

# Representations of a Nation? Comparing the Dutch 1956 National Monument and the 2021 National Holocaust Monument of Names

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The Dutch National Holocaust Monument of Names was inaugurated in Amsterdam in September 2021. Reciting, for the first time, all 102,162 known names of Jewish, Sinti and Roma Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, the monument is the latest Dutch national World War II monument. The earliest one is the National Monument at Amsterdam's Dam Square, completed in 1956. Following James E. Young's claim that national monuments express national memories, this paper investigates both monuments' relationship with the Dutch national memory of World War II, comparing the monuments' expressions with other acts and artefacts of commemoration in the 1950s and today: Remembrance Days, rituals, other monuments, and texts. I argue that the National Monument aligns more with other acts and artefacts of commemoration in the 1950s than the National Holocaust Monument of Names does today, due to a rise of transnational acts of commemoration since the early 1990s. Consequently, I argue that in the global age, national World War II monuments can serve as important markers of (trans)national memory dynamics. This, in turn, asks for a shift of our contemporary understanding of the expressive potential of World War II monuments.

Key terms: Monuments; World War II; Holocaust; national memory; transnationality.

The Dutch National Holocaust Monument of Names (*'Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument'*) was inaugurated in Amsterdam on September 19, 2021.<sup>1</sup> Reciting, for the first time, all 102,162 known names of Jewish, Sinti and Roma

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Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, the monument is the latest Dutch national World War II monument. The earliest one is the National Monument (*'Nationaal Monument'*) at Amsterdam's Dam Square, completed in 1956.

National monuments are part of what Aleida Assmann calls the national memory—a national framework that institutionalizes national memory norms and self-images of the past. After World War II, most European nations, including the Netherlands, created national memories of the war corresponding to national self-images as glorious resistance fighters or innocent victims. These memories were produced in monological national contexts, mostly isolated from memory productions in other countries. However, since the beginning of the new millennium, national memories of World War II are increasingly entering cross-border dialogues, leading to the creation of transnational memories of World War II (Assmann 2016, 197 – 200).

According to James E. Young, this increasing globalization of memory landscapes has resulted in national World War II monuments losing their ability to express national memories. This, in turn, causes them to fail as national markers of memory as they do not include all the different layers of national memory referring to them (Young 2016, 14 – 16). However, I argue that national monuments can still serve as expressions of national memory and furthermore, hold potential to express ongoing dynamics of national memories in the global age, rather than just focussing on their expression of temporal specificity. I analyze this shift of national memories expressed in national World War II monuments by comparing the Dutch 1956 National Monument with the 2021 National Holocaust Monument of Names. Describing and analyzing both monuments with regard to their expression of the Dutch national memory, I compare these expressions to other acts and artefacts of commemoration in the 1950s and today: Remembrance Days, rituals, other monuments, and texts. Thereby, I do not only explain the differences of both monuments but reflect on the changing potential of national monuments to express national memories.

### **The transformation of national Holocaust memories in Europe and their representation in national monuments**

The concept of national memories goes back to the notion of collective memories, coined by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s (Halbwachs 1985, 2). According to Halbwachs, memories are not only individual. Instead, individual memories in a community also influence each other and therefore “all individual memories are socially framed” (Bottici 2010, 340). Halbwachs states that collectives shape memories of individuals, thereby creating a collective memory that individuals share within their own memories (Halbwachs 1985, 2). Assmann develops this

concept of collective memory further by distinguishing between communicative, cultural, and political memory. Communicative memory is constituted by matters of socialization and communication within social groups. Cultural memory is materialized or expressed in symbols such as Remembrance Days, monuments, traditions, or texts. Political memory combines aspects of communicative and cultural memory in a top-down framework that institutionalizes memory norms. On a national level, this political memory can be referred to as the national memory, which is the paradigm I am focussing on for this research (Assmann 2006, 210 – 237).

Together with Sebastian Conrad, Assmann argues further that “until recently, the dynamics of memory production unfolded primarily within the bounds of the nation state” (Assmann & Conrad 2010, 2). As Christopher Daase highlights, after World War II, most European national memories formed around self-images of either glory or victimhood (Daase 2010, 19). However, scholars such as Assmann, Natan Sznaider, Daniel Levy and Dan Diner respectively argue that the global turn at the beginning of the new millennium caused a broadening of memory productions which Assmann and Conrad summarize as:

The globalization process has placed a question mark over the nation state as the seemingly natural container of memory debates [...] synchronic interactions and entanglements are of increasing importance, as memory debates not only unfold within national communities of pride or attrition but are connected across borders. (Assmann & Conrad 2010, 6)

Within the development of transnational cross-border memories, the Holocaust plays a crucial role as marker of collective and globalized identity. In their concept of “cosmopolitan memory,” Sznaider and Levy describe the Holocaust as “the new founding moment for Europe” (Sznaider & Levy 2006, 137). Chiara Bottici states that a collective European memory can only start from a collective memory of the Holocaust while Diner argues for the Holocaust as a bond of a shared history for EU member states (Bottici 2010, 339; Diner 2007, 39). The place of the Holocaust in the core of EU memory politics is also expressed in the organization of the EU itself. Since 2005, acknowledging the Holocaust as shared European history has become conditional for becoming a member state and therefore conditional for “being European” (Assmann 102, 103; Mark 2011, xvi).

