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National Socialism, Colonialism and Antifascist Memory Politics in Postwar Dutch–South African Exchanges

Barbara Henkes

ABSTRACT

This contribution addresses the dynamics of Dutch memory politics in the Dutch–South African exchanges between 1948 and 1975. The 1948 election victory of the Nationalist Party and their Apartheid policies brought about painful memories of Nazi atrocities, antisemitic persecution and anti-fascist struggle in the Netherlands. Soon, however, the Dutch government acquired an interest in highlighting a different history in relation to South Africa when referring to the notion of *stamverwantschap*. This implied an ethnic–racial identification of the Dutch with White, Nationalist South Africans on the basis of an alleged shared history of Dutchness.

These memory politics changed after ‘Sharpeville’ in the 1960s. Once more memories of racist exclusion during National Socialism were revived in relation to the Apartheid regime. These memories facilitated and were strengthened by a growing anti-Apartheid movement. Yet, in their effort to be ‘on the right side of history’, the grassroots memory politics of the anti-Apartheid movement ignored the Dutch colonial implementation of racial inequality and its effects, not only on the Apartheid policies but also in contemporary Dutch society. This article aims to explore spaces for a synergy between narratives of historical catastrophe such as colonialism and Nazism, both with deep historical and intellectual roots in many parts of the world.

KEYWORDS

Antifascism; Apartheid; colonialism; Dutchness; memory politics; multidirectional memory; National Socialism; self-congratulating heroism

Introduction

The 1971 poster of the fledgling Netherlands Anti-Apartheid Movement (AABN) leaves no room for doubt: here a direct link is presented between Apartheid and National Socialism. The latter is depicted in the swastikas held by the then South African Prime Minister John Vorster, also a former member of the fascist *Ossewabrandwag*, and the army units at his side. Opposite

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them are the raised fists of the Black resistance fighters against Apartheid. The poster shows how public memory of the Nazi repression re-emerged and was activated in the 1970s within the context of the anti-Apartheid movement in the Netherlands (see [Figure 1](#)).

Immediately after the 1948 victory of Malan and his National Party with their political programme of Apartheid, parallels were drawn to the racism of National Socialism. Remarkably, soon the memory of this painful episode in Dutch history gave way to a very different memory, leading up to benevolence, understanding and cooperation with the Apartheid regime in the 1950s. In the course of the 1960s this would gradually change: memories of National Socialism and its antisemitic racism became a driving force within the Dutch anti-Apartheid movement.

This development irrevocably brings us to the field of memory politics, and the question of whether and how the legacies of National Socialism, antifascism and Dutch colonialism in South Africa were addressed in the Dutch representations of the Apartheid regime. In this contribution I will historicise and contextualise Dutch memory politics – that is, the organisation of collective memory by political agents (governments, political parties, churches or social movements) – framing postwar Dutch–South African relationships during Apartheid in terms of an ethnic–racial communality, as well as antifascist divergence. Michael Rothberg’s concept of ‘multidirectional memory’ helps me to explore the relationships between different social groups’ histories of oppression and resistance.¹

Rothberg’s main argument is that memory is not a zero-sum endeavour in which public attention to one historical event necessarily detracts from public remembrance of other historical events. Rather, there can be synergies in which awareness of one event increases attentiveness to other events, often only remotely related. Still, the question that Harold Marcuse evoked in his review of Rothberg’s work remains: what determines whether one distinct memory serves as a ‘screen memory’ blocking out another, or whether a multi-directional synergy will occur by which memories of different historical events strengthen each other?² In this contribution I look at the moments when the memory of the struggle against National Socialism and of the victims of the Holocaust intensified, or rather blocked the memory of victims of Apartheid in South Africa – and vice versa. This is accompanied by insights into the different meanings of antifascism for Dutch criticism of the Apartheid policies.

In the Dutch–South African exchanges between 1945 and 1975 the Afrikaner Nationalists and their Apartheid policies evoked memories of various struggles in the Dutch past, varying from the ‘Dutch Revolt’ (that is, the Eighty Years’ War

1. M. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

2. H. Marcuse’s review in the *American Historical Review* 117, 3 (2012), 820–821.

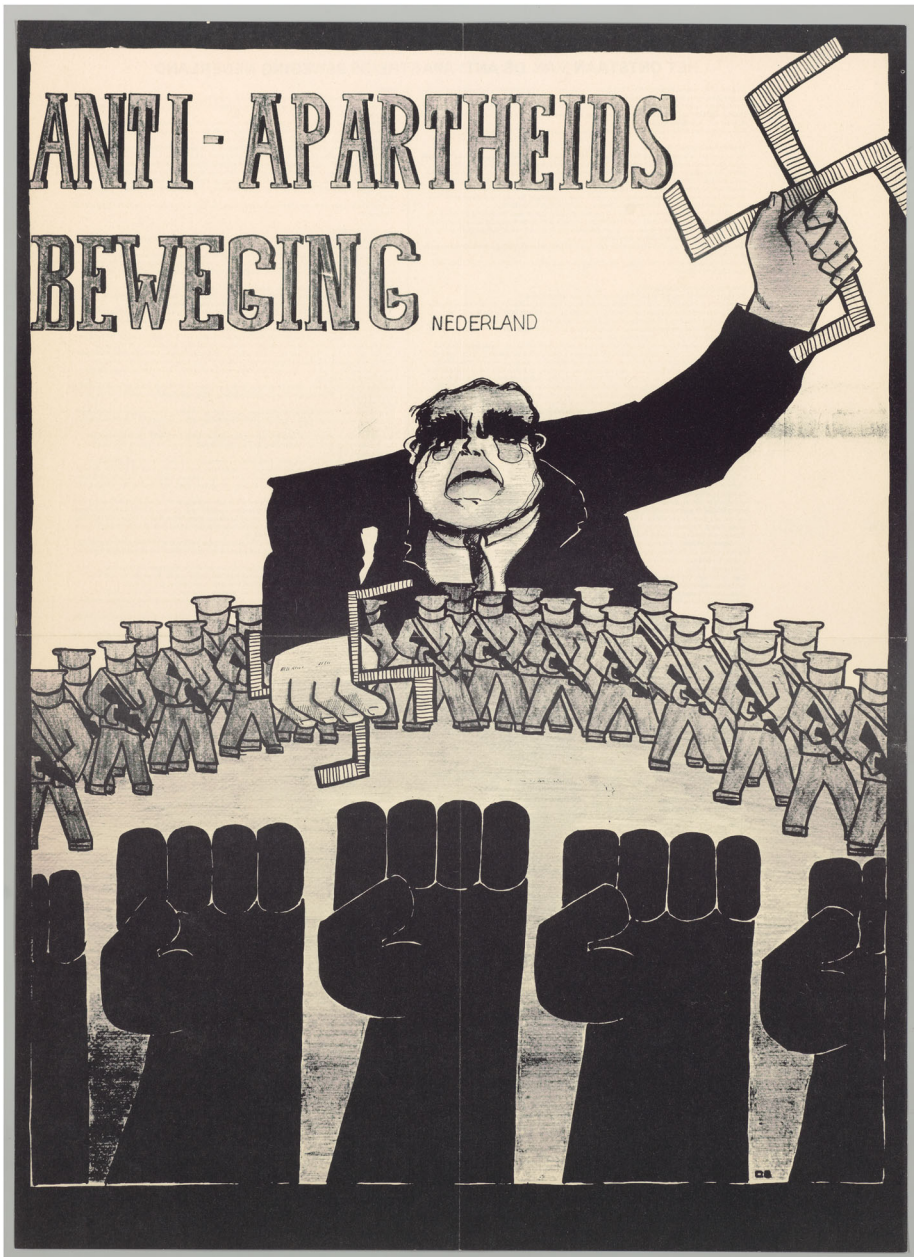


Figure 1. Poster from the Netherlands Anti-Apartheid Movement (AABN). *South African Bulletin* No. 53, December 1971. Design: Conny Braam (IISH collection, Amsterdam).

