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The Intertwined Dynamics of Coercion, Collusion, and Future-Making

The Case of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam during the Second World War

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Abstract

To broaden our understanding of the intricate dynamics that drive collaboration, this chapter examines the complex and contentious history of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam (*Joodse Raad*)and its relationship to the Nazi bureaucracy, the police, and the Dutch administration during World War II. The institutional history of the Jewish Council and the challenges it faced at that time offer insight into the moral dilemmas and destructive consequences of coercion and collusion that created a collaboration dynamic. Collaboration arose because there was an imbalance in power between the German authorities and the Jewish Council, and it was fueled by subsequent efforts by the Council to navigate its expectations of the collapsing societal order. The Council's limited capacity to influence the Nazi decisions, despite the illusion of choice, exacerbated conditions of oppression. Its strategic rationale for collaboration was rooted in the uncertainty about the future and a desire to mitigate the severity of Nazi policies toward the Jewish community—a strategy that opens up numerous questions about the perils of mitigating risks via dialogue.

Introduction: Collaboration as Positionality

Why did the Jewish Council of Amsterdam collaborate with the German occupying authorities in the Netherlands, from 1940–1945, when this led to the deportation of virtually the entire Jewish population (including members of the Council itself) to the Nazi death camps in Eastern Europe? Did Council

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members underestimate the seriousness of the reports that frequently reached them concerning the severe deprivation in these camps, the transports, and violence? Did the Council strive toward a different outcome than what happened?

Analyses of "collaboration" during World War II have generally focused on political or personal choices made in the wake of and after the Occupation of countries in (Western) Europe. Often, it was depicted as a nexus of individual self-interest and ideological affinities leading to "a betrayal of national ideals while resistance is seen to affirm them" (Gerwarth and Gildea 2018). Collaboration was depicted as an ideological choice, a game of influence and personal interest, that yielded positive results for the parties involved. However, as Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard have argued, this type of analysis is trapped in a conceptual dichotomy between collaboration and resistance, and it ignores the complexities of social processes (Drapac and Pritchard 2017). The pervasive conditions of subjugation, deception, and manipulation under Nazi rule created harmful conditions and effects that far outweighed this duality. Thus, this context opens new ways to consider how the concept of "collaboration" itself is interpreted. Drawing on these questions, we look at the case of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam during World War II, in an attempt to understand how "harmful collaboration" begins in contexts of power imbalance, the tactical rationale that underpins it, and the social, cultural, and internal mechanisms that support it.

After the occupation of countries in Eastern Europe, the German authorities set up Jewish Councils in ghettos and camps, which acted as the municipal administration responsible for the total obedience of the targeted Jewish community, which was often secured through threats and violence (Truk 1996). In Western Europe, by contrast, the Jewish Councils retained a modicum of autonomy. This latter arrangement gave the appearance of choice before the authorities, when in fact the Occupiers simply used the Councils to carry out lethal actions against the Jewish community (Vastenhout 2022:1–2). In retrospect, any form of collaboration went clearly against the interests of the Jewish community as well as the Jewish Council and its members.

The institutional history of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam reveals several paradoxes. First, the relationship was shaped, manipulated, and controlled by the Nazi authorities, not by the Jewish community, in a context where the power dynamics still made choices seemingly possible. Second, the parameters of these choices were designed to suit the German needs and were presented as a "take it or leave it" option, enforced through threats and reprisals. As Laurien Vastenhout argues in her comparative analysis of the Jewish Councils in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, there were few decisions that could be attributed to these institutions alone (Vastenhout 2022:98). Another recent study by Bart van der Boom argues that many decisions of the Dutch Jewish Council were severely limited (Van der Boom 2022).

According to Schoeps (2021), Nazi authorities chose to maintain a relationship with the Jewish community, despite their ideological and racial

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differences. The complex and seemingly contradictory nature of this relationship has resulted in a difficult historical and memorial debate surrounding the Jewish Council of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Discussion regarding the actions of the Council during the Holocaust emerged soon after the country was liberated in 1945. The tragic magnitude of the extermination of the Jewish community in the Netherlands became apparent when very few members of the Jewish community returned from Eastern Europe and raised questions about the activity of the Council (Van der Boom 2022:12; Vastenhout 2022:5). Especially in the first decades after the war, the Council was held responsible for the death toll in the Jewish community in the Netherlands, which was the highest in Western Europe (Griffioen and Zeller 2010): three-quarters of the Jewish population perished in the extermination camps of occupied Poland, most notably Sobibor and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Inspiration for this chapter grew out of the podcast with historian Rob Van der Laarse that was prepared for this Forum[1] as well as a recent publication by the historian Bart van der Boom (2022) on the Jewish Council: *De politiek van het kleinste kwaad* (The Politics of the Lesser Evil). Focusing on the moral dimensions of collaboration, we aim to offer a fresh perspective on the historical analyses of this specific collaboration, by emphasizing its relationality. It is not our intention to take a stance on the debates surrounding the aftermath and social implications of this decision, which are often central to commemorations and collective memory (Olesen 2015:91–114), nor do we seek to make a historical contribution to the debate about political choices made during World War II. The issue of collaboration has sparked fierce debate within the Jewish community across generations. Rather, our aim is to comprehend the reasoning behind the decision to participate in dialogue with the enemy in the hope of shaping a particular future, which supports "collaboration" as a realist way of thinking.