However, the creation of a “European community of memory” with the Holocaust as its central symbol for a “common painful past” poses the threat of generalization and therefore the exclusion of other Holocaust memories (van der Laarse 2013, 73; 2017, 156; Mark 2011, xvi). Especially in Eastern European states, the dominant Western narrative of the uniqueness of the Holocaust clashes with local and national memories of World War II. The end of the war did not mean

liberation, but the beginning of another dictatorship – of Stalinism. As a result, many countries in Eastern Europe see themselves “as suffering from two regimes of terror lasting from 1939 to 1989” (Van der Laarse 2013, 74). In response to these competing memories of past conflicts, Michael Rothberg regards the memory of the Holocaust as an opportunity for creating “multidirectional memories” of past conflicts that refer to rather than exclude each other (Rothberg 2009, 14).

Nevertheless, an increase of transnational acts of commemoration and therefore a broadening of national memories due to globalization is evident. Assmann describes this phenomenon as “dialogical remembering” (Assmann 2013, 195-200). The question is what this means for national monuments of World War II. As mentioned above, national monuments are part of what Assmann calls the cultural and national memory; they are the material expression of a nation’s self-image. As such, “these sites remember the past according to a variety of national myths, ideals, and political needs. [...] All reflect both the past experiences and current lives of their communities, as well as the state’s memory of itself” (Young 1993, 1-2). While Assmann highlights the importance of human carriers for the development of dialogical and transnational memories, she and Conrad also state that “some memories are currently anchored on a national level in museums and monuments” (Assmann & Conrad 2010, 6). Due to monuments’ materiality – this does not apply to, for example, digital monuments – they cannot physically traverse national borders as easily as individuals. As Lowe notes “[...] when the world changes, our monuments – and the values that they represent – remain frozen in time” (Lowe 2020, xvii). They remain as material focal points of mostly national debates of past and present (Carrier 2005, 7).

Responding to this contradiction of national memories developing rapidly and national material monuments remaining still, Young states that “in an age that denies universal values [...] there can be no universal symbols, the kind that monuments once represented” (Young 2016, 14). Because there are fewer shared values in a society that could be expressed in a monument, according to Young, a national monument today “succeeds only insofar as it allows itself full expression of the debates, arguments, and tensions generated in the noisy give-and-take among competing constituencies driving its very creation” (Young 2016, 16). Consequently, if national monuments do not include all these different debates, arguments, and tensions, they fail.

While I agree with Young that the globalization of the European memory landscape indeed influences national World War II monuments, I do not think this has to mean the failure of these monuments as representations of national memories. Rather, I believe that the differences that national monuments show compared to other commemorations can serve as a material expression of

ongoing processes of national memories. Hence, I argue that in the global age, national World War II monuments can serve as important markers of (trans)national memory dynamics. The development that the expressions of national monuments show more differences in relation to other national acts and artefacts of commemoration is not a reason to dismiss the monuments' importance for expressing national memories but to highlight their potential for expressing dynamic changes in these memories. This, in turn, asks for a shift in our understanding of national monuments as expressions for national memories at a specific point *in* time to understanding them as expression for developments of national memories *over* time.

These material dynamics of memory become visible when we compare the National Monument and the National Holocaust Monument of Names, especially in their relation to other acts and artefacts of commemoration. As the Dutch national memory of World War II is increasingly nuanced and multi-faceted, it becomes more and more difficult to include all these facets in one monument, which, according to Young, is desirable. In the following descriptions and comparison of both monuments, I question Young's statements by highlighting the variety of Dutch World War II commemorations today that have evolved from a more monological narrative of Dutch resistance and victimhood in the 1950s.

### **The National Monument on Dam Square**

Soon after the liberation of the Netherlands on May 5, 1945, voices emerged calling for a national monument as a permanent reminder of the suffering that the nation of the Netherlands had to endure during the German occupation. Plans were made for a national monument that in the words of then Prime Minister Willem Drees,<sup>2</sup> "represents our country's unity, the fight of our people as one" (Raaijmakers 2017, 78).<sup>3</sup> The first component of the monument – a curved stone wall built in 1946 – on Dam Square in the heart of Amsterdam, housed eleven urns, each in its niche. Soil from all Dutch provinces, taken mainly from execution sites where Dutch people were murdered during the war, fill each urn. Three years later, a twelfth urn was added with soil from Indonesia (the former Dutch East Indies) to recognize the suffering of Dutch citizens under the Japanese occupation (Lowe 2020, 82). Since 1988, this suffering in the Dutch East Indies is remembered in a monument of its own, the *Indisch Monument* ('Indies Monument') in The Hague. There is no urn with soil from a concentration camp. In 1952, a delegation of Dutch Auschwitz survivors had travelled to the former camp site and returned

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<sup>2</sup> Officially the title is *minister president*.

<sup>3</sup> Original: "[...] *de eenheid van ons land, dat de strijd van ons volk als één geheel symboliseert.*"

with an urn filled with ashes. They were not allowed to add the urn to the monument (Van der Laarse 2017, 149). By deciding not to include ashes from concentration camps, Jewish suffering is actively excluded in the National Monument's focus on a generalized Dutch victimization and resistance.



Figure 1. The National Monument. Photographed by author.

The narrative of collective Dutch victimhood and resistance continues in the second compound of the monument, a tall stone column twenty-two meters in height, added in 1956. On May 4, 1956, Queen Juliana officially inaugurated the monument as the National Monument, as shown in Figure 1. She was joined by, amongst others, Amsterdam's mayor Arnold Jan d'Ailly and director of the National Monument Commission Marie Louis van Holthe tot Echten (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-16). The column portrays four stone sculptures by Dutch artist John Rädecker, three in one row and one on top, as seen in Figure 2. The sculptures of two men on both sides portray the intellectuals' and workers' resistance. They frame the group of the chained men in the middle symbolizing Dutch suffering in general during the war. Moreover, the crucifixion of one of the

portrayed men is a Christian reference. Christian influence also is apparent in the sculpture on top of the men, a woman with child reminiscent of Mary and Jesus and symbolizing rebirth. The wreath above her head stands for victory and the doves for hope and peace, another Christian allusion. As Lowe contends: “The Dutch resisted oppression. They were unified in their suffering. They were faithful to an ideal. And in the end their suffering paid off: they were rewarded with victory, peace and the opportunity for rebirth” (Lowe 2020, 83).



