourning with you'. It must be noted that this memorial was not supported by the Jewish community at large. The NIHS was not present at its inauguration because it argued that the Jewish community had already sufficiently demonstrated its gratitude and that the committee responsible for the memorial did not properly represent the Jewish community.²⁰ The memorial was never appropriated as a significant site for commemorations.

The *Dokwerker* commemorated the 1941 February Strike and is located at the very location where the NIHS had wanted to construct its memorial. The strike was a source of national pride and solidarity between Jews and non-Jews because it was seen as the largest general protest in Europe against the persecution of the Jews. Its initiative was a point of controversy between the communist party (CPN) and anti-communists.²¹ The inscription on the memorial subscribed to the second interpretation, labeling the protest as an 'act of resistance of the bourgeoisie'.²² Furthermore, the memorial stressed resistance against Nazi terror and only indirectly commemorates Jewish victims.²³ Two editorials published in the weekly Jewish newspaper, the *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad (NIW)*, claimed it would have been more appropriate to commemorate Jewish victims, rather than celebrate their rescuers, especially at this square which had always been a center of Jewish

¹⁹ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 117–122.

²⁰ *NIW* February 17 and 24, 1950. The NIHS argued that this committee was not officially endorsed by Jewish institutions and was the initiative of random camp survivors.

²¹ Annet Mooij, *De strijd om de Februaristaking* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2006).

²² Stigter, "Beelden om nooit te vergeten," 44.

²³ Historian Ido de Haan claims that there was a complex relationship of competition and reciprocal interdependence between the postwar resistance movement and the Jewish community. Ido de Haan, *Na de ondergang. De herinnering aan de jodenvervolging in Nederland, 1945-1995* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997), 80.

religious life.²⁴ The annual February 25 commemorations were well-attended, but were not appropriated in the early years by the Jewish community as ‘their’ commemoration.

In spite of the national narrative that underlies these memorials, it must be pointed out that the persecution of the Jews was not repressed or forgotten in the early postwar period.²⁵ From 1946 onwards, several impressionistic studies and diaries were published, sooner than in surrounding countries.²⁶ Internationally, the Anne Frank diary, the Nuremberg trials and movies such as the Polish *THE LAST STAGE* (1948) and the French *NUIT ET BROUILLARD* (1955) attest to an early interest in the topic.²⁷ Furthermore, in 1950, the first systematic study of the persecution of the Jews appeared, entitled *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging* by Abel Herzberg.²⁸ Most of these films and publications did not focus on the painful issues of passive collaboration, the role of their own governments, political systems or administrations and were therefore framed within a national unity discourse.

²⁴ Joop Melkman ‘Rondom het Meyerplein’ *NIW* May 2, 1952; M.H. Gans, ‘Ons Monument’ *NIW* December 19, 1952.

²⁵ For a critique on this argument in the Netherlands, see Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, chap. 4; De Haan, *Na de ondergang*, 2–4; Von der Dunk, *In het huis van de herinnering*, 296–297, 309, 313–314, 319. For a critique on Novick, see Lawrence Baron, “The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945-1960,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 62–88.

²⁶ Sam de Wolff, *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland, laatste bedrijf* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1946); H Wielek, *De oorlog die Hitler won* (Amsterdam: Amsterdamsche Boek- en Courantmij., 1947). Both Ido de Haan and Conny Kristel argue that these publications appeared sooner than in surrounding countries. De Haan furthermore argues that the historiographical production on the persecution of the Jews was only stalled in the 1970s and picked up again in the 1980s. See Ido de Haan, “Breuklijnen in de geschiedschrijving van de Jodenvervolging. Een overzicht van het recente Nederlandse debat,” *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 123 (2008): 31; Conny Kristel, *Geschiedschrijving als opdracht. Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser en Loe de Jong over de jodenvervolging* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1998), 17. To mention just a few diaries that were published: Siegfried van den Bergh, *Deportaties: Westerbork, Theresiënstadt, Auschwitz, Gleiwitz* (Bussum: Van Dishoeck, 1945); E De Wind, *Eindstation - Auschwitz: waaraan toegevoegd: verslag van de Staatscommissie der U.S.S.R., belast met het onderzoek naar de toestanden in het concentratiekamp Oswiecim (Auschwitz)* (Amsterdam: Republiek der Letteren, 1946); Anne Frank, *Het achterhuis. Dagboekbrieven van 12 Juni 1942 - 1 Augustus 1944* (Amsterdam: Contact, 1947); memoires that only partially deal with the persecution, but offer much insight on the Hollandsche Schouwburg Henriëtte Davids, *Mijn levenslied* (Gouda: J. Mulder, 1948). For an extended list of memoires, see Martin Bossenbroek, who argues that there was a surge of publications related to the persecution of the Jews, both by Jews and non-Jews, until 1947 when public interest in ‘barbed wire reading’ disappeared. He argues that, in spite of these publications, many camp survivors could not talk about their experiences and where, in the words of G.L. Durlacher, travelers poor of words. M. P. Bossenbroek, *De meelstreek: terugkeer en opvang na de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2001), 501–508.

²⁷ Baron, “The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945-1960”; Frank van Vree, “Indigestible Images. On the Ethics and Limits of Representation,” in *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe, Amsterdam*, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 257–83; Rob van der Laarse, *Nooit meer Auschwitz? Erfgoed van de oorlog na Europa’s eeuw van de kampen* (Hooghalen: Herinneringscentrum Kamp Westerbork, 2013).

²⁸ Abel Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging* (Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1956). This last book was published as part of a series about the war. It was reprinted as a separate book in 1952, 1956, 1960, 1978 and 1985.

Nonetheless, their very existence refutes the notion of complete silence on the topic of the persecution of the Jews, especially during the early postwar years.²⁹ The persecution of the Jews was indeed not forgotten, but integrated into a dominant narrative that supported postwar reconstruction of the Dutch nation-state, in line with the previously described memorial policy.³⁰ One important characteristic of this narrative was the equalization of the memory of civilian victims and the externalization of evil.³¹ The abovementioned study by Jewish historian Herzberg is a poignant example of how the persecution of Jews could be framed without condemning the Dutch government or society at large. He interpreted the persecution as an attack from outside rather than as a Dutch event when he writes that:

The persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, though executed on Dutch territory, is not an actual Dutch history. It did not arise out of Dutch circumstances. One could even say that this would have been impossible.

The *resistance* against the persecution has been a Dutch issue.³²

Herzberg's position is an example of the difficult and ambiguous position of Dutch Jews who needed to reconcile their will to move forward with the reality of recent events. In spite of the fact that Jews had been integrated into the fabric of Dutch society for many decades before World War II, many more Jews living in the Netherlands had been murdered than in any other West-European country.³³ After

²⁹ Van Vree argues that 'unwanted' memories are absent but not forgotten when there is no appropriate social space or ideological framework to support or in which to articulate them. The reasons are manifold: a desire for continuity and reconstruction, political repression, but also feelings of shame, embarrassment, loyalty or gratitude. Frank van Vree, "Absent Memories," *Cultural Analysis* 12 (2013): 1–12.

³⁰ Van Vree argues that the fate of the persecuted was either suppressed or annexed in a national discourse, see Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, 91.

³¹ The externalization of evil was not exclusive to the Netherlands: even in Germany and Austria similar processes occurred. Historian Jörn Rüsen argues that in postwar Germany, Nazism and the persecution of the Jews were both ex-territorialized as un-German occurrences. "The Nazis were demonized and ex-territorialized into a realm beyond the main lines of German history. Nazism and Nazi dictatorship shrunk into an invasion of a relatively small group of political gangsters coming out of nowhere and occupying Germany." Jörn Rüsen, "Holocaust - Memory and German Identity - Three forms of generational practices," *Textos de História* 10, no. 1–2 (2002): 95–106. Historian Alexander Prenninger demonstrates that in Austria, the *Anschluss* was interpreted as an external event for several decades. He quotes a history manual from 1970 in which the authors argue that World War II was not an Austrian war, but a world war, and that Austria did not partake in the war itself. Alexander Prenninger, "Zelfbedrog en dubbelspraak. De 'verbannen' herinnering aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Oostenrijk," in *De dynamiek van de herinnering. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context*, ed. Frank Van Vree and Rob van der Laarse (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009), 265–87. This perspective is reminiscent of Abel Herzberg's view in the 1950s, as will be discussed below.

³² Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolgving*, 7, emphasis in original.