This perspective views "collaboration" as a choice resulting from conditions of power inequality that conceal coercion and subjugation under the guise of agency, decision making, and change. The analysis will demonstrate that the collaboration between the Germans and the Jewish Council of Amsterdam was, in many ways, a tactic of compliance and delay, assessment and mutual control. The process of exploring the motives of the other to obtain a preliminary comprehension of their goals and reasoning was motivated by the necessity to gain a better understanding of one's own capabilities and make well-informed choices. Although collaboration appeared viable even when it was not in the actual long-term interest of one party in a situation of subjugation, it was maintained in the hope of opening new pathways for dialogue. It is important to acknowledge, however, that this hope may have been oblivious to the negative outcomes for one of the parties involved.

[1] Podcasts are available at https://esforum.de/forums/ESF32_Collaboration.html?opm=1_3

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An Institution Navigating a Collapsing Order

Following the German takeover of the civilian administration in the Netherlands, and the military occupation of parts of France and Belgium, it became customary for the Nazis to endorse the emergence or consolidation of a single Jewish organization. The intent of the Nazis was to ensure that all their directives would be carried out in accordance with their requirements. The German authorities selected one Jewish organization to represent the entire community residing in that area (Vastenhout 2022:14). During the initial meetings of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam in February 1941, some members were hesitant to engage with the new authorities due to concerns about potential complicity. This issue was prevalent during the negotiations surrounding the establishment of the Council itself. For instance, Lodewijk Visser,[2] the head of the preexisting Jewish Coordination Committee, expressed opposition to collaboration (Van der Boom 2022). He wanted to meet the Germans with "demonstrative pride and legalism" as he believed Jewish people were Dutch citizens and thus entitled to their rights (Van der Boom 2022:55). It is worth noting that from December 1940 to June 1941, two organizations coexisted: the Jewish Coordination Committee and the newer Jewish Council. Eventually, the Nazi authorities neutralized Visser, as they preferred the more pragmatic vision presented by the leaders of the Jewish Council, David Cohen and Abraham Asscher (Van der Boom 2022:62). As of February 1941, the Council was assigned the responsibility of "transferring" and "implementing" German decrees, while retaining the "right to decline dishonorable tasks" (Van der Boom 2022:28). Given these circumstances, Asscher and Cohen, who were confident that they had a good grasp on the needs of the Jewish community, believed that keeping a channel of communication open with the German Occupiers would lead to a more secure outcome for the Jewish community (Vastenhout 2022: 419).

Control was a primary function of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam. In addition, like the Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe, it also provided essential social support for those interned in transit camps and mediated between the Occupiers and the community. The Council was responsible for the day-to-day administration of the community (Vastenhout 2022). The Occupiers sought to appoint members to the Council who had been active in refugee relief organizations, mainly because they already had legitimacy and visibility within the community (Vastenhout 2022:94). Jewish refugees were the first category of people to be isolated in the Netherlands at the beginning of the war. Although the Netherlands accepted many German Jewish refugees after 1933, the internal national challenges and negotiations triggered by this influx resulted

[2] Lodewijk Visser was a jurist and the president of the Dutch Supreme Court. In, November 1940, he was suspended and then in March 1941 fired by the German Occupiers as part of their move against all Jewish civil servants (Presser 1965).

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in a gradual buildup of hostility toward the refugees (Leenders 1993:34–36; Vastenhout 2022). Access to economic opportunities was restricted for fear of creating competition with the local community. The *vreemdelingenwet* (Aliens Act) of 1849 kept refugees separate from society at large and was motivated by the efforts of Dutch political elites to prevent potentially radical consequences (Felder et al. 2014). Especially after 1938, the Dutch government was reluctant to accept German Jewish refugees. This led to complex negotiations between the Dutch government and the Council, in terms of what support the government was willing to offer to the refugees and resulting tensions in the Jewish community that had to be mediated (Moore 1986). The intermediaries who championed the rights of this group, such as Asscher, were well-known members of the community and thus in the best position to persuade the community to comply without disrupting the social fabric.

