

Rails of Reflection

The Nederlandse Spoorwegen's Reckoning with its Role in the Holocaust since 1945

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Preface

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of companies involved in the Holocaust, especially those in the public transport sector, has become a focal point of scrutiny, with the train symbolising the mass deportations to concentration and extermination camps. This thesis examines the Nederlandse Spoorwegen's (NS) engagement with its historical role in the Holocaust from 1945 to the present. The main question guiding this research is: *How has NS managed its public image concerning its role in the transportation of Jews, Sinti, and Roma during World War II in the context of Dutch memory culture since 1945?* Utilising historiographical analysis, archival research, interviews with experts and stakeholders, and supplementary historical web research, this study traces and outlines the developments of NS's public image strategies, with Dutch memory culture of World War II serving as a contextual framework. The research findings illustrate NS's initial efforts to shape a post-war narrative of resistance while downplaying its wartime collaboration, followed by strategic redirections of public attention and an eventual critical but cautious engagement with its past. The findings highlight NS's navigations through selective memory and corporate communication strategies to construct and revise its public image. They demonstrate NS's responses to external scrutiny and internal cultural influences, showcasing shifts from denial to acknowledgment, and the complexities of addressing historical accountability amidst societal expectations and developments.

KEYWORDS: Holocaust, Nederlandse Spoorwegen, World War II, Railways, Transports, Deportations, Memory Culture, Public Image Management

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Chapter I:
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Of course, people always talk about the gas chambers. But what should you do with that as a symbol? Build a gas chamber? No, you have to recreate that train carriage. So, the train has become the symbol of the Holocaust. And of course, they realised that at NS too.¹

In recent years, the legacy of companies involved in the Holocaust has come under increased scrutiny, particularly those in the public transport sector. As illustrated in the quote above by David Barnouw, Holocaust expert, the train has become an enduring symbol of the Holocaust due to its role in the mass deportations to concentration and extermination camps during World War II (WWII). This symbolic representation places public transport companies, such as the Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS; the Dutch Railways), at the forefront of historical accountability and the memory culture surrounding WWII. For example, the Amsterdam Municipal Tram, known as GVB, profited from leasing trams to the Germans for the deportation of Jews. These trams operated as ‘practically moving prisons’.² Similarly, Deutsche Bahn, the successor of the Deutsche Reichsbahn, was implicated in transporting tens of thousands of Jews from all over Europe to extermination camps like Auschwitz and Sobibor.³ The Belgian National Railway,

¹ Interview with David Barnouw, interview by Anne Knoop, Filmed interview, 2 May 2024.

² Hanneloes Pen, ‘Het GVB verdiende aan de tramritten waarmee Joden werden gedeporteerd door de Duitsers – “Het waren praktisch rijdende gevangenen”’, Het Parool, 5 March 2024, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/het-gvb-verdiende-aan-de-tramritten-waarmee-joden-werden-gedeporteerd-door-de-duitsers-het-waren-praktisch-rijdende-gevangenen~bdd4acf4/>.

³ Rick Van de Lustgraaf, ‘Het lukte hem al bij de NS, en nu wil Salo Muller ook compensatie van Duitse spoorwegen’, Trouw, 29 July 2020, <https://www.trouw.nl/buitenland/het-lukte-hem-al-bij-de-ns-en-nu-wil-salo-muller-ook-compensatie-van-duitse-spoorwegen~b29a8f52/>.

too, earned millions for transporting Jews, Roma, and resistance members to Nazi camps during WWII.⁴

In this context, NS faces scrutiny regarding its role in the Holocaust. NS, like its counterparts, played a significant part in the deportation process, a fact that continues to evoke strong public and historical responses. The post-war actions and responses of NS are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of companies publicly dealing with their historical roles in wartime atrocities in contemporary society. Therefore, the way these companies handle their historical legacies will significantly influence public memory and historical narratives surrounding WWII, making it an important subject to research, especially as the actual survivors of WWII and their immediate descendants grow older or pass away.

1.2 Research questions

Researching how NS has publicly dealt with its role in the Holocaust is crucial for understanding how contemporary companies navigate historical accountability and memory cultures surrounding WWII, especially since NS has had a pivotal role in the debates on corporate responsibility and historical transparency in the aftermath of wartime behaviours. This thesis will explore the strategies and measures NS has employed to publicly address its past actions, aiming to understand the broader implications for corporate public image management in historical contexts.

The main research question of the thesis seeks to address these aspects, and is stated as follows: *How has NS managed its public image concerning its role in the transportation of Jews, Sinti, and Roma during World War II in the context of*

⁴ Nina Siegal, 'Belgian Railway Earned Millions for Holocaust Trains, Report Finds', *The New York Times*, 15 December 2023, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/15/world/europe/belgium-railway-holocaust-nazis.html>; 'Belgium Launches Investigation into Railways' Role in Wartime Deportations to German Death Camps', Politico, 27 January 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/belgium-launch-investigation-railway-role-wartime-deportations/>.

Dutch memory culture since 1945? Although primary and secondary sources covering the Holocaust transports often solely speak of the fate of the Jews, for example with the phrasings ‘Jodentransporten’ or ‘Jodenvervoer’ (roughly translated to ‘transports of Jews’), the inclusion of Sinti and Roma in this thesis is essential to provide a comprehensive understanding of NS’s actions and their impact.

First, it is important to explain the prevalent focus in primary and secondary sources on Jewish victims. The Holocaust is commonly associated with Jews due to the Nazi regime’s singular focus on their persecution and annihilation. As Christopher Browning noted in “The Nazi Empire”: ‘The Final Solution gained an autonomy, priority, and singularity apart from all other persecutory and genocidal policies of the Nazi regime.’⁵ In the Dutch context, the focus on the Jewish victims of the Holocaust is particularly strong. Both primary and secondary sources on NS and the Holocaust transports often solely mention the persecution and deportation of Jews, which is understandable given the staggering numbers involved. In the Netherlands, approximately 107,000 Jews were deported via Kamp Westerbork through a total of 93 transports. Only between 5,000 and 5,500 of these deported Jews survived the war.⁶ This means that three-quarters of the Dutch Jewish population was murdered, a relatively higher percentage than in other Western European countries.⁷ Consequently, Dutch memory culture surrounding the Holocaust predominantly centres on the experiences and suffering of the Jewish community.

⁵ Christopher Browning, ‘The Nazi Empire’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 420.

⁶ ‘Gedeporteerde Joden (cijfers)’, accessed 19 June 2024, <https://www.niod.nl/nl/veelgestelde-vragen/gedeporteerde-joden-cijfers>.

⁷ ‘Nederland: het hoogste aantal Joodse slachtoffers in West-Europa’, Anne Frank Website, accessed 19 June 2024, <https://www.annefrank.org/nl/anne-frank/verdieping/nederland-het-hoogste-aantal-joodse-slachtoffers-west-europa/>.

However, Sinti and Roma suffered a similar fate to the Jews, making it important to include them in this question.⁸ As Christopher Browning explained, the Nazi genocidal projects also included the mass murder and expulsion of ‘Gypsies’ from the Third Reich, placing them within the same horrific framework as the Jews. Of the Sinti and Roma, pejoratively referred to as *Zigeuner*, ultimately more than two-thirds of them in the Third Reich and Protectorate died in Nazi camps.⁹ In the Dutch context, the Sinti and Roma were victims of the *Zigeunerrazzia* (Gypsy roundup) in 1944.¹⁰ Of the 250 Sinti and Roma imprisoned in the penal section of Kamp Westerbork, 247 were deported, and only 32 survived the war.¹¹

Moreover, Jews, Sinti, and Roma are the only ones officially documented by NS and the Germans regarding the transportations and deportations. This official recognition is reflected in the NS individual compensation scheme – which will be further highlighted in Chapter IV – acknowledging them as the primary victims of the transports: ‘When asked, NS explained in more detail that the “purge operation of the occupier” means genocide, more specifically the persecution of Jews, Roma, and Sinti with the occupier’s intention to exterminate them as a population group.’¹² The official acknowledgement of these three groups of victims of the Holocaust transportations in the previous quote, originating from the official report published by the advising Committee Individual Compensation Victims WWII Transporten NS, is a critical factor for this thesis, guiding the scope of the research.

⁸ ‘Genocide of European Roma (Gypsies), 1939–1945’, accessed 19 June 2024, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/genocide-of-european-roma-gypsies-1939-1945>.

⁹ Browning, ‘The Nazi Empire’, 407–16.

¹⁰ ‘Zigeunerrazzia’, accessed 19 June 2024, <https://www.oorlogsbronnen.nl/thema/Zigeunerrazzia>.

¹¹ ‘Vervolging Sinti En Roma - Kamp Westerbork’, accessed 19 June 2024, <https://kampwesterbork.nl/collectie/tweede-wereldoorlog/vervolging-sinti-en-roma>.

¹² Commissie Individuele Tegemoetkoming Slachtoffers WOII Transporten NS, ‘Advies Commissie Individuele Tegemoetkoming Slachtoffers WO II Transporten NS’, 26 June 2019, 3.

Furthermore, the main research question relies on a clear timeframe of post-WWII Dutch society (1945-present). The inclusion of this full post-WWII period encompasses the evolving societal attitudes towards WWII and the Holocaust and allows for a comprehensive analysis and periodic categorisation of NS's long-term and short-term strategies and public responses on this topic. Using Dutch WWII memory culture as a backdrop allows for comparing NS's actions with broader societal patterns in the Netherlands, providing more depth to the analysis.

To provide comprehensive insights and to support the rationale for the main research question, the research is subdivided into three specific sub-questions, covering distinct, temporal phases. These are:

1. *How did NS manage its public image and address its WWII role in the immediate post-war period (1945-1960)?*
2. *How did NS manage its public image and address its WWII role in the late twentieth century (1960-1994)?*
3. *How did NS manage its public image and address its WWII role in the contemporary period (1995-present)?*

Initially, the 'timeline' of Dutch memory culture was used as a theoretical framework, as outlined in sub-chapter 1.3.3. This approach involved examining NS's archived documents, public speeches, significant events described in secondary literature, interviews, and news moments through this lens, aligning them with the theoretical framework. Based on that framework, the original periodisation used to examine primary sources was divided into three periods: 1945-1960, 1960-1980, and 1980-2000s. However, after studying the primary sources related to NS's handling of its wartime role, the original periodisation was adjusted based on the actual actions, strategies, and statements of NS regarding its controversial role in WWII. This adjustment was made to reflect thematically

coherent yet still chronological ‘cases’, those being significant publications, speeches or other events. In short, NS’s ‘timeline’ exhibited different temporal breakpoints than those outlined in the theoretical framework. These cases are shown in Table 1.1 and will be thoroughly discussed and analysed in the corresponding chapters.

Case	Time (period)
Chapter II – 1945-1960	
NS’s first public appearance and the purge committee	1945-1946
The Parliamentary Inquiry Government Policy 1940-1945	1947-1956
Rüter’s publication <i>Riding and Striking</i>	1946-1960
Chapter III – 1960-1994	
125 th anniversary of the Railways	1964
(Low-Profile) Involvement with Historical Museums	1970s-1990s
Large-Scale Ad Campaign and Corporate Image Research	1980s-1990s
150 th anniversary of the Railways	1989
Chapter IV – 1995-present	
Spoorwegmuseum’s and NS’s Exhibition: <i>Riding or Striking</i>	1995
First Requests for Reparations	1995
CJO Poster Campaign and NS’s Apologies	2005
NS’s Agreement to Individual Compensations	2016-2021

Table 1.1. Overview of analysed cases concerning NS’s public image management.

1.3 Theoretical Concepts and Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of the processes behind *public image management*, the concept of *memory*, specifically *communicative memory* and *cultural memory*, and the developments in Dutch memory culture surrounding WWII as described in contemporary scholarly literature.

1.3.1 Public Image Management

In the context of this thesis, public image management is defined as the deliberate process of shaping and controlling the perception of an organisation or entity in the eyes of the public. This involves various strategies, tactics, and communication efforts aimed at influencing public opinion, attitudes, and beliefs. Given the gravity of NS's historical connection to the Holocaust and the need to understand how the company manages its public image in this context, two theories of (corporate) communication will be outlined: (1) crisis communication management, to analyse NS's response to reputational threats and public scrutiny related to its past actions; and (2) image repair theory, to illustrate the strategies and tactics NS employs to mitigate reputational damage and restore public trust in the aftermath of crises or controversies.

These two theories are closely related to each other: crisis communication management theory provides a framework for understanding how companies communicate with stakeholders, manage media coverage, and how they seek to mitigate reputational damage during times of crisis or controversy. Image repair theory complements crisis communication management by focussing specifically on the strategies and tactics organisations employ to repair their damaged reputation in the aftermath of a crisis. This may involve acknowledging past wrongdoing, offering apologies or reparations, and implementing measures to prevent similar

incidents from occurring in the future. The relationship between communication, crisis communication and image repair is best illustrated visually (Figure 1.1).

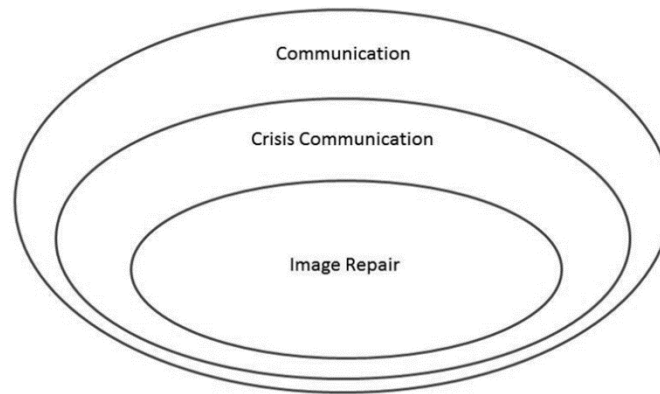


Figure 1.1. *Communication, crisis communication and image repair.*¹³

First, the more overarching concept: crisis communication. Kathleen Fearn-Banks has defined this concept very clearly: ‘A crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organisation, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name.’¹⁴ Consequently, crisis communication entails the ongoing dialogue between the organisation – or in the context of this thesis, company – and its various publics before, during, and after an adverse event. This dialogue encompasses strategic manoeuvres aimed at mitigating harm to the company’s reputation.¹⁵

Crises are mostly unpredictable and chaotic in nature. Therefore, although companies cannot prevent the onset or anticipate the unpredictability of said crises, they possess the agency to determine their response strategies and have

¹³ William L. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: Image Repair Theory and Research*, Second edition (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 4.

¹⁴ Kathleen Fearn-Banks, *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach*, Fifth edition, Routledge Communication Series (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 16.

¹⁵ Fearn-Banks, 17.

considerable influence over communication protocols. Thus, establishing control over the narrative is the fundamental goal of companies during crises.¹⁶ After all, crises have the characteristic potential to irreparably harm a company's reputation, which can result in significant (financial) losses.