³³ This phenomenon has been called the Dutch paradox, see De Haan, "Breuklijnen in de geschiedschrijving van de Jodenvervolgving," 33–34.

the war, the returning Jewish camp survivors and those who had survived in hiding were met with bureaucratic indifference and anti-Semitism.³⁴

In this climate, Jews needed to redefine their position in Dutch society. Even before the war, it was impossible to speak of a united Dutch-Jewish community. The massive persecution and murder of the majority of Jews in the Netherlands had eroded this notion of a single-minded Jewish community even further. Jewish institutions needed to rebuild themselves and individuals reconsidered both their Jewish and Dutch identities. Several thousand Jews migrated to Israel, the US and other countries, but the majority remained in the Netherlands.³⁵ Historian Bart Wallet argues that the result was a diverse group of individuals and institutions that could best be described as a ‘family of communities’, rather than one coherent Jewish community that spoke with one voice.³⁶

The experience and recollection of the war were painful for those who had survived. Most Jews mourned the loss of loved ones and had to deal with the fact that the Dutch nation had not been able to protect them. However, as former secretary-general of the Dutch Jewish Orthodox Church (NIK) Joop Sanders argues, one recurrent strategy was looking forward.³⁷ Commemorating loved ones who were murdered during the war was a private or religious matter, not a public one. Historian F.C. Brasz argues that in many families the persecution and murder was not discussed, or only in euphemistic terms such as ‘not-returned’.³⁸ For many Jews, the painful memory was not forgotten but rather silenced because it was too painful to be expressed freely and publically. Jay Winter argues that:

we cannot accept the commonplace view that silence is the space of forgetting and speech the realm of remembrance. Instead, we offer the following definition of silence. Silence, we hold, is a socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken. The circle around this space is described by groups of people who at one point in time deem it appropriate that there is

³⁴ Hondius, *Terugkeer*; Gans, “Antisemitische stereotypen in bevrijd Nederland.”

³⁵ F. Chaya Brasz, “Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog: Van Kerkgenootschap Naar Culturele Minderheid,” in *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland*, ed. J. C. H. Blom and R. Fuks-Mansfeld (Amsterdam: Balans, 1995), 364–367; Joop Sanders, “Opbouw en continuïteit na 1945,” in *Pinkas: geschiedenis van de joodse gemeenschap in Nederland*, ed. J. Michman, Hartog Beem, and Dan Michman (Ede: Kluwer, 1992), 217.

³⁶ The memory of the persecution played an important role; in the first decades it was rather a divisive issue and only later it became an essential and even binding element of what it means to be Jewish. Bart Wallet, *De ketting is nog ongebroken. Joden in naoorlogs Nederland*. (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, Forthcoming); Bart Wallet and Hetty Berg, “65 Jaar Joods Nederland,” in *Wie Niet Weg Is, Is Gezien. Joods Nederland Na 1945* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2010), 6–19.

³⁷ Sanders, “Opbouw en continuïteit na 1945.”

³⁸ Brasz, “Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog,” 400.

a difference between the sayable and the unsayable, or the spoken and the unspoken, and that such a distinction can and should be maintained and observed over time. Such people codify and enforce norms which reinforce the injunction against breaking into the inner space of the circle of silence.³⁹

Winter describes these silences in spatial terms, because they are present whether or not they are desired. “Topographically, they are there whether or not they come to the surface; and their re-emergence into our line of sight can occasion a reiteration of the interdiction on talking about them or the end of the interdiction itself.”⁴⁰ The Hollandsche Schouwburg turns out to be a site that cannot not be ignored. Painful memories of the persecution surfaced publicly and became a hotly debated topic. As such, the Schouwburg was not a site of oblivion or silence but rather a site of debate, conflict and a cacophony of opinions and voices. It was a painful site for two reasons: because of past events and the blatant disregard for the memory of the Jewish victims. The successful collection of funds to buy this theater attested to a collective will to honor the memory of the victims by framing it as an issue of national unity, piety and honor. However, when the city of Amsterdam failed to find an appropriate destination in the 1950s, it again became a site of disgrace. The decrepit building had by then turned into a constant reminder of the incapacity of the Amsterdam government to provide an appropriate solution.

2. Honoring the memory of victims: pride and national debt

In several early postwar newspapers reporting about the persecution of the Jews, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was used as a metonym for the mass deportation of Jews, similar to Auschwitz and Westerbork, at a time when the terms Holocaust and Shoah were not yet commonplace.⁴¹ In an early postwar article published in the formerly illegal resistance newspaper *Paraat* on May 6, 1945, two days after the German troops occupying the Netherlands capitulated, the story of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the Crèche and the resistance efforts of Walter Süskind was recounted. The Schouwburg was also part of the early historiography on the persecution of the Jews. H. Wielek dedicated 23 pages to the tragedy at the

³⁹ Jay Winter, “Thinking about Silence,” in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Before the first broadcast in 1978 of American television series *Holocaust*, the term Holocaust was completely absent in the European and American memory discourse. It means burnt offering and has a religious connotation of sacrifice, implying that the Jews had to be sacrificed in order for the Christians to be saved. Therefore the term Shoah is preferred in certain Dutch Jewish circles. See Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, 165–167.

deportation center and Henriette Davids discussed her memories of this deportation site over 36 pages.⁴² Herzberg devoted 9 pages to the Schouwburg and included a picture illegally taken of the prisoners who were awaiting their deportation on page 109.⁴³

It would be incorrect to argue that the history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a deportation site was forgotten. Rather, it enabled people to talk about the recent past in a very concrete way. When the theater was reopened after liberation, it soon became a site of contestation. The early debate was initiated by the communist paper *De Waarheid* and the Jewish weekly *NIW*. Where the former took an unproductive anti-government stance, the latter inscribed the issue in a discourse of national pride and unity. This foreshadowed the work of the wide ranging committee established by the Christian social-democrat journalist Johan Winkler in September 1946 that raised money with a similar appeal to national unity and pride.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg, or Dutch Theater in the Plantagebuurt of Amsterdam, had been a regular performance theater between 1892 and 1941. In 1941 it was renamed Joodsche Schouwburg to serve as the main venue for discharged Jewish artists who performed for an exclusively Jewish public. From June 1942 onwards it served as a deportation center, guarded by German soldiers and Dutch policemen and administered by the Jewish Council, who appointed Süskind as its manager. From October 1942 onwards, children under twelve were brought to a separate kindergarten across the street and separated from their parents. In total, more than forty-six thousand Jews from around the country were incarcerated awaiting transportation to one of the two transit camps in the Netherlands, Westerbork and Vught. Hundreds of children and adults were able to escape because of the efforts of Süskind and several cooperating resistance groups. However, most Jews were eventually murdered in Nazi death camps.⁴⁴

⁴² Wielek, *De oorlog die Hitler won*, 262–285; Davids, *Mijn levenslied*, 102–138. The former is a documentary account that was initiated by two journalists, H. Minkenhof and H. Heymans, who were deported and murdered during the occupation. H. Kwekzylber finished their work under the pseudonym H. Wielek. This work is cited two times by Herzberg (pgs. 120 and 187) and many times by Presser and De Jong. The account of Davids is cited once by Presser, but not about the Hollandsche Schouwburg. De Jong cites her several times, once with a half-page quote, see L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 13 volumes. (Den Haag: Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1969-1988), vol. 6, Juli '42-mei '43: eerste helft, p. 30.

⁴³ This photograph was also included by Presser, prior to page 281, before he dedicated a paragraph consisting of three pages to this deportation site, see Presser, *Ondergang*, vols. 1, pp. 285–287. De Jong mentions the Schouwburg on several occasions, and dedicates two small paragraphs to this deportation site. He included three photographs by the same photographer of the courtyard of the Schouwburg. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, vol. 6 Juli '42-mei '43: eerste helft, pp. 29–31, 256–259.

⁴⁴ Amsterdam had the largest Jewish population of the Netherlands: out of 140,000 Jews in the country, about 77,000 lived in the capital. However, Jews were also brought to the Schouwburg from other parts

After the last deportation on November 19, 1943, the theater stood empty. Its owners were deported and the building was auctioned off by the mortgage holder in 1944 and bought by two businessmen from Deventer, the Linthorst brothers. Shortly after the liberation they contracted an operator, J.P. Senff, to prepare the theater for its reopening under the new name Piccadilly. Their actions were critically followed by several journalists who argued that it was a disgrace that this site of terror would be used for popular entertainment. The publicist Peter van Steen voiced his disapproval in the formerly illegal communist newspaper *De Waarheid* when he writes that:

The most depressing and sinister tragedy since time immemorial took place in the Schouwburg. [...] The Jewish drama had to be completed until the bitter end. [...] The German directors did not take the slightest notion of their actors. They orchestrated away all the Jews. The theater hall was left behind. And in that hall the smell of fear, sweat, dread and terror lingered on. Everything was drenched, the seats [...], the corridors, the balconies. Fear and dread dripping from the walls. The performance was completed until the last sinister act. Afterwards the theater was closed. They tried to cover the incurable wound. There are people who pretend as if there has never been such a wound. Among them is Paul Ostra, singer by profession, bending servant of the German directors of the Jewish drama. [...] [He] has the audacity, in collaboration with some meat producer from the province, to sing his sickening songs at this site of horrors, this monument of human suffering.⁴⁵

Van Steen, famous for his indignation, employed the metaphor of the theater and specifically mentioned the Jewish drama.⁴⁶ His article started a lasting commitment of *De Waarheid* to the cause of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Together with the Jewish weekly *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad (NIW)*, it continued to report on this issue more than any other newspaper.⁴⁷

of the country. During the occupation, more than 107,000 Jews were deported to various concentration camps, of which about 102,000 were killed. Some 5,200 returned while others survived the war in hiding or because of their mixed origins. Marnix Croes and Peter Tammes, "*Gif laten wij niet voortbestaan*": een onderzoek naar de overlevingskansen van joden in de Nederlandse gemeenten, 1940 - 1945 (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2006), 29–42. In 1947, approximately 28,000 Jews lived in the Netherlands, many of them in Amsterdam. Others had perished during the war or settled in other countries. Brasz, "Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog," 351. Annemiek Gringold recently concluded that at least 46.104 Jews have been incarcerated at the Hollandsche Schouwburg during the deportation period. Gringold, "Het gebouw der tranen," 134–136.

