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THE MEMORY OF THE JOOP WESTERWEEL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL AND THE NETHERLANDS

Joyce van de Bildt

As part of the activities of the Zionist movement in Europe in the early 1900s, special educational centres were established in different countries in order to physically and mentally prepare Jewish youth to settle in Palestine. This programme was called '*hachshara*', literally meaning 'preparation', which involved professional training in agricultural and other skills for the ultimate goal of emigration to *Eretz Israel*. In the Netherlands, the popularity of this Zionist youth *Hechalutz* or Pioneers movement was initially minimal. The first Pioneers movement had been founded in 1918 by Rudolf Cohen in Deventer, a town in the east of the Netherlands. Its pupils lived and worked at farms throughout the country, and a Pioneers House was founded in Deventer for courses and cultural activities. During the 1930s, the appeal of emigration to Palestine increased due to the rise of anti-Semitism in the Netherlands. At the same time, a large number of German Jewish refugees arrived in the Netherlands as a result of Adolf Hitler's rise to power; the Pioneers' sentiment had been more widespread among the German Jewish youth than in the Netherlands, and this gave the movement a further boost (Pinkhof and Brasz 1997: 13). Most of them intended to stay in the Netherlands only for a limited period of time, in order to receive the necessary training on their way to Palestine. As a result of the presence of the German Jewish refugees, additional work centres and *hachshara* farms were established. Among the most famous were a large farming village in Wieringermeer and the Pavilion *Loosdrechtse Rade* in the North Holland province.

After the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany in 1940, the *hachshara* movement was forced to be more careful in its activities until its farms were eventually banned in 1942. As Jews became persecuted in the Netherlands, several young Zionist Pioneers (*Halutzim*) engaged in underground activities. One of them, German Jewish refugee Joachim Simon ('Shushu'), established an extensive network to hide fugitives and organise escape routes. He was assisted in this effort by a Dutch Christian teacher and pacifist from Rotterdam, Johan Gerard (Joop)

Westerweel and his wife Wilhelmina Dora (Wil) Bosdries. Both Jews and non-Jews formed part of their resistance movement, which came to be called the Westerweel *Hechalutz* Underground Movement, or later simply the Westerweel group.¹ The majority of the Jewish members of this underground movement were Zionist Pioneers, most of them of German origin in their teenage years or early twenties.

Due to the efforts of the Westerweel group, about 400 young Jews were saved during the Second World War. Many of them succeeded in escaping with forged identity papers through secret routes via Spain and Switzerland, and arrived in Mandate Palestine by boat during the 1940s. Once in Palestine they were divided between several *kibbutzim*, among them the so-called 'Dutch' *kibbutzim* Chulioth, Sde Nehemia and Hazorea. A larger group of Westerweel survivors came to live in *kibbutz* Even Yitzhak (later called *kibbutz* Gal'ed), which was at the time largely inhabited by German Jews. The Dutch leader of the underground movement, Joop Westerweel, was arrested in 1944 and assassinated in Camp Vught in the Netherlands shortly after. His partner Joachim Simon was caught during one of his missions in the south of the country and committed suicide in prison.

Described by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation as embodying 'nonconformist resistance', the Westerweel group was unique in two respects: it did not make use of weapons, and it was comprised of both Jews and non-Jews. In fact, the Westerweel underground chose to work with an established Pioneers movement, which makes it an even rarer phenomenon. Hans Schippers argued that all members of the Westerweel movement were somehow marginalised in Dutch society (Schippers 2015: 35, 77). On one side were the young East European and German Jews who were fervent socialists and engaged in only minimal interaction with the Dutch Jewish community; on the other side were the leftist, pacifist Dutchmen whose idealism led them to risk their lives for the sake of others. Schippers added that the nonconformist nature of this particular resistance movement was further apparent in the unconventionally equal position of women within it. The Westerweel group was also distinctive in the sense that it was actively working for the sake of Jews, instead of against the Germans. There were certainly many types of passive and active resistance during the Second World War but only a small fraction of it was immediately directed against the persecution of the Jews.

The unique position of the Westerweel movement in the Dutch history of the Second World War is reflected in the survivors' continuous efforts to commemorate their own distinctive, shared past through private memory initiatives. In the commemoration of their past, they put special emphasis on the non-conformist nature of their resistance as described above, and clearly attempt to establish it as a symbol for humanity. The practice of using a person or event as a reference point to commemorate a larger phenomenon is common: after all 'the power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance' (Zerubavel 1995: 8). In this case, the Westerweel commemorations are not strictly connected to the personality of its leader but are meant to commemorate and legitimise the ideals he embodied. The following examination of the

commemorative practices of the Westerweel group in Israel serves to demonstrate the wider meaning its members sought to attach to their memories.

The Joop Westerweel forest in Israel

Efforts to commemorate Joop Westerweel started as early as 1945. In December 1945, six months after the liberation from the Nazis, a new commissioner was appointed to the Dutch branch of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) as part of the first steps towards the resumption of its functions. One of the first campaigns it organised was the 'Westerweel-campaign', which aimed to raise 36,000 guilders to plant 10,000 trees in a forest in Israel to be dedicated in his name.² During a meeting of the Amsterdam Zionist Organisation in January 1946, its chair J. Soetendorp officially announced the decision to create the Joop Westerweel forest to honour the non-Jews who helped Jews escape from the Nazis during the war.³ The JNF invited all Dutch Jews to donate and plant a tree in the name of their non-Jewish helpers. On 25 January 1946, the Dutch Jewish weekly *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad* featured an article about the commemoration of Joop Westerweel on its front page, and called on its readers to help plant a forest in his name.⁴ Donations arrived from people throughout the Netherlands and the JNF was able to officially inaugurate the forest in March 1947. The forest was established in the Menashe hills in Israel near *kibbutz* Gal'ed, which had recently become home to many of the Dutch and German Pioneers saved by the Westerweel movement.