Figure 2. Detail of the National Monument. Photographed by author.

As such, The National Monument focuses on the representations of collective Dutch suffering and heroism without acknowledging victim groups of the Holocaust (Lowe 2020, 82). The design as well as the expression of the National Monument is characteristic of Western European national World War II monuments in the early post-war years. Another example is the Memorial to the Combatants of France (*Mémorial de la France combattante*) in the Parisian suburbs, located at a former execution site of thousands of people, most of them connected to French resistance. Charles de Gaulle unveiled the monument in 1960. Like the National Monument on Dam Square, the Memorial to the Combatants of France commemorates national resistance against German occupation, as well as collective French suffering. Moreover, like the National Monument, it combines a column with Christian allegories and human remains of victims. Contrary to the Dutch National Monument, the French monument also contains an urn with ashes from concentration camps (Wiedmer 1999, 34-37).

### Comparison to other acts and artefacts of commemoration in 1956

According to Assmann, parts of a collective memory, in this case a national memory, can be expressed in mainly four ways: Remembrance Days, rituals, monuments and texts (Assmann 2006, 54). To analyze the relation of national monuments and memories, the question is whether these other expressions of a national memory concerning World War II correspond to the expression of collective Dutch suffering and resistance as portrayed in the National Monument.

The two main Dutch Remembrance Days regarding World War II are *Dodenherdenking* ('commemoration of the dead') on the evening of May 4, and *Bevrijdingsdag* ('liberation day') on May 5. They are oriented toward the liberation of the Netherlands on May 5, 1945 and have been celebrated every May since 1946. *Bevrijdingsdag* was conceived as an initiative of the Dutch state to celebrate the liberation of the Nazi occupation. Today, it still is characterized by major festivities. *Dodenherdenking*, however, was initiated by former Dutch resistance fighter Jan Drop who wanted to dedicate a Remembrance Day to the commemoration of his murdered comrades. He soon received broad public support and in 1946 *Dodenherdenking* and *Bevrijdingsdag* were celebrated for the first time. Since 1948, both days are organized together and commemorate not only resistance fighters but fallen Dutch soldiers as well (Raaijmakers 2017, 34, 51). The inauguration of the National Monument was embedded in the *Dodenherdenking* in 1956 (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-16).

Apart from laying wreaths and having two minutes of silence, one of the main rituals during *Dodenherdenking* is the visiting of graves of World War II victims throughout the country. The first of these sites that continues to be commemorated annually is the Waalsdorpervlakte, the flat open area in the dunes near The Hague where between 250 and 280 Dutch resistance fighters were executed during the war. When, in 1948, the Dutch government became jointly involved with organizing *Bevrijdingsdag*, it also arranged the inclusion of graves of fallen soldiers. In 1956, this ritual did not include sites where other victim groups lost their lives, such as the Jewish population (Landstra & Spruijt, 42-61).

The National Monument was inaugurated at the end of an influx of around 1,500 World War II monuments unveiled in The Netherlands between 1945 and 1955. Their dominant expressions are suffering, consolation, sacrifice, strength, and victory (Van Vree 2002, 64). I highlight only two examples here. The *Bevrijdingsglas* ('liberation glass') at the *Sint-Janskerk* ('Saint John Church') in Gouda, eight meters tall, was created by Dutch artist Charles Eyck and unveiled in 1947. Around the image of a group of people greeting the Allies with raised Dutch flags, various wartime horrors are depicted. German soldiers are shown as snatching young men from their families, while the Dutch population is presented



as innocent victims and brave resistance fighters (Van Vree 2009, 23-25). Another monument emphasizing the resistance of the Dutch population is the *Verzetmonument* ('Resistance Monument') in Delft. Unveiled in 1950, it portrays a larger-than-life statue of a woman with a torch in her right hand made from bronze (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2022a). The plinth reads: "For those who fell in resisting the enemy in the years 1940-1945. You who fell for our freedom, we want you to be with us and that your presence will later inspire our children" (Resistance Monument 2022).<sup>4</sup>

The speeches around the inauguration of the National Monument were characterized by nationalism and the heroic role of resistance fighters. Amongst others, this was expressed in the speeches during the National Monument's inauguration by Prime Minister Willem Drees who reminded the public of the sacrifices they had to make to finally overcome the German occupation and by Marie Louis van Holthe tot Echten, who expressed that the Dutch population during the war "essentially valued their lives less than their striving for freedom. The reign of terror of the conqueror has not been able to enslave them" (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-16).<sup>5</sup>

Thereby, resistance victims were highlighted while the Jewish genocide was not recognized. There was no acknowledgment for marginalized victim groups like the Jewish, Sinti and Roma populations. The exclusion of Jewish suffering in the Dutch national memory of World War II in the early post-war years was later described by Jewish survivor Gerhard Durlacher:

The language for our experiences was missing. The worn-out words that were there, stayed behind our teeth, for hardly anyone was there to receive them and hardly anyone would listen, let alone understand. They would spoil the intoxication of liberation and expose further self-deception. (1985, 87)<sup>6</sup>

After returning from concentration camps, the few Dutch-Jewish survivors were largely ignored, their suffering equalized with that of the non-Jewish Dutch population (Duindam 2018, 157). In what Dienne Hondius calls the "resistance

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<sup>4</sup> Original: "Voor hen die vielen bij het wederstaan van de vijand in de jaren 1940 – 1945. Gij, die voor onze vrijheid viert wij willen, dat jij met ons zijt en dat uw tegenwoordigheid straks onze kinderen bezielt."