against the Spanish empire, 1568–1648) and the support for the Boer republics in the South African ‘Boer’ War against the British Empire (1899–1902), to the resistance against National Socialism. At the same time, it is striking that the

racial oppression on the part of Dutch colonialism in South Africa seems never to have been properly addressed in the debates on Apartheid. More generally, the way the Netherlands and other European countries dealt (and still deal) with their colonial past suffers from a severe degree of compartmentalisation, selectiveness, and what Ann Laura Stoler has called ‘colonial aphasia’, which indicates a lack of language to address violent exclusions in the colonial past.³

I will focus on the narratives regarding the Dutch–South African relationship, with special attention to the way in which national and racial proximity and distance between the populations of the two countries were invoked by the Dutch governments, media and civil society. This makes it possible to explore the significance of the memory of the Shoah and of the antifascist struggle for the shifting identifications with regard to South Africa’s Apartheid regime. It may allow us to recognise the power of memory politics, certainly when forms of ethnic–racial inclusion and exclusion are involved.

Besides existing publications on the reactions to the emergence of Apartheid in the Netherlands and worldwide, my study on the impact of memory politics is largely based on digitised Dutch newspapers and news magazines, made accessible to a large extent via the historical database *Delpher*.⁴ This database includes national and local newspapers and magazines of various cultural–political signatures: from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish to liberal, socialist and communist. After the Second World War the Netherlands had regained a ‘pillarised’ media landscape, analogous to political parties and cultural institutions, until the 1970s. This means that Dutch society was shaped to a large extent within Protestant, Catholic, (conservative) liberal or socialist networks. Newspapers and magazines that had originally emerged as nationalist or antifascist resistance leaflets during the Nazi occupation were included in one of these networks after the war.⁵

Delpher provides a good insight into the development of the public debate on Dutch–South African relations. In my search I focused on specific events that gave rise to Dutch debates on Apartheid: for example, the reception of the election victory of the National Party in 1948; Dutch officials visiting South Africa and vice versa; or the prominent protests against Apartheid both inside and outside the Netherlands. By examining how this coverage of South African affairs referred to events in Dutch and European history, such as the Shoah, I

3. A.L. Stoler, *Colonial Aphasia: Disabled Histories and Race in France* 23, 1 (2011), 121–156. See also Paul Bijl, ‘Colonial Memory and Forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, 3–4 (2012), 441–461.

4. <http://www.delpher.nl> is a freely accessible (though not yet complete) website, developed and managed by the Royal Library in The Hague, offering digitised historical Dutch newspapers, books, magazines and radio bulletins from libraries, museums and other heritage institutions. The research on the *Delpher* site was carried out in April and May 2021 with the help of F. Westenberg.

5. C. van der Eijk, ‘The Netherlands: Media and Politics between Segmented Pluralism and Market Forces’, in R. Gunther and A. Mughan, eds., *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective (Communication, Society and Politics)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 303–342.

obtained an insight into how and when memories of National Socialism and Dutch colonialism were involved in the mobilisation of protests against Apartheid, and how at the same time news about Apartheid evoked these memories.

Apartheid and the evocation of antifascist memories

In May 1948 the shock was great when the internationally highly esteemed elderly statesman Jan Smuts narrowly lost the South African elections. In the Dutch press these elections were closely followed via previews, reports and commentaries. Smuts, who had manoeuvred South Africa on the side of the Allies at the outbreak of the Second World War, had lost to D.F. Malan's National Party, with its anti-British and pro-German stance and openly racist Apartheid programme.

In the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, the Nationalists' pursuit of 'total Apartheid' evoked memories of the marginalisation, isolation and, ultimately, deportation and murder of the Jewish population under National Socialism.⁶ It should be noted that references to similar strategies of exclusion in colonial and settler societies were absent from Dutch reports at the time. Three years after the end of the Nazi German occupation of the Netherlands and other European countries, in virtually all Dutch media the focus was on the similarities between Apartheid and National Socialism. For example, the conservative-liberal newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (NRC) characterised the defeat of Smuts as 'the victory of the old Boer spirit of the supremacy of the White race'.⁷ In the progressive weekly *Vrij Nederland*, which had started as a resistance newspaper during the Nazi occupation, a connection was made between 'the racial delusion of the Nazis', the pro-German attitude of the Nationalists, and their proposed Apartheid policy.⁸ The conservative-liberal *Elseviers Weekblad* also characterised Malan as 'Anti-British, anti-Jewish and anti-Negro'. Racism and antisemitism were central to the news about the election victory of the National Party in various Dutch daily and weekly newspapers.⁹

The blatantly racist nature of Apartheid policy touched a nerve in Dutch society – a nerve that had recently been exposed by shocking reports of the Nuremberg Trials in 1945 and 1946 in all media, including the radio and the weekly newsreel. More than the individually diverse experiences during the Nazi occupation, the poignant reports from the courtroom about the massive and extreme

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6. R. Skinner, *Modern South Africa in World History. Beyond Imperialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 91. References to similar critical reporting in English and Swiss newspapers were made in the *Heerenveensche Koerier*, 25 September 1948.
 7. 'Verslagen', *NRC*, 28 May 1948, 2. Unless stated otherwise, translations from the Dutch are my own.
 8. *Vrij Nederland*, 5 June 1948.
 9. B. de Graaff, 'De Nederlandse publieke opinie over Apartheid 1948–1963: van begrip tot verwerping', *Internationale Spectator* 39 (1985), 679–685.

violence against the Jews contributed to the painful awareness that Jewish colleagues, friends, neighbours and relatives had been carried off straight to death under one's unseeing eyes. The evocation of memories of National Socialism at the outcome of the 1948 elections in favour of the South African Nationalist Party was reinforced by the fact that a number of prominent politicians in the party's ranks had actually, before and during the Second World War, publicly expressed their antisemitic views and their sympathy for German National Socialism.¹⁰

This led in October 1948 to a diplomatic row over the appointment of the new South African envoy in The Hague, Otto du Plessis, who in 1940 had written a pamphlet in which he presented fascism and National Socialism as the doctrines of the future. His membership in the *Ossebrandwag*, a fascist organisation that sympathised with the Nazis, did not help either.¹¹ The Dutch government refused to receive Du Plessis; eventually, the South African government replaced him with a less controversial representative.¹² At the time, political antifascism, which provided political parties and organisations with a discourse in which to express concerns about the danger of anti-democratic values and the return of fascist elements in political and cultural life, still had sufficient clout to ensure that the Dutch government stood firm in the case of Du Plessis.¹³

Soon this would change, when the shared worries about a revival of a fascist movement were redirected against communism in the late 1940s. That put an end to what Geoff Eley has labelled 'the moment of rare antifascist unity' in Western Europe,¹⁴ with far-reaching consequences for relations between the Netherlands and South Africa (see [Figure 2](#)).