Considering that afforestation was one of the key tools of the Zionist settlement effort, it was a highly symbolic choice to commemorate the rescue of Dutch and German Zionist youth through the establishment of a forest in what became their safe haven, *Eretz Israel*. Irus Braverman argued that the act of planting trees was central 'in transforming the Diaspora Jew into a *halutz* [pioneer], and in redeeming the land from its perceived desolation' (Braverman 2009: 319). Afforestation of the land of Israel had been one of the JNF's main objectives since 1908, a few years after its founding. Since many of the donations to plant trees came from Jews outside of Israel, its campaigns enhanced the Diaspora Jews' connection to Israel while at the same time contributing to the development of the land. As a contributor to *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad* put it:

While other nations award medals and decorations, the Jewish people chooses to connect its friends' names to developing their country and planting trees in their honour. [...] is there any greater honour thinkable than to be connected forever to the growth of this country, in which a nation was able to settle down after wandering and suffering as no other nation?⁵

Donations to the Joop Westerweel forest continued in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Trees were commonly donated in someone's name to mark a special occasion in their life, such as a birthday, *bar mitzva*, wedding, graduation or wedding anniversary. Others donated a tree to this forest in special memory of a particular

individual or to express gratitude to the resistance. The names of the donors were published by the JNF, and every donor received a special certificate, indicating the name of the donor and the name of the person to whom the tree was dedicated. This blue and white certificate was adorned with the following verse from the Book of Psalms, in Hebrew and in Dutch: 'The righteous one flourishes like the palm; as a cedar in Lebanon he grows.'⁶

Former members of the Westerweel movement encouraged the donations of trees through personal initiatives. One such was E. E. Meursing, who had been the local doctor of the city of Dordrecht for forty years and had been active in helping Jewish patients during the war, thereby risking his own life. During a local event marking his retirement in March 1963, the community suggested offering the doctor and his wife a trip to Israel to thank him for his services.⁷ However, Meursing responded that a donation of trees in the Joop Westerweel forest would be a much more desirable gift. Two months later, he was presented with a certificate for 800 trees on behalf of the people of his town. In return, Meursing published a brochure called *The Joop Westerweel Forest in Israel* to provide everyone who donated with information about Westerweel's deeds, and he called on people to continue the campaign.⁸

In 1973 members of the Dutch Youth Workers Central (AJC), the socialist youth movement of the Social Democratic Workers Party, offered to plant trees in the Joop Westerweel forest to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the state of Israel. Joop was once a member of the party and it used to have many Jewish members. A group of 240 alumni planned to visit Israel and the organisers offered to plant two trees on behalf of each of them in the Westerweel forest. However, the various campaigns for the donation of trees to the forest had been so successful by the early 1970s that the JNF had to inform them that there was insufficient space for that many more trees in the Westerweel forest.⁹ Instead, the JNF suggested an alternative location.¹⁰ During a ceremony on 10 May 1973, the AJC members visiting Israel accordingly buried a lead tube between the trees of the Westerweel forest, containing inside a list of names of AJC members who were killed in the Second World War. Twenty more trees were also planted.¹¹

Joop Westerweel: a symbol of humanity

The first trees in the Westerweel forest were planted during an inauguration ceremony on 3 March 1947, which was attended by officials from the Dutch embassy in Israel and representatives of the Dutch immigrant and youth movements. Although some came from as far as Haifa and Jerusalem, turnout was affected by the siege that had just been imposed by the British and Arabs which hindered representatives of various institutions from attending the planting. JNF representative Shlomo Levy stressed during his speech that he personally had decided to undertake the journey despite the siege because 'it is exactly in times like this that we should raise the memory of those who were among the righteous of the nations, and whose love for the people of Israel was not limited to mere words and statements'. Pioneers

from Holland who immigrated to Israel during the war expressed gratitude for the help they received from Joop Westerweel, 'hero of the Dutch underground, who sacrificed his soul to save Jewish children in the war years'. Mirjam de Leeuw, who spoke on behalf of the organisation for Dutch immigrants in Israel, recalled the words Westerweel had spoken as he bid farewell to those refugees whom he accompanied all the way on their escape route to Spain: 'Don't forget the actions of those who enabled you to obtain freedom; those who gave their lives, in order for you to reach your goal.'¹² These words were often repeated during commemorations in the following years.

In September 1954, the Westerweel group marked ten years since Joop's death with a ceremony in the Westerweel forest, where his widow Wil Westerweel unveiled a monument for him. It is located in a small open space surrounded by trees and greenery, and reads in Dutch and Hebrew that he was 'an inspiring force in the underground activities during the German occupation of the Netherlands, and [...] gave his life to save the Jewish youth'. A sign at the entrance to the site also indicates the centrality of Joop Westerweel as the leader of the movement:

Joop Westerweel, born in Holland (1899–1944) to Christian parents, was a great educator and a pursuer of peace. He was a central figure in the underground movement of Jewish Pioneers (Halutzim). He and his friends bound their own fate with that of the Halutzim and founded a non-violent underground group in accordance with Joop's views. His energy and great inspiration roused his friends to action.

