

Between Community and Collaboration

This is the first comprehensive, comparative study of the 'Jewish Councils' in the Netherlands, Belgium and France during Nazi rule. In the post-war period, there was extensive focus on these organisations' controversial role as facilitators of the Holocaust. They were seen as instruments of Nazi oppression, aiding the process of isolating and deporting the Jews they were ostensibly representing. As a result, they have chiefly been remembered as forms of collaboration. Using a wide range of sources including personal testimonies, diaries, administrative documents and trial records, Laurien Vastenhout demonstrates that the nature of the Nazi regime, and its outlook on these bodies, was far more complex. She sets the conduct of the Councils' leaders in their pre-war and wartime social and situational contexts and provides a thorough understanding of their personal contacts with the Germans and clandestine organisations. *Between Community and Collaboration* reveals what German intentions with these organisations were during the course of the occupation and allows for a deeper understanding of the different ways in which the Holocaust unfolded in each of these countries.

Laurien Vastenhout is researcher and lecturer at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam. She received her doctorate in History at the University of Sheffield and was awarded various scholarships and prizes, including the Claims Conference Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies and a Yad Vashem research fellowship.

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Between Community and Collaboration

*‘Jewish Councils’ in Western Europe
under Nazi Occupation*

Laurien Vastenhout

*NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and
Genocide Studies, Amsterdam*



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To Mark, light of my life

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Preface

This book has been written to understand the circumstances and mindset that shaped Jewish leaders' choices and behaviour in Nazi-occupied Western Europe. The controversy still surrounding the 'Jewish Councils',¹ and the supposed collaboration with German authorities of their chairmen, stimulated my desire to provide a comprehensive understanding of these organisations in Western Europe (the Netherlands, Belgium and France). During the course of this research, I realised that a comparative approach is crucial if we want to fully grasp the histories of these organisations, because such an approach enables a more thorough understanding of how local conditions shaped German rule in the occupied territories and, in turn, how differences in local conditions affected the form and function of the 'Jewish Councils' as well as the choices of their leaders.

The image on the cover of this book depicts one of the administrative departments of the Jewish Council in the Netherlands (De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam), situated in Amsterdam. It is symbolic of the organisation's day-to-day reality. During the course of this investigation, reading through numerous personal testimonies, meeting reports and other administrative sources, it was striking to see how quickly the 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe turned into expansive bureaucratic apparatuses. On a daily basis, employees of the administrative offices dealt with numerous letters of Jewish individuals who needed (social or financial) support, or material resources, while they also facilitated

¹ As will be further explained in the introduction of this book, the term 'Jewish Councils' (the literal translation of the term *Judenräte*) is not an entirely accurate term for all representative organisations the German authorities imposed upon the Jewish communities across Europe. For example, in Belgium and France respectively, the Association des Juifs en Belgique (AJB) and the Union Générale des Israélites de France (UGIF) were referred to as Associations. Yet because 'Jewish Councils' is a widely used and understood concept, it was considered most straightforward to use the term, between quotation marks, in certain instances when general references are made to these organisations (including those in Belgium and France).

communication between the organisation's numerous departments and sub-departments. The piles of paper on the desk in this photograph are illustrative of the bureaucracy involved.

The cover image is part of a series of more than 100 photographs in which the work of the Jewish Council in the Netherlands is visually recorded. The photographer Johan de Haas produced the images on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of the chairman of the Dutch Council, David Cohen, on 31 December 1942. It was a period in which there was little to celebrate. Between summer and winter 1942, conditions for Jews in the Netherlands, and Western Europe more broadly, had drastically deteriorated. As decreed by the German authorities, summer 1942 marked the start of the mass deportations of Jews to Eastern Europe and there was uncertainty about the fate of those deported. Jews were increasingly deprived of their basic human rights. Moreover, German pressure on the 'Jewish Councils' to facilitate the removal of Jews from society grew. In this atmosphere of distress and anxiety, the Dutch Council's functionaries wondered whether it was appropriate to celebrate Cohen's anniversary. In the end, they decided they *had* to. On the day of the celebration, Meyer de Vries (general advisor to the Jewish Council), Henri Eitje (who chaired the Council's Aid to Non-Dutch Jews department) as well as Chief Rabbi Simon Dasberg, all emphasised in their speeches for Cohen that they wished to honour him because, for years, he had tirelessly dedicated himself to the plight of the Jews.²

