

Commemoration, a philosophical view

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm a researcher and philosopher, associated, for more than thirty years now, with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt – the old 'Frankfurt School'. I start off with this sentence, because there's a certain embarrassment I might as well confess to you right away: I didn't grow up in the Netherlands (so there are people here who know much more about the practice of remembrance here than I do), and furthermore, although we are here at the university, CRESCAS is a Jewish organisation, and what you expect from me – as the title seems to promise – is something more than an academic and theoretical paper in philosophy. 'Joods Nederland' wants to understand the peculiar rudderlessness of the 4/5 mei comité of recent years, and it suspects that moral clarity – a clear distinction between perpetrators and victims – is being sacrificed on the alter of a relativistic and populist all-inclusivity. 'Keert de Shoah zich tégen de Joden?'²

Against that background these "filosofische beschouwing" have the following purpose: to place these very practical, very immediate concerns in a broader – historical, intellectual, international – context; on the old philosophical assumption that greater abstraction leads to greater insight. Let's see if there's any truth in this.

1 *Crescas*, Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit, 12.3.2013.

2 The comité's argument is that, almost seventy years after the war, it is necessary to broaden the appeal of the annual commemorations, but this 'verbreeding', according to the critics, has led to a "wegvallen van het onderscheid tussen daders en slachtoffers". (Letter of the 'Cairo-overleg', addressed to the 4/5 mei comité. NIW 148, feb. 2013, p. 6.) Evelien Gans: "Keert de Shoah zich tégen de Joden?" *Auschwitz Bulletin* 57, nr. 1, January 2013.

I. Een breuk in het bestaan – herdenking en collectieve identiteit³

I started off by asking myself the following question: what is it that sets Jewish sensibilities apart from those of everyone else here in Holland? Just what is it that sets *our* teeth on edge? ‘Religion’, ‘Holocaust’ ‘Israel’ are the usual answers given, but as a researcher one is trained to be as interested in what answers are capable of obscuring as much as what they reveal. My own parents would have rejected all three of the above answers – and when I read Gans’s *De kleine verschillen*⁴ their reaction seems quite representative of many of the survivors. Neither of my parents came from a religious background – my mother here in Amsterdam, my father in the mediene, in Den Helder. Would they have accepted the word ‘Holocaust’? No. They died before the word became fashionable, and if a journalist or anyone else had ever tried to speak to them they would have reacted with the incomprehension that Imre Kertesz describes in *Roman eines Schicksallosen*. I don’t think the word ‘Israel’ was ever mentioned at home, and I’m not at all sure that they were aware, at the time, of the Eichmann trial. On the words that did resonate with them – ‘Apeldoornsche Bosch’, ‘onderduik’ – they seldom spoke in front of the children, and then only in incomprehensible allusions. The only word that I remember, in that context, from my childhood, was shouted with such rage and despair, – in the middle of the night, my father’s voice – that it shakes me even now, more than sixty years later: ‘Sobibor’. (Speak of intergenerational transmission..)

But I’m already moving in the direction of the individual-psychological side of things, which I do not want to discuss today. I want to stay at the level of the institutional reactions of the Jewish community – the ‘remnant’ – here in Holland after the war. After an early phase of disinterest and neglect (in itself the cause of much bitterness at the time, which has not entirely been assuaged)⁵, there was a short phase, during the sixties, in which the Jews and their fate were widely accepted as a symbol of the *national* commemoration of ‘de oorlog’, ‘the war’, a basis for solidarity with all

3 This title comes from C.M. Jacobs-stam (1981): *Oorlog, een breuk in het bestaan*.

4 Evelien Gans (1999): *De kleine verschillen die het leven uitmaken – Een historische studie naar joodse sociaal-democraten en socialistisch-zionisten in Nederland*. Amsterdam.

5 Isaac Lipschits (2001): *De kleine sjoa – Joden in naoorlogs Nederland*. Amsterdam.

those who resisted the German occupation, risking their lives for ‘parliamentary democracy, national independence, and freedom of conscience’.⁶ They were not quite resistance fighters, but the *verzet* itself, in any case a numerically tiny group until very late in the war, were prepared to accept the Jews as a symbol of these ‘*verzet*’ values – enabling their incorporation into the commemorative canon via the ‘*Dokwerker*’ in Amsterdam. “Niet om de Jood als zodanig, maar om de Nederlander in de Jood, de proletariër of de mens in hem, kon een verzetsactie als de Februaristaking tot stand komen: zo kon de massa begrijpen, dat onze speciale nood ook de hunne was of kon worden.”⁷

‘Goed en fout’, ‘collaboratie en verzet’ was the tone that was set during official commemorations through to the sixties⁸, and it was nationally re-

6 "Von der Dunk legt er ... de nadruk op dat de Duitse bezetting veel intensiever was dan alle voorgaande en eigenlijk alleen te vergelijken valt met de beginperiode van de achtig-jarige Oorlog. Hij ziet de bezettingstijd als een worsteling op leven en dood tussen twee tegenover elkaar staande totaal verschillende normsystemen. In scherpe tegenstelling tot Blom wijst hij erop, dat vooral sinds 1943 het Nederlandse volk zichzelf opdeelde in ‘goeden’ en ‘fouten’. In het artikel van Termeer in *Kleio* lijkt mij vooral belangrijk de opmerking dat juist het verzet de continuïteit met het voorlogse nastreefde, d.w.z. de parlementaire democratie, de nationale onafhankelijkheid en de gewetensvrijheid.” (Gjalt Zondergeld 2002: *Goed en kwaad. Vijftien opstellen, van fascisme tot pacifisme, van Rudolf Steiner tot Colijn*. Antwerpen-Apeldoorn.)

7 One of the organisers of the Februari staking – quoted in Evelien Gans (1999): *De kleine verschillen die het leven uitmaken*, p. 764.
One of the earliest Holocaust monuments in Holland, the 1947 ‘gratitude’ monument, a stones-throw away from the ‘*Dokwerker*’, is dedicated to “Those who protected the Dutch Jews during the occupation”. “Unified with you in resistance/protected by your love/strengthened by your resolve/mourning together”. [*Monument uit Erkentelijkheid – Aan de beschermers der Nederlandse Joden in de bezettingsjaren./vereend met u in afweer/beschermd door u liefde/gesterkt door uw weerstand/rouwend met u.*] The website adds: “Het monument ... is door toedoen van een klein comité tot stand gekomen, tegen de wens van veel Joodse overlevenden.” (Blom, p. 127: “Beschermd door Uw liefde’ staat erop te lezen. Op die gedachte zou men inmiddels, nu doordrong hoe hoog vergelijkenderwijze het percentage omgekomen Joden uit Nederland was, niet meer komen.”) Another example: *Een paar minuten is het stil – Beelden van de oorlog*. (Aangeboden door het Gemeentebestuur van Arnhem ter gelegenheid van de herdenking in 1965 van de Bevrijdingsdag.) Over de ‘*Dokwerker*’: “Het vertelt je, dat gewone mensen het niet langer konden verdragen de knecht te zijn van de Duitsers. Kijk naar het beeld, dan zie je het. Het geduld van die man is op. Hij gooit het werk er bij neer. Hij heeft er genoeg van, slaaf te zijn. Hij staakt. De staking begon op de 25ste februari van het jaar 1941 in Amsterdam. Er was een bijzondere reden voor. Precies dezelfde reden, waarom mijn leraar ook geen les meer wilde geven. Ik vertelde je dat er een leraar was ontslagen, omdat hij een Jood was. Joden zijn Nederlanders net als jij en ik. Het zijn gewoon onze landgenoten.”