<sup>5</sup> Original: "De allermeesten hebben in wezen hun leven minder geacht dan hun smachten naar vrijheid. Het schrikbewind van de overweldiger heeft hen niet vermogen te knechten."

<sup>6</sup> Original: "De taal voor onze belevenissen ontbrak. De afgesleten woorden die er waren, bleven achter onze tanden, want vrijwel niemand was er om ze in ontvangst te nemen en vrijwel niemand wilde luisteren, laat staan begrijpen. Zij zouden de bevrijdingsroes vergallen en verder zelfbedrog ontmaskeren."

norm,” the Jewish experiences of the Holocaust were subordinated to those of the Dutch resistance (2003, 79). For example, resistance fighters would receive a life-long pension, whereas Jewish survivors did not even have the possibility to claim back their apartments if they were now inhabited by non-Jewish Dutch families (Hondius 2003, 79-80).

Public acknowledgement of the Holocaust only emerged in the 1960s, when attention was increasingly drawn to Jewish suffering during World War II, starting with the Eichmann trial being broadcast in 1961, and the term Holocaust gaining increasing public prominence. Other milestones during that decade were the publication of Jacques Presser’s history of the persecution of the Dutch Jews, *Ondergang: De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom* (‘Ashes in the wind’), published in 1965, and the opening of the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* (‘Dutch theatre’) as a Holocaust memorial in 1962 (Held 2019, 27; Van Vree, Berg & Duindam 2018, 12). This former Amsterdam theatre used to be the location from where tens of thousands had been deported to the concentration camps (Van Vree, Berg & Duindam 2018, 9-12). In short, while in the early post-war years Dutch victimization had been generalized, in the 1960s the Jewish Holocaust became salient. In an opposing development compared to the 1940s and 1950s, non-Jewish Dutch people now even identified with Jewish victims. Thus, the symbol of Anne Frank as innocent victim became a national symbol of identity (Van Vree 2001, 71). Yet, the acknowledgement of Jewish suffering did not publicly challenge the Dutch national self-image as victim and resistance fighter as expressed in the National Monument. Moreover, the Jewish population was simply included in the broader victimization. This can be seen in Loe de Jong’s successful TV-series *De Bezetting* (‘Occupation’), which was broadcast between 1960 and 1965. The series portrayed the Dutch nation as a collective victim that with significant effort had resisted the occupation (Wielenga 2009, 324).

The recognition of the genocide of Sinti and Roma people in the Netherlands took even longer than the acknowledgement of the Jewish Holocaust. In 1978, the first monument to commemorate the 220 Sinti and Roma from the Netherlands who perished in the concentration camps was unveiled at the Amsterdam Museum Square. *Hel en Vuur* (‘hell and fire’), referring to the Sinti and Roma term *Porajmos* (‘consumed by fire’), was the first specific Sinti and Roma monument in the world. Not until 2000 were reparations paid by the Dutch state to Sinti and Roma communities (De Wagt 2021, 29-33). All in all, the expression of the National Monument aligned with other acts and artefacts of commemoration in 1956. The narrative of Dutch victimhood and resistance went mostly uncontested, allowing for its materialization in the National Monument.

### The National Holocaust Monument of Names

The Dutch National Holocaust Monument of Names was inaugurated at the Weesperstraat in Amsterdam on September 19, 2021. Initiated by the Dutch Auschwitz Committee under the leadership of its president Jacques Grishaver, a Dutch-Jewish Holocaust survivor, it was designed by Polish-Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind, a son of Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivors. Libeskind is also known for his design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the new World Trade Centre complex in New York (Foray 2020, 26). Consisting of two-meter-high walls made from 102,162 bricks, the labyrinth-like National Holocaust Monument of Names forms the four-letter Hebrew word לזכר ('In memory of') on a square of one hundred times twenty meters, as seen in Figure 3. Inscribed on each brick are the name, date of birth and age at the time of the murder of the Holocaust victims, as shown in Figure 4. For the first time, every single one of the known 101,942 Jewish as well as the 220 Dutch Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust from the Netherlands would be remembered by name in a monument. On top of the brick walls are mirrors following the shape of the walls (National Holocaust Monument of Names 2022).

The inscription on a brass wall reads:

This is a place of commemoration and mourning, of remembrance and contemplation – a warning for all generations, all over the world, now and in the future. Through the names written here, the victims are not forgotten. They will never be forgotten. (National Holocaust Monument of Names 2022)

Around the walls are patches filled with white pebble stones. In Jewish tradition, visitors are asked to put these pebble stones in front of a wall, commemorating the dead. The first pebble stone was placed by King Willem-Alexander during the inauguration ceremony on September 19, 2021. Well-known politicians such as prime minister Mark Rutte and Amsterdam's mayor Femke Halsema followed. They were accompanied by a group of some ten Dutch survivors of the Holocaust. Televised interviews before the inauguration as well as conversations with King Willem-Alexander afterwards, made these survivors and their life stories the focus of the event (NOS 2021).



Figure 3. The National Holocaust Monument of Names. Photographed by author.