Fearn-Banks states that a crisis has five stages: (1) detection of the crisis, (2) prevention or preparation, (3) containment, (4) recovery, and (5) learning from the crisis. In line with this five-stage model, crisis communication serves as a crucial component across all phases. Unlike in the most common legal systems, where individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty, in the court of public opinion, individuals or companies are presumed guilty until proven innocent. The primary function of crisis communications is therefore to influence the public opinion process and play a pivotal role in establishing and communicating evidence to refute the prevailing 'truth' or its partial accuracy. Subsequently, the company must provide explanations regarding the extent of truth in the situation. If the company does in fact bear full or partial responsibility for the crisis, admitting fault is typically the most effective approach. The public tends to be forgiving when proactive measures are taken to prevent recurrence.¹⁷ However, strategic (crisis) communication may cross ethical boundaries when its main purpose is to safeguard the organisation's reputation by misleadingly shifting responsibility away from the organisation.¹⁸

Second, as said, crisis communication includes *image repair discourse*. In the words of William Benoit: 'The theory of image repair discourse focusses exclusively on messages designed to improve images tarnished by criticism and suspicion.'¹⁹ From an ethical standpoint, it is imperative for a 'guilty' company to

¹⁶ W Timothy Coombs and Sherry J Holladay, 'The Handbook of Crisis Communication.', n.d., 530.

¹⁷ Fearn-Banks, *Crisis Communications*, 19–24.

¹⁸ Coombs and Holladay, 'The Handbook of Crisis Communication.', 694.

¹⁹ Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, 3.

confess and apologise in order to repair its public image. Yet, such a confession and owning up to wrongdoing could aid in one objective, for example restoring the public image, while conflicting with other objectives, such as evading legal repercussions for their actions.²⁰ This conflicting nature of image repair, especially when combined with potential legal trials, can lead companies (or individuals) to adopt different image repair strategies, such as denial, evading responsibility, or reducing offensiveness, with the aim to alter the public's perception.²¹

1.3.2 Memory

Memory, as a theoretical concept, is multifaceted and deeply intertwined with identity, politics, social dimensions, and power dynamics. Memory, in social and cultural contexts, refers to the collective ways in which groups and societies remember and interpret past events. It enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities, in turn, enables us to build a memory.²² Therefore, memory is a product of social interaction, forming a 'collective memory' that is public and shared, enabling the ability to create 'mnemonic communities' within or outside this collective memory.²³ Moreover, memory allows us to construct images and narratives of the past, thereby shaping our understanding of ourselves in the process.²⁴ Thus, memory serves a dual purpose: it enables the creation of coherent narratives of the past and helps construct identities over time.

According to Felix Berenskötter, memory is not *given*, it is *made*. This simple fact renders memory open to modification, manipulation and contestation.

²⁰ Benoit, 20.

²¹ Benoit, 22–29.

²² Peter Meusbürger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, eds., *Cultural Memories* (Springer Dordrecht, 2011), 16.

²³ Felix Berenskötter, 'Memory, Identity and Its Politics', in *Handbook on the Politics of Memory*, 2023, 20.

²⁴ Meusbürger, Heffernan, and Wunder, *Cultural Memories*, 15.

Therefore, memory has a grave impact on political processes. Consequently, the political relevance of memory lies in its ability to represent past experiences crucial for the collective identity of a social group, thereby structuring social relations and providing distinctive identities.²⁵ Historical narratives are often provisional, continually reshaped by new experiences, emerging knowledge, and shifting centres of power.²⁶ In the face of emerging historical research that challenges established narratives, dominant groups often wield power by favouring select memories, thereby shaping historical narratives to their advantage. This hegemonic control suppresses alternative accounts, portraying different interpretations as harmful to maintain their favoured historical narrative. To counter this hegemonic memory, Berthold Molden uses the concept of ‘resistant pasts’. ‘Resistant pasts’ demonstrate diverse historical events and present alternative viewpoints.²⁷

In any case, memory is a powerful *agent of change*. However, as Aleida Assman and Linda Shortt highlight, it could also be argued that it is not memory that is the powerful agent of change but *forgetting*. Resetting the narrative, or ‘wiping the slate clean’, can be seen as a potent force for change that fosters social harmony and cohesion. To put it simply: the (forced) forgetting of memories might wield even greater influence than memory itself. They explicitly state: ‘What we encounter as reality is in fact the product of an act of interpretation. Thus, it follows that the relationship between the past and the present is constantly changing and open-ended.’²⁸

An additional characteristic of memory that is especially relevant for this thesis, is the difference and relationship between *communicative memory* and

²⁵ Berenskötter, ‘Memory, Identity and Its Politics’, 18–20.

²⁶ Meusburger, Heffernan, and Wunder, *Cultural Memories*, 8.

²⁷ Berthold Molden, ‘Resistant Past versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory’, *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (2015): 130–36.

²⁸ Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt, eds., *Memory and Political Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230354241>.

cultural memory, as explained by Jan Assman. Communicative memory, referred to as noninstitutional, resides within everyday interactions and communication. Unlike cultural memory, it lacks stability. Communicative memory embodies a more fleeting nature, shaped by the ongoing dynamics of human interaction and therefore dependent on the fact that living memory does not stretch back further than 80 years.²⁹ In contrast, cultural memory is depicted as an institution, externalised and symbolically stored, transcending specific situations and remaining stable over time. It functions as a repository of shared knowledge, transferred and transmitted across generations. Cultural memory contains a disembodied quality, distinct from the embodied and embedded nature of human memory, which is a characteristic of communicative memory.³⁰ These two types of memory differ not only in their content but also in their forms, media, time structures, and participation structures (Figure 1.2). While communicative memory operates within the fluidity of social exchanges, cultural memory persists as a stable reflection of collective experience and identity, emphasising the importance of recognising the role of ‘mnemonic institutions’ in the concept of memory.³¹

²⁹ Jan Assman, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, in *Cultural Memories* (Springer Dordrecht, 2011), 18–19.

³⁰ Assman, 17.

³¹ Assman, 18.

Forms, dimensions	Communicative memory	Cultural memory
Content	History in the frame of autobiographical memory, recent past	Mythical history, events in the mythical (<i>in illo tempore</i>) or historical past
Forms	Informal traditions and genres of everyday communication	High degree of formation, ceremonial communication; Rituals, feasts
Media	Living, embodied memory, communication in vernacular language	Mediated in texts, icons, dances, rituals, and performances of various kinds; “classical” or otherwise formalized language(s)
Time structure	80–100 years, a moving horizon of 3–4 interacting generations	Absolute past, mythical primordial time, “3,000 years”
Participation structure	Diffuse	Specialized carriers of memory, hierarchically structured

Figure 1.2. *Communicative and cultural memory, areas of difference.*³²

1.3.3 Developments in Post-War Dutch Memory Culture of WWII

In recent decades, several relevant publications have appeared on this subject, often overlapping in terms of periodisation. The scholarly literature in this section will be discussed and ‘bundled’ into one timeline to create a clear periodisation of the different phases in Dutch memory culture after 1945 in order to broaden the focus of this thesis and enable a comparison between Dutch society’s interaction with WWII and NS’s interaction.

The years immediately after the liberation are often described as a period of ‘silence’. During the 1950s to 1960s, attention was primarily directed toward

³² Assman, 22.

(material) recovery, with the majority of the Dutch population seeking to swiftly put the war behind them, avoiding in-depth discussions about the memories surrounding it.³³ As Jolande Withuis states: ‘In the mental climate of those years, silence was golden and remaining strong was the best remedy.’³⁴ In any case, the war in these years was more likely to be characterised as a ‘national’ event. The memories, according to Frank van Vree, were forced to fit within the framework of the dominant ideology, in which the war was described as a period of oppression and resistance from which the country had emerged united.³⁵ During this period, these aspects even developed into a ‘resistance myth’, or resistance narrative. The emphasis was on the united struggle against the oppressor and on those who had made the sacrifice of their lives, creating the illusion that most Dutch people had been, in some way or another, part of the resistance. Until well into the 1960s, killed resistance members and soldiers were the centre of rituals and monumental attention.³⁶ Within this memory culture there was hardly any room for the dead and the events that were difficult or impossible to fit into the narrative of heroism and national resurrection.³⁷ The national pursuit of a ‘Great Story’ about the war and occupation left little room for the bitter experience of the persecuted Dutch Holocaust victims. They were included in what the dominant historical picture presented as a collective fate of the Dutch people.³⁸ Thus, a significant reason that

³³ Chris Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 9th ed. (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Contact, 2008), 347–48.

³⁴ Jolande Withuis, *Erkenning: Van oorlogstrauma naar klaagcultuur*, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2022), 8.

³⁵ Frank Van Vree and Rob Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context*, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2009), 7–8; Madelon De Keizer and Marije Plomp, eds., *Een open zenuw: Hoe wij ons de Tweede Wereldoorlog herinneren* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2010), 14; Rob Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte: Herdenkingscultuur in Nederland*, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2011), 726–32.

³⁶ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 726.

³⁷ Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 25.

³⁸ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 731.

the experiences of ‘other groups’, such as Jews, Sinti, and Roma, were not discussed, is because it did not fit into the national picture outlined. As Rob van Ginkel states: almost immediately after the war, there was a neatly furnished and tidy ‘House of Remembrance’ of WWII.³⁹

This changed – quite drastically – in the 1960s. As a decade characterised by tumultuous social changes and counter currents, the 1960s also had major consequences for the memory culture in the Netherlands.⁴⁰ In a sense, there was a ‘rediscovery’ of the war at the beginning of this decade.⁴¹ This is partly due to the rise of mass media and the increase in (academic) publications covering the Netherlands during WWII. Striking examples are the works of Loe de Jong (*De Bezetting* and *Het Koninkrijk*), Presser’s *De Ondergang* and the worldwide attention for the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem.⁴² This made the scale of the horrors in concentration and extermination camps visible for the first time, and younger generations launched a frontal attack on the values and norms of their parents’ society.⁴³ Subsequently, the previously discussed resistance myth was increasingly questioned. Research showed that ‘nation-wide resistance’ had been an affair of relatively few. The pressing question arose as to how it was possible that so many Jews could be deported and murdered from the Netherlands.⁴⁴ Thanks to these developments, ‘Auschwitz’ emerged as a universal and independent theme.⁴⁵ In addition, there was a lot of commotion around ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and the retrospective question of who had belonged to which group during the war.⁴⁶ In the

³⁹ Van Ginkel, 732.

⁴⁰ Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 32–34.

⁴¹ Withuis, *Erkenning*, 37.

⁴² Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 34–35; Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 376–79; Frank Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz: Herinneringen, beelden, geschiedenis*, 1st ed. (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1995), 21–22.

⁴³ Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, 21; Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 733.

⁴⁴ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 733–34.

⁴⁵ Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, 10.

⁴⁶ Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 374–98.

late 1960s and early 1970s, the memory culture gradually opened up to other groups. Its core changed from ‘resistance myth’ to ‘victim cult’.⁴⁷ Since the 1970s, commemorations and exhibitions have increasingly revolved around the recognition of victimhood. There is no term as common at that time as ‘recognition’, which during the 1970s manifested itself in a growing social sensitivity to (psychological) war suffering.⁴⁸ Despite the harsh discussion on ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in the 1960s, the following decade was characterised by a shift from an exclusivist memory culture – with only attention to ‘national’ suffering and examples of resistance – to a pluralistic memory culture with a strong moral dimension. This last variant gave more space to the ever-expanding categories of victims, including Jews.⁴⁹

The last characteristic phase in Dutch memory culture surrounding WWII spans from approximately the end of the 20th century to the 2000s.⁵⁰ At the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, the commotion around ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, characteristic of the previous years, diminished even more, creating more room for nuance in the social debate about (the handling of) WWII. This was partly due to a new, adult generation that had not experienced the war. In addition, one can speak of a disillusionment with regard to thinking about the war; a development that had occurred since 1989. After all, post-1989, and therefore almost at the end of the Cold War, history ‘thawed’, which led to a reconsideration of the past and dealing with WWII in Western Europe.⁵¹ The end of the 1990s was a turning point for many countries, including the Netherlands. People became increasingly aware of the derailments and tensions that nationalistic sentiments could cause.⁵² A large social

⁴⁷ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 734.

⁴⁸ Withuis, *Erkenning*, 57–60.

⁴⁹ Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 33; Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 734–37.

⁵⁰ Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 399–412; Withuis, *Erkenning*, 63.

⁵¹ De Keizer and Plomp, *Een open zenuw*, 12–16.

⁵² Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 38.

and political lobby was set up to achieve worldwide condemnation of the Holocaust.⁵³ In addition, Liberation Day became a national holiday in the Netherlands in 1990, with the theme ‘freedom’ instead of ‘liberation’. This made the commemoration and celebration more diffuse and open to more groups, but also placed WWII further at a distance; characteristic of the memory culture as we know it today.⁵⁴ Finally, there is a certain ‘struggle for recognition’. The trend that started in the late 1960s and during the 1970s continued around the 1990s, with more and more groups joining together and making their voices heard with the aim of recognition for their suffering.⁵⁵

To provide a general comparison of the periodisation in this thesis based on the aforementioned framework: Chapter II (1945-1960) still largely overlaps with the first period in the theoretical framework which is commonly associated with ‘silence’. Chapter III (1960-1994) overlaps with the framework’s periodisation of 1960-1980 and 1980-present, respectively known for ‘rediscovery’ and ‘recognition’. Chapter IV (1995-present), though still overlapping with the notion of ‘recognition’, covers a period that is mostly underrepresented in current literature on Dutch memory culture, which typically extends to the early 2000s. This chapter spans nearly 25 years beyond that timeframe, therefore relying on a more limited theoretical framework.

1.4 Historiography

Over the past decades, the history of NS and its role during WWII have garnered significant attention in academic publications, ranging from works being published 15 years after the liberation of the Netherlands to those anticipated for release in

⁵³ De Keizer and Plomp, *Een open zenuw*, 18–19.

⁵⁴ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 739.

⁵⁵ Withuis, *Erkenning*, 77.

2026. However, since earlier works on this subject should be considered primary sources, this literature review will focus exclusively on publications from the 1990s to the present, adhering to a criterion that the works are no more than 30 years old at the time of writing this thesis. This ensures that the historiography incorporates scholarly interpretations and analyses that build upon primary sources predating the 30-year mark.

One of the first publications within this 30 year-period that covers NS's role in the Holocaust, is Chris van der Heijden's *Grijs Verleden (Grey Past)*, albeit very briefly. *Grijs Verleden*, published in 2001, explores the morally complex choices and societal responses to Nazi occupation in the Netherlands during WWII, while also examining the enduring social repercussions of collaboration and resistance. The publication caused controversy for blending analytical-explanatory and moralistic historiography, presenting WWII as a grey area rather than 'right' or 'wrong'. Critics argued that Van der Heijden's source selection seemed arbitrary and biased towards supporting his narrative.⁵⁶ In any case, his chapter "Stilte, werk en bitterheid" ("Silence, Work, and Bitterness") briefly touches upon NS attempting to 'polish its war image' in the immediate post-war years,⁵⁷ though most of his writing on NS covers a dispute between two prominent NS Presidents in the early days of the war. This dispute will be outlined in Chapter II of this thesis. Moreover, his passage on NS jumps back and forth in time, making the overarching narrative difficult to interpret. Lastly, of Van der Heijden's six used sources on his passage on NS, five cover solely information on the rivalry between the NS Presidents whilst highlighting a one-sided perspective of one of them.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ J.C.H. Blom, 'Grijs Verleden? [Review of: Chris van der Heijden (2001) *Grijs Verleden. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog*]', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 2001, 483–84.

⁵⁷ Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 370.

⁵⁸ Van der Heijden, 368–70.