However, despite the dedication of the forest to the leader of the Westerweel movement and the centrality of his figure in the memory of the group, it can be argued that the memorial and the commemorations had a wider function than just remembering Joop and his colleagues. In fact, many *Halutzim* who were saved by the Westerweel movement had never known Joop in person. One survivor, Hanan Florsheim, said that the monument is a general expression of gratitude to everyone who risked their lives to save Jews during the Second World War, and that the place is meant to symbolise the heroism of the entire Dutch resistance.¹³

During a commemoration ceremony for Joop's colleagues Joachim Simon and Kurt Hanneman in March 1963, Wil Westerweel said it was important to remember the past for the sake of the future:

There is only one thing we can do to keep Shushu's name alive, and that is to carry on his struggle for justice, uprightness and freedom. This is the value of this memorial for us and our descendants, rather than to bury the spirit of the resistance underneath a pile of stones.¹⁴

During the same event, reference was made to a biblical verse from the Book of Joshua, according to which Joshua ordered the Israelites to take twelve stones from the Jordan River, one for each tribe, and place them in the encampment

near the river as a memorial for the children of Israel until the end of days.¹⁵ One of the speakers remarked that in this biblical story the point was not to commemorate the great deeds of the personality of Joshua, but rather the significant events that had happened. Exactly the same point applied to the memorial for the Westerweel group:

If descendants will ask, what is the meaning of these names? It does not suffice to tell them just about the actions of these two friends; it is only possible to understand this memorial stone if presented in the context of the life of the Pioneers in the Netherlands before and after the occupation, and the spirit of the resistance.¹⁶

Wil Westerweel often said that she preferred not to describe Joop as a hero because that placed him at a certain distance from the common people, while his deeds should function as an example for others of how to act. She believed that the main way to keep Westerweel's memory alive was to strive to live one's life as he did.¹⁷ Despite Westerweel's reluctance to use the characterisation, Yael Zerubavel's argument about heroes nonetheless seems to apply here: 'heroes that figure in myths are often supposed to serve as models for the new situation. Their centrality is not as an individual but rather as a collective representation' (Zerubavel 1995: 44). In the representation of the past, 'heroes' come to embody a change and provide a new paradigm of action that sometimes assumes mythical dimensions.

Remembering the 'Righteous among the Nations'

Aside from providing an example for future action, the immediate establishment of the Westerweel monument after the war and the glorification of Joop Westerweel and his friends served an important purpose in dealing with a traumatic past. Irena Steinfeldt has argued that after the Holocaust, 'the Jewish people and the survivors needed to hang on to some hope for mankind, something that would enable them to maintain their faith in human values and rebuild their lives after having witnessed an unprecedented moral collapse'. She noted how the commemoration of so-called 'righteous gentiles' suited this effort.¹⁸ Indeed, the monument in the Westerweel forest seems to emphasise the immense sacrifice that was made by both Jewish and non-Jewish activists in their effort to save Jews, as its text reads:

Many members of the underground movement, Jews and gentiles, sacrificed their lives in the struggle against the Nazis. Joop Westerweel was captured and put to death at the Vught concentration camp in Holland on August 11, 1944. [...] The memorial stones in the forest commemorate all those activists, Jews and gentiles, who sacrificed their lives in order to rescue the Halutzim.

Throughout the text, there is a double emphasis on the background of the activists; that is, they were both Jews and gentiles. The appreciation for the participation

of non-Jews in the Joop Westerweel movement was also highlighted in a personal interview with Hanan Florsheim, who said:

I always say, [...] what a courage they had! I don't know if I would have done what they did for me, Risking the entire family to save a Jewish child ... to take in a boy or a girl and to host it in secret, not for days or weeks but sometimes for months! You had to be careful with family members who were with the NSB,¹⁹ who consorted with the Germans [...]. Yes, the people who helped hiding Jews took upon themselves an incredible risk.²⁰

A similar sentiment was expressed on 21 August 1957 during a large reunion of members of the Westerweel movement held in Moshav Beit Yitzhak in Israel in honour of a visit of the Dutch couple Bauke and Vrouwkje de Koning who had saved many Jews during the war. Jewish resistance fighter Menachem Pinkhof expressed his appreciation on behalf of the survivors and said that they often wonder if they would have acted in the same way in their circumstances.²¹

The state of Israel merged the commemoration of righteous gentiles into commemorations of the *Shoah* from an early stage. In 1953 Yad Vashem was established with the chief task of commemorating the six million Jews who had perished during the *Shoah*; the commemoration of the 'Righteous among the Nations' (non-Jews who had put their lives at risk to save Jews during the Holocaust) was defined as another key task of the museum from its very inception. Since 1962, the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous has been in charge of awarding the honorary title which, among other things, consists of an honorary certificate, mention in Yad Vashem and even citizenship rights. Joop Westerweel has long been recognised as a worthy member of the 'Righteous among the Nations', and his work has been acknowledged in key historical works on the Holocaust in the Netherlands. Some have, however, claimed that he deserved much more attention. A 1964 book review published in the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* addressed the Hebrew book *His Inner Light (Oro Ha-Ganuz)* about Westerweel's life and death. The reviewer wondered why this book had not aroused the same interest as Anne Frank's diary. He believed that

it should be among the first ranks of Holocaust literature, and be translated to all languages, and be mandatory reading in schools. Especially in this time of extreme cynicism and scorn for ideals, it shows the meaning of courage, sacrifice and noble personality.²²