Although the German Occupier displayed a fanatic animosity toward the Jewish community, the operational setup seemingly encouraged dialogue over mutual benefits. This conveyed the impression that citizens, including Jewish citizens, were still engaged with the mechanisms of the state and that the Dutch state was operating in accordance with the rule of law (Felder et al. 2014:370). It was not uncommon, however, for contradictions and tensions to emerge within the Council concerning what was perceived as a choice and what was actually an obligation. For instance, in early 1941, the Germans compelled the Jewish Council to establish its own printed communication channel with the Jewish population. While some objections were raised against this quiet legitimization of German demands by the Council, there were concerns that a refusal to comply could have serious consequences (Van der Boom 2022:23). The content of the message to be conveyed was defined and controlled by the German Occupiers; the Jewish Council was responsible for disseminating this message through its newspaper, *Joodsche Weekblad* (Presser 1965:105). The Jewish Council initially claimed to have taken up the task of communication voluntarily as it took over an already existing paper (Van der Boom 2022:28, 126). The paper published new orders, legislation, and various indications to the community.

While attempting to navigate between the two sides, the Jewish Council found itself increasingly isolated from the community it was supposed to represent. In addition, the German authorities prohibited existing Dutch governmental organizations from working and communicating with the Jewish Council (Presser 1965:109). Despite the existence of informal personal connections, this order from the German authorities to refrain from communicating or collaborating with the Jewish Council was strictly followed. In addition, due to the relative impunity of the German police in the Netherlands, it was practically impossible to counter their actions (Van der Boom 2022:30; Vastenhout 2022:21). It is also worth noting that some members of the Council had, prior to the war, worked for various Dutch governmental institutions.

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This made it difficult to establish a critical and necessary opposition within the system.

The Council's processes were overseen by a select few in the Occupation administration. These individuals were appointed by the Nazi authorities to govern the Netherlands and had prior experience in establishing collaborations in Austria and Poland (Van der Boom 2022; see also podcast by Van der Laarse). SS-Obergruppenführer Arthur Seyss-Inquart had previously served as Hitler's personal representative in Ostmark, the newly annexed Austrian province (Griffioen and Zeller 1998). After being appointed the Chief of Civil Administration following the occupation of Poland, Seyss-Inquart went on to become the Reichskommissar of the Netherlands, reporting directly to Hitler. He worked with Fritz Schmidt (in charge of Nazi propaganda) and Hanns Albin Rauter (leader of the Higher SS and police), two other key individuals involved in the war governance. Seyss-Inquart maintained close control over the administration. Under their leadership, the Netherlands was under a civil government, rather than a military regime, as were Belgium and occupied France (Vastenhout 2022:24). This arrangement came about for several reasons; for instance, it reflected the Nazis' racial ideology, which viewed the Netherlands as a "Germanic brother nation" in a more "favorable" position than Belgium and France (van Roekel 2017).

The Nazi authorities intentionally created a sense of continuity to encourage the population's compliance with their machinations as well as to persuade Dutch civilians, including the Jewish community, to collaborate in the service of the Occupiers' goals. The German structure was superimposed, and new German bureaucratic elements and organizations were added where necessary, as was the case of the Jewish Council. The strict terms of collaboration between the German Occupier and the Jewish Councils in the Netherlands were established within the administrative framework of the country (Browning 2014:202). Compliance was helped as many civil servants remained in their positions for various reasons, even as the Dutch government went into exile (Vastenhout 2022:92). Many stayed in the belief they could prevent the worst from happening. As Van der Laarse argues, this was considered the proper thing to do after the surrender of the Netherlands on May 15, 1940. Bureaucrats remained in their positions for the benefit of the population. However, the void left by the departed authorities was filled by top civil servants and new recruits from the Dutch Nazi movement, NSB (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*) (De Haan 2010). In fact, research into how the German Occupiers maintained such insidious control over occupied populations and territories has highlighted the importance of bureaucracy, an appeal to order, and the pretense of efficiency as control mechanisms during war and occupation (Gruner 2006). The local response in the Netherlands tragically aligned with this vision. Furthermore, since the German police dictated the raids and the deportations, there was no immediate evidence of violence against larger segments of society (Griffioen and Zeller 2010).

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The expectations of the Occupier were embedded in the existing government structure as they sought to maintain a semblance of order and control.

This also happened because the ambitions of the Occupier met, paradoxically, the hopes of the Dutch administration to maintain control over potentially deep social unrest and disorder. An example of the Dutch government's efforts to ensure order was the implementation of a comprehensive citizen registration and identification system. The Dutch bureaucracy developed, and introduced in April 1941, the most advanced and fraud-proof personal identification system (Browning 2014:203). This provided the Occupier with vital information about ethnicities, occupation, and numbers of family members.

During the Occupation, a delicate balance had to be maintained between the objectives of the new authorities and those who were occupied, which often entailed a concern for potential social unrest. This balance was particularly challenging for Dutch authorities, who had already faced a wave of refugees and the associated instabilities and challenges, especially after 1933, when a large number of working-class Jewish Germans sought support and led to increased mistrust in the Jewish community. It did not help that the representation on the Council was not evenly distributed; certain groups such as laborers and German Jews were underrepresented on the Council (Vastenhout 2022:96). Although the Jewish Council felt responsible for the needs of the entire Jewish population, most of the Council members represented the upper classes of the community. This situation created challenges: individuals who belonged to underrepresented groups did not always perceive collaboration with the Germans to be beneficial. In addition, it posed difficulties for societal groups that were not directly represented on the Council.