Similarly like Van der Heijden, in his seminal dissertation from 2003, *Noodzakelijk Kwaad (Necessary Evil)*, Joggli Meihuizen also covers the dispute between the NS Presidents in his sub-chapter “De Nederlandsche Spoorwegen”.⁵⁹ *Noodzakelijk Kwaad* examines the post-WWII Special Jurisdiction in the Netherlands. Meihuizen describes in detail the how and why of the punishment of economic collaboration in the Netherlands, or lack thereof, by using various large and small companies as case studies. In a 848 page book on economic collaboration, NS plays a relatively small part. The sub-chapter is only 3 pages and, besides the dispute, is focussed solely on the (legal) decision-making process regarding NS’s attitude towards the Germans after Dutch capitulation. The final sentence of the brief sub-chapter mentions the transports of Jews without covering the consequences or impacts of these transports, let alone how NS’s attitude and strategies could be compared to other instances of economic collaboration.⁶⁰

Years later, in 2019, Manon Bax and Mijke De Waardt publish the legal article “Belofte maakt schuld” (“Promise Makes Debt”), focussing on reparations and victimhood. This article is a direct response to NS’s promise in 2018 to provide individual compensation to survivors and descendants of the NS transports. It examines the compensation provided by NS to transport victims, highlighting unrecognised or inadequately addressed suffering of certain groups. While offering valuable insights into the legal and victimological aspects of NS’s compensation efforts, it does not address NS’s public image management regarding the transports or NS’s engagement with its wartime legacy. Instead, it focusses on the legal

⁵⁹ Joggli Meihuizen, *Noodzakelijk Kwaad: de bestraffing van economische collaboratie in Nederland na de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Boom, 2003), 121–23.

⁶⁰ Meihuizen, 121–23.

framework and recognition of victimhood, making it more suitable for research on the legal and ethical dimensions of NS's actions during the war.⁶¹

In 2022, “Beladen transport: Nederlandse Spoorwegen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog” (which roughly translates to “Loaded Transport”), was published by the NIOD. The publication is an integral part of a broader ongoing investigation into the actions of the NS during wartime. It serves as the report of a preliminary study into the actions of NS, the organisational relations within the company, and NS's potential accountability for the transports. The preliminary research findings – derived from a multitude of archival sources from Het Utrechts Archief, the NIOD, the Nationaal Archief, the IISG, and the Bundesarchiv Berlin – indicate that the actions of NS during wartime cannot be examined in isolation. The company's operations during the war were influenced by the interaction of NS management with various Dutch and German authorities, the wartime developments, and the international context in which the company operated. The report concludes with the statement that further research is needed in order to address the academic gaps surrounding the organisational structure and level of collaboration of NS during WWII, for which they propose several research directions. This final report will likely be published in 2026. The initiative for this article was taken following the establishment and advice of the Individual Compensation Committee Victims WWII Transports NS. Moreover, NS paid for the research for “Loaded Transport” and pays for the anticipated final report.⁶² NS's financial contributions to and involvement with the NIOD's research, will be further highlighted in Chapter IV.

It is evident that very few sources directly address how NS dealt with its war history. When attention is given to this aspect, the literature focusses on

⁶¹ Manon Bax and Mijke de Waardt, ‘Belofte maakt schuld: Nederlandse Spoorwegen en schadevergoeding voor overlevenden van WOII-transporten’, *Tijdschrift voor Herstelrecht* 19, no. 4 (2019): 36–49.

⁶² Lennert Savenije and Laurien Vastenhout, ‘Beladen transport: Nederlandse Spoorwegen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog’ (NIOD Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies, 2022).

describing the (legal) role of NS regarding the transports, the details of the transports, or researching the level of accountability attributable to NS as a company for these transports. Concrete academic literature on the handling or response of NS to its actions during wartime is scarce. The aforementioned works concentrate mainly on the NS *during* the war, with limited attention to the NS's public image management or engagement with history *after* WWII.

However, there are two exceptions that do partially cover NS's public approach to its WWII legacy. In 2019, Barnouw, Veenendaal, and Mulder published *De Nederlandse spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945* (*The Nederlandse Spoorwegen in Wartime, 1939-1945*). According to the authors, this book should be seen as a retelling and re-evaluation of the Railway Strike in 1944.⁶³ While most of the book indeed focusses on the Railway Strike, it also highlights the transports, providing ample details,⁶⁴ but hardly presenting any new findings in relation to earlier publications on NS and WWII.⁶⁵ However, what makes this book interesting is that the last one and a half chapters delve into “Remembering and Commemorating” and “Debt, Apologies, and Compensation” (translated) in the context of the actions and public strategies of NS *during* and *after* the war. These chapters, written by David Barnouw, outline trends, combining NS documentation, NS policies, academic publications, and societal developments related to the remembrance and commemoration of the Holocaust in the Netherlands.⁶⁶ However, this publication should be seen as a ‘general interest book’; it functions as a synthesis of the scientific consensus on the subject of NS and WWII, aimed at the

⁶³ David Barnouw, Dirk Mulder, and Guus Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945: Rijden voor Vaderland en Vijand*, 1st ed. (Zwolle: WBOOKS, 2019), 9–10.

⁶⁴ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, 58–145.

⁶⁵ Wouter Veraart, ‘Rechtsherstel als moreel design: Enkele kritische opmerkingen bij de Uitkeringsregeling NS voor vervolgingsslachtoffers’, *Overheid en aansprakelijkheid*, no. 2 (2020): 57.

⁶⁶ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 147–82.

general Dutch public.⁶⁷ Therefore, it lacks thorough academic referencing, decreasing the replicability of the research.⁶⁸ Moreover, the publication is now five years old, missing recent developments. Nevertheless, it can be considered the most concrete and detailed publication to date regarding NS and WWII, providing ample starting points for the research of this thesis. Therefore, rather than providing an in-depth academic exploration of the subject, the publication serves as an excellent introduction.⁶⁹

The second exception is Wouter Veraart's 2020 article "Rechtsherstel als moreel design" ("Legal Restoration as Moral Design"). Veraart critically examines the compensation scheme for Holocaust survivors of the transports by NS. The article questions whether the scheme truly delivers justice, comparing it to similar issues resolved in France related to the French Railways. The author emphasises the importance of moral gestures in addressing historical injustices, while also highlighting the need for public accountability and a surrender of narrative control by NS to fully acknowledge its role in the deportations. Veraart's analysis suggests that for reconciliation to be successful, it must be rooted in truth, justice, and a genuine confrontation with the past, with the latter aspect not (yet) being fully present at NS.⁷⁰ Even though Veraart's article is centred around legal and justice issues regarding NS's compensations for the victims, it does provide a very general overview of NS's narrational strategies regarding the transports, even describing a dominant historical trend of NS 'controlling' the narrative without genuine attempts of self-reflection.⁷¹ Veraart provides several illustrating examples, such as the

⁶⁷ Nico Wouters, 'David Barnouw, Dirk Mulder, Guus Veenendaal, De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945. Rijden voor vaderland en vijand', *TSEG - The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 18, no. 3 (2021): 177–80.

⁶⁸ Veraart, 'Rechtsherstel als moreel design', 57.

⁶⁹ 'De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd', *Historiek*, accessed 22 June 2024, <https://historiek.net/ns-in-oorlogstijd/129599/>.

⁷⁰ Veraart, 'Rechtsherstel als moreel design'.

⁷¹ Veraart, 57–62.

official NS apologies in 2005, to support these statements.⁷² However, the article is covers only 15 pages, resulting in NS's narrational strategies being an additional subject at most. Still, similarly to the previously discussed publication of Barnouw et al., Veraart does provide various starting points and statements that can be cross-referenced to help in answering the main research question of this thesis, and is therefore of great value.

1.5 Relevance

This thesis on NS's public image management of its role in the transportations during WWII holds both social and academic relevance. Socially, NS's actions during WWII, particularly its role in transporting Jews, Sinti, and Roma to concentration camps, are part of a broader historical narrative of corporate complicity in wartime atrocities, especially within the public transport sector. Investigating how NS has managed its public image post-WWII contributes to ongoing discussions of historical accountability and reconciliation. Moreover, understanding how NS has chosen to portray its past actions can influence societal perceptions of corporate responsibility and the ethical obligations of companies with historical ties to the Holocaust or other wartime atrocities.

Academically, this research addresses a notable lacuna in existing literature, which mostly focusses on NS's actions during the war or legal aspects, leaving a gap in understanding how NS has addressed its post-war image through public image management. Moreover, researching NS's public image management offers methodological insights into corporate historical narratives and public relations strategies regarding WWII and how these aspects interact with existing literature on Dutch WWII memory culture. This thesis provides a case study for analysing

⁷² Veraart, 53.

how a corporation such as NS publicly navigates a sensitive historical legacy and how it engages with the national memory culture.

1.6 Sources

The foundation of this masters' thesis mainly rests upon two types of sources: a selection of primary sources in written form, allowing to study NS's public image management, and interviews with key stakeholders and experts.

The written sources encompass a diverse range of archival material, including the NS archives stored at Het Utrechts Archief (the Utrecht Archives), news archives (Delpher and Nexis-Uni), and visual content from Beeld en Geluid and the NIOD Database. Additional perspectives are derived from organisations like the Westerbork Memorial and the Spoorwegmuseum (Railway Museum), both offering visual and textual materials, while also being key actors in shaping the narrative around this historical issue. Moreover, the *Verslagen Parlementaire Enquête Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945 (Reports Parliamentary Inquiry Government Policy 1940-1945)*, preserved at the Nationaal Archief (National Archives), sheds light on the official investigation into NS's WWII-role and NS's response regarding this subject.

Besides the archival materials, several prominent publications were main primary sources on NS's postwar public image management, such as Adolf J.C. Rüter's book *Rijden en Staken: NV Nederlandsche Spoorwegen tijdens oorlogstijd (Riding or Striking: NV Nederlandsche Spoorwegen During Wartime)*, published in 1960.⁷³ It must be noted that these books do not cover research on NS's public image management, but that NS had an influence, or attempted to have, on these publications, making it a direct example of its public image strategies.

⁷³ A. J. C. Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, 1st ed. ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960).

In addition to written sources, interviews were conducted to provide a contemporary perspective on the subject, gathering information and personal experience from five experts and stakeholders. The details of these experts and stakeholders can be found in Appendix II. This approach to complementing oral sources introduced the potential for new or more detailed insights, enriching the overall depth of the research.

However, it is important to recognise a potential limitation in the available sources, particularly the possibility of missing information regarding what NS has not explicitly stated on this specific topic. This gap may affect the comprehensiveness of the available archival material, as the potential absence of certain perspectives or undisclosed information from the NS could impact the overall depth of the analysis. While reliance on archival materials and public statements is valuable, it is necessary to approach the sources critically, acknowledging the potential biases or omissions in the historical record and accounting for the limitations posed by the potential unspoken or undocumented aspects of the NS's narrative on its wartime role.

1.7 Methods

The research methodology comprises a historical study of the developments in NS's public image management related to WWII, with the aim of constructing a comprehensive timeline outlining trends, pivotal moments, and the public image strategies employed by NS throughout different periods. This includes examining public image management regarding NS resistance activities and other WWII aspects to highlight contrasts and developments in NS's public image management concerning the transportations of Jews, Sinti, and Roma, which remains the central focus of this research.

This includes a hermeneutic, interpretive, analysis of archival data from diverse archives as mentioned previously, including the NS archives, NS website, NIOD Database, Beeld en Geluid, Delpher, and NexisUni. The NS archives offered policy documents, minutes of meetings and workshops, internal and external correspondence, and official NS publications. The Nationaal Archief provided a digitised version of the interrogations conducted for the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission Government Policy 1940-1945. The NIOD Database and Beeld en Geluid archives provided various (AV-) media sources, and Delpher and Nexis Uni contained news articles from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries respectively, enriching the historical context – and NS’s public responses – and yielding a comprehensive dataset.

Furthermore, five interviews with stakeholders and experts on this topic were conducted. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a balance between guided questioning and open-ended responses. They were conducted in Dutch, and were filmed, all with proper informed consent. The stakeholders and experts were selected on their professional, mostly academic, experience with the subject (Appendix II). For each interview an interview guide was used that was tailored to the specific area of expertise or experience of the interviewee, though all covered key themes such as NS’s historical actions, public image strategies, and the broader influence of Dutch memory culture. Tailoring the interview guides was crucial as some interviewees were experts and approached the topic from the perspective of a researcher, others had personally and professionally been involved in the topic, which required an oral history approach. The data from the interviews, after having been transcribed and having been analysed thematically, was triangulated with other primary and secondary sources, to validate the findings.

Finally, in Chapter IV of this thesis, covering the period from 1995 to the present, historical web research was utilised as an additional method. This approach focussed on examining the presence and updates related to WWII on the NS website,

using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine to retrieve and compare digitally recorded versions of NS's informational webpages. The goal was to assess changes in content and phrasing over time, aiming to reveal narrational developments from NS's perspective on its wartime history, particularly concerning the transportations. However, an important limitation is the potential gaps in archived web content due to the sporadic nature of web crawling by the Wayback Machine, which may not capture every webpage update.⁷⁴ Therefore, while historical web research provided valuable insights, its use was supplementary rather than central to this thesis.

In the following chapters, this thesis will explore NS's public image management during 1945-1960, 1960-1994, and 1995-present in Chapters II, III, and IV respectively. The main findings will be summarised in Chapter V, where they will be examined in the context of literature on Dutch memory culture and public image management. Additionally, insights on future implications for NS will be provided. Finally, Appendix I encompasses a chronological overview of NS Presidents mentioned in this thesis and an alphabetical overview of institutions and other people related to NS. Appendix II contains the details of the interviewees.

⁷⁴ Noor Hazarina Hashim, Jamie Murphy, and Peter O'Connor, 'Take Me Back: Validating the Wayback Machine as a Measure of Website Evolution', in *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2007* (Vienna: Springer Vienna, 2007), 435–36, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-69566-1_40.

Chapter II:
Selective Memory: NS and Public Image Management in the Post-
War Recovery Era
(1945-1960)

This explanation of the course of events seemed desirable to me, not only as an explanation of the slowness [of publication], but also to make it clear that the following is not consistent with the vision of the Nederlandse Spoorwegen as an institution.¹

These are telling words from Rüter's preface in his publication from 1960 titled *Rijden en staken: de Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd* (*Riding and Striking: The Nederlandse Spoorwegen in Wartime*; from here known as *Riding and Striking*). Indeed, Rüter's work uncovered a narrative that differed from the idealised portrayal NS sought to maintain after the war, highlighting inconsistencies between NS's maintained public image and its actual wartime behaviours.

The years after the liberation are most often described as a period of 'silence' in the Netherlands, with a focus on (material) recovery. In-depth and critical discussions on the past years of war were, according to recent scholarship, not prevalent in the public debate of that time.² When addressing the war, the emphasis was on the united struggle against the oppressor and on those who had made the sacrifice of their lives. Mainly killed resistance members and soldiers were the centre of rituals and monumental attention, thus highlighting the 'heroic deeds'. These aspects developed into a 'resistance myth', or resistance narrative, resulting in Dutch WWII memory to be forced to fit the framework of this dominant ideology. The war had been a 'national' event; a period of oppression and resistance of which the country had emerged united.³ Within this memory culture, there was no room for the events that were difficult or impossible to fit into the narrative of heroism and national resurrection; thus, these experiences, such as those from the Jews, Sinti,

¹ Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, XI (preface).

² Withuis, *Erkenning*, 8; Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 347–48.

³ De Keizer and Plomp, *Een open zenuw*, 14; Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 726–32; Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 7–8.

and Roma, were simply not discussed.⁴ In this context, the activities and roles of institutions like NS during WWII became a sensitive and complex issue.