8 J.C.H. Blom sums it up with the words: “Men kan met H.W. von der Dunk van een basisconsensus spreken, die ‘tevens het geestelijk fundament vormt voor de

spected figures such as Lou de Jong, Jacques Presser, Abel Herzberg who exemplified a direction, in their work, that was considerably more than 'merely academic' historiography. But this 'identity' of historiography and public sentiment did not last, and it is really the effects of the breakup of this national consensus of the sixties that we are now seeing happening around us.⁹

Seen in retrospect, one must probably accept that it couldn't have lasted anyway – too powerful were the forces (economic, political, philosophical) acting upon that consensus. Economic boom-times (the 'brood-op-de-plank' mentality) are not conducive to reflection and a cultural renaissance, the experiences of the Jewish survivors were too starkly different from those of their non-Jewish countrymen, the sheer international scale of what had happened in any case dwarfed the purely local and national narratives, there was a crisis in the Middle East and in Vietnam, the tiny Jewish group was itself too deeply divided among secular, religious, Zionist-national lines for it to be able to speak with a single voice. 'Goed en fout' began to be seen not as the necessary *moral* basis for a national consensus affecting very many different areas of society and polity – making a clear and unambiguous symbolisation thereof on the 'Dam' and elsewhere possible – but as a one-sided and ostensibly old-fashioned *moralism* which a new generation of historians began to see as a 'straightjacket' they needed to get out of if historical objectivity was going to get its due.¹⁰ From now on 'gewone Nederlanders' and 'de Joden' begin

hedendaagse democratie in Nederland en in heel het Westen. Als hij zou verdwijnen zou dat impliceren, dat de fundamenteën van die democratische samenleving zijn aangevreten. In zoverre blijft er een direct verband tussen de oorlogshistoriografie en het heden.' "Zingeving", *In de ban van goed en fout*, p. 122/3. He immediately hastens to add, however, that the 'scientific' conception of historiography is not concerned with this: "Deze omstandigheid verklaart waarom veel van de moderne wetenschappelijke geschiedschrijving, die zich juist los wil maken van die zingeving en de volle nadruk wil leggen op accurate reconstructie en verklarende analyse, zo moeilijk aansluiting vindt bij dat naar zijn aard juist wel politiek en moreel openbare debat." (p. 123.) On this avowed, methodologically defended ('wetenschappelijke geschiedschrijving') disinterest in what is after all the *history of the present*, I shall return below.

9 "Halverwege de jaren tachtig was het voor Joden net zo moeilijk zeggenschap uit te oefenen over de herinnering aan de Jodenvervolging als in de jaren vijftig en zestig. Achteraf beschouwd, was de algemeen gedeelde eerbied voor het psychisch leed van de Joodse overlevenden, op basis waarvan zij als de woordvoerder voor de herinnering aan de Jodenvervolging konden optreden, een korte onderbreking in een algemener tendens van voortdurende controverse." Blom, op. cit., p. 129/130.

10 J.C.H. (Hans) Blom (1983): *In de ban van goed en fout? wetenschappelijke geschiedschrijving* Inaugural lecture University of Amsterdam. c.f. also Guus

to drift apart, to end up with the situation we have now.¹¹ It is as if a ‘separation wall’ is going up, in Amsterdam, between the “Dam” (‘leed, vastberadenheid en de betere wereld’) and the “Hollandsche Schouwburg” (“de Holocaust”).

Let’s turn our attention for a moment to one indication of this drift – what Evelien Gans called the “Dutch Historikerstreit”¹². It’s not really new – one need only browse de Haan’s *Na de ondergang* to appreciate this – but it’s also a bit of a misnomer. What I call here the ‘drift between the Dam and the Schouwburg’ has a different history and is argued from quite different premisses when one compares it to the original Historikerstreit.

II. Niets/iets

I start with an entry in the diary of Anne Frank, lines she wrote on the 3rd February 1944, not long before she and her family were betrayed:

Achterhuis: ‘We hebben het alles toch zelf meegemaakt, eerst in Duitsland en dan hier. En wat gebeurt er dan in Rusland?’

Jan: ‘De joden moet u even buiten beschouwing laten, ik geloof dat niemand weet wat er in Rusland aan de hand is. De Engelsen en Russen zullen net als de Duitsers voor propagandadoeleinden overdrijven.’

Achterhuis: ‘Geen kwestie van, de Engelse radio heeft altijd de waarheid gezegd. En stel dat de berichten tien procent overdreven zijn, dan zijn de feiten nog erg genoeg, want u kunt niet ontkennen dat het een feit is, dat er in Polen en Rusland vele miljoenen vreedzame mensen zonder veel omwegen vermoord of vergast worden.’

Meershoek (2003): “Driedeling als dwansbuis. Over het onderzoek naar de vervolging van de joden in Nederland” in: Conny Kristel (ed.) *Met alle geweld. Botsingen en tegenstellingen in burgerlijk Nederland*. Amsterdam. There’s a deep ambiguity in this ‘In de ban van goed en fout’ that deserves exploration. In Philosophy moral judgements can be criticised from two quite different perspectives: from the point of view of *scientific objectivity* (in the sense of the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of science) and in the continental sense of *Wissenschaft* (hence also: *Wissenschaft des Judentums*) with its strongly *historical* perspective. One could also say: from a *global* perspective, from a ‘species-perspective’ (R. Lifton), a perspective on – say – the last say 300 (or 3000 or 3m) years, capable not only of transcending the Eurocentric or even Western perspectives, but from the perspective of moral-ethical *universality*.

