



PERSPECTIVES

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The Netherlands' Profound Hypocrisy on the Jews

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Netherlands' attitude towards the Jews reveals Dutch society to be profoundly hypocritical. The Dutch government remains the only one in Western Europe that consistently refuses to admit, let alone apologize for, the massive failures of its predecessors towards the Jews during WWII. Ignoring the truth of its past enables the Dutch government and parts of the political system to act as moral judges over others, with Israel a prime target.

The Netherlands is a profoundly hypocritical society. To prove such a statement in detail would require a lengthy book. One shortcut to support this claim is to look at the history of the relationship between Dutch Jews and the society at large.

The extreme behavior of the Dutch is not readily visible. The Netherlands isn't particularly hospitable to its Jews, but neither can one rank its attitude towards them among Europe's worst. Only a handful of foreign correspondents are based in the country, so negative aspects of the Netherlands rarely make it into the international media.

In May 1940, the Netherlands was occupied by the invading Germans within a matter of days. In the years to follow, more than 70% of its 140,000-strong Jewish population were murdered after having been sent to German camps, mainly in Poland. In the preparatory activities for what would lead to genocide, the Dutch authorities followed Nazi orders. Dutch police arrested Jews, including babies, simply for being Jews. Dutch railways transported Jews to the Dutch transit camp Westerbork, and from there to the German border. Dutch police guarded the Jews in the camp.

The Dutch government in exile in London gave no instructions to the bureaucracy in their occupied country. One government employee in London, Henri Dentz, wrote a report in December 1943 that stated that most Dutch Jews had already been murdered. This report was sent to all ministries and to a number of other Dutch institutions in

London, including the Red Cross. After the war, Dentz testified that nobody wanted to read it.

While authorities in the occupied Netherlands assisted the Nazis, a small minority of good Dutchmen helped 24,000 Jews to hide. A third of these were ultimately betrayed. According to a historian with whom I spoke, the Netherlands was the only occupied country in which a group of volunteers and a special police unit were paid to hunt down Jews in hiding.

In spite of all this, the Dutch government remains the only one in Western Europe to consistently refuse to admit the huge failures of its wartime predecessors towards the Jews. Even the small states of Luxembourg and Monaco have admitted their wartime misconduct and offered apologies.

In an interview with an Israeli government radio station in 2000, then Dutch PM Wim Kok said: "The Dutch have never been responsible for the misconduct of the Germans in the Netherlands during the war." He made no reference to the responsibility for wartime misconduct towards Dutch Jews by Dutch authorities, institutions, and many individuals. It was a classic straw man argument. No one accuses the Dutch of committing the Nazis' crimes, only of committing their own.

This absence of admission and apology for crimes and negligence is a key element of the hypocrisy of Dutch society. That hypocrisy can be seen in Dutch behavior elsewhere. The Netherlands committed major war crimes in the military campaigns of 1947 and 1948 - euphemistically known as "police actions" - in its then colony, the Dutch Indies, now Indonesia.

Over the decades, hardly anyone has cared about those Dutch crimes, even after the publication of information about them. Consider, for example, the case of Dutch officer Raymond Westerling, who was in charge of "pacifying" parts of the island of Sulawesi during the Indonesian war. An interview with him in which he admitted to war crimes was filmed in 1969. Not a single Dutch TV station agreed to broadcast it. It was finally shown in 2012. In 1971, Westerling told a journalist over a glass of diluted whisky that he had court-martialed 350 captives and personally executed them. Again, no action was taken by justice authorities. In the late 1960s, a young Dutch historian, Cees Fasseur, was officially charged with investigating these "police actions." He later admitted the superficial nature of his research.

In 1997, historian Ad van Liempt wrote a book, *The Train of Corpses*, in which he detailed how the Dutch starved to death about half of the local captives on a train transport during that war. Van Liempt told me that many had found it scandalous that he had written the book. A Dutch filmmaker known personally to me made a movie in 1995 about the Dutch army's mass killings of hundreds of men in the village

of Rawagede on the island of Java. He told me the locals spoke of similar crimes that had taken place in nearby villages.

In 2017, Dutch-Swiss historian Rémy Limpach published an 870-page book – with more than 2,400 footnotes - about Dutch war crimes that had been committed in 1947 and 1948 in the Dutch Indies against independence fighters and criminal bands. He concluded that these crimes were structural, not incidental, as had been previously claimed. The book gives many examples of the soldiers committing arson, torturing and shooting prisoners, and killing women and children. It also mentions their rape of minors. Several reviews were published, but there were no major reactions in Dutch society.

I asked two leading Dutch historians why the Netherlands is so indifferent towards its problematic past. Frank van Vree answered: “The history of war memory shows that the Netherlands is willing to look at the weaknesses of its society. But at the same time the obstinate thought exists that the Netherlands has erred in many ways; but all in all it has done many things better than others...The feeling of ‘if we haven't done it well, we've done it better than others’ is deeply ingrained in Dutch culture. On the one hand there is acknowledgement, on the other hand there is glossing over.”

Hans Blom said, “The Netherlands is a country where the need to make compromises was present very intensely early in its history. In addition one can say that the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th century has developed a tradition to think that ‘we’ are a country with very high moral standards. In the 19th century it became unavoidably clear that the powerful Netherlands of the Republic of the United Netherlands was no longer a significant factor...In these small Netherlands a self-image emerged that it is nicer to be the world’s most moral nation, rather than the most powerful. In such a tradition of high moral self-image, it is more difficult to publicly and properly treat events where that is evidently not the case.”

In this environment of make-believe, Dutch PM Mark Rutte even dared, in 2015, to say about the Netherlands: “We have a marvelously perfect country, full of energy and creativity.”

The above are only some examples of Dutch indifference to its own criminal past. Many others can be added. Neglecting this past enables the Dutch government and parts of the political system to act as moral judges over others. Israel is a prime target.

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