⁴⁵ P. Steen, *De Waarheid* August 23, 1945. All translations of Dutch sources are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

⁴⁶ De Theun de Vries, "Peter Mourits (Peter van Steen)," in *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden, 1974-1975*. (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 76–85.

⁴⁷ During the first postwar year, the issue was mainly discussed by these two newspapers. Between August 1945 and September 1946, *De Waarheid* published six and the *NIW* five articles. In the summer

Where the communists took an outsider's perspective and framed the persecution of the Jews as part of fascism that continued after the war, for instance in the imperialist colonial policy of the Netherlands in the Dutch East-Indies, the *NIW* approached this issue from a Jewish perspective. Editor Jaap Soetendorp wrote a similarly passionate plea:

[The Hollandsche Schouwburg] is a name that will make every Dutch Jew shiver and evokes a very unpleasant association for non-Jews as well. [...] Shame overpowers you when you think of the henchmen who helped the Nazi's. The Schouwburg signifies all of this. [...] They are going to exploit the theater once again. [...] In a hall where every chair is a memory, where every step leads to the shadow of the worst suffering. Where parents and children went on the journey to their destruction, where people sobbed and begged for their lives and their freedom, where men died of fear and terror, where people who had been in hiding were brought in and illusions vanished, this is where theater is offered. [...] They should either turn this building into a museum or demolish it. Execution sites where resistance fighters were killed are now revered. The holiest human feelings are taken into consideration. This is why we demand that the site where the execution of our deceased began is not made a mockery.⁴⁸

A week after these publications, the mayor of Amsterdam revoked the permit for public performances at the Schouwburg, a decision that was commended by the *NIW*. Soetendorp repeated his idea to establish a museum in the theater in order to 'ensure that our posterity would not be unfamiliar with the consequences of Nazi tyranny and unpredictability. We know this, but may future generations never forget.'⁴⁹ Site of horrors [*oord van verschrikkingen*]; every chair a memory [*iedere stoel een herinnering*]; journey to their destruction [*tocht naar den ondergang*]; never forget [*nimmer vergeten*]: words and metaphors that reappeared throughout

of 1946, the formerly illegal social-democrat newspaper *Het Parool* became an important actor, especially through the writings and actions of editor Johan Winkler. *De Waarheid* was the organ of the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and had the highest newspaper circulation in the first postwar year before the communist party was isolated and ostracized. See Van de J. van de Plasse and Wim Verbei, *Kroniek van de Nederlandse dagblad- en opiniepers* (Amsterdam: O. Cramwinckel, 2005), 115; Ger Verrips, *Dwars, duivels en dromend: de geschiedenis van de CPN : 1938-1991* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1995), 233–234. The Jewish weekly *NIW*, established in 1865 and censored by Nazi authorities during the occupation, was not related to a specific political party; in 1948, it refused to place political advertisements during the election because it argued that, being a general Jewish organ, it should not choose one political side. See Isaac Lipschits, *Honderd jaar NIW. Het Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad, 1865-1965* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 1966), 225. *Het Parool* was not allied to one specific prewar political party, such as the social-democratic SDAP, but had argued for a progressive break with the prewar political situation in 1944, see Lydia E. Winkel, *De ondergrondse pers, 1940-1945* (Utrecht: Veen, 1989), 197–205. *De Vlam* and *Paraat* both published one article about this issue in this period.

⁴⁸ J. Soetendorp, *NIW* August 24, 1945.

⁴⁹ J. Soetendorp, *NIW* September 14, 1945.

the debate. For Soetendorp, the Schouwburg embodied the past and should therefore be treated with respect, in line with Van Steen's description of the walls dripping with fear and dread. For Soetendorp, this building offered an ideal opportunity to educate future generations and prevent the obliteration from memory of past crimes that occurred at this site.

In spite of these objections and the revoked license for public performances, the owners continued to rent out the auditorium for private events. The Mayor and Executive Board of Amsterdam had prohibited all forms of entertainment at this theater, public or private. However, private meetings with an appropriate character were allowed. There was a shortage of venues and the Hollandsche Schouwburg was in great demand for events ranging from weddings, sport games, business parties to meetings organized by the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and other organizations. All requests were assessed by the police and critically followed by the newspapers. When an opera was planned for April 14, 1946, the *NIW* successfully called for the city government to revoke its permission, reminding it of the 'memory related to this site of deportation'.⁵⁰

The communist party and its party organ *De Waarheid* were among the first to stress Jewish victimhood as a particular category and to take offense at reestablishing a theater at the Schouwburg, together with the Jewish *NIW*. Literary scholar Michael Rothberg argues that:

communism provided one of the discursive spheres, both in the United States and elsewhere, in which the articulation of genocide and colonialism could first be attempted – and this long before the intellectual vogue for either Holocaust or postcolonial studies.⁵¹

However, the communists would not have a significant role in the committee established by Winkler in 1946, on the one hand because of their anti-governmental stance and on the other hand owing to a strong anti-communist attitude in the postwar Netherlands.⁵² On December 11, 1945 *De Waarheid* published an editorial, entitled *The memory and the money*, wondering how long before the first public entertainment would be staged at this theater 'used by the Germans to incarcerate the Jews before transporting them to Poland'. This moral outrage did not prevent the CPN from using the theater as a conference hall on

⁵⁰ *NIW* April 5, 1946.

⁵¹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 118.

⁵² Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 248–250. The only significance the communists had in this issue was through CPN-member and city alderman Ben Polak, who had a troubled relationship with the party, and with the continuous scrutiny of *De Waarheid*.

several occasions. Only six days after the editorial was published, the next party congress was announced, in part held at Piccadilly.⁵³

The communist party was able to express its moral outrage and at the same time make use of the theater because it interpreted its own existence as part of the continued anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle.⁵⁴ During the war, the communists fought against the persecution of the Jews, and now they opposed the colonial policy of the Dutch government. When the nationalist student group Perhimpunan Indonesia celebrated the first anniversary of the Indonesian declaration of independence at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the communist party was represented at this meeting by various prominent members such as Berend Blokzijl and A.J. Koejemans, editor in chief of *De Waarheid*.⁵⁵ Both the CPN and Perhimpunan Indonesia stressed the right of autonomy of a people in their speeches, an unalienable right that had previously been taken away from the Jews.⁵⁶ The CPN saw its commitment to the cause of the anti-colonial movement as a continuation of their former struggle against the fascist persecution of the Jews, which was stressed by the location of this anti-governmental celebration.

The Jewish newspaper *NIW*, differently from the communist party, made an emotional plea against any use of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, which could be reconciled with the hegemonic national discourse of unity. Soetendorp argued that people should refrain completely from using this venue in order to force the operator to shut down his theater. He suggested that the former theater would be treated with the proper respect normally reserved for resistance fighters:

People lay flowers at execution sites of freedom fighters [...]. People take off their hats in honor of the victims of terror and persecution. Most Jews were murdered far away, in the East. Why not treat the Schouwburg as an execution site? We do not expect flowers, nor a solemn salute. We ask respect for the memory of our fallen [*onzer gevallen*].⁵⁷

⁵³ *De Waarheid* December 11 and 17, 1945. When *De Waarheid* wrote critically about the use of the Schouwburg, they used the name Schouwburg; when the CPN made announcements of gatherings at this same site, it used the name Piccadilly. Other CPN-related meetings at the Hollandsche Schouwburg include: a CPN board meeting (*De Waarheid* October 22, 1945); a propaganda film for dock workers, cancelled because of technical issues, (*De Waarheid* November 15, 1945); Joop van Santen organized an election event (*De Waarheid*, May 14, 1946); the mainly communist trade union EVC had regular meetings here, see Archive of the Police (5225), Artstheater Piccadilly (4862), City Archives Amsterdam for an overview of all events at Piccadilly.

⁵⁴ Verrips, *Dwars, duivels en dromend*, Chapter 17; Dunk, *In het huis van de herinnering*, 306–307.

⁵⁵ *De Waarheid* August 18, 1946.

⁵⁶ On September 5, 1945 a column appeared about the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the fate of the Jewish people. 'A scattered, disarmingly people, which has contributed enormously to mankind in every field, science and literature, music and sculpture, law and philosophy [...] has been banished and burnt, beaten and trampled.'

⁵⁷ J. Soetendorp, December 21, 1945. Soetendorp uses the word *gevallen*.

Soetendorp framed the Jewish victims as actively fallen; sacrificed, rather than passive victims.⁵⁸ He effectively inscribed his plea into the prevailing nationalist memory discourse, rather than take an anti-governmental stance. This strategy would prove to be successful for the future committee established as a response to the plan to reopen the theater under a new name in November 1946.