11 <http://nos.nl/artikel/366401-ophef-over-gedicht-4-mei.html> accessed 13 Feb. 2013

12 Evelien Gans (2010): “Iedereen een beetje slachtoffer, iedereen een beetje dader. De Nederlandse Historikerstreit over de grijze oorlog” in: Groene Amsterdammer, 27-01-2010.

Taking passages like this, out of context, and arguing, abstractly – like a seminar in Analytic Philosophy – about their ‘meaning’ has something of the grotesque about it, but that is exactly what has been happening. Does one conclude from these lines that Anne Frank *knew* about ‘Auschwitz’, or was she merely reporting a rumour? (A few months later she wonders after all whether German Jews who had been deported to Poland from Holland “shouldn’t be allowed to return here” after the war, implying that she couldn’t have known for certain.) On this question of what ‘ordinary people’ – Anne’s fame was after all posthumous – actually *knew* about the fate awaiting those whom the occupying Germans had designated ‘Jews’ there has now erupted a heated controversy, centred in the first instance on Leiden historian Bart van der Boom, who in his book *‘Wij weten niets van hun lot’ – Gewone Nederlanders en de Holocaust*, sets out to ‘debunk’, on the basis of an examination of many such war-time diaries, what he calls “the myth of the guilty bystander”. ‘The ordinary citizen’ (the ‘bystanders’ of Hilberg’s *Perpetrators victims bystanders*) has been saddled with a moral opprobrium, according to v.d. Boom, that is an insult to the memory of ‘our grandparents’.¹³

It’s a classic reductionist argument. In answer to his critics¹⁴, who hold that he’s obfuscating the *category* difference between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, – between scientific-technical and moral-practical discourses –, he casts himself in the heroic pose of ‘breaking the taboo’ surrounding the “similarities” between victims and bystanders, which was much greater than the moralists (who, he insists, keep hounding him and impugning his integrity) are prepared to acknowledge:

Het hoofdbezwaar van Gans en Ensel is dat mijn boek onderdeel zou uitmaken van een verwerpelijke trend van ‘nivelleren, van bestaande verschillen verkleinen in positie, gevoelens en motieven tussen daders, omstanders en slachtoffers’. Zoals ik al in de Groene heb betoogd is dat een wetenschappelijk onbruikbaar verwijt. Wat zijn ‘bestaande verschillen’? Liggen die vast? Kan daarover niet gediscussieerd worden? Zou het niet kunnen dat er tot nu toe onopgemerkte, maar relevante overeenkomsten tussen slachtoffers en

13 "Het is nogal wat om over onze grootouders te zeggen dat ze het wel prima vonden dat hun joodse burens werden vermoord." Gans' pointed riposte: "Wiens grootouders bedoelt hij?" ("Wij weten iets van hun lot II" *Groene Amsterdammer*, op. cit.)

14 A sample: Evelien Gans, Remco Ensel: "Wij weten iets van hun lot – nivellering in de geschiedenis". *Groene Amsterdammer* 12.2.2012 and 6.2.2013; Guus Meershoek: "Een aangekondigde massamoord. Wat wisten Nederlanders van de jodenvervolgung?" in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 30.01.2013.

omstanders zijn? Wat schieten we ermee op om die bij voorbaat taboe te verklaren?¹⁵

“Why can’t this difference *itself* not be discussed?” The non sequitur is obvious: will we ever *really* know what Anne Frank and all the other war-time diarists meant? No. Hence *as far as this factor is concerned*, there are no *empirically* convincing differences between victims and bystanders. (As if the moral-ethical aspect were irrelevant, ‘unscientific’.)

One could surmise that what really concerns v.d.B. becomes clear from this ‘FAQ’ on his blog:

Q: Je beweert dat de meeste niet-Joodse Nederlanders de Jodenvervolgving verafschuwden. Maar het uitzonderlijk hoge percentage uit Nederland gedeporteerden bewijst het tegendeel.

A: Dit is het begin en eind van menige discussie over Nederland en de Holocaust: een maatschappij die 75% van zijn Joden laat vermoorden is ten diepste verrot: onverschillig, laf en antisemitisch. Het is een begrijpelijke redenering, maar een cirkelredenering: waarom zijn er zoveel joden gedeporteerd? Door de onverschilligheid van de omstanders. Waar blijkt die uit? Uit het grote aantal gedeporteerden.¹⁶

“A society that lets 75% of its Jews be murdered is rotten to the core: indifferent, cowardly, anti-Semitic.” This, according to, v.d.B., is a caricature. One can “understand” why someone should argue this way, but *their logic* is faulty. It’s really a circular argument, with the premiss and the conclusion mutually reinforcing each other: why were so many Jews deported? Because of the indifference of the bystanders. Why do we know that the bystanders were indifferent? Because of the large number of deported Jews. (Like so many well-meaning liberals, van der Boom feels himself unjustly misrepresented, unfairly attacked.)¹⁷

15 *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 6 Feb. 2013.

16 v.d.Boom blog:

<http://wijwetennietsvanhunlot.blogspot.nl/p/faq-veelgestelde-vragen.html> Accessed 15.2.2013.

17 The argumentation is abstract. He speaks of ‘factors’, ‘elements’, definitions. He poses speculative ‘what-if’ questions of the ‘imagine a parallel universe’ type, : “If there had been no Holocaust ... we would now *still* think that the reasons so many Jews gave for not going into hiding – risk of punishment, reluctance to break the law, risking the lives of others – were entirely plausible.” His critics are unscientific ‘arrogant political-moral hangmen.’: “Gans en Ensel schrijven niet als kritische collega’s, maar als politiek-morele scherprechters. Dat is onhebbelijk, arrogant en ver buiten de wetenschappelijke orde.” Blog v.d.B.

But to see how oddly stilted this ‘logic-chopping’ approach of some of the professional historians is, one need only place it next to a book, e.g., by the non-historian Ed van Thijn, *Blessure Tijd*:

Het blijft voor mij een raadsel waarom de Nederlandse regering in Londen, die al in december 1942 met andere regeringen protesteerde tegen de ‘bestiale politiek van uitroeiing in koelen bloede’ (de zogenoemde Geallieerde verklaring), dat thema nadien nooit meer heeft aangesneden en nimmer via Radio Oranje heeft opgeroepen tot hulpverlening aan onderduikers. Van der Boom verdedigde zich met de opmerking dat woorden als ‘vernietiging’ en ‘uitroeiing’ toen moeilijk letterlijk konden worden genomen.”¹⁸