The revival of memory politics in ethnic-racial terms

Within 18 months after Malan's election victory, the observed similarities in racial exclusion between the former Nazis and the actual Apartheid regime disappeared from the public debate. Despite his government's refusal to accept Du Plessis as an envoy because of his fascist sympathies, the Dutch Social

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10. e.g. P.J. Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Hanover/New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1991); B. Henkes, 'Shifting Identifications in Dutch-South African Migration Policies (1910-1961)', *South African Historical Journal* 68, 4 (2016), 641-669.
 11. C. Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel. Radical Afrikaner Nationalists and the History of the Ossewabrandwag* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009).
 12. Telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, D.U. Stikker, to the Pretoria envoy, 13 August 1948, quoted by Lars van Suntenmaartensdijk, 'Nederland en Zuid-Afrika 1948-1958' (MA thesis, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, 2009), 23.
 13. D. Olthoff, 'Old and New Anti-Fascism. Evolutions of Anti-fascist Action in the Netherlands, 1945-1989' (ReMa thesis, History, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, 2018).
 14. G. Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 288.



Figure 2. Poster from the Social Democratic Party (1947): 'It's still smoldering (fascism)! The rescue: democracy and socialism. Partij van de Arbeid. Design: Nico Broekman (IISH collection, Amsterdam).

Democratic Prime Minister Willem Drees soon made himself known as a man who identified with the Afrikaner Nationalists in South Africa and the

Malan government. Malan's official recognition of the state of Israel in May 1949,¹⁵ a year after his inauguration as Prime Minister, contributed to Drees's position: the memory of the recent exclusion of Jews on ethnic-racial grounds, evoked by Apartheid, was deactivated by Malan's step. In the same year, Drees received the new South African Prime Minister with due honours. On that occasion the Dutch media seemed to have forgotten their earlier criticism of Apartheid, in their benevolent reports.

The fact that Drees begins his 1962 memoirs with his youthful sympathies for the Boer struggle points to a deeply felt sentiment, which he had also expressed during his visit to South Africa in 1953.¹⁶ After the South African Prime Minister Malan stated that the Afrikaner people would never forget that they were 'a daughter of the Netherlands', Drees answered that 'viewed in those terms the daughter has reached a marvellous adulthood', and he voiced his hopes of forever maintaining the close ties between the two countries.¹⁷ With this reference in historical-genealogical terms to the close ties between the Netherlands and South Africa, the Dutch Prime Minister harked back to a past that reconnected the Netherlands with the White, nationalist Afrikaners in South Africa: the colonial occupation of the Cape that started in 1652 with the arrival of Dutch captain Jan van Riebeeck and his European crew (mostly German, Dutch and Scandinavian) on behalf of the Netherlands East India Company (VOC). Soon, other European settlers had followed and merged, also with the local Khoisan and enslaved,¹⁸ into a group known as 'Boers' or 'Afrikaners'. After the Dutch government handed over control of the Cape to the British in 1806, groups of these settlers, the so-called Afrikaner *Voortrekkers*, began to leave the Cape Colony to free themselves from British rule.

The histories of the 'Great Trek' (1830–1850), the founding of the Boer republics the Transvaal (1852) and the Orange Free State (1854), and the subsequent struggles with the British have already been extensively chronicled and discussed. Relevant here is the growing identification of many Dutch people with the struggle of the 'Boers' against the 'Brits' in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. The identification was promoted by a memory politics that emphasised a shared history, as expressed in similarities between the 'mother' tongues (Dutch and Afrikaans), family names and religious (Protestant) practices in the two countries. This evoked feelings of recognition and affection in which, as Benedict Anderson puts it, 'there is always an

15. S. Gilbert, 'Jews and the Racial State: Legacies of the Holocaust in Apartheid South Africa, 1945–60', *Jewish Social Studies*, 16, 3 (2010), 32–64, here 52.

16. W. Drees, *Zestig jaar levenservaring* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1962) 3–5.

17. W.G. Hendrickse, 'Die betrekkinge tussen Nederland en Suid-Afrika, 1946–1961' (PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 1984), 174–175, with references to articles in the Afrikaner dailies *Die Burger* and *Die Transvaler* of 7 October 1953.

18. H.F. Heese, *Groep sonder grense. Die rol en status van die gemengde bevolking aan die Kaap, 1652–1795* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2005).

element of fond imagining'.¹⁹ At the end of the nineteenth century this fed into a heightened Dutch nationalism, when Dutch identification with the 'distant cousins' in South Africa reached its peak during the subsequent South African War from 1899 to 1902.²⁰

Interestingly enough, the struggle of the Boers in South Africa around 1900 brought back memories of another struggle, namely that of the *Geuzen* (the organised opposition) during the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish Empire (1568–1648). We can analyse these developments as a form of what Rothberg calls 'synergy': the awareness of one event (the struggle of the Boer Republics against the British Empire) directing attention to another, remotely related event (the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish Empire). The memory of the Dutch Revolt, in turn, fed into the identification with the Afrikaner struggle in South Africa. This combination of self-victimisation and self-congratulating heroism seems a key element in these synergies, articulating a collective self as victims of, and freedom fighters against, some form of oppression. It facilitates the articulation of certain events in history, which are seen as victory over evil and at the same time promote the kind of 'aphasia' mentioned above about involvement in past atrocities, as I will show in the course of this contribution.²¹

The passionate identification of the Dutch with the Boers against the almighty Britons had diminished after the Afrikaner surrender in 1902; even more so since the Netherlands, South Africa and Great Britain had all been part of the Allied forces during the Second World War. In addition, the pro-German attitude and Nazi sympathies of a prominent group of nationalist Afrikaners detracted from the articulation of a cultural, genealogical, 'natural' and therefore self-evident bond between the Dutch and Afrikaners. Nevertheless, this ethnic–racial notion of *stamverwantschap* still slumbered in the Dutch national memory, and was clearly revived by Drees, his government and the public debate at the end of the 1940s.²²

Since then, the painful and shameful memories of the racist exclusion and eventual murder of the Jews evoked by South African Apartheid policy faded into the background. Parallel to that, the appreciation for the moral principles and determined position of the former antifascist resistance, with the communists in the lead, were largely displaced by anticommunism and political pragmatism. The anticommunist sentiments were closely intertwined with the warming of the Cold War. In the Dutch context, these were further reinforced because the Netherlands Communist Party was the only political party that took

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19. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2006), 154.
 20. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism: Colonies and Foreign Policy, 1870–1902* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
 21. e.g. A. Mijić, 'Identity, Ethnic Boundaries, and Collective Victimhood: Analysing Strategies of Self-Victimisation in Postwar Bosnia–Herzegovina', *Identities* 28, 4 (2021), 472–491.
 22. The memory of *stamverwantschap* is still present in certain political movements, as evidenced by the political programme of the nationalist, populist right-wing *Partij voor de Vrede* (PVV).