Some specifically highlighted the fact that Joop was Christian, in order to underline a certain bond between Jews and non-Jews. An Israeli author wrote once that Joop Westerweel 'sacrificed his life for the sake of love for men and for Israel', since he recognised that 'it was the duty of each nation and that of every righteous Christian to help the Jewish people to arrive alive and free and safe to their historic homeland'.²³ In 1963, the Dutch Jewish weekly *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*

expressed its appreciation for Wil Westerweel who had enrolled in Hebrew classes and since then only spoke in Hebrew at commemoration ceremonies: 'This is the most pure way of honouring the movement, since from this resistance, a bond was forged between Christians and Jews, a bridge was built to a free life on this soil [of *Eretz Israel*]'.²⁴

In contrast, others sought to deemphasise the difference between Jews and non-Jews and sought to highlight the human aspect of the resistance movement. For example, in January 1967 a group of about forty Dutchmen received an award from the Dutch ambassador in Israel, Dr. D. Lewin, on behalf of Yad Vashem. The ambassador remarked that the award was intended to preserve the memory of the many Dutchmen who helped their fellow Jewish countrymen, 'not because they were Jews, but because they were people'.²⁵ Moreover, in 1994, Wil Westerweel protested against one of the captions accompanying her husband's photos in the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in Northern Israel, which mentioned that he was Christian. She urged the museum not to focus on Joop's religion, but on the fact that he was a combatant against injustice and suppression.²⁶

While the survivors saved by the Westerweel movement had an interest in preserving their particular shared memory of the past, their activities also drew the interest of the Dutch and Israeli governments. The 1964 memorial gathering marking the twentieth anniversary of Joop's death was celebrated in extensive fashion as a group of Dutch underground members from the Westerweel movement was invited by the Israeli government to visit Israel. As part of the visit a ceremony was organised in Yad Vashem where certificates of honour were distributed to the resistance fighters and Wil Westerweel planted a tree in the museum's Garden of the Righteous. She herself was awarded the title 'Righteous among the Nations' and received a posthumous recognition on behalf of her late husband. That night Israeli foreign minister Golda Meir received the group in her house, where she told them: 'Your words and acts of protest formed the foundation stone for a better world'. The next day, the group was invited to visit Israeli president Zalman Shazar who expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Israeli nation. He added that the Dutch tradition of tolerance and understanding for the Jewish people dated as far back as the period of Spinoza and Rembrandt.²⁷ Menachem Pinkhof then presented Shazar with a book about Joop's life. A few days later, on 11 August 1964, on the anniversary of Joop's death, the JNF and Dutch survivors in Israel organised a commemoration service in the Westerweel forest on the occasion of the visit.²⁸ It was attended by Westerweel's family, representatives of the Dutch Jewish survivors and Dutch Foreign Ministry officials.²⁹ A representative of the embassy of the Netherlands planted a tree in Joop's name, and at the end of the ceremony, members of the Westerweel group planted trees near the memorial stones. Finally, the group visited the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum where the archives of the Westerweel group were stored.

On the level of bilateral relations, the actions of the Joop Westerweel movement were sometimes presented as a reflection of the sympathetic attitude of the Dutch nation towards the young state of Israel.³⁰ In the Netherlands, a street in Rotterdam



FIGURE 9.1 The son and daughter of Joop Westerweel at a memorial gathering marking the 20th anniversary of his murder. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Online Archives.



FIGURE 9.2 A representative of the Netherlands embassy in Israel, planting a tree in a forest planted in memory of the Zionist Pioneer underground in the Netherlands. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Online Archives.

was named after Joop in September 1974.³¹ In the years that followed, several other streets in the Netherlands were named after him, including in the municipalities of Heenskerk, Montfoort and Vlaardingen. In Amsterdam, a public elementary school was named after him. Moreover, the work of the group is acknowledged in the Amsterdam Resistance Museum and the National Monument in former Camp Vught, where Westerweel was killed.

However, it has been argued that ‘recognition for the Westerweel group in the Netherlands was considerably less than in Israel’ (Schipper 2015: 210). Moreover, conflicting narratives about the movement’s legacy caused tension at times. For example, in April 1984 a documentary was broadcast on Dutch television entitled *To Never Forget*, telling the story of the Westerweel group. The documentary was produced by Jan Grijpink, Jan Pieter Visser and Loes van Egmond in cooperation with Israeli television. However, the Dutch public broadcasting services believed that the original documentary represented the events ‘too much from an Israeli perspective’ and requested that the makers adjust the documentary and add new materials highlighting the Dutch role.³² Similarly, Schipper pointed out an additional controversy when another documentary about the movement was broadcast on Dutch television in the mid-1990s. According to some of the Dutch members of the movement, the documentary did not do enough justice to the share of the non-Jewish participants and had exaggerated the role of the Jewish Palestine Pioneers (Schipper 2015: 8).

A critical narrative in the Ghetto Fighters’ Museum

A few years after the Second World War had ended, the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum in northern Israel started archiving documents and other materials that the *Halutzim* had brought to Israel and that testified of their experiences. This came at the initiative of Mirjam Pinkhof, one of the members of the Westerweel group. Pinkhof worked with the museum’s archival staff to collect testimonies from more than one hundred individuals related to the Westerweel group and to create a comprehensive archive of its history. In order to translate the material from Dutch into Hebrew, the German-speaking Mirjam requested the help of Tanya Ronen, the daughter of German-born parents, who spent part of their lives in hiding in the Dutch border town of Nieuwlande. With the help of the Westerweel group, Tanya’s parents managed to reach Israel. Ronen was born and grew up in *kibbutz* Gal’ed, where she met Mirjam. The two women worked on the preservation of the Westerweel movement for years. The Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum housed the archives of the Westerweel group until they were moved to the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam in 2011.