Here the two opposing notions of objectivity are palpable: van Thijn wants serious answers to questions concerning the *causes* – political, economic, social, educational, ethical – of the disasters of the last century – whereas v.d. Boom confines himself to what he insists are just the ‘facts’ of the diaries (as if these war-time diaries don’t presuppose *interpretation* on our part), and to the ostensible ‘logical errors’ of those who oppose his own narrow rationalism. (As if there’s been no progress, in the Social Sciences, since Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, and the huge literature on the differences between the natural and the social sciences – from Max Weber more than a century ago to the ‘positivist dispute’ of the sixties – never happened.) There’s a *reality* that abstract rationalism cannot fathom, and in this unfathomability it serves the social function of an amnesiac – I find this well-formulated here:

“Terecht heeft ... Von der Dunk opgemerkt dat tijdens de bezetting voor de twee uiterste groeperingen, de actieve bestrijders en de actieve helpers van de bezettingsmacht, een tegenstelling bestond tussen leven en dood zoals Nederland die sinds de eeuwen van de godsdiensttwisten niet gekend heeft.”¹⁹

Let me try to place this in a larger context. There are really two different controversies going on here. There is, first of all, the question of what that *means*: objectivity with regard to the historiography of the last hundred years, and most especially with regard to the Holocaust. It is above all this that motivates Evenien Gans, if I read her correctly, when she insists, against v.d. Boom, that a discussion of the past without clear moral-ethical principles leads to a dangerous relativism in public discourse, and that a

18 Ed van Thijn (2012): *Blessure Tijd – Dilemma’s van een Joods politicus*, p. 253.

19 Adriaan Venema: *Blommeldingen*, 38/39.

professional historiography that lacks this is only pouring oil on the flames:

Zeker het laatste decennium is nivellering van daders, omstanders en slachtoffers tot een trend uitgegroeid. Het televisieprogramma *Andere tijden* zond op 1 april 2012 een programma uit over vier mannen op het snijvlak van collaboratie. Zonder verder commentaar werden interviewfragmenten uitgezonden van een politieagent die joden had weggehaald, een hulpmachinist op een deportatietrein, een joodse jurist die in Westerbork deportatielijsten had bijgehouden, en een marechaussee die in Westerbork had gediend. ... Van der Boom op zijn beurt betitelt de holocaust als ‘een donderwolk’ die ‘een schaduw over de hele Nederlandse geschiedenis werpt’ en ‘voor een algemeen onbehagen zorgt.’ Als dat zo is, dan vormt een rechtlijnige redenering die motieven en gevoelens van omstanders en slachtoffers tegen elkaar wegstreep een onbevredigend antwoord. Dat de enige negatieve reacties op Van der Booms boek van joodse kant kwamen, is uiteraard niet toevallig.²⁰

I read this argument as saying: there’s no such thing as a ‘value-neutral’ study of the Holocaust, and if the Jewish community is troubled by this v.d. Boom approach, then one must take this an indication of something deeper, which requires attention. The perpetrator/victim distinction stands for the necessity of a historiography that is more than just an eclectic accumulation of facts, and doesn’t wash it’s hands of what’s happening in the media with the argument ‘we’re specialists, so what’s happening in the media isn’t our concern’. This, and I think Evelies Gans is right in this, is an important aspect of what the ‘Historikerstreit’ in Germany was all about.

But the very different reactions from within the Jewish community also indicate a *second* controversy: a deep unease with the inflationary use of the ‘anti-Semitism’ and ‘Holocaust denial’ charges as a polemical device. The weaknesses of a rational/empirical approach in historiography (the original ‘Historikerstreit’) is one thing, anti-Semitism something else. Gans and Ensel sometimes argue as if the opening up of historiography to the methods of the social sciences (which the NIOD originally instituted under the directorship of Hans Blom) is somehow anti-Semitic, as if, almost seventy years after the war, with the real victims and perpetrators in their nineties, the ‘goed’/’fout’ position of the sixties is still an adequate ba-

20 Evelien Gans, Remco Ensel (2012): “Wij weten iets van hun lot. Nivellering in de geschiedenis” in: *Groene Amsterdammer*, op. cit.[]

sis for an understanding of the past – or of the present, for that matter.²¹ This controversy is every bit as divisive *within* the Jewish community as the Historikerstreit is with regard to the ‘right’ methodology of the social sciences. (Do we – as emancipated *Dutch* Jews – approach the disasters of the past from the perspective of moral, ethical, cognitive universalism [symbolised by the ‘Dam’] or as Nederlandse *Joden*, from the point of view of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, from the point of view of the *Holocaust*?)

In the controversy marked by v.d. Boom’s book *both* themes are there: the question of an objective understanding of the past that conforms to the standards of the Humanities and the Social Sciences, versus an exclusive focus on the *Holocaust*, with the implication that what is at stake *here* is the divide between Jews and non-Jews. Van Thijn represent the *first*, Gans and Ensel the *second*. Van Thijn, as I understand him, wants a debate, a *European*, a *universal* debate, about the causes of the war; Gans and Ensel on the other hand often argue as if they equate the perpetrator/victim distinction with morality *tout court*, placing their critics in the vicinity of Anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial.²²

Like many, Gans and Ensel are disturbed by the trivialisation and general ‘dumbing down’ of everything to do with the past – with our current

21 Whatever else is to be said about Blom’s *In de ban van goed en fout*, he can’t be faulted for insisting that the specific *Dutch* debates need to be opened up at both the *international* and *interdisciplinary* levels.

22 It is, as far I can tell, only Meershoek who explicitly links the weaknesses of v.d. Boom’s account – his *positivism* – to his inability, at the methodological level, to make a clear distinction between *explaining* something and *understanding* something: “Van der Boom trekt ten onrechte de ernst van getuigenissen van wetenschap van de genocide in twijfel door deze los te maken van de context. Hoe de joden de dood zouden vinden was een kwestie die ook liever niet werd aangeroerd, door nationaal-socialisten om de angst erin te houden, door anderen uit angst. Door eenzelfde abstrahering miskent hij hoe fundamenteel de positie van niet-joden tijdens de bezetting verschilde van die van joden, hoe de laatsten met grote moeite, tegen alle aanslagen daarop in, een normaal bestaan in stand probeerden te houden, terwijl niet-joden zich ongestraft van die nare werkelijkheid en hun bedreigde mede-burgers konden afkeren en dat ook massaal deden. Beide groepen werden met een volstrekt andere onzekerheid geconfronteerd. Daarom laat Van der Booms verklaring voor het gedrag van niet-joden – voorzover die al hout snijdt – zich niet transponeren naar dat van joden. Overigens geldt sowieso dat een historische beschrijving van de vervolging wel staat of valt met een treffend beeld van de ervaringen van de bedreigde joden, maar dat voor een historische verklaring de opstelling van de joden van geringe betekenis is. Het lot van de joden werd overwegend bepaald door de opstelling van anderen, bovenal het Duitse bestuur, maar ook door de Nederlandse instanties en bevolking. Met andere woorden: ook door gewone Nederlanders.” Guus Meershoek (2013): “Een aangekondigde massamoord. Wat wisten Nederlanders van de jodenvervolging?” in: *Groene Amsterdammer*, 2013/5.