This chapter seeks to answer the first sub-question: *How did NS manage its public image and address its WWII role in the immediate post-war period (1945-1960)?* This is answered, first, by outlining the corporate culture and historical context of NS during this period and providing context for NS's situation shortly after the war. Subsequently, two specific instances are highlighted as exemplary cases illustrating how NS communicated regarding its role in WWII, specifically focussed on the transports. First, the Parliamentary Inquiry (1946-1955) will be discussed, in which, amongst others, NS President Hupkes was interrogated regarding NS's behaviour during wartime. Second, Rüter's aforementioned publication *Riding and Striking* will be covered, with a focus on NS's attempts to alter and prevent the publication. These two case studies are then utilised to draw conclusions aimed at addressing the first sub-question.

2.1 Contextualising NS: Corporate Structure and Mentality

NS, formally the N.V. Nederlandsche Spoorwegen, was officially established on August 2, 1937, following a merger of the HSM and the Staatsspoorwegen. At that time, the State was the only financial stakeholder that had full control over the N.V. (Naamloze Vennootschap; Public Limited Company).⁵ Therefore, NS was a state-owned company; something which would not change until 1995-2002, from which point on NS became a privatised company with the State as its sole shareholder.⁶

⁴ Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 25.

⁵ W. Van den Broeke et al., *Het spoor: 150 jaar spoorwegen in Nederland*, ed. J. A. Faber, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1989), 48–49.

⁶ 'Inrichting Corporate Governance | Over NS | NS', Nederlandse Spoorwegen, accessed 5 June 2024, <https://www.ns.nl/over-ns/corporate-governance/inrichting-corporate-governance-bij-ns.html>; 'Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS)', accessed 5 June 2024, https://www.parlement.com/id/vipwtmurc6wi/nederlandse_spoorwegen_ns.

After the merger in 1937, it was decided that the former Presidents of HSM and the Staatsspoorwegen would be the new co-Presidents of NS. However, after one of them suddenly died in November 1937 and the other sought retirement, the State, being the only shareholder, had to find a new President for NS. Although NS's Board of Directors had its eyes on Willem Hupkes, the Dutch government appointed Jan Goudriaan, an 'outsider', with the goal to break the ingrained corporate culture at the Railways. This appointment was overshadowed by strong objections from NS's Board of Directors. Goudriaan, widely seen as the founder of modern business administration in the Netherlands, had no prior experience with or knowledge of railways, creating a stark contrast with Hupkes who had been educated as a mechanical engineer and who was Chief of Traction at NS.⁷ As Evelien Pieterse, current Head Curator of the Spoorwegmuseum (Railway Museum), stated in her interview: 'As the President of the Railways, you had to at least be able to design a locomotive. If you couldn't do that, you were simply out of luck, because you absolutely had to be an engineer.'⁸ Therefore, in this period, NS can be described as a technocratic company, with President Goudriaan as the ultimate exception.⁹ However, since Goudriaan preferred to have additional support as NS President from individuals with more familiarity with the company, acknowledging his lack of railway experience, Hupkes and Van Rijckevorsel – NS Head of Transportations – were appointed as directors alongside him, making the actual management of NS threefold during these years leading up to WWII.¹⁰

In addition to being technocratic, NS had a strong and clear hierarchical structure, which almost resembled the military. As Guus Veenendaal, former Company Historian of NS, explained in his interview, this mindset was due to the

⁷ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 34–35.

⁸ Anne Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse, Filmed interview, 3 May 2024.

⁹ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 35.

¹⁰ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, 35.

strict organisational discipline where every employee, from the lowest to the highest ranks, had a clearly defined role and was expected to follow orders precisely, without deviation. After all, deviating from these orders could lead to lethal accidents. The hierarchical structure and military-like mindset, combined with NS being a ‘family business’, as people worked there often from grandfather and father to son, simultaneously made it very difficult to go against orders, as employees were deeply ingrained in a culture of strict obedience and adherence to the established corporate structure and mindset.¹¹ This corporate culture and mindset serves as a the key backdrop for explaining NS’s public image management in the immediate post-war years and later, as it had implications for later decision making processes and the NS management’s behaviour concerning its WWII-role.

2.2 NS During the German Occupation

On May 15th, 1940, the Dutch Army surrendered to the Germans, marking the beginning of the German occupation in the Netherlands, which would last almost five years. In the chaotic first days of the occupation, NS approached Commander-in-chief of the Dutch Armed Forces General Winkelman to determine NS’s attitude towards the occupier after the capitulation. General Winkelman and Colonel Van Alphen stated that NS had to resume business in the interest of the Dutch people, as NS was indispensable for food transports and work, being one of the largest employers at the time.¹² As for such, it would be best for NS to comply with the German demands, in order to keep the management in Dutch hands and to serve the Dutch people. On May 20th, the NS management informed its personnel of the decision to resume business under German supervision by distributing a work order.

¹¹ Anne Knoop, Interview with Guus Veenendaal, Filmed interview, 8 May 2024.

¹² Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, 20; Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 41.

The work order declared: ‘We exert our utmost strength, in loyal cooperation with the German authorities, to ensure that the Nederlandsche Spoorwegen company can resume operations across the entire network as soon as possible.’¹³ The chosen words ‘loyal cooperation’ would later play a significant part in the controversies that arose surrounding NS’s role in the war, as they exactly covered the grey area of NS’s behaviour and whether it should be categorised as (economic) collaboration.

Although matters for NS seemed briefly to be back to somewhat normal, a forced changing of the guard took place in the autumn of 1940. In October of that year, Goudriaan was taken hostage by the Germans and was brought to Buchenwald in retaliation for the arrest of Germans in the Dutch East Indies.¹⁴ After several months of captivity, he was released, but the German leadership prohibited him from interfering with NS. Shortly afterward, he was dismissed by *Reichskommissar* Seyss-Inquart. Hupkes continued as acting NS President alongside Van Rijckevorsel for the remainder of the war.¹⁵

As the war and occupation dragged on, the demands of the Germans regarding the railways grew larger and more urgent. Initially, this mainly concerned physical railway materials, such as steel rails and superstructure materials. However, on July 15, 1942, the first deportation train departed from Kamp Westerbork, carrying 1,132 Jews as forced passengers with the final destination of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. This train marked the beginning of the systematic and large-scale deportation of Jews living in the Netherlands, as ordered by the Nazi’s and as (partly) executed by NS.¹⁶ Adolf Eichmann, who organised the deportations of Jews throughout Europe from Berlin,

¹³ Jan Goudriaan, *Vriend en Vijand: Herinnering aan de Nederlandsche Spoorwegen 1938-1948* (De Bezige Bij, 1961), 108.

¹⁴ Goudriaan, 124–25.

¹⁵ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 44–45.

¹⁶ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, 49–59.

was satisfied: the trains from the Netherlands ‘rolled at the beginning so beautifully that one could say it was a splendour.’¹⁷ The central location of Jewish persecution in the Netherlands can be assigned to Kamp Westerbork, which from 1942 to 1944 can rightly be classified as a deportation machine. *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Ferdinand Aus der Fünften stated that ‘all roads lead *through* Westerbork’.¹⁸ Therefore, Westerbork and its transports are closely intertwined with NS’s role in the Holocaust; though it should be noted that, in contrast to the deportation trains *from* Kamp Westerbork, considerably less is known about the transports *to* Westerbork. The overview of incoming (NS) transports has, in fact, not been completely preserved.¹⁹ Still, NS had a considerable role in the transportations of Jews, Sinti and Roma – and other groups targeted by the Nazi’s – during the Holocaust, illustrated by the invoice sent by NS to the German occupier for one of the ‘Beförderung von Juden’, meaning the transportation of Jews (Figure 2.1).²⁰ As Loe de Jong phrased it in his seminal work *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog (The Kingdom of the Netherlands During the Second World War)*: ‘The fact is that the entire process of persecution of Jews and Jewish deportations cannot for a moment be separated from the cooperation provided by bodies of the Dutch government and by government and semi-government companies such as the Nederlandsche Spoorwegen.’²¹ Based on NS’s strong hierarchical organisation and the obedient and adherent mindset of its personnel, it is almost a given that the employees would not take action, for example against the

¹⁷ ‘Nederland: het hoogste aantal Joodse slachtoffers in West-Europa’; Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 59.

¹⁸ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 60–69.

¹⁹ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, 74.

²⁰ ‘Invoice to Germans of Transports of Jews by NS’, 10 June 1944, 077 - Generalkommissariat für das Sicherheitswesen (inventory number: 804), NIOD.

²¹ Loe De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Deel 7. Mei ’43 - juni ’44. Eerste helft*, vol. 7 (’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 369.

transports or other German directives, without receiving a direct signal from above, being: the NS management.

N.V. NEDERLANDSCHE SPOORWEGEN
TE UTRECHT

FACTUUR N^o 47347 | 8

B 216/6449

DIENST Admin. Afdeling Amsterdam
UTRECHT, 20 Juni 1944

AFD.: II
BUR.: 216

Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung
Amsterdam
Zeich.: *[Handwritten]*
Ding.: 14 JUN 1944
Abg.: *[Handwritten]*
R. Nr.: *[Handwritten]*

Bij correspondentie over deze Afdeling en factuurnummer vermeld
Uw ref.:

Herrn Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des S.D. für die besetzten niederländischen Gebiete
Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung Euterpestraat 99
AMSTERDAM.

DEBET aan de N.V. Nederlandsche Spoorwegen, Utrecht.

OMSCHRIJVING	BEDRAG
Kosten für die Beförderung von Juden während des Monates Mai d.J. laut unterstehender Aufstellung	
4 Mai von den Haag S.S. nach Assen 56 Pers. h. f	5,85 = f 327,60
9 " " A'dam MP " " 113 " " "	4,80 = " 542,40
19 " " den Haag SS " " 37 " " "	5,85 = " 216,45
17 " " A'dam MP " " 72 " " "	4,80 = " 345,60
18 " " A'dam CS " " 58 " " "	4,90 = " 284,20
26 " " A'dam MP " " 59 " " "	4,80 = " 283,20
	1.999,45

Die auf vorstehender Rechnung vom 10. Juni 1944 aufgeführten Transporte wurde vom Referat IV 4 B bestellt und durchgeführt. Die aufgeführten Personenanzahl stimmt mit den hiesigen Unterlagen überein. Es handelt sich um straffällige Juden die dem Lager Westerbork zugeführt wurden. Die richtige Durchführung des Transportes zum Lager Westerbork wird bescheinigt.

Ein tausend neun hundert neun und neunzig Gulden und fünf und vierzig Zent.

Festgestellt
[Handwritten Signature]
44-Untersturmführer und Polizeisekretär

[Handwritten Signature]
44-Untersturmführer

Figure 2.1. Invoice for transportations of Jews sent by NS to the German occupier.²²

²² 'Invoice to Germans of Transportations of Jews by NS'.

This signal from above came on 17 September 1944, coinciding with the start of Operation Market Garden, when the NS management called for its personnel to strike. The direct order to strike came from the exiled Dutch government, which resided in London during the war. Though there had been strikes in the Netherlands before, such as the February Strike in 1941 and the April-May Strikes in 1943, NS had not participated in these, as they had not been officially called for by the Dutch government in London. With the changing military situation in 1944, specifically the ongoing advancement of the Allies, and with the direct order from the government, NS carried out the Railway Strike.²³ Though the Strike was initially meant to last a short time, the failure of Operation Market Garden resulted in it lasting a total of eight months, including the Hunger Winter. Later, it has even been argued that the Strike had worsened the conditions of the Hunger Winter due to the lack of food transports and distributions.²⁴

In sum, NS's difficult position between serving the Dutch people whilst 'loyally cooperating' with the Germans, particularly in facilitating the deportation trains, significantly complicated its historical legacy concerning WWII, especially when also trying to account for its act of resistance: the Railway Strike. Therefore, when posing the question whether the NS management had managed to avoid both collaboration and the loss of independence, the answer should be negative.²⁵ Subsequently, without further touching upon NS's culpability or collaboration, it can be concluded that NS did not get through the war morally unscathed.

²³ Van den Broeke et al., *Het spoor*, 218–19.

²⁴ 'Spoorwegstaking - Kinderen van Versteegh', Spoorwegmuseum, accessed 21 February 2024, <https://www.spoorwegmuseum.nl/collectie/kinderen-van-versteeg/spoorwegstaking/>; Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 145.

²⁵ Van den Broeke et al., *Het spoor*, 218.

2.3 NS After the Liberation

On May 5th, 1945, the Netherlands was officially liberated from the German occupation, which ended German supervision of and interference with NS and ended the Railway Strike that had been ongoing since September of the previous year. The NS workforce was contacted directly on Liberation Day by means of an additional work order. This order acknowledged that the Strike was ‘particularly difficult’ for NS staff and that everyone had to undergo ‘great difficulties and personal losses’. In addition, it stated that NS had to sit idly by and watch as its beautiful company was completely destroyed.²⁶ This likely refers to the Germans having destroyed the vast majority of railway equipment towards the end days of the occupation. Another notable aspect, nevertheless appropriate for a work order on Liberation Day, is the praise of the railway employees for their perseverance and determination during the Strike and the commemoration of fallen employees.²⁷

A day later, on May 6th, NS made its public appearance, by holding a press conference for various newspapers. An article by *Paraat* shows that the press conference was given by Jongstra, NS Press Officer, who provided several noteworthy remarks when asked directly about the transports. Jongstra acknowledged that NS trains had transported Jews, prisoners of war and deportees and that this had been the majority of German transports. However, according to Jongstra, NS President Hupkes and Van Rijckevorsel were not allowed to interfere with these transports unless consulted with the exiled Dutch government. Until then, NS ‘had to be accommodating’, stated Jongstra. Moreover, the fact that NS had been accommodating had ‘completely lulled the enemy to sleep’. Jongstra added that the Jewish Council was informed in a timely manner of each transport to

²⁶ Willem Hupkes and Willem Van Rijckevorsel, ‘Extra work order after liberation’ (Nederlandse Spoorwegen, 5 May 1945), Het Utrechts Archief.

²⁷ Hupkes and Van Rijckevorsel.

Westerbork by NS; a statement that received no further elaboration.²⁸ For context, the Jewish Council served as an intermediary between the occupiers and the Jewish community, conveying orders and directives from the German authorities to Jewish leaders. This effectively made the Council a conduit for anti-Jewish measures imposed by the occupiers.

Consequently, in this first public reaction of NS, a threefold argument can be discerned: (1) NS had not acted on the transports because the government did not order them to, (2) because NS had been accommodating, the Germans had let their guard down which, for example, enabled the Railway Strike to succeed in being a surprise, and (3) NS did everything it could within its power regarding the transports, such as notifying the Jewish Council. Therefore, a day after the liberation, NS polished its public image by avoiding the issue of responsibility concerning the transports by referring to external factors such as the government, and by highlighting positive acts that served as a more heroic narrative.

Further underlining NS's heroic narrative, one of the first public speeches that NS President Hupkes gave after the liberation was on September 17, 1945; the one-year commemoration of the declaration of the Railway Strike. As might be expected, this speech covered the courageous deeds during the Strike and about the (material) losses that were suffered.²⁹ Not a word was said directly about NS's controversial transports, only that the Netherlands had 'suffered greatly from the lack of freedom that is indispensable to us; deported en masse, robbed, starved, thrown into prison, tortured and murdered, but the Germans did not get us down'.³⁰ Consequently, there is a clear focus on valour and suffering, connected to a strong sense of collective identity.