The strategy of coercion employed by the German Occupation did not go unnoticed, but to what extent the general population or Dutch politicians had a full understanding of the actions of the Nazis, their genocidal intentions, and the racial overdetermination remains a matter of complex debate. It is important to note that those who refused to be appointed to the central boards of the Council were not punished; for instance, Rabbis Lodewijk Hartog Sarlouis and David Francès, who refused to accept their appointment by the Germans (Vastenhout 2022:93). One (somewhat controversial) position is that Dutch society was largely agnostic about the extermination of the Jews (Van der Boom 2012). Leading politicians and leaders in the Dutch resistance, however, were aware of the risks. For instance, the socialist Koos Vorrink reported on this matter to the Dutch government in London in a memo from November 1, 1940 (Witte 2021). Similarly, on June 29, 1942, the Jewish diarist Etty Hillesum (1986:168–169) noted in her diary:

> The latest news is that all Jews will be transported out of the Netherlands through Drenthe Province and then on to Poland. Moreover, the English radio has reported that seven hundred thousand Jews perished last year alone, in Germany and the occupied territories.

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On July 11, 1942, Hillesum (1986:192) expressed further concern:

> The Jews here are telling each other lovely stories: they say that the Germans are burying us alive or exterminating us with gas. However, what is the point of repeating such things even if they should be true?

The level of awareness among members of the Dutch political elite regarding the real meaning of the deportations to the East is still a topic of discussion (Van der Boom 2017:399).

By 1940, it became clear that taking no action was no longer a viable option. Some involved parties believed that having a dialogue or some access to the workings of the state could be a rational solution to the conundrum ahead. This attitude was noticeable in the Jewish Council's first meetings in February 1941, after the Germans had appointed the Council as the prime representative of Dutch Jews. One reason for engaging in this dialogue was the Council's belief that liberation was inevitable and considered not far off in the future, even as early as 1941. It was ultimately anticipated that defeat would occur in 1943. However, with hindsight, it appears that this expectation of an early end to the war may have been a combination of wishful thinking and an optimistic interpretation of military developments. This was made evident by the significant setbacks of the German armies in late 1942 (El Alamein) and early 1943 (Stalingrad), as well as the eventual liberation of Europe in 1945. After the war, the surviving members of the Jewish Council expressed their belief that collaboration and goodwill were necessary, for the sake of the community, to get through the war. They saw their decisions as a reasonable choice for the welfare of the community. This was particularly evident when the consequences for the community began to overlap with those of the individual Council members, their relatives, and friends (Van der Boom 2022:205).

The Realism of Collaboration

To increase the chances of survival of the community, the Council sought to cultivate dialogue. They wanted to maintain a say in the future and secure a pathway for potential changes that could be manipulated for the community's survival. Their position was tactical. Maintaining a connection with those in power was a carefully considered decision, based on the vision of a future where negotiation could, to some extent, be possible. Choosing not to collaborate would have meant forfeiting the opportunity to negotiate and influence the Occupiers' actions. Therefore, from the perspective of the Council, collaboration would increase the agency of the Dutch Jewish community in the face of adversity, even amid the ongoing uncertainty at the time. This does not mean there was no Jewish resistance, which was quite resourceful in finding new response paths. In fact, there was a sizable resistance hailing from the Jewish community itself (Braber 2013:91).

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The case of the Jewish Council provides an example of how collaboration mechanisms can be developed under extreme powerlessness, creating a sense of "insider" status and (false) agency. Such a sense of agency is illusory; under such conditions, collaborators risk losing even the smallest amount of agency and choice in exchange for potential salvation. The members of the Jewish Council were aware that the German Occupiers would try to use them to exact their goals. Ongoing oppression and warnings provided the rationale to collaborate with the Germans. By doing so, the Council hoped that to keep the oppressors close to prevent even worse outcomes. The Jewish Council did not actively resist or pursue an alternative course of action, as they were considered to be insiders.

The Council's decision to collaborate was based on the shared assumption of an uncertain future for the community, for which certain options and scenarios needed to be kept as open as possible. Despite their opposing ideological convictions, both parties faced an insurmountable problem that created the necessary conditions for collaboration with the other. Collaboration by the Jewish Council was driven by a general principle shared by the Dutch authorities and civil servants; namely, to avoid worse repercussions and to maintain a proper functioning society under the rule of law. The Germans needed the Jewish population to collaborate to ensure their destruction and avoid disrupting the process of assimilation into the Third Reich. This willingness to think of alternatives was conducive to manipulating the Jewish Council toward a particular choice, gradually excluding other scenarios so that the direction became a single one.