‘culture of forgetting’, with the relativistic ‘grijs verleden’ tone set by so many of the professional historians.. But even within the Jewish community itself, both here and abroad, there is unease about the inflationary charge of Anti-semitism in situations where this is hardly called for.²³

As I said, this controversy is not new. Some people may still remember that Otto Frank spent the last years of his life in a rancorous series of court cases, trying to prevent stage and film adaptations of his daughter’s diaries which he regarded as too Zionist in their tone, and anyone delving into the history of the Anne Frank Museum here in Amsterdam will see that this is as sensitive an issue as ever.²⁴

As an aside, on this issue of diaspora versus Israel, David Goldberg, Rabbi Emeritus of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London, tells this rather entertaining story:

In the years after the Lebanon War of 1982, the Israeli ambassador in London was a passionate orator who liked to work a favourite anecdote into his speeches. ‘For a time, he would say, and unbeknown to each other, Theodor Herzl and Sigmund Freud lived on the same street in Vienna. Imagine what would have happened if one day Herzl had knocked on Freud’s door and said: ‘Doktor, I have had a dream”?’ Having captured his listener’s attention with such a novel possibility, the ambassador would then paint a vivid picture of how the dream had been turned into reality, list Israel’s many achievements and assure audiences that even greater triumphs lay ahead if only peace could be concluded with the Arabs.

In the London district of Hampstead, where every third resident is a Jewish psychoanalyst, so the joke goes, there is a Freud Museum. The museum opened a new wing in memory of Freud’s daughter Anna and invited the Israeli ambassador to be the guest speaker. Clearly, he had no more idea of what he was doing there than his audience had of why he had been invited, but he launched into his standard anecdote as being vaguely appropriate. When he delivered its punchline about imagining what might have happened if Herzl had said to Freud, ‘Doktor, I

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- 23 Ido Abram: “Wat wisten Joodse en niet-Joodse Nederlanders tijdens ‘de’ oorlog? Volgens historicus Bart van der Boom niet genoeg om adequaat te kunnen handelen.” *Kol Mokum*, sept. 2012; Leo Frijda: “Ik ben het er niet mee eens dat het boek van Van der Boom, zoals Evelien Gans en Remco Ensel ... betogen, past in de trend van nivellering van daders, omstanders en slachtoffers.” <http://www.crescas.nl/site/blog/webcolumnfrijda/> accessed 25.2.2013; David Goldberg (2002): “Let’s have a sense of proportion – We Jews do ourselves a disservice if we cry ‘anti-semite’ at every liberal critic of Israel” in: *The Guardian*, Jan. 26, 2002. More generally: Moshe Zuckermann (2010): *Antisemit! Ein Vorwurf als Herrschaftsinstrument*.
- 24 c.f. my 2010 paper “Translating the life-world of Anne Frank into the language of the postwar generation”. xxxxxLINKxxxxxxx Also: the so-called Dutch ‘Dreyfus-affaire’: Wim Berkelaar (1995): “W.F. Hermans en de Weinreb-affaire – Altijd gelijk maar eeuwig verongelijkt” in: *Algemeen – Cultuurgeschiedenis – Historiografie* nr. 3/1995

have had a dream', from the back of the hall someone muttered, *sotto voce*, 'Perhaps he would have cured him!'²⁵

III. Yerushalmi – three Jewish responses to the Holocaust

In pondering this multi-layered, three-cornered controversy that I sketched above one can learn much from historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi – especially from his *Zakhor – Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Yerushalmi, who unites in his work and in his person those two elements upon which the whole notion of a Jewish collective identity depends: *history* and *Judaism*, is a useful guide to these difficult questions. He points what we have been discussing here – the v.d. Boom/Gans controversy – in a direction different from the above. Not diaspora versus Zionism, or Jewish versus non-Jewish, but to the core issue of the philosophy and the historiography of the last half-millennium altogether: the question of *secularisation*:

There is an inherent tension in modern Jewish historiography even though most often it is not felt on the surface nor even acknowledged. To the degree that this historiography is indeed “modern” and demands to be taken seriously, it must at least functionally repudiate premises that were basic to all Jewish conceptions of history in the past. In effect, it must stand in sharp opposition to its own subject matter, not on this or that detail, but concerning the vital core: *the belief that divine providence is not only an ultimate but an active causal factor in Jewish history*, and the related belief in the uniqueness of Jewish history itself. [emphasis added]²⁶

Jewish history and Jewish faith are, according to Yerushalmi – at least until the 19th Century – not strictly separable. History “as such” is “structured”, as much by the active narrative of deliverance from disaster as it is by a description and documentation of objective historical events.

This is not the place to try to give an account of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the 18th and 19th Century. Except to make this one point: that the understanding of what that *means*, ‘historiography’, *itself*, undergoes a profound change during the centuries that follow – in the period say from

25 David Goldberg (2006): *The Divided Self – Israel and the Jewish Psyche Today*. p. 210/211

26 *Zakhor*, op. cit., p. 89.

Zunz, Graetz, Eduard Gans, to Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem and the Frankfurt School. Or rather: it undergoes a *split*. On the one hand there is the tendency which Yerushalmi describes with his famous phrase “history becomes what it had never been before – the faith of fallen Jews.”²⁷ This meaning of history culminates in the notion that the ‘history of the Jewish people’ is a topic to be subsumed under *general* history – in the same sense that one speaks of the history of the English people, the Dutch, French and so on. A type of historiography in other words which remains what it was in the heyday of the Nation State, namely *national* history, the affirmation of our identity as citizens and voters within a specific set of institutions and specific national borders. But the other direction (signposted by the names Spinoza and Hegel) reads ‘Wissenschaft’ in an entirely contrary sense to today’s meaning of the term ‘science’ – namely as ‘Universalgeschichte’, a ‘global’ or ‘planetary’ history that encompasses and affects us all. (And in the process dissolving much of its connection with the particularity of *Jewish* history.²⁸) This ‘haskalah’ or ‘emancipation’ direction, culminating in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, treats the Jews, the Holocaust, Anti-semitism, the wars of the last century as *historical* (and that means ‘innerworldly’) phenomena that are in principle as explicable as everything else *in* this world – including the various creeds and religions contained within it.