Surrounded by his closest colleagues and representatives of the Jewish communities throughout the Netherlands, David Cohen (Illustration P.1) received a photo-album that captured the social work in which the Council's functionaries were engaged.³ While many images were taken at the organisation's main office at the Nieuwe Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, the work of other departments is also shown, including that of the so-called Expositur, where exemptions from deportation to Eastern Europe for Jewish individuals were arranged, as well as that of the office for Help for the Departing (Illustration P.2). The so-called *Gids voor den Joodschen Raad* (Guide to the Jewish Council), published in March 1943, shows that the Dutch Council consisted of more than 150 departments, sub-departments and commissions. These included the bureau for Extracurricular Youth

² Speeches of Meyer de Vries, Henri Eitje and Simon Dasberg in honour of David Cohen, Doc I 248-0294, Prof. D. Cohen, Inv. No. 2, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam.

³ René Kok, 'Het fotoalbum van de Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam', in Willy Lindwer (ed.), *Het fatale dilemma: De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam 1941–1943* (The Hague: SDU Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht, 1995), 173. There exist photos and photo-albums that capture the work of other Jewish Councils in Nazi-occupied Europe as well. A notable example is that of the Judenrat in Łódź. For further reading on this, see Tanja Kinzel, *Im Fokus der Kamera. Fotografien aus dem ghetto Lodz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2021), 127–369; Pawel



Illustration P.1 Chairman of the Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam (JR), David Cohen (centre), at Olympia Square in Amsterdam during a raid, 20 June 1943. Photograph by Herman Heukels. Reproduced by kind permission of the NIOD, Amsterdam.

Care (Illustration P.3), a sub-department at Tehuis Oosteinde that was responsible for sewing and mending (Illustration P.4), and a commission that administered the distribution of vegetables (see Illustration P.5).

Fifty years later, De Haas reflected on his visit to the organisation's offices. He was struck by the fact that the employees were eager to be portrayed.⁴ Perhaps, having witnessed the deportation of thousands of Jews from the Netherlands at this point, and unsure about their own future, they wanted to leave a visual trace of themselves, and their work, behind. Today, the whereabouts of the album, if it still exists, remains unknown. Fortunately, De Haas preserved the negatives.

In addition to the photographs, numerous other sources bear witness to the untiring efforts the Council's employees and its leaders to provide

Michna, 'Visual Representations of modernity in documents from the Łódź Ghetto' in Jack Dominic Palmer and Dariusz Brzeziński (eds), *Revisiting Modernity and the Holocaust: Heritage, Dilemmas, Extensions* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2022) 88–107; and 'Modernism in the Lodz Ghetto. A Tentative Interpretation of Forgotten Holocaust Documents', *Miejsce (Place)*, Vol. 6 (2020), 81–111; Andrea Löw, 'Documenting as a "Passion and Obsession": Photographs from the Lodz (Litzmannstadt) Ghetto', *Central European History*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2015), 387–404.

⁴ Statement of Johan de Haas in Lindwer, *Het fatale dilemma*, 170.



Illustration P.2 Employees of the Help for the Departing department in front of the JR office at Oudeschans 74 in Amsterdam, late 1942. Photograph by Johan de Haas. Reproduced by kind permission of the De Haas family and the NIOD.

assistance to the Jews in the Netherlands. In Belgium and France, the situation was similar. The Union Générale des Israélites de France Nord (UGIF-Nord) and the UGIF-Sud administered a wide range of social aid activities in France, including the provision of juridical aid to Jews, schooling and the supply of food through canteens. Numerous departments and sub-departments of the UGIF were scattered across both occupied and unoccupied France. The Association des Juifs en Belgique (AJB) in Belgium similarly provided care to the Jewish communities. In June 1942, a representative of the AJB Brussels branch (and member of the central board), Salomon van den Berg, wrote that the organisation sought to help the poor, assisted in emigration efforts and provided schooling, adding that the organisation ‘has done a good job in social matters, not caring in the least about political issues’.⁵ In February 1943, the former secretary of

⁵ Salomon van den Berg, *Journal de guerre*, p. 37, A006685, Joods Museum van Deportatie en Verzet (JMDV), Centre National des Hautes Études Juives (CNHEJ), Buber Collection, Kazerne Dossin, Mechelen.