Their efforts also culminated in a unique permanent exhibition in the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum in Israel, focusing exclusively on the Jews in Holland and the Dutch resistance during the Second World War, which was inaugurated in 1996 in the presence of the Dutch ambassador to Israel. An organisation called Dutch Friends of the Holland Department of the Ghetto Fighters’ House Israel had

been founded to support and subsidise the exhibition which, according to Mirjam Pinkhof, was intended to underline the positive aspects of the Dutch resistance against the Germans. However, it was also intended to debunk the myth that the Dutch were generally good to the Jews during the war. Pinkhof emphasised that, unfortunately, the large majority of the Dutch people had not demonstrated the courage to take action.³³

The message of the Joop Westerweel forest discussed above, as well as the narratives of Dutch *Halutzim* such as Hanan Florsheim, contributed to the positive image of Dutch behaviour during the Second World War which was widespread in Israel and the Netherlands, especially in the first decades after 1945. Based on personal experiences, the Dutch *Halutzim* told about the exceptional endeavours by people risking their own lives and those of their families for their sake. However, this positive portrayal of the Dutch resistance overlooked the fact that many Dutchmen had collaborated with the Germans during the war, while others remained on the sidelines as Jewish neighbours and acquaintances were rounded up. The former Dutch ambassador in Israel, Gideon W. Boissevain, recognised exactly this fact during the inauguration ceremony of the Westerweel forest in September 1954, saying that among the Dutch a feeling of guilt remained for having witnessed the injustice committed against their Jewish counterparts. ‘If we are able to look ourselves in the mirror again, this is only due to men like Joop Westerweel’, he said.³⁴

Still, it took years for a nuanced narrative to gain some ground in both Israeli and Dutch society. In the Netherlands in the 1950s, only Jewish historians wrote about the *Shoah*, and their writing, according to Brasz

did not bring about a genuine recognition of these events [while] the negative involvement of Dutch non-Jews in the Shoah was rarely discussed. The Jews seemed to deal with the subject of the persecutions only within the isolation of their own community.

(Brasz 2001: 156)

In the 1960s, ‘non-Jews began to recognize Jewish suffering, but the Jews’ fate was discussed mainly by psychiatrists, as an issue of individual psychic trauma. [...] They were perceived as victims’ (Brasz 2001: 157). Only towards the end of the 1960s did the recognition of Jewish traumas give rise to a campaign for social benefits for the victims of Nazi persecution. In the 1980s a critical discourse gained pace as the Dutch role in the persecution of the Jews became highlighted and historical inaccuracies were revised. However, the process of demystification was slow and did not completely alter the dominant narrative of the war in the Netherlands, which focused on the German occupation of the country and portrayed the Dutch as victims of the Nazi regime. In this commemorative narrative, heroic stories of the resistance

helped shape what Dienke Hondius has termed ‘the resistance norm’ [...] which had the effect of creating a standard for evaluating conduct during

the war in terms of 'goodness' and 'wrongness'. Although some Dutch individuals were singled out as wrongdoers, these people were immediately condemned by society and viewed as exceptions to the general standard of resistance that placed the Netherlands as a nation on the right side of the war, fighting for the good of all its citizens. Acts of individual heroism and resistance were not only celebrated, but also taken to be emblematic of the Dutch nation as a whole.³⁵

Considering this, the exhibition in the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum may be understood as an attempt to contribute a critical narrative about the Dutch position in the Second World War. This is clear from the description of the exhibition on the museum website, where it is introduced as follows:

The conquest of the Netherlands rather resembled an annexation, for the Germans were met with cooperation from the Dutch population, including its Jewish community. The deviously mild occupation policies, coupled with the Dutch people's trusting belief in the rule of law, enabled the Nazis to essentially do as they liked with Dutch Jewry.³⁶

The exhibition starts with a brief history of the Jews in the Netherlands and then follows their gradual marginalisation and eventual persecution and deportation in the war. Equal attention is paid to the German Nazi presence in the Netherlands and the role of Dutch Nazi political parties such as the NSB. And while the activities of the Dutch resistance are highlighted, the exhibition also demonstrates the role of Dutch collaborators and the *Joodsche Raad* (the Jewish Council). Moreover, the exhibition touches on several elements that are not widely known in the Netherlands when it comes to the pre-war years, such as the story of the arrival of German Jewish refugees throughout the 1930s and the activities of the Zionist Pioneer movement in the Netherlands. For example, the exhibition highlights the fact that the Dutch work camp Westerbork, which later became a notorious transit camp during the occupation, was built by the Dutch government in 1939 in order to house German Jewish refugees who had entered the Netherlands. The camp was built after the Dutch government had already closed its borders to German refugees in December 1938, shortly after *Kristallnacht*, after which the flow of refugees had increased.

According to Tanya Ronen, one of the curators of the exhibition, these controversial aspects of Dutch pre-occupation history are rarely presented in the Netherlands. In an interview with the author she emphasised that the narrative as it is told in this exhibition is not presented anywhere else in such a complete manner, which is precisely why her team invested so much effort in creating it. Ronen claimed that the exhibition made a huge impact on Israeli visitors. However, according to her, a similar recognition by the general Dutch public or the Dutch government was still 'far away'.³⁷ This too may be changing, however. At the time of the interview, the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam had not

yet announced its plans to establish a National Holocaust Museum in 2016. Yet this planned museum will present the history of the Holocaust in a broad international context and use it as a starting point to address timely issues such as genocide, integration of minorities, religious intolerance, anti-Semitism and the violation of human rights and international law. The museum will seek to complement the commemorative function of an existing war monument and museum that is located across the street in Amsterdam, *De Hollandsche Schouwburg* (The Dutch Theatre), which used to function as the Nazis' assembly place for Jews awaiting deportation.