The Jewish Council's vision of their people's past was intertwined on several levels with their vision for the future, and this informed the solution to their present problems. Two elements are crucial in this context. First, collective memory was an essential dimension of this mechanism of thought. The members of the Jewish Council substantiated and justified their decision by invoking a shared vision of the Jewish people's common past to create a sense of solidarity. Through their suffering over the centuries, including during times of exile, Jewish communities sought to maintain amicable relationships with the non-Jewish people who ruled or even oppressed them (Jütte 2013). The intent of this strategy was to protect the Jewish people from worst-case scenarios and to create opportunities for them to secure better alternatives over time. In other words, this understanding of the past and the interpretation of the present derived from it, upheld by the Council, was instrumental in justifying the decision to collaborate with the German Occupiers and in making that decision more acceptable. The use of collective memory in this way to model the future is often moralizing in that it defines the ethical frameworks for future events. The Council, as an institution, operated on the assumption that survival was the prime purpose. Acceptance of this fact determined the ethics of its actions and for that, they drew on the past as a warning.

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Second, the virtualization of the future drove collaboration, demonstrating how collective memory involves modifying perspectives of the future based on the past. Interpretations of history, especially past violence and shared pain, are projected onto the future to avoid a potential repetition while maintaining a circularity of potentiality for the future (Gutman et al. 2010). In this case, collective memory serves as a repertoire of experience and examples used to imagine what is likely, possible, or desirable. There is also an element of generalization, whereby conditions known in the past become the leading benchmark for the expectations of what will happen. If decontextualized, these conditions change (de Saint-Laurent 2018).

As mentioned above, the *threat of disorder* galvanized choices for both parties. The pressing short-term problem of avoiding reprisals against the Jewish population of Amsterdam helped convince the Jewish Council that collaboration was wanted and necessary. From the beginning of 1941, several Dutch paramilitary organizations sympathetic to the Nazi ideology (e.g., the *Weerafdeling,* WA, and the NSB) initiated riots under the supervision of German soldiers by attacking Jewish cafés and shops in the Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam. On February 11, 1941, Jewish and allied non-Jewish workers reacted when WA members appeared in the Jewish Quarter. During the fight that ensued, a member of the WA was knocked unconscious and died from his injuries a few days later. This was considered a serious breach of the Occupation order; thus, the Jewish quarter was sealed off from the outside world. Subsequently, the German Occupiers initiated the formation of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam to gain their cooperation in restoring order in Amsterdam, supposedly a common goal (Michman et al. 1992:62; Vastenhout 2022).

According to one of the chairmen on the Council, the German Occupier and the Jewish Council agreed that the authorities would make it impossible for anyone entering the Jewish Quarter, in uniform or not, to cause trouble in the future. In return, all Jewish people who owned weapons would have to hand them over to the police, which could be done without punishment (Van der Boom 2022:21). It was also communicated that the German Occupiers were planning to reestablish transport to and from the Jewish Quarter. All this came to nothing when new incidents occurred in other parts of the city, and very few weapons were handed in to the police. In retaliation for the violence, protests, and lack of collaboration, the German Occupiers organized a raid (razzia) on February 22, 1941, in which 400 Jewish men were rounded up and presented to the community as hostages to ensure that there would be no further disturbances (Van der Boom 2022:35).

In response to this raid, the workers of Amsterdam called for a general strike on February 25, 1941: non-Jewish residents of Amsterdam protested the persecution of their fellow Jewish citizens in an unpreceded and, indeed, the first strike of its kind in occupied Europe. Many had witnessed the atrocities committed during the raid, and the German authorities threatened to arrest a further 300 Jewish men if the strike continued. Although the Jewish community

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leaders feared further arrests and actively tried to dissuade people from further strikes, the City Council of Amsterdam managed to end the strike on February 27, 1941. This outcome had been "negotiated" between the community and the Nazi authorities.

This resolution can be viewed as a ploy to create *a sense of agency* in the victim group and the new institution, the Jewish Council, which could be manipulated. Within a few days after the strike ended, the Occupiers invited one of the chairmen of the Council (Asscher) to represent the Jewish community in Amsterdam. Further, the mayor of Amsterdam encouraged Asscher to take on this role (Van der Boom 2022:22). Asscher then invited other representatives to the Council largely from his own network, fully convinced that there was a need to negotiate on behalf of the Jewish population. This process raised questions about bias and representation. The Germans used these tensions to deport the first group of Jews, thus establishing their dominance and demonstrating their ruthlessness.