The owners did not consider the building to be heritage and disavowed any public claims. However, they recognized the public indignation and introduced a new plan that attempted to negotiate between their financial interests and the call for piety in the newspapers. Piccadilly, a reference to the entertainment area in London, would be transformed into a serious theater, the Artis Theater that would house a new theater company, Het Zuid-Nederlands Toneel. The victims of the war would be commemorated with a plaque. The planned opening production *Oranje Hotel* was written by Eduard Veterman, a former resistance fighter and theater director who had been active in the Joodsche Schouwburg during the occupation. The owners turned to a play about the memory of the resistance, in the hope that it would be accepted by the general public. The city government initially granted permission, arguing that the law did not allow for a continued prohibition. However, the plan backfired: the owners claimed that Veterman, who had died in a car crash shortly before, supported their plans. However, they were contradicted by several close friends of Veterman, who argued Veterman had vehemently opposed the reopening of the theater just before his death and had argued the building should be demolished completely.⁵⁹ The issue was widely covered by several newspapers and as a result, the theater troupe withdrew from the plan.⁶⁰

The plan to install a memorial plaque failed as well. This initiative was the first serious attempt by the owners to commemorate the victims of the war. A broad group of notables was invited to discuss the plan at the office of Alderman Ben Polak on September 24, 1946, amongst them, chief rabbi Justus Tal, catholic pastor Willem Nolet and protestant minister Jan Buskes.⁶¹ Just a day before the meeting took place, the Christian social-democrat Johan Winkler published a scathing

⁵⁸ Aleida Assmann argues that in a post-conflict society, the commemoration of *sacrificia* (soldiers, resistance fighters) is often prioritized over that of the *victimae* (civilian casualties), since the former can be integrated more easily into a more positive national self-image. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 75 ff.

⁵⁹ *Prinsestad* November 2, 1946; *De Waarheid*, November 3, 1946.

⁶⁰ *NTW* September 13, 1946; *De Waarheid* September 26 & October 12, 1946; *Het Parool* September 26 & October 3, 1946; *Het Vrije Volk* September 28, 1946; *Vrij Nederland* October 5, 1946.

⁶¹ The invitees were: acting Chief Rabbi Justus Tal, pastor W. Nolet, protestant minister J.J. Buskes, H.M. Randwijck (journalist, resistance fighter), protestant minister Hazenbroek, CPN-alderman Ben Polak, Jaap Parsser Parsser (member of the Jewish orthodox church council), Albert van Dalsum (actor), Siem van der Linden (initiator), J.P. Senff (operator) and S. Attema (business partner of Senff). Letter of C.F. Helms to Siem van der Linden, September 16, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives.

article in the former underground newspaper *Het Parool* in which he recounted two stories from the deportation time in the Schouwburg: the suicide by Professor Mannheimer and the singing of Hatikwah, the later Israeli national anthem.⁶² Winkler argued that the plaque was an empty gesture:

The Hollandsche Schouwburg will become a cinema or theater, a place of entertainment. Step by step this tragedy unfolded, the tragedy of our unimaginative impiety, our mentality of “let us quickly forget, quickly laugh again, quickly make money again”. Step one: a private meeting; step two: a private serious performance; step three: a private, slightly less serious performance; step four: a small party; step five: a wedding. Yes – we party and celebrate weddings on the Golgotha of the Jews; we turn a graveyard into a carnival. [...] Should we not honor the memory of those who found themselves in this hell? Not just a little bit, not with some small plaque which later will accidently be covered by a poster, but completely? [...] Should we not, collectively if necessary, buy the building [...] in order to give it a truly worthy destination? Museum, library, it does not matter what exactly [...] as long as silence will prevail.⁶³

Winkler’s plea had an effect and the owners’ initiative for a memorial plaque would not be endorsed by the committee’s members as long as the theater was still in operation.⁶⁴

Winkler would play a key role in a new committee that would formulate an alternative plan: the complete suspension of any theater at this site of memory. He had asked virtually the same group that had rejected the plan to install a memorial plaque. However, he excluded the owners and their partners and included more Jewish members.⁶⁵ Winkler acted as secretary and the renowned 69-year old

⁶² Both incidents are recounted slightly differently in H. Wielek’s book that was published several months later. Sam de Wolff wrote that Hatikwah was sung in front of the Big Synagoge at the J.D. Meijerplein during the raid in the night of May 25, 1943, and that the socialist song *Morgenrood* was sung in front of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Wolff, *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland, laatste bedrijf*, 95, 105. These two accounts do not necessarily rule each other out, though it is possible that they were mixed up. The incident of Mannheimer’s suicide and the singing of Hatikwah are mentioned here because they were both mentioned several times in subsequent newspaper articles and other publications.

⁶³ *Het Parool*, September 23, 1946.

⁶⁴ *Het Parool* and *De Waarheid*, September 26, 1946. Both articles mention the establishment of a new committee of five members to look for a new destination for the building.

⁶⁵ The committee members were: Sam de Wolff (chairman), Johan Winkler (secretary), J.J. Buskes, Siem van der Linden, S. Lissauer, priest W. Nolet, Jaap Parsser, Ben Polak, E.A. Rodrigues Pereira (Portuguese Jewish Community), acting Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam Justus Tal, L. Vromen and L. W. Wildervanck (treasurer). Official call of the committee, December 10, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives. In comparison to the ‘first’ committee, this committee had more Jewish members. The chairman, secretary and treasurer were all new. Siem van der Linden would have a minor role in the committee according to Winkler, see Letter J. Winkler to Jan

Zionist and socialist Sam de Wolff was the appointed chairman. The committee was, in their eyes, a representative group of both religious and non-religious Jewish leaders and politicians, together with Christian dignitaries and had warm ties with the media. De Wolff was a well-known publicist and journalist for the leftist newspaper *De Vlam* and Winkler was deputy editor of the progressive *Het Parool*. Minister Buskes was famous for his radio speeches for the VARA, a social-democrat public broadcasting company, and was a regular contributor to the socialist *Het Vrije Volk* and *De Vlam*. The honorary committee included prominent members such as Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, an important figure for the former non-communist resistance movement, the Minister of Education, the Governor of the Province North Holland and the Mayor of Amsterdam. The committee of recommendation consisted of fifty-one members, mainly journalists and politicians from different backgrounds. This broad set-up and support was of great importance in a country still characterized by so-called ‘pillarization’, the almost complete vertical separation of society in integrated systems of politico-denominational institutions, organizations and media. This is why *Het Parool* described the committee in the following terms:

A committee that holds all political and religious movements and is sanctioned by an honorary committee [...] is trying to collect 300,000 guilders [...] a protestant pastor, a catholic priest, a communist, a liberal, a banker and a journalist, joined together in their cause [...].⁶⁶

The comprehensiveness of the committee was praised in the papers: ‘the composition of the committee attests to the possibilities of solidarity – something which did not have to be discussed during the occupation and is perhaps not mentioned enough presently.’⁶⁷

When the committee issued its call for donations, it was simultaneously published in several newspapers:

The Hollandsche Schouwburg – place of torture for tens of thousands of Jews, last station on the way to Westerbork, Auschwitz, etc. – cannot become a site of entertainment. [...] The committee asks everybody for a contribution to bring together the necessary 300,000 guilders. This is needed to purchase and redevelop the parcel to come to an exploitation that is not in conflict with the memory of the inexpressible suffering that took place there. The aim is to form a historical center that deals with the contribution of Jews to Dutch history [...]. In addition, this center should

Roelfs, May 11, 1971, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives.

⁶⁶ *Het Parool* December 13, 1946, most likely written by Johan Winkler.

⁶⁷ *De Groene Amsterdammer* November 2, 1946.

contain a memorial to those that were killed. [...] We owe it to the memory of those who suffered in the Hollandsche Schouwburg, to ensure their memory is not defiled by turning it into a site of entertainment once again.⁶⁸

The call was often accompanied by an editorial urging readers to donate money. These editorials appealed to a sense of national pride and the fact this issue was a debt of honor, and stressed that as many people as possible should contribute.⁶⁹ *Het Parool* called for the 'entire population' to join in, while Buskes argued in *Het Vrije Volk* that it was not up to only the Jews but the entire population to contribute money. In addition, he argued that although large donations were important, in order to have a 'truly national memorial, we need many small donations.'⁷⁰ One year later, the nation-wide certificate-action, designed to raise money for national war memorials, employed a similar collective strategy, this time with little success.⁷¹

The appeal to the entire nation rather than the Jewish community put the latter in a quandary: should Jewish institutions and individuals contribute to the cause, either by joining the committee or donating money? Since the committee had Jewish, catholic and protestant leaders and journalists from *De Vlam*, *Het Parool* and *Het Vrije Volk* amongst its ranks, it would have made sense to invite *NIW* editor Soetendorp who had followed the issue closely for over a year. There is no evidence whether or not he was invited. However, Soetendorp had argued in September, before Winkler and De Wolff had established the committee that Jews should not ask for piety. He repeated this argument in his accompanying editorial when the *NIW* placed the call for donations in December.⁷² Piety should not be

⁶⁸ Official call of the committee, December 10, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives. It was published in different forms in several newspapers: *Het Parool*, *De Nieuwe Dag*, *Het Vrije Volk* and *De Waarheid* December 13, 1946; *NIW* December 27, 1946.