²⁸ 'Spoorwegen', *Paraat*, 6 May 1945.

²⁹ Willem Hupkes, 'Speech Hupkes First Remembrance Railway Strike', 17 September 1945, Het Utrechts Archief.

³⁰ Hupkes, 31.

NS's emphasis on commemoration, resistance, and the recognition of damages also emerged in the immediate post-war years as a frequent phenomenon in the established media of the time. Repeatedly, *Polygoon* (newsreel) fragments and newspapers focussed on the reconstruction of the railways, as well as on the commemorations of the Railway Strike.³¹ In addition, NS had more than a hundred commemorative plaques placed at stations, honouring the fallen NS employees.³² Therefore, a focus on reconstructing the railway company emerges as a key theme during this period, reflecting a forward-looking perspective. When NS did publicly focus on the past instead of the future, it was almost exclusively with regard to the commemoration of the fallen railway employees and with an emphasis on acts of resistance. Based on this, it can be said that NS wanted to draw a clear line between WWII and the years that followed.

This intention is further illustrated by Hupkes in an internal letter to the chairman of the Purge Committee. The aim of this Purge Committee was to rid the company of 'wrong' employees. This was not a unique development for that time. As early as 1944, the Dutch government in exile in London developed a 'Purge Decree'. The decision gave certain government officials the authority to strike, suspend or dismiss persons falling under their department if there had been 'expression or behaviour in a National Socialist sense'.³³ What is notable about NS's case, however, is that the NS management itself established its internal committee, against government rules. This could have been to prevent outsiders from interfering with NS, as it was likely apprehensive about a critical examination

³¹ 'De spoorbrug over de IJssel bij Zwolle weer in gebruik genomen', *Polygoon Dutch News*, 10 May 1946, Beeld en Geluid; 'Onthulling Spoorwegmonument', *Polygoon Dutch News*, 23 September 1949, Beeld en Geluid; 'Goederentreinen gaan weer rijden', *Het Vrije Volk*, 14 May 1945; 'Hulde aan onze spoorjongens! Herstel Spoorwegen biedt grote moeilijkheden', *De Waarheid*, 16 May 1945.

³² Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 163.

³³ Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 'Inventaris van het archief van het Ministerie van Justitie: Bureau Juridische Zaken (Zuivering Politie), (1941) 1944-1965 (1983)', 2022, 8.

of the company's behaviour during WWII.³⁴ Consequently, the NS management itself took a seat on the internal Purge Committee, and therefore did not have to answer to this Committee.³⁵

The letter that Hupkes sent to the chairman of this Purge Committee served as an internal response to a complaint filed by the deposed NS President Goudriaan against Hupkes and Van Rijckevorsel. Goudriaan, despite being twice detained by the Germans, had attempted to resume leadership of NS during the final months of the war, by being NS President to the in 1943 liberated south of the Netherlands, resuming (food) transportations in this region.³⁶ He covered his work for NS in his memoirs *Vriend en Vijand: Herinneringen aan de Nederlandse Spoorwegen 1938-1948* (*Friend and Foe: Memories of the Nederlandse Spoorwegen*). However, Goudriaan's attempt to resume leadership of NS after the liberation faced strong resistance from railway personnel, especially from Hupkes as Goudriaan recalled.³⁷ After a week of conflict, Goudriaan gave in and resigned in May 1945, resulting in Hupkes's official succession.³⁸ Considering this context, Goudriaan's complaint should be analysed sceptically, as it can also be categorised as a vindictive attempt to discredit Hupkes and Van Rijckevorsel in retaliation for the conflict of his eventual resignation.

According to his complaint, Goudriaan considered Hupkes, among other things, responsible for transporting prisoners of war and Jews. In his letter to the chairman, written in 1946, Hupkes defends NS policy during the war. Hupkes first dismissed Goudriaan's complaint as revenge-fuelled, and consequently stated that the management did not control NS at the time. According to Hupkes, the transports were outside their command. In addition, the aim of the management would have

³⁴ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 150.

³⁵ Savenije and Vastenhout, 'Beladen transport', 11.

³⁶ Goudriaan, *Vriend en Vijand*, 184–232.

³⁷ Goudriaan, 173.

³⁸ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 147.

been to keep the railway company serving the Dutch people and to help them through the war as well as possible. After all, NS was indispensable for food and work, according to Hupkes. Consequently, he cited several acts of resistance from NS, illustrating that NS did not only cooperate with the Germans. Finally, Hupkes discussed why NS had to be compliant as a company: real obstruction for the Germans could only be achieved through a general strike, therefore ‘the powder had to remain dry’.³⁹ What is interesting about the letter, is that the transports of Jews were not mentioned, only the ‘military transports’.⁴⁰ Concludingly, Hupkes’s words show that the negative practices of NS should have been attributed to the NS management not fully controlling the company or to having to obey the Germans to prevent worse. However, when it comes to positive behaviour, such as the acts of resistance, it suddenly is possible that NS secretly circumvented German influences or openly went against them, creating a stark contrast between the narrative on the transports and the narrative on resistance and the Strike.

In summary, in the first months after the liberation, NS demonstrated a distinct emphasis on commemoration, resistance, and acknowledging inflicted damage. Concurrently, it attempted to delineate between the wartime era and the ensuing period by adopting a forward-looking perspective of recovery and rebuilding, while attempting to address its controversial history only privately. Outwardly, NS focussed on the heroic narrative of resistance, matching the resistance myth that is commonly associated with this period. By doing so, NS controlled its public image by downplaying its agency and (moral) responsibility concerning the transportations of Jews, Roma, and Sinti, and concerning its contribution to the German war efforts. The Railway Strike appears to have been its biggest metaphorical weapon against accusations of collaboration or its

³⁹ Willem Hupkes to J. M. Van Bemmelen, ‘Reaction to Goudriaan’s complaint’, Formal Letter, 12 June 1946, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁴⁰ Hupkes to Van Bemmelen.

controversial role in the persecution transportation of the aforementioned groups, especially during these early post-war days.

2.4 NS Under Parliamentary Inquiry: Hupkes's Testimony

However, despite attempting to keep controversial matters private and striving to avoid the question of (moral) responsibility for the transports, questions about NS's WWII past still arose from outside. The most important external investigation to which NS was subjected, was that of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Government Policy 1940-1945. The reason for the establishment of this Commission was that accountability of the cabinets in exile – during the German rule – to the parliament after WWII was considered necessary. After all, during the period of 1940-1945, there had been no Dutch parliament that had exercised control over the Dutch government, as the Dutch government had fled to London after capitulating to the Germans. The Inquiry would address the 'governmental lacuna'. The proposal for the Commission was adopted in November 1947 and the Commission was constituted and started that same year. It consisted of members of the Dutch parliament. The Inquiry covered a variety of subjects, such as military policy, the departure of the government, neutrality politics, and the financial-economic policy, whilst using sources from the RIOD (Institute for War Documentation), the Armed Forces and (criminal) trials. The Inquiry Commission was initially given one year to complete its investigation, with a deadline of November 1948. However, realising that this timeframe was insufficient, the Commission requested several extensions, with the final deadline extended to January 1, 1957, on which day the results of the Commission were published.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 'Inventaris van het archief van de Parlementaire Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945, 1947-1956 (1981)', 2021.

In this context, several prominent NS figures were called as witnesses, as NS was still under direct control of the State and had answered to the exiled Dutch government during the war. More specifically: Hupkes was interrogated in his role as (acting) NS President during the war, regarding NS policies. The minutes of Hupkes's interrogation in 1953 contain revisions and corrections, most likely done by Hupkes himself. Hupkes was asked point-blank by the chairman of the Commission whether the issue of 'the transport of Jews' had ever been the subject of discussion with the official authorities. Hupkes answered 'No, never', with 'never' later having been crossed out, indicating a reluctance to make a definitive statement about NS's involvement in the transports. Hupkes's explanation for his denial was that Germans could instruct a station master to drive a train ahead without indicating the destination. This would also have been the case with the transport of Jews, consequently diminishing NS's actual agency regarding the transportations. In addition, according to Hupkes, these transports had already been going on for 'about ten days or so' before it dawned on him that NS was transporting Jews, suggesting (the potential pretention of) limited knowledge concerning these transports.⁴²

The chairman consequently keenly asked whether the transport of Jews had not presented itself as a problem at the Railways. Hupkes believed that people in 1953 would look at it very differently than it was looked at during the war. Moreover, he stated that the President of the Amsterdam Tram had received a note from the Jewish Council asking if he wanted to 'please' (after revision, 'please' was crossed out) transport the Jews, because otherwise they would have had to walk.⁴³ This can be seen as part of a broader argument of not having acted alone – after all, there were many Dutch corporations and other actors collaborating with the Germans – and of actually doing the Jews a favour by transporting them instead

⁴² 'Dr.Ir. W. Hupkes, vraagpunten G en H, 1953 aug. 18', 18 August 1953, 5, Nationaal Archief.

⁴³ 'Dr.Ir. W. Hupkes, vraagpunten G en H', 5.

of them having to undergo long marches to the camps. Hupkes, on behalf of NS, answered clearly by pointing the finger to another exemplary company who struggled with the same moral issues.

Furthermore, Hupkes added that no one had ever spoken to him about the transports and that NS had never been approached about it, again avoiding blame by sidestepping the issue of responsibility.⁴⁴ The inquiry about the transports was concluded with the question: ‘The problem that people were being exported from the country, who, like every Dutch person, had all rights and freedoms in our country, did not therefore present itself to you as a violation of the Landoorlogreglement?’⁴⁵ The Landoorlogreglement (Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land), adopted at the Hague Convention II in 1899 and revised at the Hague Convention IV in 1907, provided guidelines for the conduct of parties involved in armed conflict, including rules governing occupation.⁴⁶ Article 52, in particular, limited the occupier’s authority to demand personal services from the population to meet the needs of the occupying forces, unless such demands compelled participation in military actions, in which case the population had the implicit right to refuse. However, these Regulations were outdated and not fully applicable to the situation of complete (German) occupation. Similar circumstances applied to the Aanwijzingen (Directions), which were somewhat akin to the Regulations.⁴⁷ A case can even be made for the possibility of the NS management not knowing of these Regulations and Directions. Goudriaan stated in his memoirs that neither he himself, Hupkes or Van Rijckevorsel had any

⁴⁴ ‘Dr.Ir. W. Hupkes, vraagpunten G en H’, 5.

⁴⁵ ‘Dr.Ir. W. Hupkes, vraagpunten G en H’, 7.

⁴⁶ ‘Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907.’, accessed 17 June 2024, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907>.

⁴⁷ Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, 17–19.

knowledge of the Regulations except for maybe its name. Regarding the Directions, they had never heard of it.⁴⁸

To the chairman's question, Hupkes originally answered: 'It wasn't a problem for us. One of the people from the union was with me and once told me that the transport of Jews to the camps had been running for a long time. I asked the direct transport employees about this, but I did not consider this a problem.' Hupkes's response clearly does not seem to answer the chairman's inquiry concerning the Land War Regulations. Nevertheless, this might be explained by the fact that the Regulations seemed to be (partly) unknown for NS during the war. However, the original answer was crossed out and a different answer was written above it: 'No, we did not see it that way' (Figure 2.2).⁴⁹ Not only is this answer much more superficial and reserved, it also shifts the narrative perspective from the individual, Hupkes, to the company, NS, without revealing that they seemed to have had no detailed knowledge of the Regulations.

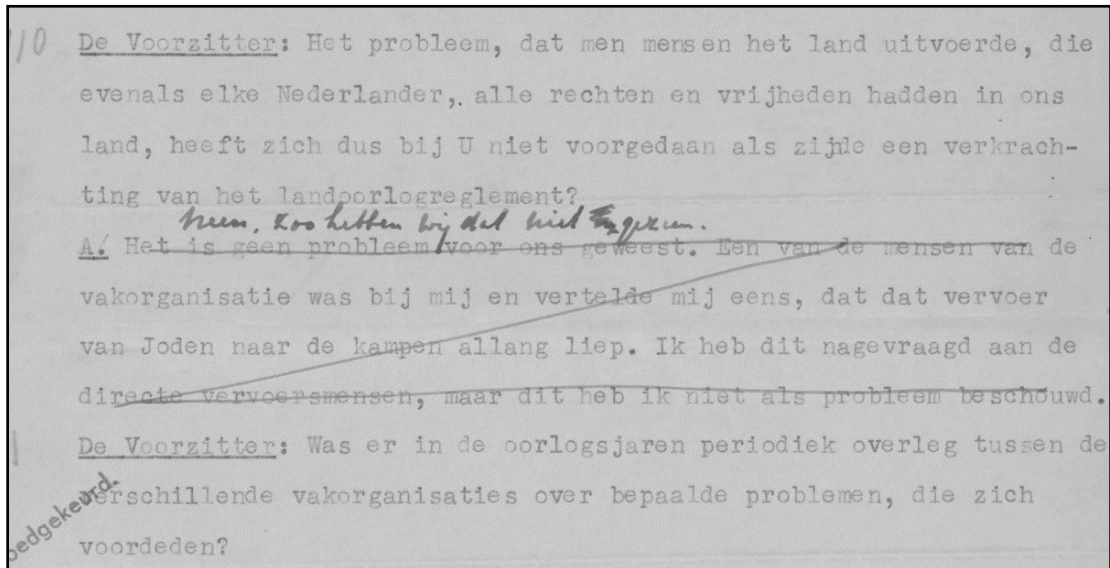


Figure 2.2. Original and revised answer by Hupkes.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Goudriaan, *Vriend en Vijand*, 104.

⁴⁹ 'Dr.Ir. W. Hupkes, vraagpunten G en H', 7.

⁵⁰ 'Dr.Ir. W. Hupkes, vraagpunten G en H', 7.

His answers give the impression that Hupkes, on behalf of NS, was closing ranks together with the NS management regarding the accountability for NS policies and actions during WWII. They also correspond with his explanation for the Purge Committee in 1946 and Jongstra's press conference after the liberation in 1945, therefore giving the impression that only one storyline of NS was released to the public, attempting to shape NS's public image into this single narrative. This storyline mostly entailed a focus on resistance such as the Strike and NS's indispensability for the Dutch people, providing an explanation for NS's initial compliancy to the Germans. Questions about the transportations were redirected by assigning responsibility to the Dutch government or by stating that NS had little knowledge or agency. Based on this information, it can be assumed that the issue of the transports of Jews and the subsequent (public) handling of it had been discussed internally; at the very least, NS's (public) approach regarding the subject must have been discussed in order to create one narrative. Drawing a line and moving on seemed to be NS's adopted strategy, with the exception of highlighting positive memories connected to resistance or other heroic feats.

When the complete *Reports of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry* were published in 1955, the answers of the NS management, and especially those of Hupkes, were widely covered in the newspapers. The articles quoted some crucial passages from Hupkes's interrogation, such as the refusal of the controversial transports never having been considered. NS was criticised in the *Reports of the Commission* for the 'laconic way' in which the NS management had responded to the transports; a statement which was frequently quoted in newspaper articles.⁵¹ Therefore, NS's attempts to justify its accommodating role as a means to

⁵¹ 'Men kon maar een maal staken: Te weinig verzet bij NS tegen Duitse deportaties?', *Dagblad voor Noord-Limburg*, 5 November 1955; 'Aangrijpende getuigenis van trouw der spoorwegmensen', *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser courant*, 8 November 1955; 'Houding Spoorwegen onder de loupe: Weigering Jodentransporten is nooit overwogen', *De Telegraaf*, 5

appease the Germans ended up revealing its inaction on morally contentious issues. However, it should be noted that NS also received ample praise in the Reports, especially concerning the Railway Strike.⁵² This praise seamlessly aligned with the resistance myth or resistance narrative that was very prevalent and dominant at the time and provided support for NS, as the *Reports* were the official words of the government. Nevertheless, as said, the newspapers mostly covered the criticisms on NS, which contradicts both the notions of silence and resistance, simultaneously contrasting the more nuanced outcomes of the *Reports*.

