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THE SHADOWS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN THE POST-WAR NETHERLANDS

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The events of the 20th century left quite painful and antagonistic memories in Europe, which play a crucial role in the representation of today's identity.

The memory of Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism is central to the collective memory of many European countries, where these regimes existed. In this regard, memory sites, museums, the establishment of special institutes for academic research is of great importance.

It is very significant for identity to bring out the basic elements in the national memory. One such key element of collective memory in the Netherlands is the period of Nazi occupation. Main question: What is the approach and memory politics in the Netherlands towards the Nazi regime and the Holocaust? The article will present how this period is kept and perceived in the memory of the Dutch people.

Memorializing the Nazi occupation in the Netherlands

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Very soon after the Nazi occupation, the government and Queen Wilhelmina left the country and went to London. The Queen called on the

people to continue the fight against the Nazis. Both the Queen and the government thought that the memory and history of the war should not be falsified by the enemy. Even during the war, the exiled government in London, namely the Minister of Education called on the people to write diaries over the radio, describing their emotions, the daily life of the war, because, according to him:

History cannot be written on the basis of official decisions and documents alone... If our descendants are to understand fully what we as a nation have had to endure and overcome during these years, then what we really need are ordinary documents -- a diary, letters.¹

All of these diaries were housed in the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide studies established in 1945 in Amsterdam three days after the liberation of the country, originally called the State Institute for War Documentation. It was the first institution of its kind in Europe.

The NIOD institute is an institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences that conducts academic research on World War II, the Nazi occupation, the Holocaust, organizes exhibitions, public discussions, lectures, and publishes publications. Therefore, it keeps the memory of the Nazi occupation at the academic level.

The resistance movement began gradually, at first students started protesting in universities, and then worker's strikes followed, which prevented them from being deported to forced labor in Germany².

There is a Resistance Museum in Amsterdam, dedicated to the period of Nazi occupation – Verzetsmuseum. The museum was founded in 1984 and is housed in a building built in 1876. The building with the Star of David at various times served as a center for Jewish culture and a synagogue.

The museum exhibition covers all forms of resistance: strikes, armed resistance, and people into hiding. Verzetsmuseum depicts the most poignant moments of the period: the hunger winter in 1944-45, three fighting teenage girls against the Nazis, personal letters, diaries, various documents, junior museum for children. The museum also features a narrative about people who collaborated with the Nazis, as well as people who stayed neutral.

The Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-45 had killed twenty thousand people. It is the most painful memory during which people even ate tulip bulbs. Survivors remember the horrors³.

1 Georgia commission on the Holocaust, Anne Frank and other diarists during the Holocaust. Available at <https://holocaust.georgia.gov/blog-post/2015-07-01/anne-frank-and-other-diarists-during-holocaust>

2 Dutch Citizens Resist Nazi Occupation, 1940-1945. Available at <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/dutch-citizens-resist-nazi-occupation-1940-1945>

3 Witness History – the Hunger Winter. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0137xh7>

The family of Anne Frank spent 25 months with her family in the attic of the house¹. A sixteen-years-old girl is one of the iconic symbols of the Holocaust. The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam is a memory place, where a continuous line of visitors stands. This memory place is a kind of illustration not only of the persecuted Jews living in the Netherlands, but also of the Holocaust of the European Jews as a whole.

Museum Executive Director Ronald Leopold writes about the mission of Anne Frank House:

The Anne Frank House and the diary do not only remind us of Anne Frank and the history of her time, they also invite us to reflect on, raise our awareness of and give meaning to our own times.

One of the key lessons from the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust is perhaps the insight that it was all the work of human beings: the exclusion, the persecution and deportation, and ultimately the murder of six million Jews. The emptiness of the house reflects this. Walking through the house, visitors see the reflection of what no longer is, of what was deliberately destroyed during the war. And they experience that this had to do with 'people like you', who were victims, perpetrators, helpers or bystanders.

So within the historical context, the Anne Frank House makes it clear where anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination in extreme forms can lead, even today².

The highest number of Holocaust victims is in the Netherlands across Western Europe³. In September of this year, King Willem-Alexander and Prime Minister Mark Rutte unveiled the National Holocaust Monument in Amsterdam, designed by a Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind. The monument consists of 102,000 bricks and the names of the victims are engraved on each of them, including Sinti and Roma. The Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said in a speech at the opening ceremony of the monument: This monument says: No, we will not forget you. No, we will not allow your names to be erased. No, evil does not have the last word⁴.

1 Nina Siegal, Anne Frank Who? Museums Combat Ignorance About the Holocaust, The New York Times. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/arts/design/anne-frank-house-anti-semitism.html>

2 Ronald Leopold, History in the Here and Now. Available at <https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/who-we-are/history-here-and-now/>

3 Nina Siegal, Beyond Anne Frank: The Dutch Tell Their Full Holocaust Story, The New York Times. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/18/world/europe/beyond-anne-frank-the-dutch-tell-their-full-holocaust-story.html>

4 Dutch Holocaust memorial opens after years-long legal deadlock. Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/dutch-holocaust-memorial-opens-after-years-long-legal-deadlock/a-59231217>

You can also find stumbling stones in Amsterdam. In general, this project is reminiscent of the Holocaust throughout Europe, not just in the Netherlands.



The picture shows the stumbling stones dedicated to a Jewish family I photographed in front of their residence in the central district of Amsterdam. The creator of this design is the German artist Gunter Demnig¹.

Amsterdam National Holocaust Museum is currently under restoration and is temporarily closed. The concept of the museum is based on deportation, self-sacrifice, courage, and also collaborationism. It is still somewhat uncomfortable in Dutch society to speak about the fact that some of the Dutch helped carry out the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands. “The Dutch did not hide the Jews²”

Conclusion

Memory is an integral part of both national identity and statehood. The historical past does not matter if it is shameful or heroic needs to be

1 Stolpersteine in Berlin. Available at <https://www.stolpersteine-berlin.de/en/node/1>

2 Humanity in Action, A Founding Myth for the Netherlands: The Second World War and the Victimization of Dutch Jews. Available at https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/a-founding-myth-for-the-netherlands-the-second-world-war-and-the-victimization-of-dutch-jews/?lang=pl

kept and analyzed. Especially if this history is very painful, the inhumane atrocity committed must be in-depth analyzed and shown the way how it happened so that it will never happen again.

This dark history that still raises questions, emotions, encourages commitment and vigilance for the future. The politics of memory is a significant challenge for a country like Georgia that lived under the Soviet totalitarian regime and terror for 70 years and this regime was no less severe than Nazism.

I completely agree with the German Professor Aleida Assmann, who thinks that we have left the twentieth century, but this century has not left us.