⁶⁹ One article disapproves of the use of the theater in the following terms: 'Do theater companies have so little decency? [...] They could not have offended the Dutch people even more.' *Prinsestad*, November 2, 1946. *De Stem van Nederland* used an illustration of the Hollandsche Schouwburg on its cover for its issue of February 8, 1947, with a caption reading: 'A national debt of honor: the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam.' Frank van Vree argues that the memory of the persecution of the Jews was framed as a 'debt of honor' in those first postwar years, see Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, chapter 4.

⁷⁰ *Het Parool*, December 13, 1946; *Het Vrije Volk* December 14, 1946.

⁷¹ This nation-wide action was organized between November 11, 1947 and February 1, 1948 and symbolically sold twelve million square centimeters of Amsterdam's Dam Square for 50 cents each. The intended six million guilders were to be used, for among other things, to build national monuments. Only 2.2 million was collected, of which more than 10% was used for overhead expenses. Van Ginkel argues that the population was not as willing because many had already contributed to local and private initiatives, such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg, see Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 57–61, 74–75. It must be noted that according to Bossenbroek, the end of 1947 was also the turning point for interest in publications that dealt with the persecution of the Jews. See Bossenbroek, *De meelstreep*, 501–508.

⁷² *NIW* September 13, 1946.

asked for by the Jews but should be offered by the Dutch people. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not an issue of self-pity, but an honorary debt of the nation. Soetendorp asks:

Will the [Dutch people] truly realize what a great injustice has been done at this site, and will this recognition of a debt of honor lead to a [collective] donation? With minister Buskes, we believe this will be the case. This is why we deplore the fact the committee has so many Jewish members. They should have trusted the sense of honor of the Dutch [...].⁷³

Ies Spangenthal, editor of the Zionist paper *De Joodsche Wachter* followed the same argument. He writes that:

If there is enough piety in the Netherlands for what happened to the Jews, people will no longer use [the theater] for entertainment. If this is not the case, they should do whatever they want to do. But we Jews should distance ourselves from this cause, since such an action will ask for pity. [...] One could ask, are we not Dutch as well? Yes, we are Dutch, but we were persecuted as Jews and Jews exclusively [...].⁷⁴

Similar considerations were expressed by the Jewish Orthodox Church in Amsterdam (NIHS) and the Zionist Bond (NZB). The board of the NIHS contacted Buskes, not chairman de Wolff, in November of 1946, to discuss the role of the two orthodox committee members. It was agreed that Tal and Parser would not need to step down, but could only voice their opinions in their personal capacities. Furthermore, the NIHS would not contribute to the cause – not surprising considering it was still waiting for permission to establish a memorial on the J.D. Meijerplein. De Wolff, prominent member of the NZB, was criticized for his active role in the committee. The NZB argued that all available Jewish funds should be allocated to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. When de Wolff was rebuked by the board of the NZB, he replied that his activities for the committee were none of its business and he continued to serve as its chairman.⁷⁵ The positions of the NZB, NIHS and the *NIW* would remain ambiguous, which turned out to be a critical point during the early-1950s when the city of Amsterdam was unable to find a satisfactory solution for the Schouwburg.

The committee's strategy to appeal to the entire Dutch population was successful. Newspapers continued to publish and republish the call in different forms.⁷⁶ Wielek, who was preparing his upcoming publication *De Oorlog die Hitler*

⁷³ *NIW* December 27, 1946.

⁷⁴ *De Joodsche Wachter* November 19, 1946.

⁷⁵ With thanks to Bart Wallet, who pointed out the correspondence of the NIHS to Buskes. For the latter incident, see Gans, *De kleine verschillen*, 651.

⁷⁶ The catholic daily *De Volkskrant* published the call on January 23, 1947 stressing the catholic members of the committee of recommendation. The liberal daily *Algemeen Handelsblad* published a

Won, wrote a plea in *De Vlam*: “To use this theater again would mean desecration of the dead. [...] We should all help to realize this goal [of the committee]. With the help of the entire nation, [...] the committee will acquire the building.”⁷⁷ In addition to this, he introduced his account of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in his book with the follow aspiration: ‘May the Schouwburg never reopen as a renewed theater. Which actor and what theater play could even portray what has unfolded here?’⁷⁸ Donations came from all over the country and charities were organized by Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. People went door-to-door for collections, such as Ms. Duyf, who had written a poem and collected 205 guilders and 13 cents in Zaandam. A letter from a small town in North-Brabant, Dinteloord, lists all donor names, including their religious domination – all catholic or protestant – and occupation.⁷⁹ On January 17, 1947, Queen Wilhelmina stopped her car in front of the theater for one minute of silence and donated 500 guilders.

The owners of the theater and their partners resisted all committee activities and claimed in December 1946, when the campaign had just begun, that the group had no backing in society. ‘If the people have no interest in your actions, you should not impose your will upon the people; this is not democratic and smells like dictatorship.’⁸⁰ They were proven wrong: the media continued to pay attention to the issue and donations from Jews and non-Jews alike ensured that the committee collected enough money. When approximately 200,000 guilders had been collected by May of 1947, an anonymous donation of 100,000 guilders was made. Only posthumously was it made public that benefactor Bernard van Leer made this contribution.⁸¹

Negotiations about the purchase of the building were started in May 1947. In November 1947, a provisional deal was struck after the Mayor of Amsterdam intervened. Due to legal issues – the heirs of the prewar owner claimed that the sale

call on the same day. On February 15 that same year, writer and editor Piet Bakker wrote an article about the Hollandsche Schouwburg urging readers to donate to the committee in the right-winged weekly *Elsevier's Weekblad*.

⁷⁷ *De Vlam*, February 1, 1947.

⁷⁸ Wielek, *De oorlog die Hitler won*, 269.

⁷⁹ Letter to the committee, February 13, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives.

⁸⁰ Letter of theater operator to Winkler, December 24, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives.

⁸¹ *De Waarheid*, May 23, 1947. For the donation of Van Laar, see Letter J. Winkler to Jan Roelfs, May 11, 1971, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives. Van Leer was a Jewish industrial who had been able to negotiate his leave from the Netherlands during the occupation. He created a fund that was used to establish a Jewish orchestra in the Hollandsche Schouwburg before it became a deportation center. Pauline Micheels, *De vatenman: Bernard van Leer (1883-1958)* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2002); Pauline Micheels, “Bernard van Leer, 1883-1958,” in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 108–17; Göbel, “De Joodsche Schouwburg.”

of the theater during the war had been illegal – it took two more years before the building was actually transferred to the committee. The building was offered to the city of Amsterdam on several conditions: no entertainment for at least 25 years; a dignified destination for the building; and the establishment of a mourning chamber holding an eternal flame. The accommodation of the famous Jewish Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana was mentioned in the deed of transfer, but this was not a requirement. The council accepted the donation under these conditions after a debate on May 9, 1950. During this session, it was emphasized that the negative goal, no more entertainment, had been realized, and that the city government now needed to find a positive destination. Several possibilities were mentioned: to name one of the spaces after resistance fighter Süskind; to inscribe the names of all Jewish victims from Amsterdam; to establish a Jewish cultural center or library; or to use the building to promote Israeli-Dutch relations.⁸² All of these initiatives would be discussed in the following years to no avail however; the structure remained vacant for the next decade.

3. Addressing Painful Heritage: Representation and Appropriation

State-sponsored memorials are usually constructed to bring a sense of unity to a post-conflict society and to affirm rather than criticize the nation's birthright or renaissance. As James Young argues, 'to do otherwise would be to undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state's seemingly natural right to exist.'⁸³ The postwar memorial policy in the Netherlands is an example of this: civilian casualties were to be commemorated collectively, for an emphasis on Jewish or other specific victim groups might cause social discord. The early discussions about the Hollandsche Schouwburg were not about the construction of a state-sponsored memorial, but rather about dealing with sensitive and painful heritage. This is a fundamental difference: where state-sponsored *ex novo* memorials are usually political instruments that symbolize an idealized national community – such as the National Monument located at the Dam Square in Amsterdam, the symbolic center of the Netherlands – sites of painful heritage refer to events whose memories might undermine such a political project.⁸⁴

⁸² Gemeentebld Amsterdam, afdeling 2, March 9, 1950, p. 201-205

⁸³ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 2.