As pointed out earlier, for the Dutch *Halutzim* in Israel who were saved by the Westerweel group, the fact that only a minority of Dutchmen actually participated in the resistance was hard to grasp. Hanan Florsheim admitted that even in his mind the legend of the benignity of the Dutch people only started to change in the last twenty years. Hanan acknowledges that with their stories he and his friends contributed to the positive image of the Netherlands during the war. Although he knows that in retrospect the heroes were only few, he continued to reiterate how difficult it was for Dutchmen to stand up against the Germans and the Dutch collaborators:

You cannot resent most Dutchmen. They hated the Germans, but had to continue their lives. They went through a lot too, the famine,³⁸ the horrors in Amsterdam *et cetera*. The people in the resistance were the bravest and were also the minority. It was very dangerous. But the real fighters are always the minority, and in the Netherlands it really was very dangerous.³⁹

Shared memories, group identity and future generations

The relations between the surviving members of the Westerweel group now living in Israel and its non-Jewish members living in the Netherlands have remained exceptionally good. Florsheim emphasises that the contact with these families, for example those who helped to hide Jews, remained enduring and special after the war. The Jewish members of the movement regularly hosted Joop's widow Wil in Israel, and the *Halutzim* would receive similar hospitality and visit Wil while in the Netherlands. Other Dutch rescuers, such as Bauke and Vrouwkje de Koning, were invited to Israel as the guests of the survivors.

As is demonstrated from the above, the commemoration of the Westerweel group served to maintain a sense of group identity amongst its members. Those Pioneers cherished the shared experience of surviving the war due to the help of the Westerweel group. Halbwachs argued that memory is a social construct and is shaped in interaction with and *vis-à-vis* others: reconstructed images of the past provide a group with an account of its origin and development and allow the group to recognise itself through time (Halbwachs 1992: 38). As summarised by Aleida Assmann, memory 'provides a repository for group affinities, loyalties, and identity formations' (Assmann 2010: 39). Since one usually belongs to multiple groups in



FIGURE 9.3 Young Jews from the Netherlands whose rescue was aided by members of the Zionist Pioneer underground, hosting Wil Westerweel. Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters' House Online Archives.

society, it is possible to identify with multiple collective memories at the same time, ranging from those as small as the memory of the family to as large as the memory of the nation. On the one hand, collective memory is instrumental in expressing or proving one's belonging to a group. At the same time, it is crucial for distinguishing this group from other groups. The members of the Westerweel group adhere to multiple collective identities, among them that of the Israeli Pioneer movement and that of the Westerweel group.

The memory of the Westerweel *Hechalutz* Underground is a two-fold memory of survivors of the Second World War who were saved with the help of non-Jews and became Pioneers in *Eretz Israel*. On the one hand, these Dutch Pioneers fulfilled the Zionist dream in which Jews assumed 'an active role in changing the course of their own history', by 'liberating themselves from centuries of exile' and 'revitalizing Jewish national culture' (Zerubavel 1995: 14–15). Their emigration to *Eretz Israel* and their contributions to the settlement of the land are highly praised in the Zionist reconstruction of the past. The story of the Jewish survivors who reached Palestine due to the clandestine efforts of the Westerweel group complies with this narrative as they became Pioneers and were fully absorbed into Israeli society. On the other hand, the way these Dutch Pioneers arrived in Israel does not entirely fit the Zionist representation of the past. They were forced to flee their home countries because of anti-Semitism, went into hiding in the Netherlands and were eventually able to escape to *Eretz Israel* with the help of non-Jews. Their departure

from Europe was not always an ideological move. For example Hanan Florsheim, who was among those saved by the Westerweel group, wrote in his memoirs:

Thus I returned to the land of my ancestors. However, I cannot pretend that a dream had been fulfilled. Although I had been a member of *Maccabi Hazair*, the Zionist youth organization in Amsterdam, and had lived in the Zionist living quarters of Wieringen, all of that did not mean very much to me. To be honest, today I still explain my arrival in Palestine as the result of the kick in the butt that the Nazis gave me. Without it, I would be living today in Germany, my country of birth, without devoting a single thought to immigration. However, owing to the stormy times in which I had become trapped, I was lucky enough to end up in a circle of friends led by comrades of the resistance who had set the goal of reaching Palestine.

(Florsheim 2007: 119).

Since their arrival in Palestine, the Jewish members of the Westerweel group have made various efforts to preserve their history and to create a legacy out of their experiences in Europe and the bravery of the Westerweel resistance movement. They continued to pay tribute to their rescuers and preserved their particular history locally through the establishment of a memorial forest, annual commemoration services, reunions, archiving and the publication of memoirs.

The survivors of *Hechalutz* Westerweel living in Israel have stayed in touch and organise commemorative initiatives within the community. The Association of the Pioneers Underground in Holland consists of former members of the Westerweel group and meets once a year. Its meetings are usually held in *kibbutz* Gal'ed, which seems to function as the base of the group. This is despite the fact that most former activists have left Gal'ed and have helped to establish other *kibbutzim* such as Yakum or have moved to cities in the centre of Israel such as Ramat Gan. The annual meeting of the Association generally starts with a ceremony in the Joop Westerweel forest, where a 'yizkor' ('memorial prayer') verse is read, and wreaths are laid on the monuments in the forest. After that, the group convenes in the clubhouse of *kibbutz* Gal'ed where they are hosted by Rolf Rozenhal and his son Amir.