Preceding the monument's inauguration was a remarkable and highly emotional debate. The idea for the National Holocaust Monument of Names originated in 2005, when Jacques Grishaver visited the reopening of the Dutch Pavilion in Auschwitz which included a Wall of Names of over 60,000 Holocaust victims from the Netherlands who were murdered in Auschwitz (De Wagt 2021, 12). Grishaver is the chairman of the Dutch Auschwitz Committee, an organization founded in 1956 by Dutch Holocaust survivors to support and ensure the commemoration of the Holocaust in the Netherlands. When the Committee handed in an official request for a National Holocaust Monument in Amsterdam's former Jewish neighbourhood, the municipality of Amsterdam refused at first. The mayor at the time, Job Cohen, stated in 2009 that it was not desirable to have two monuments both commemorating the Holocaust close to each other (Catz, de Swaan and Vuisje 2019, 8).

Cohen was referring to the monument of names in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*, also located in the Jewish neighbourhood which I describe more in detail later. However, in 2010 a newly elected municipal government accepted the Auschwitz Committee's request for a monument of names (De Wagt 2021, 208). One year later, Daniel Libeskind visited Amsterdam to give the annual *Nooit Meer*

*Auschwitz* ('Auschwitz never again') lecture, also organized by the Auschwitz Committee. When speaking with Grishaver about the planned monument of names, Libeskind spontaneously offered to design the monument, calling it "*schandelijk*" ('outrageous') (de Wagt 2021, 214), that Amsterdam did not already have a National Holocaust Monument for Jewish victims. In 2014, Libeskind presented his first design for the monument, a contorted construction of dark concrete and high walls. This design was meant for the Wertheimpark, also in the Jewish neighbourhood. The location had been chosen by the municipality in coordination with Libeskind (De Wagt 2021, 215). However, the idea to install the monument in the Wertheimpark led to an immense debate. It was argued that the monument of names would take away from Jan Wolkers' 1977 *Nooit Meer Auschwitz* monument that is already located in Wertheimpark. After multiple legal proceedings, the municipality changed the monument's location to the nearby Weesperstraat. However, the debate about the monument's location had begun a debate about whether a National Holocaust Monument was even necessary. In 2019, Petra Catz, Abram de Swaan, and Herman Vuijsje published an anthology that opposed the idea of a National Holocaust Monument of Names, expressing concern that there were already enough Holocaust monuments in Amsterdam, especially in the former Jewish neighbourhood, and that the monument was too expensive and unoriginal (Catz, De Swaan & Vuijsje 2019, 7-12). This debate yet again encapsulated the levels of disagreement regarding the memory of World War II in the Netherlands today.

The National Holocaust Monument of Names is meant to express the Dutch national memory of World War II. It focusses on the Jewish, Sinti and Roma Holocaust victims as central to this national memory, not resistance fighters. Contrary to the National Monument that portrays a collective suffering of the Dutch population, the aim of the Monument of Names is not to represent something that many people can relate to but to express individual stories of the Holocaust victims by naming them. These individual stories are then placed in a national embedded structure, using brick as the main material. Brick is known as a typically Dutch material used in most Dutch city centres. Furthermore, the monument is located at Weesperstraat, in the heart of the former Jewish neighbourhood in Amsterdam and the later entrance to the Jewish ghetto (De Wagt 2021, 70; 213). Before World War II, the exact site was the place of nine brick houses, homes to Jewish families of the working class. By choosing this position, the monument again underlines its representation and expression of Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, highlighting especially the Jewish victims. In the mirrors on top of the walls, a connection is created between the Jewish neighbourhood before World War II and the monument's context today, reflecting the names of the victims in the current city of Amsterdam.

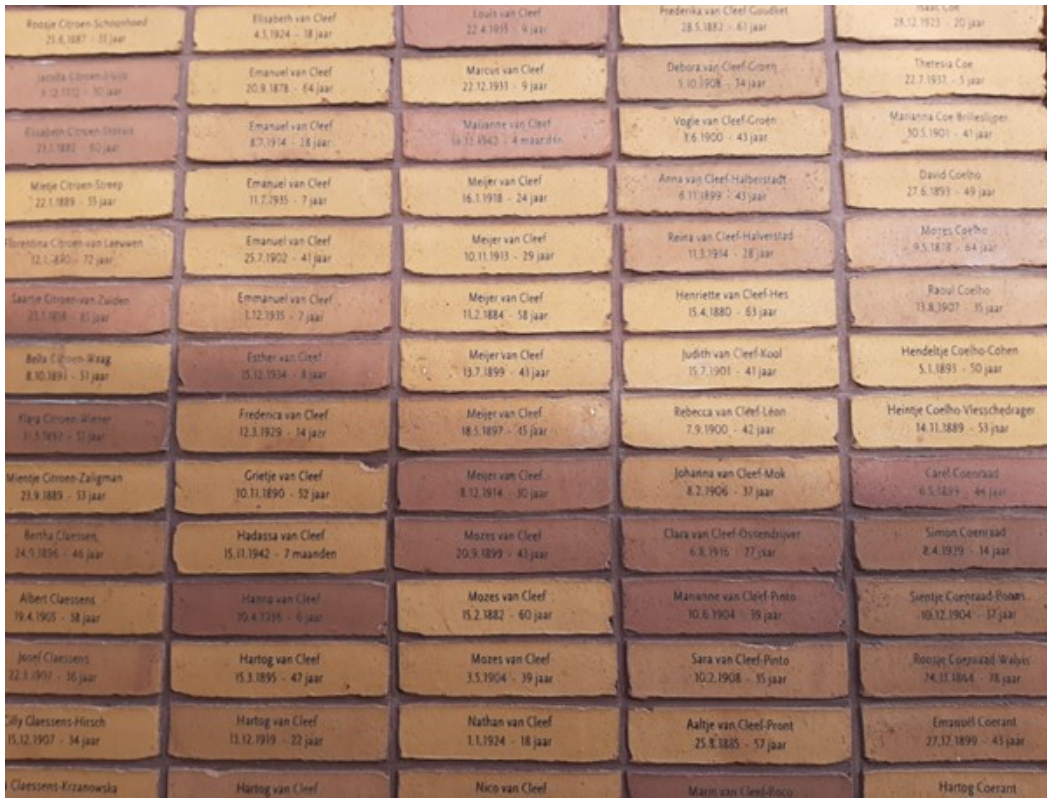


Figure 4. Detail of the National Holocaust Monument of Names. Photographed by author.