All of this has a direct bearing on the ‘why did it happen’ question underlying the Gans/v.d. Boom controversy that I started off with. Why were, within living memory, more than 100,000 Dutch citizens, labelled by the German occupier as ‘Jewish’, murdered? If this is the real source of the unease about the ‘formal rationalism’ of the v.d. Boom approach and the ‘we’re just empirically orientied social scientists’ type of historiography, how is this to be articulated? Yerushalmi helps us here because he shows that the Jewish community and the Jewish tradition has responded to what is now called the Holocaust in three different ways that themselves have a long, and in part even an *ancient* history: i) the traditional *faith-based* response; ii) the *history of the Jewish people* approach; iii) the ‘Holocaust is an aspect of the crisis of Modernity altogether’ approach. The tensions between these three ‘paradigms’ – need I say that here – are huge, for here is being fought out, all over again, the old issues of faith versus reason, science versus politics. But what interests me here is above all what *unites*

27 *Zakhor*, p. 86.

28 Isaac Deutscher (1969): *De niet-joodse jood: over het jood-zijn in de moderne wereld*.

them. Whether we're speaking of the transhistorical values of the Torah, or the *real* history of the Jewish people, or the disasters of the last hundred years, no discussion of any of this is conceivable without taking *history* seriously. And here it seems to me there is a collision with the narrowly conceived 'no value-judgements please' type of historiography that has gained currency over the last decades. What the three approaches that Yerushalmi sketches – the faith-based, the 'history of the Jewish people', or the modernist approaches – have in common is the conviction that *historiography without a moral-ethical basis is an illusion*.²⁹ It is this necessity of some kind of perspective that is both 'meta-historical' and substantive at once that Yerushalmi makes so palpable with this tale of Borges:

Jorge Luis Borges tells a story, Funes el memorioso ("Funes the Memorious"), which haunts me largely because, though Borges did not intend it so ..., it looms as a possibly demonic parable for a potential denouement to modern historiography as a whole. It is a tale about an Argentinian, Ireneo Funes, who, as the result of a fall from a horse at the age of nineteen, found that henceforth he could forget nothing, absolutely nothing. He tells Borges: "I have more memories in myself alone than all men have had since the world was a world." But I give you Borges' own words:

"We, in a glance, perceive three wine glasses on the table; Funes saw all the shoots, clusters, and grapes of the vine. He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book he had seen only once, and with the lines of the spray which an oar raised in the Rio Negro on the eve of the battle of the Quebracho...

In effect, Funes remembered not only every leaf on every tree of every wood, but every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it. He determined to reduce all of his experiences to some seventy thousand recollections, which he would later define numerically. Two considerations dissuaded him: the thought that the task was interminable and the thought that it was useless. He knew that at the hour of his death he would scarcely have finished classifying even all the memories of his childhood..."³⁰

In this 'Google' world of ours, it is not difficult to appreciate the point that Yerushalmi is making here: a purely *factual* study of the Holocaust (or of

29 Though it is a commonality that remains abstract: faith-based, nation-based, post-modernist based conceptions have in common only this *anti-positivist* element, and little else. Another way of putting this: the confrontation with death, even in 'normal' circumstances (let alone the disaster that struck us eighty years ago) – cannot be handled – to use an old terms from medieval metaphysics – 'intentio recta', as if it were one fact amongst others.

30 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1982): *Zakhor – Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, p. 102.

the last 100 years, or of history altogether) that delivers nothing but an unmanagable mountain of unstructured ‘data’, doesn’t help us in the least when we’re facing those troubling “Hoe was het mogelijk?”³¹, questions. When we go to the Dam, the Schouwburg, the Februaristaking, the Auschwitz herdenking, it’s no consolation to hear that the past is ‘grey’, or that there’s nothing new under the sun. So the *first* conclusion to be drawn from Yerushalmi is a rather formal, a purely ‘negative’ conclusion: a historiography that has nothing to say about freedom, about values, that is not able to give us some guide to ‘practice’, is not going to help us with our enquiry here. So how *do* we conceptualise that moral-ethical basis, and what *do* we learn from Yerushalmi on this?

IV. On symbolising ‘de oorlog’

I want to take those three ‘paradigms’ (for want of a better word) that Yerushalmi reminds us of (the ‘faith’-, ‘nation’-, ‘universal values’-based way of conceptualising the past) and then return to the question with which we started out: why is the 4/5 mei comité making such heavy weather in finding a convincing national symbolism?³²

What moves us individually is very varied. Some people can be deeply moved by a monument, a speech, an inscription, a film – while others remain quite unmoved. Age, experience, cultural background, upbringing, education all make a difference, play a role. Emotions are not only the most individual and intimate reactions we know, but if you ask around, or consult your own family, your own biography, you will find that for most of the survivors of the war and for most of their families, commemorations are deeply disturbing – some people (on 4/5 May) go on holiday, others switch off the TV and the internet, or do something apparently unrelated – though if you look closely and know them well enough you realize that what they’re doing fits the motto: ‘anything is preferable to once again facing those intolerable images’. So I invite you to think about your own choices

31 J.C.H. Blom (2010): "Hoe was het mogelijk? De Holocaust in de context van de Tweede Wereldoorlog". in: *Cleveringarede*, Universiteit Leiden.

32 I’ve been speaking of ‘types of symbolism’, or of ‘paradigms’, and in doing so I’m following here a line of thought in modern philosophy that affixes its attention above all to the implicit assumptions, to the so-called ‘apriori’ aspects of our thinking that seem so automatic, that are so obvious, so apparently ‘intuitive’, that in the normal course of events we see little reason to thematise them at all. Until, that is, we are confronted with people from an entirely different culture, an entirely different ‘mind-set’.

on 4 mei: what do you do, where do you go to, what does your family, your friends do. And then, with all this in mind, try to apply this classification of Yerushalmi: how does this affect you personally, and what conclusions, which *resolutions* do you make based on those emotional reactions? How do you express them and communicate them to your friends and family?

To be ‘rational’ in these things is more than just difficult – the popular word ‘rationalisation’, coming from the psychologists, has entered our vocabulary for a good reason. Denial and projection are very ancient and very human responses to what we find emotionally intolerable. But let’s look a moment at some of these monuments: the Dam, the Auschwitz-monument, the Hollandse Schouwburg, the Zadkine monument in Rotterdam, the Apeldoornsche Bosch – to mention only these. Is it possible to *classify* our emotional reactions, and our responses to these reactions, in accordance with Yerushalmi’s scheme?

IV. i. The faith-based paradigm

The oldest type of symbolisation that I’m aware of, in the context of the public commemoration of ‘de oorlog’, are these lines from a plaque at Westerbork:

“Olie van olijven, zuivere gestotene, gestoten en geslagen, om leed als licht te dragen.”