Nevertheless, the members of the Westerweel group have aged greatly and fewer and fewer people attend the annual meetings. In the past, it was very common for them to bring their children and involve them in commemorative events or to introduce them to their rescuers from the Netherlands when they visited Israel. By the same token, Joop's own children had not known their father very well but supposedly came to know him through the preservation of his memory by those he rescued. Joop's son Leo said that for a long time he had been unable to really connect to the past: 'As the son of the man who gave his life in the battle against injustice, I most of all missed having a father.'⁴⁰ One of his children, Marta, settled in Israel, where she met many of those whom her father had saved. She testified: 'I was three-and-a-half years old when my father was arrested and five years old when he was executed. I never really knew him. In the Netherlands I was a fatherless



FIGURE 9.4 Paved area. Joop Westerweel forest, Israel. Photograph © Joyce van de Bildt.

child; here in Israel I became my father's daughter'.⁴¹ It was from the survivors that she learned stories about her father. After the war, Wil regularly visited Israel with her four children, one of whom was later married there.⁴²

Besides these interactions, there is a question mark over whether the second and third generation of survivors will continue the commemorative initiatives. Marianne Hirsch introduced the concept of 'postmemory', which she defines as 'the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right' (Hirsch 2008: 103). Hirsch notes that although memory can be transmitted, the 'received' memory will be distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. This contradiction is inherent to the phenomenon of postmemory, which is not identical to memory but approximates memory in its affective force (Hirsch 2008: 109). In the case of the Westerweel group, its memory has been transferred to the second generation but to different extents. While some descendants, such as Tanya Ronen, are actively engaged in preserving historical material related to the group, others have limited their involvement to joining their parents on 'roots tours' to Europe. One member of the second generation, Yoram Goren, is a good example of the former. His mother Lori Durlacher was rescued by the Westerweel group and Yoram has taken upon himself the task of founding and managing the website of the group.⁴³



FIGURE 9.5 Monument in the Joop Westerweel forest, Israel, with names of key actors in the underground movement, and the Hebrew phrase 'Nizkor' ('We will remember'). Photograph © Joyce van de Bildt.

The Israeli-born Yoram has designed the website entirely in Hebrew, which makes it available mainly to the Israeli public. There is no comparable endeavour in Dutch, German or English. Another member of the second generation, Amir Rozenthal, has started to help his ageing father with taking care of the surroundings of the Westerweel forest, and hosting the group in *kibbutz* Gal'ed once a year. However, according to Hanan Florsheim, there are only a few who are attracted by the Westerweel history to the extent that they are actively involved in the preservation of its legacy.

Conclusion

The Westerweel case serves as an example of a sectional community memory. Its meaning is limited to a particular group and does not completely fit into the memory of other groups. This case study has attempted to show that individual consciousness of the past is linked to group identity, not only on the national level but also on the level of communal groups that perceive their past as distinct. Indeed, although the survivors of the Westerweel group form an integral part of Israeli society, they seek to distinguish themselves through the memory of their group's past.

The sectional nature of this memory is first of all evident in the nature of the group's commemorative initiatives, such as its intimate reunions and remembrance services. Moreover, the location of the Joop Westerweel monument in the forest that became the group's main commemorative site is exemplary of the local nature of this memory. In general, monuments or memorial stones are likely to be established inside a populated area, where their exposure is most guaranteed. They help sustain a group memory and its presence in the public space functions as a constant reminder of the past. However, in this case of sectional community memory, the memorial was placed in nature, close to *kibbutz* Gal'ed where a large part of the survivors had found a new home. When passing through this rather remote area in Israel, the memorial area is easily overlooked. This underlines the fact that the memorial served most of all to sustain a group memory particular to the residents of the area and others who share it.

Since afforestation was one of the key tools of the Zionist settlement effort, and it was common to plant trees in someone's name, the establishment of the Joop Westerweel forest was a highly symbolic form of commemoration for those European Jews saved by Westerweel who became Pioneers in Palestine. Viewed from the Israeli state level, it could be said that the forest's establishment in 1947 came relatively fast, since, during those years, the nascent Israeli state had not yet started dealing with the trauma of the Holocaust. This observation again reiterates the fact that the initiative was private and belonged to a select group of people.

Moreover, the local memory of the Westerweel group does not precisely map onto dominant national discourses in Israel and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, resistance is an important element of the narrative of the Second World War, but the Joop Westerweel movement was exceptional in many ways and has been marginalised in this narrative. The uncommon combination of its members, as well as the group's aim to save Jews and help them escape to *Eretz Israel*, were unique in the history of the Dutch resistance. The various Joop Westerweel commemorative activities emphasise the exceptional nature of the Westerweel group. In the private memory initiatives dedicated to the Westerweel group, the nonconformist nature of the group is presented as an example for future generations. It should be noted that at the same time, others chose to emphasise the movement's acts of humanity, and not so much the unique cooperation between its Jewish and non-Jewish counterparts. For them, commemorations held by the Westerweel group are not necessarily about its leader Joop Westerweel, but to honour all those who risked their lives to save Jews. Hence, they sought to attach a wider meaning to the legacy of the Westerweel movement. Finally, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in Israel took the story of Joop Westerweel as a starting point to contribute a critical narrative to the story of the Second World War in the Netherlands. A special exhibition on the Jews of Holland highlighted the heroic acts of the Westerweel movement and the ultimate price paid by some of its members. At the same time, this exhibition sought to balance both the Dutch and the Israeli perception that the position of the Dutch during the Second World War was largely benign, as the exhibition paid ample attention to the role of collaborators and bystanders.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