a stand against the unsuccessful attempt by the Dutch government to regain control over its former colony after Indonesia's declaration of independence and the capitulation of Japan.²³

This changing political culture was accompanied by a shift in memory politics, reflected in the sending of an 'unofficial' Dutch delegation to the inauguration of the Voortrekkers monument in Pretoria in December 1949: the symbol *par excellence* of White Afrikaner nationalism.²⁴ The presence of the Dutch, led by the Social Democratic former Minister of Education Gerardus van der Leeuw, was intended to resume and strengthen the economic and cultural ties between the two countries. Before his departure, Van der Leeuw emphasised that the Netherlands and South Africa were linked by 'a special bond of an economic and cultural nature', and that 'the deep roots' of the past would be 'ineradicable'.²⁵ Like Prime Minister Drees, he framed his mission in terms of *stamverwantschap* and thus within an overarching ethnic-racial discourse of White Dutchness. During the ceremony he was given a prominent position on the podium alongside Afrikaner leaders such as Malan and opposition leader Smuts, whose speech, with a plea for tolerance and unity, was disrupted by part of the Nationalist crowd demonstratively turning their backs on him.²⁶ From the stage Van der Leeuw overlooked an estimated 200,000-strong, all-White crowd.

The Dutch media reported enthusiastically about these festivities. Malan was quoted as paying tribute to the Voortrekkers, who as 'descendants of the Geuzen [!, BH] and Huguenots', fought for freedom and 'laid the foundations of a White Christian civilization in Greater South Africa'. He stressed in so many words that the Voortrekkers had never 'waged a war of extermination' against the indigenous communities.²⁷ Thus, by referring to extermination, he implicitly denied any relationship between Apartheid and Nazism such as that put forward by opponents of his regime in both South Africa and Europe.²⁸ '[T]he dislike or hatred of any race or part of the population' had not been the National Party's drive, according to Malan, but rather 'the injudicious application of the slogan of the French Revolution to a community where White Christian civilization had to struggle for its survival against attacks and influences of a surrounding barbarism'. This disqualification of the pursuit of 'Freedom, Equality and Fraternity' apparently did not raise any questions with the Dutch reporter

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23. Jan Bank, 'Rubber, rijk, religie. De koloniale trilogie in de Indonesische kwestie 1945-1949', *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 96, 2 (1981), 230-259.
 24. R.K. Autry, 'The Monumental Reconstruction of Memory in South Africa: The Voortrekker Monument', *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, 6 (2012), 146-164.
 25. *De Telegraaf*, 15 December 1949. In addition to Van der Leeuw, the delegation consisted of the director of the Dutch Bank for South Africa, the chairman of the Dutch-South African Association (*Nederlands-Zuid-Afrikaanse Vereniging*) and a top executive from KLM, who personified the economic and cultural ties between the two nations.
 26. *Algemeen Handelsblad* 23 December 1949, in a report from their foreign correspondent.
 27. *Het Parool*, 16 December 1949.
 28. S. Gilbert, 'Anne Frank in South Africa: Remembering the Holocaust During and After Apartheid', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, 3 (2012), 366-393, here 376.

who was on the spot. Instead, Malan's speech was characterised as 'very neutral' and the whole event breathed 'a spirit of piety and tolerance', according to this report, which was readily adopted by many Dutch newspapers, as can be concluded from the similar wording in their articles on the subject.²⁹

The framing of Dutch–Afrikaner relations in terms of *stamverwantschap* was a form of memory politics with unspoken racial implications: it made a shared 'Whiteness' evident without naming it as such. It offered both Malan's Apartheid regime and Drees's coalition governments in the 1950s a handle to tighten mutual relations. How can this rapid shift in the Dutch approach towards the Apartheid regime during the 1950s be explained? The lost re-colonisation war in Indonesia was an important factor in the framing of the Dutch–South African relationship. From July 1947 until January 1949, the Dutch government attempted to regain control over its former colony with the argument that the Netherlands should not abandon its 'civilising' task in Indonesia. A similar reasoning was used by Malan, Smuts and their predecessors when it came to White dominance in South Africa. In this sense, the Dutch authorities recognised the position of their South African counterparts – even more so because the South African government had been the only one to support the Netherlands after the United Nations condemned the Dutch violence in Indonesia. South Africa emphasised that the war in Indonesia was an 'internal' Dutch affair in which the United Nations (UN) should not interfere. Conversely, the Dutch government would also declare time and again in the UN that Apartheid policy in South Africa was a domestic affair.³⁰

The shift in the Dutch approach towards the Apartheid regime was also prompted by the return of Dutch soldiers from Indonesia in 1950, after the transfer of sovereignty. The high rate of unemployment and a major housing shortage led to an active promotion of Dutch emigration. Canada and Australia were popular destinations, as were other settler societies such as the USA, New Zealand and South Africa. Due to a shortage of skilled and educated workers, the arrival of White migrants (with the *stamverwante* Netherlands and Germany as favourite feeder countries) was promoted by the Malan government.³¹ These newcomers were expected to strengthen the White Afrikaner community and the politics of the National Party, instead of identifying with the English-speaking population and its orientation towards the United Party. The appeal to a common ground with a specific community of White South Africans connected the efforts of the Drees government to revive Dutch

29. Malan's speech was quoted in similar words in a broad range of Dutch newspapers on 16 December 1949, such as the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Trouw* and *Apeldoorns Nieuwsblad*. The communist newspaper *De Waarheid* did not pay attention to this event at all. Only the regional *Twentse dagblad Tubantia* of 20 December 1949 referred to 'the recent disorder caused by natives at the inauguration of the Voortrekkers Monument, who claimed that the Voortrekkers 'were soaked with the blood of the native population'.

30. M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Drie eeuwen Nederlandse betrokkenheid bij Zuid-Afrika: 1652–1952' in C. van Lakerveld, ed., *Nederland tegen apartheid* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1994), 5–41, here 39.

31. Henkes, 'Shifting identifications'.

emigration to South Africa with the efforts of the South African government to enlist the newcomers into their Nationalist ranks.

The interweaving of population politics and memory politics was central to the framing of the Netherlands–South Africa relationship as a ‘natural’ bond by the Drees governments during the 1950s. Along this line, the previous indignation about racial discrimination and the sympathies on the part of prominent Nationalists for Nazi Germany disappeared from the public debate. More generally, the memory of Nazi atrocities and the postwar desire for change because of the failure of the social and political order before 1940 made way for a renewed imperialism and growing anticommunism.³² The ‘Red Scare’ that gathered force from the late 1940s tarred any criticism of racial inequalities and support for anticolonial movements with the brush of communism, thereby clearing the way for anticommunist attacks.³³ Hence, no protests were vented when the South African Suppression of Communism Act was introduced in 1950, banning the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and denouncing any form of opposition to Apartheid policy as a communist conspiracy.³⁴

The alleged ‘communist threat’ helped the South African government to sustain its position internationally, and it contributed to the neglect in the Netherlands of any remaining criticism of Apartheid policies. Hence the broad support in the Dutch parliament for the Cultural Treaty with South Africa, which was concluded in May 1951.³⁵ According to the Communist delegate Jan Haken in the Dutch parliament, the acceptance of the treaty meant nothing less than moral support for ‘these followers of Hitler, these Hitlers in miniature’.³⁶ Obviously, the treaty was a boost for the Apartheid regime, but Haken’s rhetoric was not convincing, not least because it was expressed by a Communist representative during the heat of the Cold War. It shows that antifascism no longer was a movement but rather a rhetorical device in the political debate.