It’s from *Exodus*, though my own source is Eddy de Wind’s *Confrontatie met de dood*. I’ve since then located them at Westerbork – they’re next to the stone memorial field that marks the ‘apelplaats’. In this type of symbolism memory, suffering and hope are not elements that are – in the modern mode – analytically *separable*, but are intimately tied to one another within the psyche itself; “destruction and redemption”, says Yerushalmi, are “dialectically linked.”³³ Leed en licht, suffering and hope, death and rebirth.

Zakhor, remembrance, is the only permissible reaction to the sin of shikhecha, of forgetting, and in this act of remembrance itself the thinking ego comes to a consciousness of both: of the *reality* of the transcendent, the soul, the spirit, and of the sinfulness and guilt of our nature. This symbolism marks a dark place that writers and poets have grappled with since time immemorial, and doubtlessly will continue to do so for as long as we are mortal and for as long as our existence on this planet remains precarious.

(And who's to say we're not, and it isn't?)³⁴ The call that we 'are all responsible', that each one of us has it within us to be able to *choose* between good and evil, that this choice goes straight to the core of what we mean by 'freedom', echoes to us down the ages with undiminished resonance. They are the same sentiments, still recognizable two millenia later, in these words to be found on the *Nationaal Monument* on the Dam:

"Nimmer, van erts tot arend, was enig schepsel vrij onder de zon, noch de zon zelve, noch de gesternten. Maar geest brak wet en stelde op de geslagen bres de mens. Uit die eersteling daalden de ontelbaren. Duchtend zijn hoge blik deinsden hun zwermen binnen de wet terug en werden volkeren en stonden elkander naar het leven, onder nachtgewolkten verward treurspel, dat wereld heet. Sindsdien werd geen mens vrij dan ontboden van boven zijn dak, geen volk dan beheerst van boven zijn torens. Blijve ons dat bij, verlost als we werden uit het schrikbewind van een onderwereld. Niet onbeheerst, doch enkel beheerst van boven de wereld blijft vrijheid ons deel."³⁵

Or, in lines, to be found on the monument commemorating the Apeldoorsche Bosch in Apeldoorn:

"Nooit heb ik wat mij werd ontnomen zo bitter bitter liefgehad".³⁶

Or, in another metaphor of 'heaven', these words by the maker of the 'Spiegelmonument', Jan Wolkers:

Tot barstens toe kan je je hersens afpijnigen of er een beeld wil opdoemen dat die schande en dat leed bij benadering zou kunnen weergeven. Je kijkt naar de hemel en je begrijpt niet dat dat blauwe uitspansel boven die ontzetting heeft gestaan, even onaangedaan en vredig als boven een wei met bloemen. En in een visioen van rechtvaardigheid zie je de blauwe lucht boven je vol barsten trekken, alsof de verschrikking die daar op de aarde onder haar heeft plaatsgehad voorgoed de eeuwigheid geschonden heeft. Zo ben ik op het idee gekomen om gebroken spiegels op dat kleine stuke aarde waar die urn met as ligt neer te leggen. Voorgoed kan op die plaats de hemel niet meer ongeschonden weerspiegeld worden.³⁷

34 "'Herinneren' (Zachor) en 'terugkeren' (Tesjoewa), als 'opdracht', nodigt uit om innerlijk actief te worden en het leven te heiligen. Zie en proef dat het leven goed is. En hoe lasten, zegeningen, verliezen, vervullingen en verwondingen verzacht kunnen worden." (Limmoed quote.)

35 Words by Adriaan Roland Holst.

36 Monument by Ralph Prins, lines from a poem by Ida Gerhardt.

37 *Auschwitz Bulletin*, 1977. cit. in v. Thijn p. 73.

Even in our own prosaic, secularised world, – and perhaps, precisely because of it – we cannot resist the power of metaphor, the transcendent and sometimes overwhelming magic of language.

IV. ii. The nation-based paradigm

But there is a *second* type of symbolism, and that is the symbolism of the group, the nation, the ‘collectivity’.

Zakhor, remembrance, is *also* the “remember what Amalek did to you; remember Haman”; the Rabbinic tradition doesn’t just exist in a vacuum, it is part of the history of what becomes, once it is secularised, the history of the Jewish *People* - nowadays with its own National State and national institutions. At the Dam, the *national* aspect is just as present, namely in the eleven urns immured in the wall – one from each Dutch Province, and one from Nederlands-Indie. Urns containing the ashes from ‘erenbegravingen’ around the country; ashes of those who died for their *country*. This *national* symbolism in Holland is there in the Wilhelmus, (“Die Tyranny verdrijven,/Die my mijn hert doorwondt”), echoed also in the van Randwijk lines at the Weteringsschans:

Een volk dat voor tirannen zwicht, zal meer dan lijf en goed verliezen, dan dooft het licht.

So there’s not just the universal symbolism of morality, suffering, exile and the spiritual, there is also the symbolism of the *Nation*: here in Holland, after all, the oldest republic in Europe, with allusions going back to the ‘Geuzen’, the ‘patriotten’, and the war of national liberation against *Spain*. One could call this the symbolism of ‘Orange’, which once acted as a source of inspiration for Republicanism and national independence everywhere – including for that small onetime Pilgrim congregation in Leiden, setting sail, in the ‘Mayflower’, four hundred years ago.

IV iii. The post-national paradigm

And then there is a third layer of associations and allusions, a ‘post-national’ or post-modernist layer, in which it is the collective future of humanity, that is appealed to. *Liberal* values – one only needs to read Geert Mak’s *Amsterdam* to realize how deeply rooted they are right here, in our

own city – based in nothing more than the *individual's* rights to dignity and freedom.³⁸

This is the symbolism of universal Human Rights – expressing a collective resolve to create a world more peaceful, more dignified, less destructive than the one we presently inhabit.

We eren de moedige stakers. Wij verzetten ons tegen discriminatie van mensen vanwege hun afkomst, politieke overtuiging, geloof of seksuele geaardheid en komen op voor democratische waarden en mensenrechten.³⁹

– words from the *Herdenkingskrant*, issued on the occasion of the Februari-staking last month. We are *citizens*, burgers of this country, and it is as *citizens* that the Jews are commemorated on the monuments at the Stopera and the Dokwerker. (Stopera: “Ter herinnering aan het verzet van de joodse burgers gevallen 40-45”; Dokwerker: “Daad van verzet der burgerij tegen de Jodenvervolging door de duitse bezetter.”)

