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
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’, 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).
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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

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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. 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


4 Statement of Johan de Haas in Lindwer, Het fatale dilemma, 170.
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 Salomon van den Berg, Journal de guerre, p. 37, A006685, Joods Museum van Deportatie en Verzet (JMDV), Centre National des Hautes Etudes Juives (CNHEJ), Buber Collection, Kazerne Dossin, Mechelen.
Preface

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

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 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
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 Bouwknegt 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...
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 Séminel 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.

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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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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 Diamantbewerkers 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 pour 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

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List of Abbreviations

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  Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad
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 Todt
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  Sturmbteilung
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