⁸⁴ Archaeologist Britt Baillie argues that after certain unresolved conflicts, such as in former Yugoslavia, monuments are used as instrument to continue the conflict. Rather than describing this period as post-conflict, she describes it as conflict-time. Britt Baillie, "Capturing Facades in 'Conflict-Time': Structural Violence and the (Re)construction Vukovar's Churches," *Space and Polity* 17, no. 3 (December 2013): 300–319. In the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, however, the conflict about the Hollandsche

The debate about the Schouwburg was initially framed in a discourse of national pride and unity. Jewish victims were on the one hand nationalized and on the other hand particularized. This ambiguous perspective was supported by Jewish newspapers and institutions, who argued that the Jewish community should not contribute to but also not turn away from this cause. In the words of the Zionist Spangenthal, Dutch Jewish victims had been Dutch nationals as well, but had been persecuted exclusively as Jews. The Hollandsche Schouwburg could hardly symbolize a nation of equals, since it had been used to isolate and deport Jews in order to murder them. On the other hand, the collective effort to raise money demonstrated a broad consensus that this building should no longer be used for entertainment and a small memorial space should indeed be installed.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was transformed from a site of painful heritage to a site of national piety by separating the actual persecution of Jews, a process that had demonstrated a fundamental split between the Jewish and non-Jewish population and was therefore potentially divisive, from honoring the memory [*nagedachtenis*] of those victims within a national and unifying framework. This separation enabled the Hollandsche Schouwburg – symbol of deportation and persecution – to be reinterpreted as a symbol of honor, piety and national unity that should not be demolished but rather rescued from the embarrassment of being used as a site of entertainment. Large parts of the Jewish community were unable to fully accept this discourse of national honor; they mourned the loss of loved ones that had left a palpable emotional gap rather than a symbolic scar in the national tissue. Their position towards the destination of the Hollandsche Schouwburg would remain ambiguous: on the one hand, they agreed that the memory of the victims should be honored, on the other many of them said they would never be able to enter this building, whatever destination it would have, because of the painful emotions attached to it.

The initial plans for this rather large building involved the establishment of a destination in line with its wartime history: a Jewish library, a center about the historical significance of the Jews in the Netherlands or the housing of the Westerbork archives. Other suggestions were the establishment of a university lecture hall, student cafeteria, a church, or a depot for large paintings in the Rijksmuseum collection. Jewish newspapers and institutions did not take a leading role in this process but they did follow the discussion closely. After three years of indecisiveness, the city government invited the former De Wolff committee to formulate a plan, under the assumption that this mixed group of both Jews and

Schouwburg was fundamentally different from that of the war itself: it was not about the victims, but the memory of the victims.

non-Jews could represent the general population, including the Jewish community. The NIHS and NZB challenged this and distanced themselves from this advisory committee. The conflict reached its peak when in 1953 the building was offered to Israel for the establishment of an Israeli center. When this plan fell apart, the advisory committee was disbanded and the theater remained empty until 1958 when it was decided to build a memorial in memory of the Jewish victims of the war.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not an important national issue until its postwar reopening as a theater was contested by several journalists in 1945.⁸⁵ Suddenly, there was public outcry that successfully challenged the use of the theater and appropriated it as a site of national significance. The committee of de Wolff and Winkler had elicited broad support by framing the issue of the Schouwburg as a national debt of honor. As such, it differed from other possible sites of heritage related to the memory of the murdered Jews such as Westerbork, Vught, the former *Zentralstelle* in Amsterdam and the synagogue complex at the J.D. Meijerplein. None of these sites elicited such an intense public reaction as the Schouwburg did during these early postwar years.

The former transit camps were soon put to use after liberation as prison sites for Germans or collaborators and later for the accommodation of repatriates from the East-Indies. Only at a later stage would these be monumentalized in order to commemorate the persecution of the Jews.⁸⁶ An example of painful heritage within Amsterdam is the infamous Euterpestraat where several Nazi institutions instrumental in the persecution of both Jews and resistance fighters had been located. In addition to the memory of these institutes, the street was bombed by allied forces, causing dozens of civilian casualties. During the first postwar city council meeting, the street was renamed after the resistance fighter Gerrit van der Veen.⁸⁷ However, the buildings in question – one destroyed, the other now a school again – were not turned into sites of memory. The last example is the synagogue complex at the J.D. Meijerplein. It was badly damaged during and after the war and

⁸⁵ It has been argued that all heritage is contested, because there is always a group that is disinherited. See Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*.

⁸⁶ Former Nazi camps in Europe were often used for new purposes after the war. The camps in the Netherlands were memorialized at a rather late stage, see Hijink, *Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering*, 175–177.

⁸⁷ Bianca Stigter, *De bezette stad. Plattegrond van Amsterdam, 1940-1945* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2005), 21–22, 65, 218–219; Jan Eikelboom, “Dodenherdenking 2005: de Euterpestraat,” *Geschiedenis* 24, 2005, <http://www.geschiedenis24.nl/speler.program.7096264.html>, accessed on December 3, 2013. The name change was a form of silencing an unwanted memory. J. Spierdijk wrote in *De Waarheid* that the name Euterpestraat – analogue to Nazi crimes – should disappear: ‘the lovely lady Euterpe was dressed in the hated green uniform and we will not forgive her.’ *De Waarheid*, June 28, 1945.

withered away only to be restored decades later when the Jewish Historical Museum took up residence in the complex.

For various reasons, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was different from these sites. First of all, it was located right a neighborhood where many of the Jewish victims had lived and furthermore in the city where most surviving Dutch Jews had settled after the war. Because the site was located in an urban environment, it was more visible than the former camp sites that were situated far away. Secondly, these camps were owned and used by the government, rather than by a commercial party. In comparison to the Euterpestraat, the history of the Schouwburg could be molded into a narrative of agency. The acts of persecution and resistance that had taken place in and around the former theater could be brought together in a coherent narrative of agency where Nazi violence was countered by acts of resistance. In the case of the Euterpestraat, both Nazi and allied casualties were to be mourned over. Here, there was no heroic Dutch reaction to be commemorated, only a failed attempt that led to the tragic deaths of citizens. Lastly, the synagogues were not directly connected to the history of the persecution of the Jews.

Once the establishment of an entertainment center was prevented and the building transferred, the city of Amsterdam was saddled with the responsibility of finding a proper destination that could be reconciled with the history of this site. It was one of the first sites of heritage that the government needed to manage that was specifically related to the persecution of the Jews, at a time when such sites were not considered to be evidently valuable. Four years later, in reaction to international commotion about the eminent demolition of the Anne Frank House, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns argued that the Dutch government could not intervene because the building was not a monument of historic or artistic relevance and because it was private property.⁸⁸ The limited definition of heritage employed by Luns was characteristic of that time and the Anne Frank House was only saved after a non-governmental committee eventually intervened.

In a similar vein, the city of Amsterdam did not consider the Hollandsche Schouwburg to be valuable as an historic structure or otherwise and therefore looked for a new destination. It struggled with asking the fragmented Jewish community for formal advice. Several institutions claimed to represent the Jewish community at large, in particular the Dutch Jewish Orthodox Church (NIK) and the Zionist Bond (NZB), in spite of the fact many Jews did not feel represented by

⁸⁸ Jos van der Lans and Herman Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank Huis: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 66.

either of them.⁸⁹ The NIK saw itself as the natural representative of the Jewish community. In 1955, the Permanent Committee (the daily board of the NIK, the national orthodox Jewish community) claimed: ‘We represent the entire Jewish community in the Netherlands. [...] Our religious community has always been and will continue to be based on the Torah and Tradition.’⁹⁰ A controversial claim, since it implied that only people with a Jewish mother were to be considered Jews. Additionally, the postwar Jewish community was characterized by processes of secularization and religious pluralism, rather than an attachment to a unified and orthodox denomination.⁹¹ On the other hand, the Zionist Bond had gained more support after the occupation. The prewar notion that assimilation would lead to a safe environment where Jews were protected against anti-Semitic violence had been invalidated by the Nazi persecution. The alternative Zionist ideal of Israel that a sovereign state that could defend Jews world-wide had gained traction. In the words of Abel Herzberg, without Israel, every Jew is an uncovered check.⁹² Several thousand Jews migrated to Israel, but this did not mean a diminishment of NZB sentiment during the first decades following the war.⁹³ A third important actor was the Jewish weekly *NIW*. Before the war, it had been anti-Zionist; after 1945, this changed and in 1947 the *NIW* argued that the NZB was the most important Jewish organization in the Netherlands.⁹⁴ The influence of this newspaper was considerable. During city council meetings dealing with the Hollandsche Schouwburg, its editorials were often cited. In addition, the letters to the editor section offered a platform for both institutional players and individual opinions. As such, the *NIW* provided something of a public realm for the otherwise fragmented and diverse community.

A few days after the donation was accepted by the city council, the *NIW* published an editorial expressing the opinion that:

Nobody seems to know what to do with the building. The Jewish community, which is the obvious choice for putting the building into use,

⁸⁹ It is important to stress that the Zionist and orthodox community in the postwar Netherlands were not radically opposed but intimately intertwined. Evelien Gans argues that there was a ‘zionist march through Jewish institutions’ from 1945 onwards, see Gans, *De kleine verschillen*, 591–596.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Joop Sanders, “Samenwerken - of niet. De onderlinge verhouding tussen de joodse kerkgenootschappen in Nederland,” in *Wie niet weg is, is gezien. Joods Nederland na 1945*, ed. Hetty Berg and Bart Wallet (Zwolle: Waanders, 2010), 79.

⁹¹ Wallet and Berg, “65 Jaar Joods Nederland.”

⁹² Quoted by David Wertheim, “Hypotheek op een ongedekte cheque. De betekenis van Israël voor de Nederlands-joodse schrijvers Abel Herzberg, Leon de Winter en Arnon Grunberg,” in *Wie niet weg is, is gezien. Joods Nederland na 1945*, ed. Hetty Berg and Bart Wallet (Zwolle: Waanders, 2010), 135.