The 4 mei lezingen themselves are a rich source for this *post-national* symbolism. Geert Mak starts his ‘4 mei lezing’ some years back with the arresting words: “Ik ben een kind van de Enola Gay”. To end with a rousing:

Waar is onze gedroomde internationale broederschap? Waar is de Europese beweging, dat groots ingezette vredesproces, op uitgelopen? Wat heeft jullie generatie gedaan met de gerechtigheid en de vrijheid? Waarom hangen er wolken van cynisme rondom onze felbevochten democratie, overal in Europa? Waar is de passie? Waar het gevoel dat politiek ook groots kan zijn? Is het allemaal voor niets geweest, voorbijen tijden, vergetelheid?”⁴⁰

Once again Yerushalmi:

Today Jewry lives a bifurcated life. As a result of emancipation in the diaspora and national sovereignty in Israel Jews have fully reentered the main-stream of history, and yet their perception of how they got there and where they are is most often more mythical than real. Myth and memory condition action. There are

38 If only it were possible, in today’s world, to do what the burgemeester once did, long ago, to pacify the city: issue a decree to outlaw the words “Hoek” and “Kabeljauw”!

39 2013 Februari-staking Krans inscriptions: Uit Respect/Geef haat and discriminatie geen kans/De strijd gaat door/De Staat en het Volk van Israel/Nooit vergeten/Nooit meer/Dat nooit meer/Fascisme is moord/Blijf waaksaam/Dankzij jullie strijd is er vakbond vrijheid/Eenheid van actie toen en nu/Strijd tegen onrecht blijft noodzakelijk

40 *Breekbare dagen – 4 en 5 mei door de jaren heen*. (Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei, Stichting Collectieve Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek, [no date, prob. 2012] p. 238/239.)

myths that are life-sustaining and deserve to be reinterpreted for our age. There are some that lead astray and must be redefined. Others are dangerous and must be exposed.⁴¹

Let's now try to apply this 'different symbolic forms' approach to the word 'Holocaust'.

i) There has been, over the years, a powerful movement to *sacrilise* it, for instance in the work of Emil Fackenheim⁴², Arthur A. Cohen⁴³, or by what would later become the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Commission, *Zachor: The Holocaust Resource Center*. If a well-known Dutch Rabbi uses the word 'Endlösung', the necessity to go on aliya, and suggests that it is really the *luxuries* of the Babylonian 'ballingschap' in which we are said to find ourselves that is keeping us from going on aliya, he represents *this* movement.⁴⁴ The Holocaust becomes a symbol of evil *tout court*, an unprecedented and unique event, a 'singularity' in history that is not 'in' it but transcendent to it.

ii) The opposite approach is *secularise* it in the Zionist sense – this is discussed in some detail by Yehuda Bauer, former Yad Vashem director, in "From the Holocaust to the State of Israel".⁴⁵ It turns every aspect of the discussion of the Holocaust into a shibboleth, a 'loyalty-test' vis-a-vis Israeli politics.⁴⁶

iii) The third approach is that of the 'Frankfurt School', my own tradition. One could call this the *universalisation* approach. Modern society contains within it (in this view), in the core institutions that we take for granted – the economy, parliamentary democracy, the media – some of the same factors that caused the disaster of eighty years ago, and for this reason is an important research direction that helps to identify the causes of the crisis of modernity, of the globalised world in which we now find ourselves.

41 p. 131.

42 His 614th Commandment, "to be appended to the 613 that, according to tradition, were received from God at Mount Sinai: 'the commanding voice of Auschwitz'". (cit. in Peter Novick [1999]: *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 199.

43 Arthur Allen Cohen (1981): *The tremendum – a theological interpretation of the Holocaust*.

44 Rabbijn Evers, "Poerim", *Joods Actueel*, Antwerpen, Feb. 2013.

45 Yehuda Bauer (2001): *Rethinking the Holocaust*, p. 7.

46 Yom Hashoah, according to James E. Young, „nationalised the oldest of all Jewish paradigms: destruction and redemption.“ (in: *The Texture of Memory – Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. Yale U.P. 1993.)

(Sacrilisation, secularisation, universalisation – with the survivors somewhere in the middle, trying as best they can to make sense of it all.)

Bearing all this in mind, it is not difficult to understand why the 4/5 mei comité is struggling to find a non-political, non-controversial form of commemoration. Its government-set mandate is to find a *national* consensus; but the reality is that issues of European integration on the one hand, the *local* consequences of the crisis in the Middle East on the other ('glocalisation') makes such a purely *national* consensus increasingly difficult. In an increasingly globalised, fragmented, polarised world, it becomes ever more difficult to find a symbolism at the *local* level for events that are themselves only intelligible, if at all, on an international scale.

When I look around me in Holland, and above all in the Jewish community, what strikes me most of all is how most people seem able to accommodate all three of these 'mindsets' simultaneously – able to 'skipper' around the contradictory demands made upon them, keeping the conflicts latent, even in their own minds. Until, that is, that most neuralgic point of all is touched: *memory*.

Let me end by presenting to you the following two theses for discussion:

- 1) This 'Yerushalmi' approach helps us sort out conflicting loyalties, which for the survivors here in Holland has been intense – and is becoming more so year by year, as the crisis in the Middle East exacerbates;
- 2) It helps us understand a great deal of the controversies that surround us, whether it is the 4/5 mei comité difficulties, the Gans/v.d. Boom controversy, or the 'where do you stand on Israel' question.



Herinneren &
Herdennen

Herdenken, een filosofische beschouwing

lezing van dr. Frederik van Gelder

Het debat rond de 4-mei-herdenking vorig jaar liet weer eens zien hoe hoog de emoties kunnen oplopen. Niet alleen bij Joden, ook bij de rest van Nederland. Iedereen kent waarschijnlijk het gevoel van terugdeinzen voor de werkelijkheid bij de confrontatie met iets verschrikkelijks. Tussen deze basale emoties en de taal waarin wij proberen ze te uiten, bestaat een kloof die zo oud is als de filosofie en de literatuur zelf. Aan de hand van publicaties van auteurs

uit verschillende disciplines - literatuur, filosofie en psychoanalyse - en met een vluchtige blik op Zakhor van Yosef Yerushalmi, gaat de docent nader in op deze kloof tussen gevoel en taal, tussen gevoel en werkelijkheid. Hij laat zien dat herdenken minimaal twee betekenissen heeft: een moderne, herdenken met onderscheid tussen subjectief en objectief, en een veel oudere, waarbij we te maken hebben met basiselementen van de menselijke identiteit in het algemeen.

Frederik van Gelder is geboren in de onderduik en groeide op in Zuid-Afrika, waar hij actief was in de Anti-apartheidsstrijd. Hij behaalde universitaire graden in de medicijnen, antropologie, sociologie en economie. Sinds dertig jaar is hij verbonden aan het *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt.

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