Human rights discourse and the re-emergence of antifascist memory politics

However, Dutch protests against South African Apartheid policy were not entirely silenced during the 1950s. A leading role was played by the

32. Olthoff, ‘Old and New Anti-Fascism’, 29–30.

33. e.g. C. Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

34. The Parliament of South Africa, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Suppression_of_Communism_Act,_1950/, accessed 10 October 2021. After its re-emergence in 1953 as the underground SACP, the party has worked closely with the African National Congress (ANC).

35. Appendices Debates of the House of Representatives on the approval of the Cultural Treaty concluded in The Hague on 31 May 1951 between the Netherlands and the Union of South Africa, p. 2396. https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/19511952/0000290565/1/pdf/SGD_19511952_0001466.pdf accessed 10 October 2021.

36. Jan Haken, cited by Stefan de Boer, *Van Sharpeville tot Soweto. Nederlands Regeringsbeleid Ten Aanzien Van Apartheid, 1960–1977* (Den Haag: SdU Uitgevers, 1999), 78.

Socialist–Protestant church minister Jan Buskes, who after a three-month stay in South Africa made his voice heard loud and clear with the Dutch-language publication *South Africa's Apartheid policy: Unacceptable!* in 1955.³⁷ He regarded racial discrimination as ‘a threat to humanity and a danger to a peaceful cooperation and cohabitation of peoples’ and therefor considered it the duty of all Christians and humanists to act against Apartheid. He himself set the example with the founding of the South Africa Committee (*Comité Zuid-Afrika, CZA*).³⁸ Its first activity was to organise a benefit event for the support of imprisoned anti-Apartheid fighters and their families in South Africa. Instead of an antifascist discourse, the Christian–pacifist oriented Buskes and his companions tuned in to the human rights discourse as formalised in the Declaration of Universal Human Rights, which had been overshadowed by the increasing tensions of the Cold War.

Gradually the situation changed with the entry of more and more young, independent nation states from Asia and Africa into the United Nations. They were keen to put inhumane forms of exclusion on racial grounds in South Africa on the political agenda. In international circles human rights advanced to the centre of attention, which led to several UN resolutions against Apartheid policies. The Dutch government coyly remained on the sidelines, saying that this was a ‘domestic affair’. Relations between the Dutch and South African governments were kept cordial in order not to endanger Dutch emigration and economic interests, underpinned by *stamverwante* memory politics on both sides. The former Dutch colonies (then ‘part of the Dutch Kingdom’) Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles objected against the Dutch abstention from voting in favour of the condemnation of Apartheid in the UN. Their protests, however, remained ignored.³⁹

This reluctant attitude became untenable after March 1960, when the South African police opened fire on unarmed crowds protesting against the pass laws. It has been noted before: ‘Sharpeville’ marked a turning point in the resistance against Apartheid, both in South Africa and beyond.⁴⁰ A storm of international protest followed the shootings, including condemnation by the UN. Demonstrations were organised in many countries, including the Netherlands. In Amsterdam and The Hague, during a protest of hundreds of participants, slogans were carried such as ‘Stop the Negro persecution in

37. J.J. Buskes, *Zuid-Afrika's apartheidsbeleid: onaanvaardbaar!* (Den Haag: Bert Bakker/Daamen, 1955).

38. Wouter Marchand, ‘In navolging van de “grote Grensoverschrijder”. Jan Buskes, John Collins en de vroege antiapartheidsbeweging als onderdeel van de Global Civil Society, 1956–1965’, in Caspar Cillekens, Barbara Henkes and James Kennedy, eds, *Maar we wisten ons door de Heer geroepen' Kerk en apartheid in transnationale perspectief* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2017), 23–42.

39. Roeland Muskens, *Aan de goede kant. Biografie van de Nederlandse anti-apartheidsbeweging 1960–1990* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Aspect, 2014), 43–44.

40. e.g. Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (New York/Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

South Africa’, ‘One race: man!’, and ‘Human rights also in South Africa’ (Figure 3).⁴¹ This was soon followed by a call from the CZA to the Dutch population to reinforce the protests against ‘racial discrimination’.⁴² As Håkan Thörn has already pointed out, the anti-Apartheid movement was related to and supported by the emergence of issues such as human rights and democratisation in a global political context.⁴³ The reports and images of peaceful protests by civil rights movements in the USA, and the violent reactions that these provoked, had a huge impact – and so did ‘Sharpeville’.

The international human rights discourse was at the centre of all protests, also in the Netherlands where shared memories of the violent repression during National Socialism and antifascist resistance re-emerged in the public debate. This is evident from the media coverage and the debates in the Dutch parliament following ‘Sharpeville’. The Social Democrats – in the opposition since 1958 and without the ‘Boer love’ of former Prime Minister Drees and his contemporaries – filed an appeal for the government to condemn the Apartheid policy in the UN. Their request was substantiated by the statement that Apartheid ‘evokes poignant memories of the politics of racial inequality to which our people have been exposed during the Nazi occupation’.⁴⁴ What is remarkable about this formulation is not so much that the socialist opposition leader activated the memory of National Socialist repression, but that he referred to ‘our [i.e. Dutch] people’ as victims of racial inequality. An awareness that many of the same Dutch people were partly responsible for, or at least implicated in, the exclusion of Jews from Dutch society during the National Socialist occupation was not yet part of this renewed antifascist memory politics in the Netherlands.⁴⁵

Neither did the memory of the Dutch (so-called *stamverwante*) ties with White South Africa give rise to a sense of shared responsibility for the systematic racism that had been set in motion with the Dutch colonisation of the Cape. What was missing was a synergy between the collective memory of racist exclusion during National Socialism and that of racist exclusion in the history of Dutch colonialism. The passionate protests against Apartheid stemmed from a different collective memory, which still placed the Netherlands and ‘the’ Dutch on the ‘good’ side of history, namely on the side of victims of and resistance against ‘German’ National Socialism. Once more the notion of victimhood and heroism seems central to the understanding of the dynamics of

41. *Delpher*: Dutch newspapers 26 March – 4 April 1960. Also, the South African embassy in the Hague was marked with the slogan *Moordenaars* (Murderers), mentioned in *de Volkskrant*, 28 March 1960.

42. Call in the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 2 June 1960 and other Dutch newspapers.

43. Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 8.

44. Muskens, *Aan de goede kant*, 54.

45. e.g. Ido de Haan, *Na de Ondergang. De herinnering aan de Jodenvervolgving in Nederland, 1945–1995* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997).