NS did not appear to publicly respond to this media storm. This could perhaps also have been due to the fact that it was attempting to avoid further controversy regarding another development around these years: the publication of the book *Riding and Striking* by A.J.C. Rüter, something that at the time was seeming to develop into a bigger PR drama than the Reports of the Commission. Moreover, the media storm on the Reports lasted very shortly, without heavily implicating NS in the long term.

2.5 Contested Historiography: Rüter's War Documentation

Shortly after liberation, the newly established RIOD quickly created a list of important topics that required study, related to the war. Central to these topics were the three major strikes that embodied the (mythical narrative of the) spirit of Dutch resistance: the February Strike, the April-May Strikes, and the Railway Strike. As mentioned, the Railway Strike was declared by the Dutch government in exile. NS wanted to avoid being portrayed as passive and submissive to the Dutch government, as that would have implied that the exiled government ran the

November 1955, Het Utrechts Archief; 'De Spoorwegstaking: Naast grote lof voor NS ook blaam', *Eindhovensche dagblad*, 5 November 1955.

⁵² Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 152.

operations of the Strike; the exact aspect NS had prided itself on. NS desired a scientifically sound book about ‘their’ strike, which the RIOD, with funding from NS, could provide.⁵³ Consequently, NS asked the RIOD to write a war documentation of the Railway Strike in 1944-1945. In September 1946, the RIOD assigned this task to Adolf Rüter, professor of Dutch History at the University of Leiden, who was considered an expert in railway history due to receiving his doctorate in 1935 on a thesis about the railway strike of 1903.⁵⁴

However, after extensive research for two years, Rüter indicated to the RIOD that he was of the opinion that the scope of the research had to be expanded, because ‘the true epic of the strike could only be described if [he] disposed of a myth’. The Railway Strike could only be described if the years of occupation and the relationship between NS and the Germans were also taken into account. Thus, ultimately it became a war documentation of NS from 1940-1945.⁵⁵ The first version of the manuscript was completed in 1954 and was shared with the RIOD and with the NS management, at that time with F.Q. Den Hollander as NS President, Hupkes’s successor. That is when, as described by Rüter in his preface, ‘difficulties of a completely different nature began’, indicating that NS strongly disagreed with what was written in this manuscript, further supported by the example in the introduction of this chapter.⁵⁶

Before covering the contents of the publication, it is important to explain which sources – relevant to this thesis – Rüter used in his book. The previously discussed *Reports of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Government Policy 1940-1945* have been included, which Rüter labelled as a ‘gold mine’.⁵⁷ In

⁵³ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, 152–53.

⁵⁴ Huygens Instituut: Resources, ‘Rüter, Adolf Johann Cord’, accessed 26 March 2024, <https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn1/rueter>.

⁵⁵ Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, VII (preface).

⁵⁶ Rüter, X (preface).

⁵⁷ Rüter, VII.

addition, Rüter had several conversations with various prominent NS figures between 1946 and 1948, including Hupkes, Giesberger, Landskroon, Joustra and Den Hollander (see Appendix I for more details). He also spoke to 234 (anonymous) people and used the NS purge file. Finally, he was given access to Hupkes's and Giesberger's personal archive, something Rüter acknowledged as a generous gift.⁵⁸

What exactly did Rüter write about the Railway Strike and NS in general? What were the crucial passages, especially regarding the transports? In fact, he did not write much about the transports, especially in relation to the size of the book itself (478 pages). However, what Rüter did write about it, later turned out to trigger several severe points of criticism from NS. In Chapter II, entitled 'Loyal Cooperation', using NS's own words from its aforementioned work order, he described the considerations of NS to cooperate with the Germans during the occupation. The NS management would accept transporting for the Germans, as long as it could control the railways as a Dutch company and as long as the Germans did not make demands which could not be expected. Rüter summarised NS's policy during the occupation as 'compromise politics'.⁵⁹ He accompanied the term with the claim that the retention of the staff and the purity of the company was the goal of the management, not the prevention of the deportation of Dutch citizens.⁶⁰ In fact:

It was not a heart-lifting spectacle that NS provided the transport of German troops, artillery and tanks, transported Dutch workers, Jews, political prisoners and prisoners of war, [that they] were an instrument in the plundering of their own country and in the integration of that country into the German war economy.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Rüter, VIII-X (preface).

⁵⁹ Rüter, 50.

⁶⁰ Rüter, 17, 48–52.

⁶¹ Rüter, 51.

While this is a bold statement from Rüter, it stands out as one of the few in the entire book. Nevertheless, despite its brevity, it effectively summarised NS's dark history.

Many passages from the manuscript were a sore point for NS, as can be evidenced from the correspondence between the (former) NS President(s), the RIOD, and Rüter, spanning from 1953 to 1959. The correspondence also shows that NS was under the impression that Rüter's publication would be its property, as NS initially paid for it.⁶² Though, at first glance, this might appear as a copyright issue, it should more likely be considered as one of NS's main arguments why the publication had to align with NS's narrative of WWII and its role. This impression is followed by the demand that NS's opinion regarding Rüter's historiography should be taken into account.⁶³ To ensure this, Den Hollander set up an 'NS Assessment Committee' for the manuscript, consisting of, among others, former NS President Hupkes.⁶⁴ In 1955, Den Hollander, addressing the RIOD, even added force with the statement: 'For the record, I hereby confirm that the publication by your institute [RIOD] will only see the light after I have agreed.'⁶⁵

In 1956, Hupkes, on behalf of the NS Assessment Committee, sent Rüter the substantive objections to the first version of the manuscript. In the letter, Hupkes wrote that Rüter's historiography had disappointed them because it provided a distorted picture of what actually happened during the war. Rüter would also use the book to prove his own opinion on the subject, according to the Committee. Hupkes concluded his letter with the position that the book should not be accepted

⁶² F. Q. Den Hollander to Willem Hupkes, 'Finances and rights regarding manuscript "Rijden en staken"', Formal Letter, 23 January 1953, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁶³ Den Hollander to Hupkes.

⁶⁴ F. Q. Den Hollander to RIOD, 'Proposal for NS Assessment Committee regarding Rüter's manuscript', Formal Letter, 28 April 1954, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁶⁵ F. Q. Den Hollander to RIOD, 'Reminder of agreements regarding publication "Rijden en staken"', Formal Letter, 14 October 1955, Het Utrechts Archief.

as a correct neutral history of the Railways in wartime. As an appendix, the Assessment Committee added a large stack of comments and notes with the instruction to Rüter to implement these changes before a possible publication could be considered again.⁶⁶ When the RIOD indicated in September 1957 that Rüter had made adjustments where it seemed responsible, and would now submit a second version of the manuscript, Den Hollander responded (not until December 1958) that he could only agree with the publication if Rüter took into account the changes that the Committee – again – had proposed.⁶⁷ Den Hollander wrote: ‘Since complications could become unpleasant, I hope that further consultation will lead to the full acceptance of these [suggested] changes.’⁶⁸ Because these proposed changes are substantively no different than those for the first version, since Rüter did not change anything content-wise, only the changes for the second version of the manuscript will be highlighted in the next paragraph. This is because the second version of the manuscript is most similar to the final product.

The very first proposed ‘definitely necessary change’ was to change the title of Chapter II, ‘Loyal Cooperation’, to ‘Cooperation with the German Authorities’. After all, according to the Assessment Committee, the first title was misleading because it gave an incorrect impression of the relationship between NS management and German authorities (even though it was a direct quote from its own work order).⁶⁹ Another proposed change, following one of Rüter’s statements regarding cooperation between NS and the Germans, was the necessary addition that Dutch transports would have suffered seriously from the refusal to cooperate

⁶⁶ Willem Hupkes to A. J. C. Rüter, ‘Feedback and proposed revisions/comments first version manuscript “Rijden en staken”’, Formal Letter, July 1956, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁶⁷ P. J. Van Winter to F. Q. Den Hollander, ‘Notification of revised manuscript of “Rijden en staken”’, Formal Letter, 23 September 1957, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁶⁸ F. Q. Den Hollander to Chairman of RIOD, ‘Second round of necessary revisions concerning second manuscript “Rijden en staken”’, 13 December 1958, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁶⁹ NS Assessment Committee, ‘List with suggested corrections for manuscript “Rijden en staken”’, December 1958, 1, Het Utrechts Archief.

and that German transports would nevertheless have taken place. The management of NS had also been at risk of ending up in the hands of the NSB (the Dutch National Socialist Movement).⁷⁰ Finally, the Committee was critical of Rüter's description of the cooperation of the NS management with the Germans, also regarding the transports of Jews, prisoners of war and military transports, where Rüter wrote: 'The work orders spoke clear language in this respect: the interests of the occupiers were surrounded by the management with every care.' The Committee strongly suggested to include a clarification after the term 'work orders' indicating that they were 'often drawn up on behalf of the Germans', thereby suggesting that the NS management usually had no say in this.⁷¹ Rüter did not apply any of these changes – only the ones he deemed justified, which were mostly small adjustments – to the frustration of NS. In fact, he later stated, supported by the RIOD, that NS 'precisely dictated how the conclusions in the war documentation should have been formulated', something which he, as a historian, would not accept.⁷²

Ultimately, after years of – tumultuous – correspondence about the manuscript, resulting in the delay of the publication of the manuscript for six years, the RIOD decided to wait no longer for approval from NS for the publication, as it did not seem to be in the near future. In March 1959, the RIOD and Rüter approached the Ministry of Education, Arts and Science to obtain authorisation for publication, without the consent of NS. Although NS still attempted to prevent the publication by unsuccessfully requesting the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management to stop the publication, the damage had been done.⁷³ In March 1960, *Riding and Striking* was published, without permission from NS.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ NS Assessment Committee, 2.

⁷¹ NS Assessment Committee, 7–8.

⁷² Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, X (foreword).

⁷³ J. Lohmann to Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, 'Request to prevent publication of "Rijden en staken"', Formal Letter, 9 May 1959, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁷⁴ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 152–55.

With the publication of *Riding and Striking*, the proverbial ‘hell’ broke loose for NS, which was anticipated by Den Hollander’s successor, Lohmann. In 1959, after being informed that Rüter’s work would be published after all and that NS could no longer make a difference, Lohmann wrote to Den Hollander: ‘What we feared has become reality.’⁷⁵ That fear, which can be interpreted as a fear of the uncovering of a vastly different WWII-narrative than the one NS had publicly maintained for years, which could seriously impact its public image, appears to have been justified. After all, immediately after the publication of the book, Rüter’s findings dominated the newspapers; a media storm that exceeded the commotion surrounding the *Reports of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry* in 1955. The findings cited by many newspapers were the exact sore points of NS. For example, the Railway Strike, previously known as one of the largest resistance actions in the Netherlands and the pride of NS, would have been significantly less useful than expected (and may even have partly caused the Hunger Winter of 1944-1945). In addition, the NS management would have wanted to keep NS in its own hands at all costs, even if painful compromises had to be made, such as the transports. The NS management was also said to have carefully carried out the German transports, including – often mentioned by the newspapers – those of Jews and prisoners of war. Finally, it was widely discussed how NS attempted to prevent the publication of the manuscript for six years, which Rüter had covered extensively in his preface, painting a picture of a tight-lipped NS contrasting with an outspoken scientific publication.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ J. Lohmann to F. Q. Den Hollander, ‘Notification of publication “Rijden en staken”’, Formal Letter, 7 November 1959, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁷⁶ “‘Rijden en staken’ betreurd door spoorwegmensen’, *Algemeen Dagblad*, 2 April 1960, Het Utrechts Archief; ‘Opzienbarend boek onder protest NS: Spoorwegstaking (‘44) bracht Duitsers geen schade’, *Het Binnenhof*, 2 April 1960; ‘Rapport “Rijden en staken 1940-1945” van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie’, *De nieuwe Limburger*, 2 April 1960; ‘NS in eigen handen houden was het eerste doel van de spoorwegdirecteur Hupkes’, *Limburgsch dagblad*, 2

2.6 Conclusion

Rüter's publication, combined with the *Reports of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry*, revealed or amplified numerous aspects that NS had attempted to avoid addressing publicly, such as the transports. The carefully curated public image of resistance and non-responsibility that was expressed by Hupkes and Jongstra (and NS in general) immediately after the liberation, fell to pieces. However, it is not clear if there was a deliberate effort to keep controversial or difficult things hidden; that would imply a consciousness of guilt from NS's side. It is, given the context of the contemporary memory culture known for silence on difficult subjects and a focus on resistance and recovery, more plausible that NS was genuinely convinced it had acted to the best of its abilities under the circumstances, or at least had tried to convince itself of this. For example, although NS ultimately sought to prevent the publication, it had initially opened its archives and permitted external research on the Railway Strike, intending for it to be documented scientifically. It seems NS was confident that the Railway Strike would largely redeem its controversial wartime actions. NS, perhaps forced to respond openly, reacted only very briefly to Rüter's publication: 'The matter is behind us. The people who took part in it, no longer do so.'⁷⁷ A clear intention of establishing a separation between its past and its future can be discerned from this reaction.

The characteristic years of silence immediately after the war, as discussed in the first chapter, seem to be applicable to most of the patterns at NS. Dutch society's unwillingness to discuss the difficult or morally ambiguous parts of its WWII-history, aligns with NS's attempts to avoid or redirect discussions on its role

April 1960; 'Conflict over spoorwegen in oorlogstijd', *De Volkskrant*, 2 April 1960; "'Utrecht' geeft geen commentaar: Omstreden boek over de NS in jongste oorlog', *Nieuwe Haarlemsche courant*, 2 April 1960.

⁷⁷ "'Rijden en staken" betreurd door spoorwegmensen'; "'Utrecht" geeft geen commentaar: Omstreden boek over de NS in jongste oorlog'.

in the transportations, for example by assigning executive responsibility to the exiled Dutch government. However, in contrast to the Dutch people's traumatic forgetting that resulted in these immediate post-war silences, there seems to have been no traumatic forgetting within NS. Based on the information from the Inquiry and the correspondence regarding Rüter's publication, it is clear that NS precisely knew which parts of its history it wanted to remember and commemorate, and which parts NS wished to distance itself from. Controversial aspects were initially kept private and the official purge was done by NS itself.