In its design and dedication, the National Holocaust Monument of Names follows a recent trend of other Holocaust monuments in the Netherlands. The act of calling out names of the deceased has been a Jewish mourning tradition for centuries. In the early years after the Holocaust, Jewish communities in the Netherlands had already built monuments of names to remember the terrors of World War II, for example in the cemetery of the Jewish community *Gan Hasjalom* ('Garden of Peace') in Hoofddorp. However, Jewish people created these monuments for Jewish people. They were neither part of the public sphere nor presented a public Dutch national memory of World War II. In the 21st century, this has changed as the naming of Jewish victims has become more prominent in Dutch commemorations of the Holocaust.

One of the main monuments of names in the Netherlands is the Wall of Names in the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*, referred to earlier. Opened in 1993, the wall identifies the more than 6,700 surnames of Jewish Holocaust victims from the Netherlands, some representing individual victims, others representing hundreds of victims with the same surname (Duindam 2018, 187-188). Other monuments of names followed. In 2012, the city of Haarlem unveiled a monument presenting the names of 715 murdered Jewish Haarlem citizens; since 2015, a monument

remembering the 1,239 Jewish Holocaust victims from Utrecht can be seen close to the former Utrecht Maliebaanstation where trains left for transit camp Westerbork; in Amstelveen, a monument of names for the murdered Amstelveen Jewish citizens was inaugurated in 2020 (De Wagt 2021, 18-21).

It is remarkable that in 1945 Jewish sculptor Jaap Kaas unsuccessfully presented a monument of names to the commission in charge of the creation of the National Monument. Kaas' proposal was rejected as too provocative and instead the *Monument van Joodse Erkentelijkheid* ('Monument of Jewish Gratitude') was opened in 1950, symbolizing Jewish gratitude towards the Dutch society that had helped to protect them (De Wagt, 48). Due to this dedication, the monument today is subject to major controversies which Roel Hijink and Gerrit Vermeer describe in more detail (2018). The fact that a monument of names for the Dutch-Jewish victims of World War II was rejected in 1945 and realized 76 years later underlines the notion of monuments of names being a part of a contemporary monument culture as well as a development in the Dutch national memory of World War II.

### **Comparison to other forms of expressed national memory today**

The main purpose of the National Holocaust Monuments of Names is the commemoration of Holocaust victims from the Netherlands. Other acts and artefacts of commemoration express different facets of a Dutch national memory of World War II.

As noted earlier, *Dodenherdenking* and *Bevrijdingsdag* are the most prominent Dutch Remembrance Days of World War II and are still being observed today. However, since 2005 there is another World War II Remembrance Day, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, honouring the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on that day in 1945. The day of remembrance was established by the United Nations in 2000 and adopted in 2005 by the European Union. While *Dodenherdenking* and *Bevrijdingsdag* focus mostly on Dutch victims, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorates all Holocaust victims of all countries (Assmann 2016, 157). In the Netherlands, one central aspect of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day is the annual *Nooit Meer Auschwitz* lecture, organized by the Auschwitz Committee since 2004. Each year, one respected international speaker is invited to give a lecture on the Holocaust and its commemoration today. Over the years, eighteen speakers from ten different countries have been invited. In 2020, the former German president Joachim Gauck was selected, highlighting the Holocaust as a shared past that needs a shared commemoration: "Opponents of any form of totalitarianism can

be allies in addressing and denouncing crimes against humanity, as well as in processing them” (2020, 7).<sup>7</sup>

Gauck also played a role in the 2012 *Dodenherdenking*. Whereas in 1956 the graves that were visited during *Dodenherdenking* were mainly those of Dutch resistance fighters and military soldiers, during the last decades, an increasing number of soldiers from other countries have been commemorated. In 2012, for the first time, graves of German soldiers, the perpetrators, were included in *Dodenherdenking* in IJsselsteyn. Furthermore, one day later, Gauck, who at the time was still the German president, was invited to visit the official *Bevrijdingsdag* ceremony together with the Dutch king, Willem-Alexander, and to deliver the traditional *Bevrijdingsdag* speech. It marked the first time a non-Dutch head of state was invited to speak during these commemorations (Raaijmakers 2017, 12-13). In 2021, Angela Merkel was the second one (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2021b). The inclusion of a German representative, already discussed in 1995 but rejected at the time by the Dutch public, expresses a changed attitude towards shared commemorations with Germany today (Raaijmakers 2017, 205-206).

The increased acknowledgement of other nations’ World War II victims is also noticeable in other monuments today. On the one hand, an increase of Dutch monuments commemorating Holocaust victims from the Netherlands can be noted, often in the form of monuments of names. On the other hand, an increase of monuments in remembrance of other groups is manifest. In 2005, *De Plaque voor Poolse militairen* (‘Plaque for Polish soldiers’) in Bourtange was unveiled, commemorating six Polish soldiers who fell at the site in 1945 (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2021c). Furthermore, in 2021, a new visitor centre was opened at the main site of graves of German soldiers in IJsselsteyn, offering lectures on the lives of some 32,000 German soldiers buried there (Volksbund 2021). Not only fallen soldiers from other countries have been increasingly remembered in recent years, but victims of World War II in general. In 2018, the abstract *Monument aan het Columbusplein* (‘Monument at the Columbus square’) was unveiled in Amsterdam, remembering “*hen die leden, hen die stierven, hen die streden*” (‘those who suffered, those who died, those who fought’). The monument does not commemorate one specific national group but aims at including all victims of World War II (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei 2021d).