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Figure 3. Protest March Amsterdam, 1960. Photographer: Dolf Kruger / © Nederlands Fotomuseum.

multidirectional memories pro and contra Nazism and Apartheid in the exchanges between the Netherlands and South Africa.⁴⁶

The emphasis on a human rights discourse appealed to a broad audience, from conservative-liberal to Christian-pacifist and radical-socialist. For the Dutch government, a coalition of Christian parties and the Social Democrats, it was difficult to ignore. The Catholic Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns announced in 1965 that he would set aside 100,000 guilders from his budget for the Defence and Aid Fund (DAF). The DAF, run by the British canon John Collins, for which Buskes and the CZA also collected money, aimed to provide legal and material support to victims of Apartheid.⁴⁷ At the same time, Dutch Protestant churches, political parties and other collectives attempted to persuade the South African government to ‘soften’ its Apartheid policies. This proved in vain.

In 1965 board members of the Dutch CZA noted that ‘a peaceful solution to the racial problem in South Africa’ was not in sight. Buskes feared that ‘the supremacy and privileged position of the Whites will be maintained’. He also

46. The central meaning of victimhood and heroism in the dynamics of multidirectional memories is also noted by Iris van Ooijen and Ilse Raaijmakers in ‘Competitive or Multidirectional Memory? The Interaction between Postwar and Postcolonial Memory in the Netherlands’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, 3–4 (2012), 463–483. However, they focus on the memories of veterans who fought on the side of the Dutch colonial forces.

47. Marchand, ‘In navolging van’, 23–42.

noted similarities between the discrimination based on ‘race’ in both National Socialism and Apartheid, to which he immediately added that he did not want to judge the proponents of Apartheid in South Africa by the same standards as the Nazis in Germany.⁴⁸ Buskes, who himself had been involved in the resistance against the Nazis, was prudent when it came to overly simple analogies between Apartheid and National Socialism.

His young, activist successors in the 1970s had fewer reservations about that kind of analogy. After the existing CZA failed to reach a new group of anti-Apartheid activists, a White South African student in exile, Berend Schuitema, and his girlfriend Connie Braam took over in 1970. They played a key role in the transformation of the CZA into the Netherlands Anti-Apartheid Movement (*Anti Apartheids Beweging Nederland*, AABN) during the 1970s–1980s. An activist memory policy and related rhetoric were part of their action repertoire, which was also picked up by the media. The victims of National Socialism and the Holocaust formed a recurring point of reference, which is prominent in the 1971 poster mentioned and shown at the beginning of this contribution (Figure 1).

This first AABN poster was distributed together with the last issue of the *South Africa Bulletin*, the mouthpiece of the Committee, henceforth *the Anti-Apartheid News*. Under the heading ‘Racial disgrace’ (*Rassenschande*), this issue included a short notice on the legal prohibition of sexual relations with anyone of a different ‘race’ in South Africa. The law had been in force since 1927 and was tightened in 1950.⁴⁹ ‘Are there still Dutch people who know what “racial disgrace” means?’ the editor wondered rhetorically, adding that Prime Minister Vorster ‘has always been a great friend of Hitler’.⁵⁰ Both in image and in words, the memories of the exclusion policy of the Nazis was linked to Apartheid.

The notice was prompted by the protest of 45 South African clergymen in July 1971, who argued that the South African political and social system was in many ways related to Nazism. They substantiated this comparison by referring, among other things, to the South African laws against sexual relations between Whites and people of colour, similar to the infamous Nuremberg laws that forbade relations between so-called Aryans and Jews. Their ‘Open Letter’ (*Open Brief*) in the South African magazine *Pro Veritate* – which received ample attention in various Dutch daily newspapers⁵¹ – shows how Apartheid

48. J.J. Buskes, ‘De toekomst van Zuid-Afrika’, *Het Vrije Volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*, 9 April 1965.

49. The Immorality Act of 1927 prohibited sex between a White and a Black person. With the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 this law was extended to sex between ‘Europeans’ (that is, Whites) and all ‘non-Europeans’ (that is, people of colour).

50. *Zuid-Afrika Bulletin* 53 (December 1971).

51. *Pro Veritate*, the monthly magazine of the Christian Institute of Southern Africa, 19 July 1971, quoted in *De Waarheid*, 19 July 1971 and other dailies, 20 July 1971. A few months later the Open Letter was published by Kairos, a Christian Anti-Apartheid organisation.

once more activated the memories of National Socialism and its antisemitic racism, and how these memories were harnessed in the anti-Apartheid movement.

The new campaigners placed the AABN in a broader context, as can be seen from the explanation on the back of the poster. Apartheid is described as ‘an integral part of everything that our White capital brings about in the Third World’. With these references to capitalism and imperialism – well-known in the communist repertoire – the AABN revived an antifascist discourse in the 1970s. The authors emphasised that the protests against Apartheid were not aimed at ‘bad people’, but at the perfidious workings of ‘a free market economy’. This phrasing reflects the mindset of a new generation that no longer identified with ‘the free West’ as an opposite to the ‘communist East’. Instead, they saw an America waging dirty wars in Vietnam and elsewhere, thwarting liberation movements around the globe, while perpetuating systematic racism in the US itself. Identification with ‘liberal’ and capitalist America, already shaken by the violence against the civil rights movement in the 1960s, was replaced by an identification with the mostly communist-oriented liberation movements in what was then called ‘the Third World’.

Anne Frank and Apartheid

The 1970 poster of the Netherlands Anti-Apartheid Movement portrayed South African Prime Minister John Vorster (in power from 1966 to 1978) as a fascist – that is to say, as a well-fed capitalist, a powerful White imperialist backed by the military, and a National Socialist with swastikas in his fist, facing the black power of the anti-Apartheid fighters. This unambiguous depiction of the struggle against Apartheid was not unique at the time. Many would explain their involvement in the anti-Apartheid movements with a reference to the Second World War and National Socialism, as the Dutch Anti-Apartheid activist Sietse Bosgra pointed out later.⁵² It is important to realise that his generation had grown up with the impact of the daily media coverage of the Eichmann Trial in 1961. The hearing of the witnesses contributed, at least in the ‘Western World’, to a renewed attention to the chilling fate of the Jews. A few years later, the book *Ashes in the Wind: The Destruction of Dutch Jewry* (Dutch title: *Ondergang*) by the widely respected Jewish historian Jacques Presser, brought the fate of Dutch Jews painfully close.⁵³ It was taken up in all national

52. S. Bosgra, ‘From Jan van Riebeeck to Solidarity with the Struggle – The Netherlands, South Africa and Apartheid’, in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), ed., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity* (Pretoria: SADET, 2008), 533–622, here 546.

53. J. Presser, *Ondergang. De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse jodendom 1940–1945* (Den Haag: Staatsuitgeverij, 1965). The book was translated into English and published by Souvenir Press in 1968.

and regional newspapers, with entire pages being dedicated to copied parts of the text.⁵⁴

Ondergang undermined the prevailing collective memory of the Netherlands' heroic resistance against the German Nazis. Instead, Presser described the systematic involvement and responsibility of Dutch institutions, authorities and persons regarding the 'destruction of Dutch Jewry'.⁵⁵ At the presentation of his book, the representative of the government – and with him all Dutch media – underlined his troublesome conclusion that

no one who wants to account with the utmost sincerity for their attitude during the occupation can consider themselves exonerated arguing that they did not know about Auschwitz or Sobibor or the gas chambers. One knew, at least everyone could have known if they had wanted to open up to that knowledge.⁵⁶

It could no longer be ignored: the looking-away from antisemitic measures and persecution during the Nazi occupation had contributed to the isolation, deportation and murder of most of the Jewish population. Exactly that was what the new generation involved in the anti-Apartheid movements wanted to avoid: that by ignoring repressive policies – either against certain sections of the population or against independent movements in the former colonies – they would become implicated in perpetuating ethnic-racial repression anywhere in the world.