Illustration P.3 Children celebrating Chanukah, organised by the Extra-curricular Youth Care department of the JR, late 1942. Photograph by Johan de Haas. Reproduced by kind permission of the De Haas family and the NIOD.

the AJB central board likewise indicated that the organisation's sole aim was to provide for the social and legal needs of the Jewish communities in Belgium.⁶

Most Jewish leaders under Nazi rule were first and foremost interested in alleviating the suffering of their communities. In doing so, they faced a dilemma: they could only provide social assistance if they cooperated with the Germans. Their intention to do so was increasingly frustrated as they were forced to deal with and abide by increasing anti-Jewish legislation. As a result, Jewish leaders had to perform a balancing act, assisting their communities while giving in to German demands, simultaneously trying to minimise their level of cooperation. To them, cooperation with

⁶ Maurice Benedictus, 'Historique du problème Juif en Belgique depuis le 10 Mai 1940 jusqu'au 21 Décembre 1942', 18 February 1943, A006683, JMDV, CNHEJ, Buber Collection, Kazerne Dossin.



Illustration P.4 Sewing and Mending at Tehuis Oosteinde, a sub-department of the JR, late 1942. Photograph by Johan de Haas. Reproduced by kind permission of the De Haas family and the NIOD.

the Germans and assisting Jewish communities were two sides of the same coin.

As the deportation process accelerated, the line between cooperation and collaboration became thinner. Contemporaries as well as scholars have labelled the Jewish leaders' wartime behaviour as collaboration or have used the terms 'collaboration' and 'cooperation' interchangeably. Yet, in line with what the historian and political scientist Evgeny Finkel has argued, I believe we should make a distinction between the two concepts in the context of the 'Jewish Councils'. Those Jews who *cooperated* with the Germans first and foremost set out to safeguard and help the wider community; those who *collaborated* were motivated by personal gain and were not aiming to serve the interests of their communities at large. From the German viewpoint, Jews' collaboration was most desirable and effective since it merely involved placating the Jewish leaders and (pretending to) acquiesce to their individual interests. Caught between their own wish to help the communities on the one hand, and



Illustration P.5 Vegetable Distribution department of the JR, late 1942. Photograph by Johan de Haas. Reproduced by kind permission of the De Haas family and the NIOD.

increasing German pressure to collaborate on the other, Jewish leaders in Western Europe, whether successfully or not, continued to make their decisions according to the perceived interests of the community at large.

The foundations of this book were laid in January 2013, when I wrote a comparative research paper on the ‘Jewish Councils’ of the Netherlands and Belgium. I am grateful beyond measure to the teachers who then encouraged me to develop this project further and who have now become my close colleagues at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam. Specifically, I want to thank Nanci Adler, Thijs Bouwknecht and Uğur Ümit Üngör for their invaluable support, and for being an inspiration.

I owe a great debt to the large number of scholars who were willing to exchange thoughts on this subject, and who, during various stages, shaped this project. First and foremost, I had the great fortune of having two exceptional supervisors at the University of Sheffield, where I completed my doctoral studies. Bob Moore and Daniel Lee offered

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indispensable guidance and advice, both during and after my studies. Their knowledge and zeal have been nothing if not inspiring. The generous comments and suggestions on the manuscript provided by Dan Michman, whose contribution to the historiography of Jewish Councils is indispensable, have been of considerable support. Likewise, I have greatly appreciated the feedback from Dan Stone and Benjamin Ziemann. I would furthermore like to thank Jean-Marc Dreyfus, Jean Laloum, Michel Laffitte and Jacques Sémelin for their time and consideration whilst I was doing research in France. During my stay in Belgium, commentaries from Rudi van Doorslaer, Nico Wouters, Lieven Saerens and others guided me through the very early stages of this project. I am also very grateful for the support and advice of Richard Cohen. At the University of Oxford, Martin Conway's insightful comments stimulated me to rethink my research within the broader context of the nature of the National Socialist regime. Vicki Caron not only shared her thoughts on my work, but also kindly sent me one of her earlier articles on the UGIF. In addition, I am greatly indebted to the extraordinary individuals at Ohio State University. Their reflections on the transnational perspectives of my work were of immense help.

This book would not exist were it not for the help of the many archivists and librarians who guided me through the archives and who made my numerous trips abroad so valuable and so pleasant. At the Yad Vashem research centre in Israel, the aid of Eliot Nidam was especially useful. The staff of the Mémorial de la Shoah and the Archives Nationales in Paris were patient and helpful in showing me how to navigate through their collections. In Belgium, the archivists of the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Society (CEGESOMA), Documentatie Oorlogsslachtoffers (DOS), Krijgsauditoraat Brussel and the Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA) were endlessly supportive. A few individuals went above and beyond the call of duty in sharing their archival knowledge and expertise. In particular, my gratitude is owed to Laurence Schram and Dorien Styven, who quickly responded to my requests and generously led me through the extensive archives of the Belgian Jewish Association at Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen.