When the National Monument was inaugurated in 1956, Prime Minister Willem Drees spoke about Dutch people as part of a nation that had suffered and made sacrifices to finally overcome the occupation (Landstra & Spruijt 1998, 15-

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<sup>7</sup> Original: “*Tegenstanders van elke vorm van totalitarisme kunnen alleszins bondgenoten zijn bij het aanpakken en aanklagen van misdrijven tegen de menselijkheid, evenals bij de verwerking ervan.*”



16). In 2020, the current prime minister, Mark Rutte, for the first time officially apologized to the Jewish population for the share of the Dutch state apparatus in the Holocaust: "Today, while the last survivors are still among us, I apologize on behalf of the government for its actions at the time" (Rijksoverheid 2020).<sup>8</sup>

Rutte thus acknowledged a more differentiated picture of the narrative of collective Dutch victimhood during the war, namely that the suffering of Holocaust victims is not to be equated with that of the general Dutch population as it was in the early pre-war years. Furthermore, he stated that the Dutch state should have helped its Jewish population more, arguing against the broad and uncontested image of the Dutch as universal resistance fighters articulated in 1956. Prior to Rutte's apology, Queen Beatrix in 1994 had already questioned this myth of the majority of the Dutch participating in the resistance by stating that some had actively looked away from crimes instead of helping (Wielenga 2009, 262). Still, Rutte's speech in 2020 was the very first public apology from the Dutch state to the Dutch Jewish population. Five months later, on the occasion of the 2020 *Dodenherdenking*, King Willem-Alexander criticized his great-grandmother Queen Wilhelmina, saying that she could have done more to protect Dutch-Jewish citizens during the war (Het Koninklijk Huis 2020).

The debate around the Dutch past during World War II is also thematized in contemporary texts, especially in Chris van der Heijden's (2001) monograph *Grijs verleden* ('grey past'), in which he criticizes the dominant view of Dutch resistance during World War II, stating that the war cannot be simplified as only good and bad but contains multiple shades in-between (2001, 9-20). The increasing internal national debate about a Dutch obligation to take responsibility for its role in World War II can also be seen in the rise of cases of restitution of looted property. Before and after the deportations, Dutch Jews were systematically deprived of all their property (Aalders 2005, 168). In the early post-war years, little attention was given to matters of restitution, concerning mostly objects that were returned to the Netherlands after having been found in other countries, mainly Germany. Only after increased interest in restitution in the 1990s, culminating in the 1998 Washington Principles, a Dutch restitution commission was established in 2001. The commission does research on independent restitution claims but also investigates the art collection of the Dutch state itself (Campfens 2021, 59-61). This, in turn, expresses an increasing awareness of a Dutch obligation to actively engage with the historical injustices of World War II.

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<sup>8</sup> Original: "Nu de laatste overlevenden nog onder ons zijn, bied ik vandaag namens de regering excuses aan voor het overheidshandelen van toen."

The evermore diverse and nuanced picture of a Dutch national memory concerning World War II is developing today. The narrative of Dutch resistance and martyrdom is still present but is increasingly contested by other aspects of remembrance. The National Holocaust Monument of Names represents Holocaust victimhood. Even though this Holocaust victimhood is certainly dominant in a Dutch national memory of World War II today, there are other aspects that are not included in the monument.

### **Conclusion**

At the time of its inauguration in 2021, the National Holocaust Monument of Names aligns less with other acts and artefacts of Dutch national commemoration than the National Monument did in 1956, as these acts and artefacts are transnationally broadening in an increasingly globalized European memory landscape of World War II.

In 1956, the political memory of the Netherlands concerning World War II was monological; by and large it was not interconnected with the memories of other states, but it had a truly national quality. Publicly, the war was perceived as a collective period of suffering and resistance to finally overcome the war horrors (Van Vree & Van der Laarse 2009, 7). In the national memory of that time, it was hardly acknowledged that only a minority of the Dutch population had been active in the resistance, merely around 25,000 people and that it was not the Dutch resistance that had liberated the country but the Allies (Barnouw 2010, 80). Furthermore, the suffering during the war was generalized in a narrative of collective Dutch victimhood. Imprisonment and the murder of marginalized groups such as the Jewish, Sinti and Roma population were not acknowledged (Van Vree & Van der Laarse, 7). Because there was little exchange between separate groups, either with other nations or within the Dutch nation, the national memory in its public expressions at that time was not diverse. Thus, when the National Monument was inaugurated in 1956, it was possible to represent the main essence of that national memory by expressing a generalized Dutch martyrdom and resistance.

This picture has changed. From the 1960s onwards, the Holocaust gained prominence in public and academic debates. In the following decades, the Dutch victim group became more differentiated, emphasizing marginalized groups. Still, for a long time, commemorative acts continued to happen mainly in a national context (Held 2019, 23-26).