Nevertheless, the interrogation by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry and Rüter's research altered the upheld NS narrative; especially when these facets were covered by the media. The media's coverage of the Inquiry and Rüter's publication, both creating a short-lived heated debate, challenges the notion that societal critique of the war only emerged in the 1960s, as depicted by the 'protest generation'-narrative. Moreover, this chapter highlights early post-war instances of inquiry: the media's questioning, the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission's interrogation of NS, and Rüter's lengthy critical and scientific work. These efforts were not spearheaded by a new generation but rather by individuals directly impacted by the war, demonstrating the role of (historical) research in shaping memory. Thus, the theoretical framework suggesting the need for generational shifts for a questioning of the war, overlooks the earlier emergence of critical (and scientific) inquiry. Though there were no long-term consequences for NS after the concurrent media-storms, it is an interesting find that the debate on wartime-roles and possible accountability or complicity for NS as a company, took place ten years earlier than current literature on Dutch memory culture of WWII would indicate. This discrepancy is especially visible in Rüter's publication, who could only describe NS's war history if he 'disposed of a myth', referring to the myth of all-

round resistance, thus breaking with the contemporary memory patterns.⁷⁸ The exemplary cases in this chapter add nuance to the prevailing idea of silence and the main focus on resistance during these years. These 15 years are perhaps best summarised by Barnouw: ‘A train transporting Jews carries more weight than a train halted by a strike.’⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Rüter, *Rijden en staken*, VII.

⁷⁹ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 168.

Chapter III:
Storytelling Through Jubilees, Museums and Advertisements:
NS's Engagement with WWII Memory in the Late Twentieth Century
(1960-1994)

In 1986, a presentation was given to the senior management of NS about the new ‘NS-feeling’, and what that term should entail according to the NS Marketing Team. When asked what the management’s opinion on the presented possibly new ‘NS Image’ was, the note taker wrote down: ‘Reverting to history is not appreciated by quite a few people’, indicating that there was an active reluctance to embrace or emphasise historical aspects of NS’s identity as part of the marketing efforts.¹ This is one example of how NS positioned itself in the late twentieth century towards its own history. In this chapter, several exemplary cases will be analysed to assess how NS addressed its own WWII-history during 1960-1994, in order to draw conclusions aimed at answering the second sub-question: *How did NS manage its public image and address its WWII role in the late twentieth century (1960-1994)?*

As discussed, the 1960s were turbulent years according to numerous authors writing about WWII memory in Dutch society. People supposedly ‘rediscovered’ the war, particularly due to the rise of mass media and (academic) publications. There was a heated debate about who had been on the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ side of history.² Towards the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a shift from the ‘resistance myth’ to a ‘victim cult’ gradually appeared and ‘Auschwitz’ became a universal theme, leading to the Holocaust slowly fitting into the dominant memory culture.³ According to scholars, it took until the 1980s for society to settle down, leading to a more nuanced social debate about wartime handling. This coincided with a demythologisation of the national war memory; the past was no longer interpreted strictly in terms of democracy or dictatorship, or of right or wrong in the war.⁴ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s commemorations and celebrations

¹ G. Hupkes and H. Jacobs to Chairman, Members of MTs and Others, ‘Appendix “NS-feeling”’, Internal Letter; Appendix, 10 December 1986, 1, Het Utrechts Archief.

² Withuis, *Erkenning*, 37; Van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden*, 374–98; Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 32–35.

³ Van Vree, *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*, 10; Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 733–37; Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 33.

⁴ De Keizer and Plomp, *Een open zenuw*, 12–16.

slowly became more diffuse and open to more groups, correlating with the rise of awareness for racism and discrimination as key societal themes, therefore shifting the frames of Dutch WWII-memory.⁵ Almost simultaneously, a ‘struggle for recognition’ began, with various groups advocating for acknowledgement of their wartime suffering, leading to a more complex landscape of commemoration and possible acknowledgements of wrongdoing.⁶

The 125th anniversary will mark the beginning of the chapter. Subsequently, the involvement of NS with the Spoorwegmuseum and the Westerbork Memorial will be highlighted. Next, a major advertising campaign and concurrent public image research will be discussed. Finally, the activities surrounding the 150th anniversary will be described. These specific cases will provide an in-depth perspective on the positioning of NS regarding its WWII history during these years, compared to existing research on Dutch memory culture.

3.1 125 Years of Railways in the Netherlands

After the publication of Rüter’s book *Riding and Striking* in 1960 and the subsequent brief PR drama for NS, the opportunity soon arose for NS to polish its contested public image and to redirect the attention from its role during WWII. This opportunity presented itself four years later, in 1964, when the railways in the Netherlands celebrated its 125th anniversary. To clarify: it was not NS as a company that had existed for 125 years, but it was the first constructed railway in the Netherlands. In any case, NS decided to name 1964 as its jubilee year, just as was done in 1939 in honour of the 100th anniversary. Despite the meagre financial situation at NS during this period,⁷ various activities turned out well for ‘their

⁵ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 739.

⁶ Withuis, *Erkenning*, 77.

⁷ G. Meester et al., ‘Discussion of the Jaarbeurs Exhibition’, 15 August 1963, Het Utrechts Archief.

birthday'. The jubilee celebrations consisted of various components, some of which were open to the public. A newspaper article from that time – unintentionally summarising the fact that NS was changing its public image strategies – had the grand headline: 'The Railways want to prove that life begins at 125'.⁸

At the press conference in June that year, specifically for the jubilee, NS President Lohmann outlined a fairly brief history of the railways in the Netherlands. So brief, that only the early days of the railways in the Netherlands were highlighted, before suddenly jumping to the present.⁹ However, it could be argued that this press conference seemed to mainly be about describing the upcoming jubilee activities; this was perhaps not the ideal moment for an extensive coverage of NS history, let alone a moment to discuss its recent war history. Nevertheless, celebrating 125 years of railways without addressing NS history would be an impossible task. Historical descriptions therefore appeared frequently in the other jubilee activities, albeit containing a very selective narration.

For example, a jubilee book was published, titled *125 Jaar Spoorwegen in Nederland (125 Years of Railways in the Netherlands)*. It was a bird's eye view – it only covered 80 pages – of the history of the railways. Although this might appear to be a popular historiography of NS without academic inclinations, according to NS it was in fact a memorial book. Indeed, it should not be categorised as a full-fledged historiography, given that it skips the entire period of German occupation up until the Railway Strike, the damages, and the reconstruction of the railways.¹⁰ Moreover, the final chapter of the book was completely dedicated to a future perspective of the railways: 'NS in 2039'.¹¹

⁸ 'Spoorwegen willen bewijzen dat het leven begint bij 125', *Brabantsch Nieuwsblad*, 23 June 1964, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁹ Lohmann, J., 'Press Conference 125 Jubilee' (NS, 22 June 1964), Het Utrechts Archief.

¹⁰ J.M. Fuchs, *125 jaar Spoorwegen in Nederland*, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: De Branding, 1964), 15, 44, 51–53, 60, 64–65.

¹¹ Fuchs, 78–79.

NS also set up a large-scale exhibition, titled *Van Stoom tot Stroom (From Steam to Electricity)*, indicating a focus on the technological advancements of the Railways of transitioning to electric-powered railway systems. An exchange of letters between G. Meester, Director of Commercial Affairs of the Jaarbeurs, and NS shows that the initial plan was to hold the exhibition at the Jaarbeurs, a large-scale event venue in Utrecht. Meester went as far as recognising the exhibition as potentially having ‘great propaganda value’ for NS, in which ‘propaganda’ is most likely meant to indicate PR-matters.¹² Ultimately, for several reasons – mostly financial and practical – and in accordance with the Jaarbeurs, it was decided to hold the exhibition in the Spoorwegmuseum in Utrecht.¹³

Internal documents show that there was a close bond between NS and the Spoorwegmuseum, which had already existed for years. While the Spoorwegmuseum originally started as the Stichting Nederlandsch Spoorwegmuseum (Foundation Dutch Railway Museum) in 1927, it was personally revived by NS President Den Hollander in 1954 as the Spoorwegmuseum.¹⁴ Documents from the late 1980s show that NS was one of the largest subsidisers at the time, besides the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture.¹⁵ The Articles of Association of the accompanying Stichting Nederlandsch Spoorwegmuseum show that NS had a great deal of power over the ins and outs of the museum at the time. For example, the Articles dictated that the appointment of a new Museum Director explicitly needed the approval of the current NS President.¹⁶ This strong

¹² G. Meester, ‘Proposal NS Exhibition at Jaarbeurs’, Formal Letter, 6 August 1963, Het Utrechts Archief.

¹³ J. Lohmann to G. Meester, ‘No exhibition at Jaarbeurs’, Formal Letter, 15 October 1963, Het Utrechts Archief; G. Meester to Management NS, ‘Definitive decision on exhibition at Jaarbeurs’, Formal Letter, 5 September 1963, Het Utrechts Archief.

¹⁴ ‘Oprichting van het Spoorwegmuseum’, Spoorwegmuseum, n.d., <https://www.spoorwegmuseum.nl/over/blog/oprichting-van-het-spoorwegmuseum/>.

¹⁵ A. Dronkert to J.C.W. De Jong, ‘Spoorwegmuseum: Changes in Articles of Association and Covenant NS and State’, Formal Letter, 9 July 1987, Het Utrechts Archief.

¹⁶ Dronkert to De Jong, 2–6.

connection with the Spoorwegmuseum is something that can still be seen today: the current Chairman of the Supervisory Board, Rob Luyten, is also Director of Technology at NS. Furthermore, supervisor Bert Groenewegen is also CFO of NS.¹⁷ Pieterse, in her interview, described the current relationship between the Spoorwegmuseum and NS as NS acting ‘conform the governance code, so there is [currently] no substantive involvement [from NS], only an advisory and supervisory role’.¹⁸ Therefore, the contemporary relationship between NS and the Spoorwegmuseum reflects a shift from (indirect) control and direct involvement to a more formalised structure, with a more distanced role for NS. Nevertheless, the relationship between NS and the Spoorwegmuseum in the 1960s until late 1980s, is a key finding for this period, which will be further underscored in the following paragraph.

To continue with the jubilee, Lohmann’s speech for the opening of the exhibition described quite accurately the contents of the exhibition *From Steam to Electricity*, hosted in the Spoorwegmuseum. The first steam locomotives would have been on display, as well as the development of railway techniques regarding trains and stations. All this was to be seen ‘through the eyes of the railwayman’.¹⁹ However, again there was a selective and limited historical narrative. Lohmann’s words show that the WWII-period only appeared in one way: a film about recovery shortly after the war, to remind the public what a ‘gigantic task NS faced’, referring to the German destruction of the railways.²⁰ From another speech, given during the gala evening of the jubilee, where Queen Juliana was present, it seems that NS had pre-emptively decided not to talk about its war history at all. In a historically

¹⁷ ‘Organisatie Spoorwegmuseum’, Spoorwegmuseum, n.d., <https://www.spoorwegmuseum.nl/over/organisatie/>.

¹⁸ Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse.

¹⁹ ‘Speech to be delivered by the president at the opening of the exhibition: “Van Stoom tot Stroom”’, 1 September 1964, Het Utrechts Archief.

²⁰ ‘Speech opening exhibition “Van Stoom tot Stroom”’.

otherwise very detailed timeline, the period between 1930 and 1963 was completely skipped by Lohmann.²¹

The exhibition *From Steam to Electricity* ultimately attracted three times more visitors than the Spoorwegmuseum usually received and was even extended in duration due to its success.²² The possible PR tool predicted by Meester, therefore appears to have been a popular one. This is also evident from the news coverage of the papers and TV-items regarding the jubilee. After all, there were mostly joyous messages about the successful jubilee celebrations of NS.²³ The only negative press surrounding this event was not substantively about NS's narrative of its history, but about a dispute between NS and its staff about the initial refusal of a jubilee bonus, which was ultimately granted.²⁴

Interestingly, Rüter's widely publicised revelations just four years earlier seemed to no longer play any role in the media landscape and the public opinion on NS during or shortly after this jubilee year. Two main aspects, which are intertwined with each other, might have contributed to this lack of public criticism on NS's portrayal of its history. Firstly, not only did NS create an almost complete silence on its wartime role during the jubilee – for example, by skipping the war altogether in prominent speeches or other narratives – but NS constructed a brand-new narrative which enabled shifting the attention to a subject that it wanted to

²¹ 'Speech, delivered by J. Lohmann at the gala evening in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam', 19 September 1964, Het Utrechts Archief.

²² J. Lohmann to Management of N.V. Concrete Factory De Meteor, '125 Years Railways in the Netherlands', Formal Letter, 30 October 1964, Het Utrechts Archief; 'NS-expositie verlengd', *Het Centrum*, 23 September 1964, Het Utrechts Archief.

²³ 'Gala-concert 125-jarige NS werd "lintjesregen"', *Nieuw Haagsche Courant*, 21 September 1964, Het Utrechts Archief; 'Spoorwegherstel boeit vrijwel alle jongeren', *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 1 October 1964, Het Utrechts Archief; 'NS-taak in toekomst steeds belangrijker', 21 September 1964, Het Utrechts Archief; '125 jaar Spoorwegen' (AVRO, 16 September 1964), Beeld en Geluid.

²⁴ 'KBV verbaasd over weigering NS-gratificatie', *Het Centrum*, 24 June 1964, Het Utrechts Archief; 'NS-personeel ontstemd over weigering gratificatie', *De Waarheid*, 25 June 1964, Het Utrechts Archief.

spotlight: technological innovation of the railways. As mentioned before, NS was in a dire financial situation during the 1960s, partly due to the rise of the car, which threatened NS's consumer-base. Since NS was and still is primarily a company, its main objective has always been to generate profit. By flaunting its (intended) innovation, such as the electrification of the railways, NS likely hoped to win back travellers. In this sense, NS's history primarily served to highlight discontinuity; by historicising NS in speeches, in jubilee publications such as *125 Years of Railways*, and through the exhibition *From Steam to Electricity*, it enabled NS to make a distinction between its old, steam-powered identity and its new, electric-powered, environmentally friendly identity, positioning it as a reasonable and attractive alternative to the car. Therefore, the historicization of the railways served mostly as a marketing-instrument. In relation to that, racking up its wartime role, even when solely focussing on the Railway Strike, would not win NS any new customers.

Secondly, the enabling of NS's new innovation-narrative by lack of public criticism on its past in the media, can be attributed to a broader phenomenon in Dutch society: although political collaboration faced severe, often lethal consequences, economic collaboration went largely unpunished.²⁵ In his interview, basing himself on the influential dissertation *Noodzakelijk Kwaad (Necessary Evil)* Meihuizen wrote on this subject, Johannes Houwink ten Cate – expert on the persecution of Jews during WWII – stated that in the Netherlands, the issue of economic collaboration was 'swept under the rug'.²⁶ In the dissertation, Meihuizen explained that immediately after the war, there were plans in the Netherlands to try economic collaborators. However, this initiative was abandoned after a very brief period. There was no unity of prosecution policy and there was considerable

²⁵ Meihuizen, *Noodzakelijk Kwaad: de bestrafing van economische collaboratie in Nederland na de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 739–51.

²⁶ Interview with Johannes Houwink ten Cate, interview by Anne Knoop, Filmed interview, 29 May 2024.

political criticism on the possible trials of economic collaborators. Furthermore, (criminal) trials and purges would have inevitably hindered the post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands. Economic collaboration had become increasingly common during the German occupation, with over half of the Dutch industry working for the Germans by spring 1944. Considering the scale of collaboration, complete trials and purification of economic collaboration would have been impossible, according to Meihuizen.²⁷ Therefore, the plan came to an end before it was even properly executed. In the words of Houwink Ten Cate, by sidelining the issue of economic collaboration in the Netherlands, which was mainly done in the context of economic growth and reconstruction, NS profited from this decision, as it did not have to face the possibility of legal or financial repercussions for its wartime actions, specifically for the financial revenue of the transportations of Jews, Sinti, and Roma.²⁸ Therefore, NS might have been under less scrutiny during this presumed period of commotion around ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, as the scope of this commotion did not (yet) extend to economic collaborators, such as companies. As a result, NS likely managed to reconstruct the narrative surrounding its public image more easily in the 1960s to a more marketing-oriented approach by historicising its own past of the steam train and focussing on technological innovation without inviting external criticisms.