Ariel Sion's kind welcome to the Mémorial de la Shoah, combined with her insurmountable knowledge of the library's collection, made my stay in Paris enormously memorable. I am grateful to Karen Taieb and Veerle Vanden Daelen for their time and generous assistance at the Mémorial de la Shoah and CEGESOMA archives during my European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) fellowship. To the staff of the Nationaal Archief (NA) in the Netherlands, I extend my appreciation. The NIOD staff members have likewise been exceedingly helpful

and supportive. In particular, I am thankful for the ongoing support and interest of Hubert Berkhout and René van Heijningen, who repeatedly aided me in my search for documents. To Erik Somers and René Kok, I am hugely grateful, not least for asking me to take part in their important (photography) projects. Their confidence and support have been truly remarkable. I would furthermore like to express my gratitude to Esmeralda Böhm and Melinde Kassens for their trust during the preparations for the 2021 documentary on the Dutch Jewish Council.

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of various organisations, including the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities (WroCAH), the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, the EHRI and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (the Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies). The feedback I received from other fellows, alumni and affiliated faculty during the annual Kagan Fellowship summer workshops greatly helped me in refining my arguments. Specifically, the encouragement of Karel Berkhoff, Steven Katz, David Silberklang and Dalia Ofer, gave me the confidence to continue my work. It is with great pleasure and with gratitude that I look back on those stimulating weeks in Jerusalem and Washington and on the friendships I built there. I would furthermore like to thank the editors at Cambridge University Press for their confidence and support.

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Finally, the support of my dear friends and family has been indispensable. They were always there with words of encouragement and a listening ear. Froukje, whom I love more than I can say, has been my sunshine and I cherish every minute of seeing her grow up. Above all, I am intensely grateful to Mark for his unconditional support, love and understanding. There are no words to describe the incredible journey we share.

Abbreviations

ACIP	Association Consistoriale Israélite de Paris
AIU	Alliance Israélite Universelle
AJ	Armée Juive
AJB/VJB	Association des Juifs en Belgique/Vereniging der Joden in België
ANDB	Algemene Nederlandse Diamantbewerders Bond
ARA	Algemeen Rijksarchief
ASG	Amsterdamse Studenten Groep
CA	Contact Afdeling
CAR	Comité d'Assistance aux Réfugiés
CEGESOMA	Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Society
CBIP	Comité de Bienfaisance Israélite de Paris
CBJB	Comité voor Bijzondere Joodsche Belangen
CC	Consistoire Central des Israélites de France
CCOJA	Commission Central des Organisations Juives d'Assistance
CDJ	Comité de Défense des Juifs
CDJC	Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine
CGQJ	Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives
CJV	Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen
CNHEJ	Centre National des Hautes Études Juives
CRIF	Conseil Représentatif des Israélites de France
CUDJF	Comité d'Unité et de Défense des Juifs de France
DOS	Documentatie Oorlogsslachtoffers
EHRI	European Holocaust Research Infrastructure
EIF	Éclaireurs Israélites de France
FI/OF	Front d'Indépendance/Onafhankelijkheidsfront
FSJF	Fédération des Sociétés Juives de France
FTP-MOI	Francs-Tireurs et Partisans - Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée
JCC	Joodse Coördinatie Commissie

List of Abbreviations

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IKG	Israelitische Kultusgemeinde
JMDV	Joods Museum van Deportatie en Verzet
JR	Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam
LiRo	Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co.
LO	Landelijke Organisatie voor Hulp aan Onderduikers
KD	Kazerne Dossin
MJS	Mouvement de Jeunesse Sioniste
MNR	Musée National de la Résistance (also see : NWM)
MOE	Main d'Oeuvre Étrangère
MOI	Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée
NA	Nationaal Archief
NIK	Nederlands Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap
NIOD	Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
NIW	<i>Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad</i>
NSB	Nationaal Socialistische Beweging
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NWM	Nationaal Museum van de Weerstand (also see: MNR)
NZB	Nederlandse Zionistenbond
OCIS	Oeuvre Centrale Israélite de Secours
ONE	Oeuvre National d'Enfance
ORT	Organisation Reconstruction Travail
OSE	l'Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants
OT	Organisation Todt
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt
SDAP	Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij
SDB	Sociaal-Democratische Bond
SiPo-SD	Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst
SS	Schutzstaffel
SA	Sturmabteilung
SSJ	Service Sociale des Jeunes
STO	Service du Travail Obligatoire
UGIA	Union Générale des Israélites d'Algérie
UGIF	Union Générale des Israélites de France
ULB	Université Libre de Bruxelles