- 1 The term 'Westerweel group' was first introduced in the 1960s. In fact, as Hans Schippers pointed out, the activities of Westerweel and the Pioneers took place in three different frameworks that interacted with each other: that of Westerweel and his non-Jewish colleagues, the Pioneers organised in the *Hechalutz* and another group led by Frans Gerritsen (Schippers 2015: 8). In this article, the term 'Westerweel group' is used to refer to all this activity.
- 2 'Het J.N.E na 1945', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 4 September 1953, 6.
- 3 'Een "Westerweel-woud" in Palestina', *De Waarheid*, 18 January 1946, 2.
- 4 'Joden in Nederland geven uiting aan hun dankbaarheid', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 25 January 1946, 1–2.
- 5 'Joop Westerweelwoud'. *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 21 January 1966, 2.
- 6 Psalms (*Tehillim*) 92:13.
- 7 'Een bijzondere geste', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 22 March 1963, 5.
- 8 'Joop Westerweel-Woud', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 12 July 1963, 8.
- 9 'Israël krijgt van oud-AJC-ers 2000 bomen', *Het Vrije Volk*, 20 March 1973, 13.
- 10 The AJC subsequently planned to establish a 'Paasheuvelbos' in Israel, named after their famous meeting place in Holland. The forest was to be called Tel Pesach, consisting of 500 trees. See 'Paasheuvel in Westerweel-Woud', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 1 December 1972, 2.
- 11 'Oud-AJC'ers schonken Israël Paasheuvel', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 25 May 1973, 3.
- 12 'Le-zecher Joop Westerweel', *Davar*, 27 March 1947, 11; 'Ya'ar Westerweel nita be-harei Menashe', *Hatsafe*, 12 March 1947, 3.
- 13 Interview with Hanan Florsheim, 31 January 2013.
- 14 'Verzetstrijder Shushu in Israël herdacht', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 31 May 1963, 4.
- 15 Book of Joshua, 4:9
- 16 'Verzetstrijder Shushu in Israël herdacht'.
- 17 'Gedenksteen in Westerweel-woud', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 3–8 October 1954, 3.
- 18 Irena Steinfeldt, 'Paying the Ultimate Price', *Jerusalem Post*, 4 August 2009, www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Essay-Paying-the-ultimate-price.
- 19 The National-Socialist Movement (NSB) was a Dutch fascist political party and remained the only legal political party in the Netherlands during the Second World War, functioning as a collaborationist party.
- 20 Interview with Hanan Florsheim, 31 January 2013.
- 21 'Bauke Koning en zijn vrouw door hun "kinderen" in Israël ontvangen', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 29 September 1957, 4.
- 22 'Oro haganuz', *Maariv*, 11 December 1964, 14.
- 23 'Le-zecher Joop Westerweel'.
- 24 'Verzetstrijder Shushu in Israël herdacht'.
- 25 'Ambassadeur reikt certificaten uit aan verzetstrijders', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 3 February 1967, 1; 'Veertig Nederlanders onderscheiden', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25 January 1967, 9.
- 26 'Westerweel', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 29 April 1994, 6.
- 27 'Verzetstrijder Joop Westerweel in Israël herdacht', *Limburgsch Dagblad*, 6 August 1964, 5; 'Atzeret le-zichram shel chavrei makhteret Holandim ba-Ya'ar Joop Westerweel', *Henut*, 12 August 1964, 6.
- 28 'Westerweelgroep bezoekt Israël', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 14 August 1964, 3.
- 29 'Atzeret le-zecher chavrei ha-makhteret ha-Holandit', *Davar*, 12 August 1964, 3.
- 30 'Ambassadeur reikt certificaten uit aan verzetstrijders'.
- 31 'Verzetstrijders met straatnamen geëerd', *Het Vrije Volk*, 9 September 1974, 7.
- 32 'Verzetsgroep', *Nieuwe Leidsche Courant*, 2 April 1984, 10.
- 33 'Israël herdenkt verzet', *Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad*, 11 September 1992, 7.

- 34 'Gedenksteen in Westerweel-woud'.
- 35 M. Kronemeijer and D. Teshima, 'A Founding Myth for the Netherlands: The Second World War and the Victimization of Dutch Jews', *Humanity in Action*, 2000, available at www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/293-a-founding-myth-for-the-netherlands-the-second-world-war-and-the-victimization-of-dutch-jews.
- 36 See 'The Jews of Holland during the Holocaust' on the website of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum at www.gfh.org.il/Eng/?CategoryID=61&ArticleID=452.
- 37 Interview with Tanya Ronen, 20 February 2013.
- 38 The famine of 1944 is known as the 'hunger winter' in the Netherlands and took place in the German-occupied part of the country, especially in the densely populated western provinces. A German blockade cut off food and fuel shipments from farm areas to punish the reluctance of the Dutch to aid the Nazi war effort. Some four and a half million individuals were affected and only survived because of soup kitchens; around 22,000 are believed to have died.
- 39 Interview with Hanan Florsheim, 31 January 2013.
- 40 'Westerweel'.
- 41 See 'The Westerweel Network: Johan Gerard & Wilhelmina Dora Westerweel, The Netherlands' on the Yad Vashem website at www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/stories/westerweel.asp.
- 42 'Verzetssrijder Joop Westerweel in Israël herdacht'.
- 43 See *Ha-Makheret ha-khalutzit ba-Holland ve-kvutzat Westerweel*, www.westerweel-hechaluz-group.com/.

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PART IV

Practices of remembrance