Despite the power imbalance between the Nazis and the Jewish community, the appearance of a *common goal* between the parties is present. As in the case of colonial subjugation, collaboration was presented as a mechanism beneficial to both parties, one which would not lead to suffering and destruction of either party (Bernhard 2017). The colonial setting offers an interesting parallel because, as the "occupation" of the Netherlands was not clearly a military takeover, ideas of mutual benefit were as usable as they were in relation to colonial rule. We cannot assume that the Council accepted the collaboration with full knowledge of the actual outcome. Moreover, the way in which the February strike was resolved reinforced the idea that the maintenance of a common goal could mitigate any drastic action against the community. This helped to create and sustain the collaboration over time. Through this tactic of maintaining a common goal and agency, one party (the Nazi authorities) effectively forced the other party (the Jewish Council) into a process of self-destructive collaboration. Alignment was created by instilling in their victims the illusion of the possibility of achieving the latter's critical goal: self-preservation. Yet the Germans controlled the actions and conditions that made this goal one of the highest priorities for the Jewish community. This asymmetrical and disadvantageous collaboration was thus achieved through a combination of deception (by the dominant party) and wishful thinking fueled by desperation (by the other party) and resulted in a general alignment of action.

Following the measures taken by the Occupier and the Council, in response to the February strike, calm returned. The Council believed that the people arrested during the raid were being held as hostages to ensure that no further unrest would occur, but the hostages were sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp, where they perished from forced labor in the quarries (Presser 1965). Within a few months, death notices for those who had left in good health began to reach families back home. It became clear that being sent to Mauthausen was a death sentence, which had to be avoided. Although shocked, the Jewish

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Council, the Jewish community, and the Dutch society as a whole did not perceive these early deaths to be a sign of the inevitable collective extermination. Instead, they took this as a warning that all instructions from the Germans must be followed to prevent future hostage-taking. The logical conclusion was to argue for strict obedience to the Occupier (Van der Boom 2022:50).

Knowing the fate of the Mauthausen hostages, the future vision of sitting out the war until liberation was now transformed into a more negative one instilled by *terror*. To avoid raids and the wrath of those in power, compliance with their demands and negotiations to minimize the consequences became the adopted strategy. Coerced and deceived, implicit in this accommodation was that the Jewish Council was ultimately an active collaborator, if only in the hope of avoiding future problems by pursuing a set of goals that they believed were aligned with that of their oppressors. Beyond the choice of whether they wanted to collaborate, the Jewish Council had little control over who they could work with in the first place, but they could control how they justified their choices to the people they represented. For the Nazis, collaboration was not predicated on an equal relationship: they considered the Jews their irreconcilable and life-threatening enemies (Van der Boom 2022:17). The Germans collaborated with their declared enemy solely to achieve their own solution, indeed their "final solution," rather than to solve a common and mutual problem.

This asymmetrical cooperation forced a path to a particular result—one that would not arouse suspicion or create resistance among their opponents. The Third Reich exploited the idea of salvation in the future in various ways. The idea of a return to a "promised land" outside of the German Reich was peddled until the mid-1940s and plans for large-scale resettlement of European Jews were developed, such as Himmler's Madagascar plan (Breitman 1994). Adverse developments of the war turned this into the relocation of Jews from Western Europe to the ghettos and ultimately the extermination camps in Eastern Europe, again disguised as relocation and possible salvation (Foray 2010).

From the moment that deportations to labor camps in Germany were announced to the Jewish Council by the German police in June 1942, a new power dynamic emerged. The German authorities would summon those listed for deportation by means of a written notice distributed through the Council's channels. After several other administrative steps, these people were required to present for transport a few days later, but hardly anyone did. The authorities then shortened the time between the letter and date of transportation. As a result, the Germans carried out another raid without informing the Jewish Council beforehand. They also targeted people who worked at the headquarters of the Jewish Council (1941–1942) by taking them hostage and threatening their deportation to a concentration camp if the required 4,000 people did not present for transportation. The hostages were released when the numbers present for transport increased (Van der Boom 2017). The raids intensified as fewer and fewer people showed up. Without the knowledge of the Jewish Council, raids were also carried out in other cities in the Netherlands. The

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authorities tried to persuade the Council to continue to act as a liaison with the community by promising that a large proportion of the Jewish people would not be transported. We now know that this was a lie, but such deception should also have been clear at the time to the Council, the Jewish population, and Dutch society at large.

Although members of the Jewish Council had hoped and often tried to achieve their goal of appeasing the German authorities or obtaining concessions, they were met with deception and manipulation. During postwar interrogations, the German officers involved stated that they had been ordered to fill the trains and maximize the capacity of the transports. To achieve this, those in contact with the Jewish Council were prepared to lie, deceive, and, if necessary, use violence until this goal was achieved. They had no moral problems in doing so, for they did not regard the Jews as equal partners but rather as *Untermenschen*. In the face of this adversity and the denial of their expectations, the Jewish Council continuously struggled to justify its collaboration with the Germans so as to maintain its legitimacy within the community. This issue, ambiguous at the time for the community, was damning postwar.