The national epic that had espoused the Dutch and 'Western' victory over 'evil' – emphasising resistance and downplaying the extent of collaboration – was, at the end of the 1960s, eroded by the growing public realisation of Dutch complicity in Nazi rule. The emphasis on the importance of international solidarity with those who dared to resist oppression fuelled what has been referred to as 'second-wave' or 'fashionable' antifascism.⁵⁷ Thus, anti-Apartheid was consistently informed by the memory of National Socialism. This was aptly expressed in the exhibition organised during the summers of 1971, 1972 and 1973 in the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. Berend Schuitema worked there as a documentalist when the Anne Frank Foundation was officially recognised in 1970 as a 'national educational institution'.⁵⁸ This meant that it was no longer the *tangible* heritage of Anne Frank in the 'Achterhuis' that was the focal

54. In the first year 140,000 copies were sold, which is extraordinary for a historical work in the limited Dutch-speaking regions. A total of eight reprints appeared before the Dutch language book was placed online in 2005.

55. As it was formulated in several reviews, referring to the Dutch subtitle *De vervolging (persecution) en verdelging (and destruction) of the Dutch Jewry 1940–1945*.

56. The Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work, M. Vrolijk, when handing over the first copy of the book to the Mayor of Amsterdam, quoted in newspapers of 22 April 1965.

57. Olthoff, 'Old and New Anti-Fascism', 46. Olthoff argues convincingly that the emergence of 'fashionable' antifascism in the Netherlands denotes its evolution into a grassroots phenomenon – as against Ben Mercer's argument in 'Specters of Fascism: The Rhetoric of Historical Analogy in 1968', *The Journal of Modern History* 88, 1 (2016), 96–129.

58. J. van der Lans and H. Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank Huis. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 135.

point, but her *mental* heritage, which provided a handle for discussions about ‘injustice and violence in whatever form’.⁵⁹ Connie Braam, remembered 40 years later that the anti-Apartheid struggle and the fight against racism and repression worldwide belonged to the Anne Frank House.⁶⁰

In 1971 Schuitema and Braam were asked to set up an exhibition about Apartheid in South Africa. ‘Nazism in South Africa’ was the telling motto of the exhibition that visitors were confronted with after descending the stairs of the Achterhuis, the hiding quarters of the Frank family. In the centre was a huge papier mâché doll representing South African Prime Minister John Vorster (see [Figure 4](#)). The sash around his torso had ‘Apartheid’ written on it. In the exhibition attention was paid to the situation in the so-called ‘resettlement areas’ for Africans, and ‘the contrasts’ between Black and White, as the liberal *NRC Handelsblad* neutrally summarised the exhibition. The compilers of the exhibition expressed themselves more explicitly, saying that

the emphasis was placed on the South African variant of the ‘Final solution’ to the racial problem: the *rücksichtslose* [German for ‘ruthless’] resettlement policy according to which Black Africans are forcibly transferred to ‘Black areas’, large ghettos in which they are doomed to live according to an artificially low standard imposed by their White masters.⁶¹

A year later, in the second episode of the ‘Nazism in South Africa’ exhibition, the emphasis was on Western capitalist involvement – ‘in fact, complicity in the injustice in South Africa’ – on the part of Dutch companies such as Shell, Philips, Nijverdalen Cate and Bruynzeel. The parallel between Apartheid and Nazism was further emphasised in statements by successive South African Prime Ministers, such as D.F. Malan (‘We have a Jewish problem’), his successor J.G. Strijdom (‘If we don’t accept the *Herrenvolk* idea, how can Whites stay in control?’), and the Prime Minister at the time, B.J. Vorster (‘In Italy it is called Fascism, in Germany National Socialism and in South Africa we call it Christian Nationalism’).⁶²

If, judging by notes in the visitors’ book of that year, emotions already ran high in the summer of 1971,⁶³ in the summer of 1972 a real brawl broke out at the Anne Frank House when a group of White South Africans went into a

59. Interview with Heleen Schreuder-Kiewiet, quoted in Van der Lans and Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank huis*, 135.

60. Conny Braam, quoted in Van der Lans and Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank Huis*, 138.

61. E.W. van Opzeeland, reporter, ‘Tentoonstelling over Zuid-Afrika’s Nazisme. Discriminatie van nu in het Anne Frank huis’, *De Tijd: dagblad voor Nederland* 25 July 1972. The quotation refers to the design of the exposition in 1971.

62. *Ibid.* Vorster and Verwoerd were convicted by South African courts in 1942 and 1943 for fascist propaganda and actual sabotage of the South African war effort, respectively.

63. *Trouw*, 14 August 1971. The only surviving visitors’ books of the exhibition are from 1973. See Gilbert, ‘Anne Frank in South Africa’, 375.



Figure 4. John Vorster as Mr. Apartheid in the exhibition 'National Socialism and South Africa' in the Anne Frank House, 1972. Photographer unknown. Published in *Trouw*, 6 July 1972.

frenzy.⁶⁴ The third and final instalment of 'Nazism in South Africa' exhibition series was presented in 1973. This time, the South African ambassador in The Hague protested to the Board of the Anne Frank House, because of 'the very one-sided political set-up of the exhibitions', as well as 'the misleading image of South Africa that is being forced on visitors to the Anne Frank House unsolicited'.⁶⁵ The daily *Het Parool* noted this protest and the response of the Board: 'The purpose of the exhibitions was to show the similarity between the discrimination policy against the Jews, started in 1933 in Germany (Nuremberg laws), and current practice as a result of the Apartheid legislation in the Republic of

64. For a vivid, fictionalised account, see Conny Braam, *De Bokkenslchter* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1993), 83–86.

65. Evert Werkman, 'Amsterdams Logboek', *Het Parool*, 9 August 1973.

South Africa and in Rhodesia, directed against the non-White section of the population'. And: 'Our exhibitions aim to pinpoint fascist phenomena of which, as you write, in your country perhaps not the Jews, but in our opinion the Blacks are the victims'.⁶⁶

This reaction stresses two elements in the anti-Apartheid debates that were part of the postwar Dutch–South African exchanges: one is that it shows how a grass-roots memory politics within a range of social and cultural institutions and movements in the Netherlands during the 1970s took shape and were articulated in reference to National Socialist exclusion and extermination policies in the past.⁶⁷ The second element is illustrated by the response to the South African ambassador, which by emphasising racism towards the Blacks in 'your' country points to a blind spot for the Dutch implicatedness in the institutionalisation of racial inequality in its former colonies such as South Africa.