The beginning of the new millennium signified a turning point in the memory formation of World War II in Europe (Assmann 2016, 197). As shown, transnational acts and artefacts of commemoration in the Netherlands have

increased since then. By acknowledging the victims of other nations, their suffering is increasingly included in the national memory. January 27 is not a Remembrance Day for the Dutch victims of World War II but an acknowledgement of the suffering of different nations as well. This acknowledgement is also expressed in dedicating monuments to other nations' victims like the *Plaquette voor Poolse Soldaten* or the *Monument aan het Columbusplein*. An increase of memory globalization also is demonstrated through the invitation of Gauck, president of the perpetrator country which had occupied the Netherlands, to hold the main speech on *Bevrijdingsdag* in 2012 and the *Nooit Meer Auschwitz* lecture in 2020 (Van Vree 2009, 24-25). This is especially remarkable because the idea of German participation in *Bevrijdingsdag* had been rejected by the Dutch public in 1995 (Raaijmakers 2017, 205-206). It illustrates that there is a shift in Dutch public opinion towards a transnational dialogue with other states that identify as victims as well as with perpetrators.

In the Netherlands the rise of a dialogue between victims and perpetrators is not only developing with other nations but within the nation as well. While in 1956 the nation was mainly portrayed as encompassing innocent yet resistant victims, current debates increasingly raise the question of the role of the Dutch state as well as of individual people during the war. This is shown in the speeches by Queen Beatrix in 1994 as well as by Mark Rutte and King Willem-Alexander in 2020, and in the current rise of restitutions of looted property at the behest of the Dutch government. Therefore, in 1956, mostly nationally focused commemorations of collective Dutch victimhood could be materialized in the National Monument. However, due to a rise of transnational acts of commemoration, in the last number of years, a variety of perspectives has become a part of Dutch World War II commemorations. These different perspectives make it more difficult to all be included in one national monument which explains why the National Holocaust Monument of Names aligns less with other expressions of the national Dutch memory today than the National Monument at Dam Square did in the 1950s.

Young sees this development as a sign of failure of national monuments to be expressions of national memories and that for national monuments to succeed they need to include all different layers of national memory connected to them. I argue that it is not the national monuments that need to change but our understanding of them. When national memories were produced mainly in monological national contexts, different expressions of national memory mostly aligned with each other. Therefore, the National Monument mostly aligns with the Dutch national memory at the time of its inauguration in the 1956. Today, however, as memory productions are becoming increasingly globalized, the relation of national monuments and memories has changed. Due to the

development of multiple diverse facets of national memory, national monuments cannot include all these facets anymore. However, this does not mean that they cannot express national memories at all. To the contrary, by showing differences in relation to other acts and artefacts of commemoration, national World War II monuments today can serve as markers of ongoing memory processes. Thus, when we look at national World War II monuments today, we not only must ask ourselves the question what is there but what is not there. Only by including this view on national monuments in our notion of national memories, can national World War II monuments truly contribute to our understanding of ongoing memory dynamics in the global age.

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### **Représentations d'une nation? Comparaison entre le Monument national néerlandais de 1956 et le Mémorial national des noms de l'Holocauste de 2021**

En septembre 2021, le Mémorial national des noms de l'Holocauste a été inauguré à Amsterdam. En répertoriant pour la première fois tous les noms connus des 102.163 Juifs, Sinti et Roms des Pays-Bas assassinés par le régime nazi, il est le mémorial national néerlandais le plus récent de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Le plus ancien est le Monument national de la place du Dam, achevé en 1956. Suivant la thèse de James E. Young que les monuments nationaux représentent des souvenirs nationaux, cet article étudie la relation des deux monuments avec une mémoire nationale néerlandaise de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Pour cela, les monuments seront comparés avec d'autres actes et artefacts de mémoires des années 1950 et d'aujourd'hui: des jours de commémoration, des rituels, d'autres monuments et des textes. Je prétends que le Monument national était plus en cohérence avec d'autres actes et artefacts de mémoire des années 1950 que le Mémorial national des noms de l'Holocauste le fait aujourd'hui et que cela est dû à la montée des actes de mémoire transnationaux depuis le début des années 1990. Par conséquent, je soutiens qu'à l'ère de la mondialisation, les monuments nationaux de la Seconde Guerre mondiale peuvent être des marqueurs importants de la dynamique de la mémoire (trans)nationale. Ceci, à son tour, demande un changement de notre compréhension contemporaine du potentiel expressif des monuments de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

### **Representaties van een natie? Een vergelijking van het Nederlandse Nationaal Monument van 1956 en het Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument van 2021**

In september 2021 werd te Amsterdam het Nederlands Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument ingehuldigd. Het monument, dat voor het eerst alle 102.162 bekende namen van Joodse, Sinti en Roma Holocaustslachtoffers uit Nederland vermeldt, is het meest recent nationaal Nederlands Tweede Wereldoorlog monument. Het eerste monument was het Nationaal Monument op de Dam in Amsterdam, dat in 1956 werd voltooid. In navolging van James E. Young's bewering dat nationale monumenten het nationale geheugen uitdrukken, onderzoekt dit artikel de relatie van beide monumenten met het Nederlands nationaal geheugen van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Daartoe worden de uitingen van de monumenten vergeleken met de andere herdenkingen in de jaren vijftig en nu: herdenkingsdagen, rituelen, andere monumenten en teksten. Ik betoog dat het Nationaal Monument in de jaren vijftig meer op één lijn ligt

met andere herdenkingen dan het Nationaal Holocaust Namenmonument met herdenkingen van vandaag de dag als gevolg van de opkomst van transnationale herinneringsdaden sinds het begin van de jaren negentig. Bijgevolg betoog ik dat nationale monumenten over de Tweede Wereldoorlog in het globale tijdperk belangrijke markers kunnen zijn van (trans)nationale herinneringsdynamieken. Dit vraagt op zijn beurt om een verschuiving in ons hedendaagse begrip van het expressieve potentieel van monumenten met betrekking tot de Tweede Wereldoorlog.