The Council, for example, used their newspaper, the *Joodsche Weekblad* (the Jewish weekly magazine) to communicate the demands of the German authorities to the Jewish community. In the newspaper, they clearly distinguished between the orders of the Germans and the wishes of the Jewish Council. The Germans found it acceptable that the Jewish Council used the newspaper to implicitly and often explicitly call on Jewish readers to comply with German demands in order to avoid unwanted repercussions (Van der Boom 2022:28). At the same time, the duality of the Council's actions damaged its reputation within the community.

For the Council, the relative calm that returned after the German authorities managed to fill a train, and thus temporarily stop deportations, was viewed as a vindication of their effectivity. They believed that they had successfully negotiated concessions from the Germans, not for what it was, namely a capacity problem and merely a cosmetic success for their cause. The Germans reinforced this illusion because it served them well when new transports were needed. The efficiency of the deportations created a problem of justification for the Council. Although the Council persisted in the belief that collaboration was the best option, these deportations made clear the Germans had created a platform of collaboration from which it was difficult to escape. From the German perspective, this was not collaboration but a ruse in which coercion was disguised as a collaborative process.

Throughout, the Jewish Council continued to follow the orders of the Occupier, demonstrating path dependency and institutional inertia, even when the evidence accumulated against this position was mounting and the cost of doing so reflected negatively on the Council. It saw itself as the caretaker of Dutch Jewish society and justified its actions on the grounds that it was pursuing other goals. In reality, its role as an organization representing and helping

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Jewish society also made it a key tool to oppress the community. This is illustrated by the Council's clear role in determining the whereabouts of the Dutch Jewish population in the Netherlands as well as the Jewish refugees who had arrived in the Netherlands from Germany before 1941. Ultimately, those deported to the labor and transit camps and eventually to the extermination camps included Council members and their families, thus demonstrating the inability of the Council to escape from the collaboration.

In addition to the fear of imprisonment in concentration camps, the Germans used other incentives to keep the Jewish Council committed to the prospect of collaboration, such as the *Sperre* system, an exemption that offered protection from transports. In the early stages of the creation and deployment of the Council, it was a widespread practice to issue its employees a document or pass (i.e., a *Sperre*) that would exempt them from transport, primarily because these employees were essential to maintaining control over the community (Van der Boom 2017:138–156). As the risk of transportation increased and became more apparent, negotiating this *Sperre* became an all-consuming quest in the community as it offered some protection from raids and deportation. Council chairmen would often speak to the Germans to plead for the release of those who had been issued a *Sperre*, but a positive outcome was not always forthcoming. Granting or refusing the chairmen's pleas was arbitrary and, as a result, the real value of the *Sperre* remained unclear to the Council and its chairmen (Van der Boom 2022:201–202). After the war, the German officers and bureaucrats would admit that they only cynically allowed the occasional release of a person with a *Sperre* to guarantee the continued collaboration of the Council chairmen (Van der Boom 2022:202). This system of exemptions also created a complex dynamic of lobbying and negotiation within and with the Council, as it was seen as the only means of survival.

The Council's ranks increased to 7,000 due to the perceived advantages of the institution (Vastenhout 2022). For some, it was the only means of survival despite the significant moral burden it imposed. Indeed, Etty Hillesum, who worked for the Council, acknowledged the dilemmas she and her colleagues encountered while working in what she referred to as hell (Hillesum 1986). The use of the *Sperre* to protect oneself from deportation added to the complexity of the situation and to the moral dilemma of sending fellow Jews to an unknown destination (Van der Boom 2017:391). She died in Auschwitz in December 1943, leaving behind one of the most evocative diaries of the period (Hillesum 1986).

Over time, it has become apparent that the *Sperre* was a trap, which put the Jewish Council in the difficult position of having to select individuals for deportation. The matter gained greater urgency when individuals with a *Sperre* were chosen by the Council for exemption from deportation, thus crossing the Council's self-imposed boundary against assisting in the annihilation of Jews. Even in 1943, the chairmen made a solemn commitment that the Jewish Council would not initiate any call-ups (Van der Boom 2022:211). The *Sperre*

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was only partially revoked by the Germans after all others had been transported. Then, the Jewish Council was requested to limit the number of individuals.

The *Sperre* scheme may have been perceived as a concession by the German Occupiers, but its objective was to ensure the continuity of frequent transports (Van der Boom 2022:202). The Council did not directly summon individuals, but it did make determinations regarding who was deemed essential to the community and who would be included in the transport, even for those who had previously been granted a *Sperre*. The decisions regarding the *Sperre* were made partly by the chairmen and partly delegated to the heads of the different departments of the Jewish Council (Van der Boom 2022:188–189). Although some section heads refused to select people, a list was ultimately compiled. It is worth noting that people actively tried to avoid being included in the deportation list, which made the decision-making process even more challenging (Van der Boom 2022:191–193). If the number of people who showed up was not enough, the Germans conducted raids to increase the numbers and fill the transports.