⁹³ F.C. Brasz argues that at least 1500 Dutch Jews migrated to Israel between 1948 and 1953. Zionism was not the main motivation, but rather the desire to leave the Netherlands. Brasz, “Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog,” 366.

⁹⁴ *NIW* February 21, 1947. See Lipschits, *Honderd jaar NIW*, chapter 10.

doesn't need it any longer, since plenty buildings are available to its decimated population. [...] We can conclude that in the Netherlands, the heritage of the war and the memory of that period is dealt with ineptly. While we now have a monument to the protectors of the Jews and soon a new one will be established in memory of the February strike, the building through which most Jews from Amsterdam were transported to Westerbork stands vacant, and no memorial exists for those who truly matter: the tens of thousands of Jews who were deported and murdered.⁹⁵

However, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was not readily accepted as such a memorial by the aforementioned Jewish institutions. The city government was sensitive to their opinion and in an interview, the Mayor of Amsterdam said:

[we] takes seriously the prevailing opinion in Jewish circles that the building in its entirety cannot be used as a commemoration site. The remainder of the Jews [...] want to live with the living, strive for a safe future and rather put their effort into Israel than unproductively mourn their dead.⁹⁶

This statement reflected both the position of the orthodox community and the Zionist Bond, and was repeated on several occasions in the *NIW*. The orthodox community wanted to commemorate its victims within its religious institutions and not at a negative and secular site such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg or Westerbork. This did not mean the orthodox community rejected the idea of a memorial on a secular site; however, such a memorial addressed another crowd. Chief Rabbi Tal, member of the committee, argued that a memorial had two functions: to commemorate the dead and to remember what has happened. He contends that:

We, Jews, do not need a memorial. Every hour of every day we remember those who have passed away. [...] The memorial is necessary for those, who need to be reminded. It is an indictment, not of the Jewish people, but to the failure of all the good people could have done. The memorial reminds the world of its neglect.⁹⁷

The initial plans to construct a library, university hall or canteen became stranded by practical, moral and financial objections.⁹⁸ The idea to establish a memorial was

⁹⁵ *NIW* March 24, 1950.

⁹⁶ *Elseviers Weekblad* May 20, 1950.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Wim Ramaker and Ben van Bohemen, *Sta een ogenblik stil ... Monumentenboek 1940/1945* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 132. Tal spoke these words at the unveiling of a memorial within the Jewish cemetery in Muiderberg, which was built because an older initiative, a memorial at the J.D. Meijerplein in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood had been frustrated by the city of Amsterdam, see Stigter, "Beelden om nooit te vergeten," 41-42.

⁹⁸ *Het Parool* October 10, 1951.

rejected by Joop Melkman, editor of the *NIW* and future director of Yad Vashem in Israel.⁹⁹ He argued that the Schouwburg could not be considered an adequate memorial for the Jewish community, and that the J.D. Meijerplein was the appropriate site to commemorate the Jewish victims.¹⁰⁰ A few months later, a survivor who had been incarcerated in the Schouwburg wrote in a letter to the editor, stating that he would never set foot in the theater again and asserted that there are enough memorials at Jewish graveyards.¹⁰¹ Near the end of the year, *NIW* editor-in-chief Max Gans dedicated another editorial to this issue. All of the plans for a new destination had proved to be too costly for the city government. Gans' solution was straightforward. He simply asks:

Why don't they tear down the building? For now and for the future, this is the best, most pious and definitely the cheapest solution. A simple public garden and commemorative plaque, possibly with an image of the Schouwburg, would be a solution we Jews would be very grateful for towards the city council.¹⁰²

This editorial was mentioned explicitly by the Jewish social-democratic politician Ben Sajet during a city council meeting where he argued it was disgrace that the building was in such a bad shape and that the city should come quickly to a solution. He pleaded for the installment of a representative advisory committee. Alderman Van der Velde agreed; and, in order to hasten the process, decided not to install a new committee or to ask Jewish institutions for their formal advice, but asked instead the former De Wolff committee for advice.¹⁰³ Chairman De Wolff stressed that the members of this committee did not represent Jewish institutions but were invited to speak in their personal capacity.¹⁰⁴ This would prove to be a misjudgment, since the NZB and the orthodox community felt sidestepped and continued to question the representativeness of the advisory committee of De Wolff, in spite of the fact that prominent individuals from both institutions were members.

In the meantime, a new and promising opportunity had presented itself to the Mayor of Amsterdam. Zionist A. van Santen, a friend of Alderman Van der Velde, had contacted the Israeli envoy Michael Amir. His plan was to establish an Israeli Center to promote the cultural and economic achievements of this young

⁹⁹ Melkman, later Michman, became director general of Yad Vashem in May 1957. See David Bankier and Dan Mikhman, *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 279–280.

¹⁰⁰ *NIW* May 2, 1952.

¹⁰¹ *NIW* July 25, 1952.

¹⁰² *NIW* November 7, 1952.

¹⁰³ *Gemeentebled Amsterdam*, afdeling 2, December 2, 1952, p. 1292-1309.

¹⁰⁴ Proceedings of the advisory committee, March 11, 1954, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, IISH.

state.¹⁰⁵ Amir was keen to realize this project, which he saw as an exquisite opportunity to represent this young state in one of the oldest Jewish centers of Europe. The mayor told Amir that he had been unable to find a solution that would please the Dutch Jews and that he expected that a proposal by Israel would be accepted more readily. This corresponded to Amir's self-perception: as representative of Israel he clearly expected he could count on the support of the Jewish community in general, and Dutch Zionists in particular. The orthodox community in diaspora was considered to be a vanishing category and would eventually merge into the Jewish state. An Israeli Center could be instrumental in this process, and to establish this center at a site that had been used to deport Jews was a symbol of Jewish renaissance through Zionism. This was in line with early Israeli memory discourse that linked the Israeli independence war directly to the ghetto uprising in Warsaw, and used the persecution of the Jews as a *raison d'être* of the Jewish state.¹⁰⁶

Without consulting any Dutch Jewish organization, Amir looked for support in Israel. Only when the accord was ready to be announced he began to seek support in the Netherlands, starting with the De Wolff committee, which had now been expanded to include several Jewish leaders, such as Chief Rabbi Aron Schuster and the chairman of the NZB, Izak de Vries. The committee discussed several plans, including the housing of the Rosenthaliana library which by then had been incorporated into the University Library of Amsterdam. Rabbi Schuster preferred this last plan, which was in line with orthodox wishes to revive a sustainable Jewish community in the Netherlands. However, he did not veto the Israeli Center as long as there would be no entertainment at this site. De Vries supported the plan for an Israeli Center on the condition that only serious lectures and exhibitions would be programmed. He argued that the new destination should 'not only be determined by the past, but also by the fact the future more or less sprouts from the past,' linking the Zionist state with the memory of the persecution. Notary E. Spier, chairman of the Permanent Committee of the NIK and together with De Wolff one of the confidants of Amir, went even further, arguing that this plan focused on 'that part of Jewry that has continuity, that is, Israel.'¹⁰⁷ On July 13,

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed account of this plan, see Bart Wallet, "'Een levend gedenkteken'. Israël, joods Nederland en de herinnering aan de Sjoa," in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 190–99.

¹⁰⁶ Segev, *The Seventh Million*; Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁰⁷ Proceedings of advisory committee, June 29, 1953, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, International Institute of Social History (IISH).

the committee gave its unanimous support. The city council would discuss the plan on July 22, which seemed only to be a formality.

In the meantime however, the Israeli Center was intensely discussed in the newspapers. This began with a long, dismissive letter in the *NIW* written by Jewish opinion maker Henriëtte Boas, who published both in Dutch newspapers and the Israeli daily *The Jerusalem Post*. Her argument against the plan was that the Hollandsche Schouwburg had never been considered Jewish heritage before the war, such as the dilapidating synagogues at the J.D. Meijerplein undeniably had been. Because of its dark history, many Jews would never set foot in this building, which probably was too large for its suggested purpose anyway, and too costly to renovate.¹⁰⁸ Most reactions in the *NIW* were negative and followed Boas' arguments: too expensive, too negative, and why not spend money on the synagogues instead?¹⁰⁹

Eventually, both the NIHS and the NZB distanced themselves from the plan, arguing that the unanimous support of the De Wolff committee did not reflect their official position on the issue. Boas and Melkman, who had previously argued against the Schouwburg as a memorial site, managed to reduce Amir's support in Israel. Amir was forced to withdraw his support of the plan just before the council meeting on July 22. His official argument was that an estimated 20% of the Dutch Jewish community had negative sentiments towards the plan.¹¹⁰ The letter of rejection was accompanied by a conflicting oral statement contending that if the city council decided to go through with the plan, Israel would in all probability accept the proposal.

The council meeting was chaotic and emotional, with interruptions from the public gallery and several references to newspaper articles, in particular several editorials of the *NIW*. Liberal council member Le Cavelier even argued that the decision should be postponed because the issue had 'not fermented enough in the press.'¹¹¹ The proposal was accepted by a vote of 26 to 11, however the debate continued in the newspapers. The *NIW* covered the council meeting in great detail and argued in an editorial that the Israeli envoy should not intervene or represent the sentiments of the Jewish community of Amsterdam. 'This is none of Israel's business, but rather of the Dutch Jewry.'¹¹² According to the editorial, Amir had overestimated his position in the Netherlands. The editorial board writes that:

¹⁰⁸ *NIW* July 10, 1953. A shorter version appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* on July 20, 1953, suggesting that Israel would have to provide most funds for the center.