In conclusion: victimhood and heroism in postwar Dutch–South African exchanges

With the third and last version of the 'Nazism and South Africa' exhibition, I conclude my contribution about antifascist memory politics in postwar Dutch–South African exchanges. Challenged by Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, I explored whether and how collective memories of seemingly distinct histories emerge dialogically, and how memory works productively through negotiation and cross-referencing. In the development of Dutch–South African relations we can see how divergent histories of repression and resistance led to both identification and estrangement with White, Nationalist South Africa.

The distinct narratives of a shared ethnic–racial bond (*stamverwantschap*) between the Dutch and Afrikaners in South Africa, as promoted by the Dutch government in the 1950s, served as a 'safe' alternative – or, in Freudian jargon, a 'screen memory' – replacing the painful memories of racist exclusion policies, antifascist persecutions and betrayal by the Dutch in the Netherlands during the years of National Socialism. Instead, the 'natural' history of *stamverwantschap* stressed the shared heroic struggle of freedom fighters against the domination of the Spanish and British empires, respectively. Moreover, the narrative of *stamverwantschap* hindered a critical assessment of the violent history of Dutch colonialism in South Africa, as it focused on the confrontations between White settlers. As far as native Africans were implicated in these memory politics, they were subordinated in yet another heroic struggle of the Dutch and their alleged descendants against barbarism.

66. *Ibid.*

67. A. Verbij, *Tien rode jaren. Links radicalisme in Nederland, 1970–1980* (Amsterdam: Ambo, 2005), 62–63, quoted by Olthoff, 'Old and New Anti-Fascism', 50.

The crucial shift from *stamverwante* memory politics to ‘grassroots’ antifascist memory politics in the 1960s became firmly anchored in the public debate during the 1970s. From that time on, several organisations, institutions such as the churches, and the Dutch government took up positions against Apartheid. The memory of antisemitic repression during Nazism and the awareness of the implicatedness of the previous Dutch generation became an important element in the mobilisation of protests against Apartheid through identification with the victims of racist violence.

Yet the anti-Apartheid movement failed to incorporate critical reflection on the impact of the Netherlands’ colonial past in South Africa on the Apartheid policies. In the movement’s need for victimhood and heroism, the emphasis was placed on the condemnation of the ‘Other’, without questioning the implication of the Dutch in these racialised histories. That may have promoted the somewhat simplified imagery and rhetoric – also disqualified as ‘fashionable’ antifascism⁶⁸ – used in the AABN poster. As the activists were driven by the desire not to passively monitor contemporary forms of repression and inequality, they were not inclined to reflect on a kind of intergenerational responsibility for events they themselves had not been part of. They were blessed with *Die Gnade der späten Geburt* (The grace of the late birth), as it was called in Germany at the end of the twentieth century.⁶⁹

In his work Rothberg picks up on Hannah Arendt’s argument that

This vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among fellow men, and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community.⁷⁰

Arendt was also the first who, in her famous *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as early as 1951 made the connection between the narrative of the Holocaust and the narrative of anti-colonialism and Western racism.⁷¹

For the global anti-Apartheid movement, narratives of the past belonged to the political repertoire of the present. These narratives were not taken up to stimulate reflection on one’s own involvement in the colonial history that preceded Apartheid, which is aptly expressed in the words of the anti-Apartheid activist Sytse Bosgra. In a retrospective written during the heyday of the Dutch anti-Apartheid movement in 1986, he stated that for a long time

68. Olthoff, ‘Old and New Anti-Fascism’, 46.

69. This phrase was coined by the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1983/1984, intended to express that the Germans who were born after 1930 could not be held accountable for the legacy of the Holocaust. In the twenty-first [toch maar wel] century this phrase has been taken up by extreme right-wingers to argue that the whole ‘fuzz’ around National Socialism in Germany and Austria should come to an end.

70. H. Arendt, ‘Collective Responsibility’, cited by M. Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1.

71. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958).

the ties between the Netherlands and South Africa had been determined by ‘the fact that a Dutch colony had been established in South Africa for 150 years’. According to the author, Dutch–South African relations had been framed in the ethnic–racial terms of *stamverwantschap*. Few Dutch ‘wished to apply the lessons of the Second World War to the “relatives” (*stamverwanten*) in South Africa, who were (and still are) in the grip of views similar to those of our oppressor during that time of war’. He claimed that in 1986 the idea of communality with the White Afrikaners had lost all meaning for most Dutch people in the Netherlands. Instead, a new bond had developed: that of solidarity with ‘the liberation struggle of the oppressed in that Apartheid country’.⁷²

Although Bosgra did refer to the Dutch colonial past in South Africa, he separated the narrative of the Holocaust and antisemitism from that of post-colonialism and Western racism. Generally, the Dutch anti-Apartheid movements ignored the Dutch responsibility for the legacy of their colonial past in the present – a legacy that applied not only to Apartheid South Africa but also to Dutch society, in which racist ideas and practices had (and still have) not disappeared. At some point this issue was raised by the South African anti-Apartheid activist and exile of colour, Esau du Plessis. In 1972 he initiated the Boycott Outspan Action (*Boycot Outspan Aktie*; BOA) as a first successful consumer boycott of South African products in the Netherlands. Du Plessis emphasised how racism in the Netherlands – as a legacy of its colonial history – and Apartheid in South Africa were connected. Apparently, that message did not resonate within the anti-Apartheid movements: Du Plessis became increasingly isolated.⁷³

One could say that the appeal to the memory of antisemitic racism and the Holocaust initiated by Hitler’s Germany provided a ‘safe’ alternative to the memory of Dutch colonialism and its inherent racism. The urgent need to position themselves retroactively amongst ‘The Righteous Among the Nations’,⁷⁴ who would make up for injustices under Nazism, hindered a critical assessment of the legacy of Dutch colonialism in Apartheid South Africa and elsewhere. In the public debate and historiography, the histories of Holocaust and colonialism have, despite Arendt’s intervention, remained two separate areas – also because the attribution of a unique character to the horrors of the Holocaust in ‘the Western countries’ hindered a dialogue between memories of racist exclusion and persecution policies during National Socialism and colonialism.

Whereas the historiography and public debate about the Holocaust mainly developed in the ‘Western countries’, the historiography of and public debate

72. S. Bosgra in his preface to R. Rozenburg’s *De bloedband Den-Haag – Pretoria. Het Nederlandse Zuid-Afrikabeleid sinds 1945* (Amsterdam: Komitee Zuidelijk Afrika, 1986).

73. Muskens, *Aan de goede kant*, 106–125.

74. Reference to the honorific used by the State of Israel to describe non-Jews who for altruistic reasons during the Holocaust risked their lives to save Jews from being murdered by the Nazis.

about colonial violence became an important theme in the former colonies. It seems that in the twenty-first century a space is slowly emerging for a synergy between the two narratives of historical catastrophe, with deep historical and intellectual roots in many parts of the world.⁷⁵ This development can help to ensure that rhetoric of an antifascist memory politics with analogies between the Holocaust and colonialism can be simultaneously criticised and taken seriously.

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Note on the Contributor

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75. See for instance the reflections on different global historiographies in the work of Amos Goldberg and A. Dirk Moses. An inspiring work, although restricted to the German case in which the Shoah continues to function as the finalist benchmark, is provided by the work of Jürgen Zimmerer, e.g. *From Windhoek to Auschwitz* (London Routledge 2015).