The transport of the Council members signified the conclusion of the Jewish Council. During its operation, the Council had complied with growing requests from the Germans, a strategy described by historian Bart van der Boom as *de politiek van het kleinste kwaad* (the politics of the lesser evil). The Jewish Council was cognizant of their association with the Nazis, given that many of them had previously aided Jewish refugees from Germany, and that the anti-Semitic beliefs of the Germans were widely known and openly expressed, but believed non-collaboration to be a more unfavorable alternative than collaboration. Nevertheless, as Van der Laarse stressed in the podcast, at the conclusion of the war, European Jewish communities that opted for collaboration fared significantly worse than those that did not. Collaboration brought measurable, negative consequences for those who engaged in it: collaborators were easily identified, rounded up, and punished. Those who did not collaborate were able to ride out the war and survive. It is worth noting that the Netherlands was liberated at least six months after other Western European countries, which may also have played a role in the unique circumstances of the Dutch case. The last train left the Dutch transit camp Westerbork on September 13, 1944. Unfortunately, prior to that date, over 107,000 Dutch Jews were deported. After Germany's defeat in May 1945, approximately only 5% of these deported Dutch Jews survived. In September 1943, Seyss-Inquart declared the Netherlands to be free of Jews.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined a collaboration between two disparate parties: the authorities involved in the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and a mediating institution, the Jewish Council of Amsterdam, established by these authorities

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to oversee the Jewish community in the Netherlands. What transpired in this case study demonstrates clearly that the term *collaboration* is not necessarily associated with positive outcomes. The term can be misleading, especially when it is situated in a context that involves coercion, control, and an inherent power imbalance. The Jewish Council's actions and interventions were presented as opportunities for agency, but their impact was limited.

Our analysis points to a number of emerging themes with respect to collaboration and coercion:

- *Tactical compliance and delay*: Both parties engaged in a process of assessing and exerting mutual control, probing each other's intentions in an effort to understand the other party's objectives. Collaboration between the Germans and the Jewish Council was marked by a dynamic of compliance and delay.
- *Positionality and future-making*: The decision of the Jewish Council to collaborate was influenced by their position. They took a calculated step to maintain a dialogue with the Occupiers, hoping to influence the future and increase the chances of survival for the Jewish community.
- *Path dependency and institutional inertia*: Despite accumulating evidence against the effectiveness of collaboration, the Jewish Council persisted in its approach due to institutional inertia, reflecting a path-dependent process where past decisions continued to shape current behavior.
- *Coercion cloaked as collaboration*: The Germans created a platform of collaboration that was difficult to escape, effectively disguising coercion as a collaborative process. This made it challenging for the Jewish Council to recognize and break free from the detrimental relationship.
- *Negotiation and influence*: The Jewish Council believed that collaboration would preserve the agency of Dutch Jews by providing an opportunity to negotiate and influence the Occupiers' actions, even though this was often not in the actual long-term interest of the Jewish community.
- *Shared goal and agency illusion*: The Occupiers coerced the Jewish Council into a self-destructive collaboration by creating the illusion of a shared goal: self-preservation. This alignment was maintained through deception on the part of the Germans and wishful thinking, fueled by desperation on the part of the Jewish Council.

These mechanisms and processes illustrate the complex interplay of coercion and collusion that underpinned the collaboration during the Second World War (Table 4.1). The history of the Jewish Council demonstrates how rational choices made to maintain control and a semblance of agency led to a destructive situation: they forfeited all possibilities of autonomy based on the wishful belief that such a sacrifice would guarantee their survival. In fact, as history shows, actual outcomes were just the opposite.

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Table 4.1 Chronology of events in the Netherlands.

April 1933	Establishment of the Committee for Jewish Refugees (*Comité voor Joodsche Vluchtelingen*) in the Netherlands
January 1938	Restrictions by the Dutch government were imposed on German Jewish refugees, effectively barring them from entering the Netherlands
May 1940	Invasion of the Netherlands and its surrender on May 15, 1940
October 1940	Declaration by the Dutch government regarding the "Enforcement of the Fourth Regulation." Imposed by the Occupiers, this declaration required all officials in the public administration to declare their Aryan origins (i.e., confirmation of non-Jewish heritage)
January 1941	Forced registration of Jewish citizens
February 11, 1941	Fighting between the *Weerafdeling* (WA) and laborers (Jewish and non-Jewish) in the Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam
February 13, 1941	Establishment of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam
February 22, 1941	First razzia in the Jewish neighborhood of Amsterdam that targeted 400 Jewish men
February 25–26, 1941	General strike in Amsterdam
July 15–16, 1942	First transport of Dutch Jews from the transit camp of Westerbork (Netherlands) to Auschwitz (Poland)
September 13, 1944	Last transport of Dutch Jews from transit camp Westerbork to Bergen Belsen (Germany). In total, over 100 transports took place

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