¹⁰⁹ *NIW* July, 17 1953.

¹¹⁰ *Het Parool* July 22, 1953.

¹¹¹ Proceedings of the city council, July 22, 1953, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, International Institute of Social History (IISH).

¹¹² *NIW* July 24, 1953.

many unpleasanties would have been avoided if the contact between the Israeli Legation, Jewish organizations and the Jewish press would have been closer. With timely consultation directly after the plans were first made, the sentiments amongst the Jewish public could have been assessed better.¹¹³

Not much later, Israel withdrew from the plan entirely, much to the reluctance of envoy Amir. The debate about the Israeli Center had turned into a struggle over the ownership of the memory of Jewish persecution and the issue of representation. Although the Dutch Jewish organizations did not come to a joint solution, they did agree on the fact that Israel could not altogether bypass the Dutch Jewish community living in the diaspora. The *NIW* repeated its call for the demolition of the theater; the NIHS stressed that the synagogues abutting the J.D. Meijerplein should receive priority.

The De Wolff committee assembled for a final meeting on March 11, 1954, without much success.¹¹⁴ Several members pleaded for demolition; according to historian Evelien Gans they were disappointed with the national memorial policy that had prevented the establishment of a specific Jewish memorial at the J.D. Meijerplein in 1947. Max Gans and Rabbi Schuster argued that a majority of Jews were against any positive destination for this building, to which De Wolff replied that he – as a statistician – could not take this seriously. Tearing down the building was unacceptable for De Wolff, who continued to argue that it was not a Jewish but a national issue. The committee was unable come to an agreement and was disbanded.

It took another three years before the city council was able to come to a decision. During this time, there was little attention in the newspapers. In 1955, the city council discussed a rapport about the Schouwburg and the synagogue complex at the J.D. Meijerplein. The *NIW* focused mainly on the latter and merely repeated its earlier plea for the destruction of the former theater. For the *NIW*, religious heritage had become more important than the heritage of the war. In 1957, newly appointed city architect Jan Leupen suggested shifting focus from the building to the terrain, enabling a partial demolition that could still be reconciled with an appropriate destination.¹¹⁵ Leupen's insight cleared the path for his final design. One year later, on July 16, 1958, Israeli President Ben-Zwi commemorated the Jewish victims of the war on the steps of the closed theater. A large crowd, who had

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Proceedings of advisory committee, March 11, 1954, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, International Institute of Social History (IISH).

¹¹⁵ F. Boode, "Hollandsche Schouwburg' als algemene herdenkingsplaats," *Ons Amsterdam* 16 (1964): 156.

congregated both on the street and tramway, had to move away every time a tram passed. It demonstrated the unsuitability of this site for larger public ceremonies.

A few months later, Leupen's design for a commemoration site was finally accepted by the city council. The meeting of November 27, 1958 was emotional and partially held behind closed doors. Many of the former arguments were reiterated. However, there was little discussion in the newspapers compared to the heated debate five years earlier. The *NIW* even refrained from writing a commentary because it did not want to undercut the process of decision-making.¹¹⁶ Leupen's plan called for the demolition of the former theater hall, with the exception of the walls that surrounded the stage. The result was an open courtyard that followed the structure of the former theater.¹¹⁷ The seats, where once the audience sat and later the Jewish detainees awaiting deportation were replaced with a grass field symbolizing the absent victims. Nobody tread on this field, out of respect for the dead.

The grass field was surrounded by two corridors that led to the former stage. The stage was transformed into the symbolic center of the memorial and supported a large pylon with a base in the form of a Magen David. It was circumscribed by the jagged and partially authentic walls (as previously described) and a smooth dark-colored natural stone wall with the inscription '5700-5705 / In memory of those who have been taken away from here / 1940-1945'. Behind the rear wall stood fast-growing Lombardy poplar trees which offered a scenic backdrop. Enclosing the memorial, growing trees symbolized the rejuvenation of the Jewish community after the war. The courtyard design successfully merged the two historical functions of this site, theater and deportation center. It represented the absence of the victims and the continuation of Jewish life after the war. Moreover, it turned the former theater stage into a stage for performances of memory.

The front part of the building, which once housed the lobby and cloakroom among other parts, was completely renovated. The first and second floors were rented out as office space, and on the first floor an additional memorial was installed, the *chappelle ardente* that was mentioned in the deed of transfer. The former De Wolff committee that had donated the theater in 1950 was responsible for this space and asked Léon Waterman to design its interior. He consulted Soetendorp, the former journalist who, after a period living in Israel, had returned

¹¹⁶ *NIW* December 5, 1958.

¹¹⁷ For a detailed account of the architectural history of this memorial, see Coert Krabbe, "Spreken tot de bedroefden". Architectuur van de herdenkingsplaats," in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 210–17.

to the Netherlands to become a liberal rabbi.¹¹⁸ The result was a small and intimate room with three stones representing a seminal family (father, mother and child). A lamp holding an eternal flame was attached to the side wall. On a small patch of Israeli soil stand several plants, also from Israel. Above these plants stood a Psalm text in Hebrew and Dutch, 'My soul weeps because of grief; Strengthen me according to Your word'.¹¹⁹ De Wolff had been involved in this design until shortly before his death in 1960, but his suggestion to place a Psalm that addressed both Jews and non-Jews was not followed and instead a more religious text was chosen.¹²⁰

The historic façade, dating from the 19th century, was largely maintained and repaired; except for a new, open steel entrance that allowed passers-by to glimpse a view of the courtyard from the street. There was a small shield next to the entrance that read 'Former Hollandsche Schouwburg. Memorial to the fallen Jewish compatriots in 1940-1945.' After the memorial was established, this text became controversial, especially the definition of *fallen* Jewish compatriots [*gevallen Joodse landgenoten*]. In the early postwar debate, this term was considered as an acknowledgement of Jewish victims. As I discussed before, *NIW* editor Soetendorp had compared the Hollandsche Schouwburg to execution sites where resistance fighters had been shot and described the Jewish victims as our fallen. This was an attempt to inscribe the persecution of the Jews in the national memory discourse that prioritized actively fallen over passive victims.

In 1966 this strategy was no longer tolerated by a group of Jewish and non-Jewish journalists who took offense to what they argued was a euphemism for the industrial murder of more than 100,000 Jews. Henri Knap, Max Gans and Nico Scheepmaker took up the issue and organized a petition to have the text changed. Their main argument was that the Jewish victims were described as fallen heroes, rather than murdered victims. The critical stance towards the nationalistic discourse was partly due to the recent study by Jacques Presser that had been presented at this site one year earlier. Gans argued that the text on shield should be changed. 'In reaction to the publication of professor Presser's *Ondergang* we have already pointed out that he rightfully called the persecution of the Jews murder, and not an act of war.'¹²¹ The text was changed to those 'taken away and not returned' in accordance with the text on courtyard wall. Scheepmaker wrote that in

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹¹⁹ Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible, Copyright by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

¹²⁰ Evelien Gans, "Sam de Wolff, 1878-1960," in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 209.

¹²¹ *NIW* March 18, 1966.

his opinion this new text was only a small improvement and that he had spoken to Jews who preferred the term ‘never returned’ over murdered. This compromise was part of an ongoing negotiation comprising the meaning and framing of the Hollandsche Schouwburg.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not a site of oblivion between 1945 and 1962, but rather a constant and physical reminder of the persecution of the Jews and its place in the Dutch memory of World War II. In the words of historian Peter Carrier, the debate about the Hollandsche Schouwburg enabled a ‘metadiscussion on the present-day political function of historical symbols [...]. [S]uch disputed sites of memory thus offer a basis for the public negotiation of historical memories and their political function.’¹²² The long and painstaking decision process about its destination did not entail the repression of memory but rather expressed a multitude of voices.

The meaning of this site changed over time, sometimes in accordance with hegemonic memory discourse. First, it was framed as a national debt of honor; after that, it became a site of contestation on the part of several dissenting Jewish institutions which prohibited a consensual destination. When the site was finally inaugurated in 1962, this negotiation continued and as a result, the shield next to the entrance was changed. In the decades that followed, this process continued and the site was gradually appropriated by several Jewish institutions. From 1966 onwards, the Zionist commemoration of the persecution of the Jews, Yom HaShoah, was organized in the courtyard, which will be examined in the following chapter. In the early 1990s, the Jewish Historical Museum took over management and installed a small museum exhibition, which will be analyzed in chapter 4. However, the Hollandsche Schouwburg always remained a public site that never exclusively focused on the Jewish community. Alongside Yom HaShoah, the national Remembrance Day was organized and the Jewish Historical Museum aimed at educating the Dutch youth in general. The structure’s hybrid character is still visible in the current presentation of the memorial museum and attests to the continuous dynamics underlying the processes of contestation, appropriation and heritage formation that took place at this site.

¹²² Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures*, 214.