In short, NS made deliberate efforts to reconstruct its public image through this 125th anniversary. WWII was almost completely skipped or only very briefly and selectively highlighted in the form of the Railway Strike and post-war restorations. The emphasis was on the adventurous origins of the railways and NS, contrasting it with its vision of the future in which NS would be a technically advanced company, serving as a serious competitor of the car. The transports or even NS’s

²⁷ Meihuizen, *Noodzakelijk Kwaad: de bestraffing van economische collaboratie in Nederland na de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, 739–51.

²⁸ Interview with Johannes Houwink ten Cate.

time under German occupation was hardly mentioned anywhere in the official publications, nor in the established media of that time. Neither prominent newspapers, TV-items or radio segments questioned the selective narration of NS, despite being particularly critical just four years earlier and the decade before that. However, this might be partially attributed to the lack of persecution of economic collaboration in the Netherlands, allowing NS to adjust the narrative of the company without any external criticism. In any case, this 125th anniversary marks the beginning of NS rebranding itself, which will be covered further in the following paragraphs.

3.2 NS's (Low-Profile) Involvement with Historical Museums

Between the 1970s and 1990s, NS frequently interacted with two museums crucial to NS's history, albeit in a somewhat low-profile manner. On the one hand, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, NS used the Spoorwegmuseum as a PR tool, and on the other hand, NS – silently – contributed to the Westerbork Memorial to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and the transportations.

As mentioned before, the Spoorwegmuseum liked to portray itself as a PR instrument for NS during these years, especially when it needed funds. An example is provided by the Spoorwegmuseum's letters to NS regarding the desired redesign of the museum, to which it attached a 3-page appendix explaining the museum's importance to NS's retelling of its history.²⁹ The Spoorwegmuseum eventually received funds from NS for the extensive redecoration and renovation, partly due to the prelude to the next jubilee, the 150th anniversary, and the possible use of the Spoorwegmuseum for an accompanying exhibition.³⁰

²⁹ J.C.W. De Jong to Management Council of NS, 'Request for Funds for Spoorwegmuseum', Formal Letter, 4 August 1987, Het Utrechts Archief.

³⁰ 'Notes on Redecoration Spoorwegmuseum' (NS, 7 September 1987), Het Utrechts Archief.

Concurrently, NS closely interacted with another party: National Monument Kamp Westerbork. For context, this Monument would be accompanied by the Westerbork Memorial from 1983 and onwards.³¹ Although no documents or correspondence can be found about this in the NS archives, Barnouw claims in his chapters of *The Nederlandse Spoorwegen in Wartime, 1939-1945* that NS contributed materials and technical advice to the construction of the National Monument by artist Ralph Prins, which would be revealed in 1970 by Queen Juliana. According to Barnouw, the contributed NS materials were a buffer block, a railroad tie, rails, and sand; it cost NS 4.685 guilders.³² It can be assumed that these figures are correct, as Dirk Mulder, former Director of the Westerbork Memorial, co-authored the aforementioned book. Hence, Barnouw likely had access to the necessary sources.

Some years later, during the early and late '90s, NS was also involved in the redesign of the Westerbork Memorial, which had opened in 1983, aimed at a more 'museum experience'. This redesign would create a more educative approach to the retelling of the camp's history.³³ NS contributed to this redesign by transferring 1,7 million guilders to the Westerbork Memorial.³⁴ Interestingly, NS never publicly and prominently attached its name to its contributions to Kamp Westerbork during the 1970s-1990s. The lack of publicity could indicate a deliberate effort to avoid the possible question of guilt or accountability associated with its wartime activities.

These NS involvements, both with the Spoorwegmuseum and the Westerbork Memorial, do not seem to have been covered by the media of that time. For Kamp Westerbork, most press releases are about the actual opening of the National Monument or the redesign of the Westerbork Memorial, without

³¹ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 169.

³² Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, 168.

³³ H. Praamstra and B. Zeinstra, 'Bestemmingsplan Kamp Westerbork', 14 September 2017, 7.

³⁴ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 174.

mentioning NS's role in it. However, the lack of media coverage on the relationship between NS and the Spoorwegmuseum is more understandable, as this was a formal, corporate relationship mostly covered by internal documents. Nevertheless, these two instances show a commitment from NS to preserve or perhaps influence (its own) history for the next generations. NS's strong influence on the Spoorwegmuseum indicates the potential to control the narrative surrounding its (wartime) history, of which the 1964 exhibition *From Steam to Electricity* is the most illustrating example. Contrastingly, by providing support to the Westerbork Memorial in a less visible manner, NS may have sought to avoid drawing attention to the more controversial or dark aspects of its history while still participating in commemorative efforts. This suggests a complex and nuanced approach by NS to managing its wartime legacy, balancing commemoration with the desire to control its public image.

3.3 Ad Campaigns and Corporate Image Research

Simultaneously with the involvement in the Spoorwegmuseum and the Westerbork Memorial, NS was busy with an official 'corporate image rebrand' of the company. Although the corresponding internal documents date from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s, the peak of campaign activity and research occurred in the 1980s. However, the earliest attempts to rebrand the company already can be observed at the 125-year jubilee, starting a trend within NS that would be the main focus for at least another 25 years.

Internal documents about a major PR workshop in 1972 and its outcomes show that there was a newly outspoken desire for NS to communicate its actions to the public. This had, as appears from the workshop discussions, a two-fold purpose: (1) NS could accelerate its activities – such as increasing its capacity – if it got the public behind it, because the public opinion would constitute an 'indispensable

contribution'. Moreover, (2) in this way, NS could continue to increase 'immediate passenger mileage sales', which equated to a greater cash inflow. When illustrating the history of the public image of NS, WWII played a very interesting role in its description: 'During the war, when the product shrivelled up, the image briefly grew to heroic proportions', likely referring to the Railway Strike but without mentioning the more controversial aspects of its role. NS's historical image was, according to the workshop attendees, still present behind the company's 'young façade', consequently concluding that their product – NS itself – and many aspects surrounding it still needed improvements and adjustments.³⁵ This indicates that the historical aspects attached to the then current public image were undesirable aspects, at least from a marketing perspective with the goal to increase customers and consequently, profits.

In the 1980s, the next step was taken, and more attention was given to the previously expressed wish of changing its corporate image: a large-scale external market study was rolled out to research the contemporary public image of NS. The results from the market research would be used for a major, years-long public campaign with the aim of rebranding NS. The research report shows the following focus points: (1) NS must manifest itself more powerfully, (2) we must show that NS is a good alternative to the car and (3) we must convey that NS is an organisation worth existing, 'we can be a little proud'.³⁶ An internal document dated at the end of the 1980s and drawn up by NS Chief of Internal and External Relations Geurt Hupkes – coincidentally, a distant relative of former NS President Willem Hupkes – shows that NS distilled a clear positive aspect from the approaching campaign:

³⁵ 'Betreffende het "Rode Boekje" van NS', Internal (Amsterdam: Smith-Bates nv, August 1972), 3–6, Het Utrechts Archief.

³⁶ 'Image van het Spoorwegbedrijf N.V. Nederlandse Spoorwegen (verkorte versie)', Internal (Rotterdam: Instituut voor Psychologisch Marktonderzoek B.V., January 1987), 3, Het Utrechts Archief.

through advertising ‘we can decide what is said about us, to whom, in what way and at what time’.³⁷

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, a report of a presentation in the run-up to the campaign, in which a brainstorming session took place between the campaign leaders and senior management of NS, shows that one specific idea for the campaign was not appreciated by senior management: reverting to its company history.³⁸ This disapproval is not explained further in the document, but it was apparently the only noteworthy discouragement among many recommendations, as no other aspects were advised against. Again, a possible explanation for the rejection of revisiting its history may be that NS had been on the path of ‘modernisation’ since the mid-1960s, especially since the 125th anniversary, therefore creating the discontinuity within its company history. In that case, it would be logical that senior management would prefer not to bring back the image of the steam train or the beginning of the railways for the advertising campaign at the end of the 1980s that was supposed to win over new customers and polish NS’s brand image. Nevertheless, the document does not define *which* history or historical aspects should be avoided. In any case, the comment from senior management was, given previous actions of NS regarding its history, in line with the desire to draw a clear line between ‘history’ and ‘the current NS’. Therefore, it seems as if senior management decided not to take the chance to burn its fingers – again, when we think of Rüter – on its history, regardless of which part of history would be discussed. Consequently, the sole focus on NS being an innovative company would, in NS’s eyes, suffice. The campaign was eventually rolled out through various media outlets. For example, full colour advertisements could be

³⁷ ‘Geurt Hupkes: “Ik ben mede verantwoordelijk voor de files”’, Verkeerskunde, accessed 22 April 2024, <https://www.verkeerskunde.nl/artikel/geurt-hupkes-ik-ben-mede-verantwoordelijk-voor-de-files>; G. Hupkes, ‘Internal Document on Ad Campaign’ (NS, 1987), Het Utrechts Archief.

³⁸ Hupkes and Jacobs to Chairman, Members of MTs and Others, ‘Appendix “NS-feeling”’, 10 December 1986.

found in all magazines such as Panorama and Elsevier Magazine, radio commercials were played, and NS was fully present in TV commercials. This took place over a period of 3 years. The slogan of the campaign was: ‘Where would we be without the train’.³⁹

When the campaign officially started, NS Head of Marketing Passenger Transport G. Haubrich and former Head of Marketing H. Jacobs were interviewed for the magazine *Adformatie*. When asked about the new institutional campaign, they answered: ‘Our view is that nothing stands in the way of us being proud of our product.’⁴⁰ Admittedly, that view is indeed easier to convey if one can define ‘pride’ through its own advertising, therefore not having to discuss matters of which one might perhaps be less proud.

Although this campaign was mainly intended to make NS appear more modern, to appeal to more travellers, and to fight against the car, the campaign presents an intriguing extension of the trajectory NS appears to have pursued following its 125th anniversary. Wanting to completely refresh and rebrand the company fits within the trends of this chapter: reconstructing and controlling the public image surrounding NS. Moreover, these attempts can be considered more popular than the ones seen in the previous period of 1945-1960. Just like the 125th anniversary and the involvements in the museums, the ad campaign did not lead to critical questioning by established media outlets. On the contrary, the established media outlets provided a platform for NS to control its own narrative, at its own time and in its own way, just like G. Hupkes had foreseen.

³⁹ Hupkes, ‘Internal Document on Ad Campaign’.

⁴⁰ ‘Waar zouden we zijn zonder de trein en de NS durft weer’, *Adformatie*, 15 January 1987, Het Utrechts Archief.

3.4 150 Years of Railways in the Netherlands

Interestingly, this chapter started with a jubilee and concludes with one. The 150th anniversary in 1989 was even bigger than the 125th anniversary – perhaps due to better financial circumstances or the opportunity to take greater financial risks. This paragraph will highlight the most illustrative activities of this jubilee.

Again, a jubilee book got published, but this time on a significantly larger scale. This book was compiled by J.A. Faber, and contained a large number of authors, each contributing one chapter to the book. Unlike Fuchs' book *125 Jaar Spoor*, the publication *Het spoor: 150 jaar spoorwegen in Nederland (The Railway: 150 Years of Railways in the Netherlands)* was a more traditional, factual history in which many aspects, such as economics and architecture, of railway life were discussed. Moreover, the emphasis was not so much on commemoration. This emphasis is explained in internal correspondence about the preparations, where the potential book was described as 'a book that has scientific pretensions and will also fascinate a broad audience'.⁴¹ Perhaps because NS had already burned its metaphorical fingers in outsourcing a scientific narrative with the controversy surrounding Rüter's book, it now ensured that the authors' writing process was closely monitored by the NS Supervisory Committee before the first letter was even typed. The Supervisory Committee and Faber were both under management of F.D. Andrioli, Head of the 150th Anniversary Preparations. In an internal letter from 1987, Andrioli explicitly mentioned that the Supervisory Committee 'should not approve or veto, but *should* supervise'. He defined it as 'at set intervals (emphatically) making recommendations about the approach, the main outlines of texts, and consultation [...]'.⁴²

⁴¹ J. A. Faber et al., 'Report: Discussion by editor and supervisory committee with Meulenhoff' (NS, 30 October 1986), Het Utrechts Archief.

⁴² F.D. Andrioli to J.C.W. De Jong et al., 'Jubilee book', Formal Letter, 25 February 1987, 2, Het Utrechts Archief.

Interestingly, the transports of Jews are mentioned in this jubilee book, albeit briefly but with a clear moral stance. Van den Noort wrote explicitly:

The transport for the occupying forces not only involved German soldiers, but also Dutch prisoners of war, [...] and – the blackest spot on the NS blazon – Jews transported to the concentration camps. [...] Anyone who asks whether the NS management has managed to sail between the cliffs of collaboration and loss of independence will have to answer that question with a clear ‘no’.⁴³

Het spoor was provided with a preface written by NS President L.F. Ploeger and was the only official 150th anniversary edition. In addition to the book, NS had a two-part documentary made, the second part of which also focussed on WWII. According to an article of *Het Vrije Volk*, which described the contents of the documentary whilst simultaneously interviewing the director Hans Jacobs, the role that NS played in WWII was only briefly and very incidentally depicted in the documentary. Apparently, only one ‘grim facet’ of the war and NS was shown: an invoice showing how meticulously and luridly the train transports of Jews to Westerbork were charged. The newspaper followed this with the statement that the attitude of the Railways during war had been almost completely concealed, as was the same for railway disasters, which were also not shown in the documentary.⁴⁴

However, there is a discrepancy in the handling of NS history during this jubilee. Although it seems as if, when looking at the contributions to Kamp Westerbork, the 150th jubilee book and the documentary, NS gradually interacted more with its *full* history, this was not visible everywhere. In other publications, the focus on innovation and lack of historical perspective dominated NS’s narrative throughout the late twentieth century.

⁴³ Van den Broeke et al., *Het spoor*, 217–18.

⁴⁴ Ale Van Dijk, ‘Jubilerende NS maakt geen brokken’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 29 April 1989, 15.

For example, special educational material was developed for the 150th anniversary, which was requested by at least 1,700 Dutch primary schools at the time.⁴⁵ The teaching package consisted of a student bundle and a teacher bundle. While the student bundle did not say anything about WWII as a historical period for NS, the teacher bundle did mention WWII. However, only the Railway Strike, damages, and reconstructions are discussed as educational subjects. Where it starts with a short text on “Innovation”, covering technical improvements during first half of the 20th century up until ‘right before the Second World War’, it then immediately skips to a paragraph titled “1945-present”, only covering the subjects mentioned previously.⁴⁶ Therefore, this new generation of students – the teaching packages were intended for the last two years of primary school – was incompletely and selectively taught about NS and WWII.⁴⁷ One could argue that it is quite intense for children that age to be exposed to such dark history as the transports and the Holocaust. However, given the other examples in this chapter, a more fitting explanation can again be found in NS’s rebrand and focus on innovation. Perhaps these educational projects, aimed at children, were meant to establish an early positive connection with the railways and with using the train as a (primary) mode of transportation, thereby gaining travellers – and revenue – in the long run.

Another example can be found in the exhibition *Treinen door de Tijd* (*Trains through Time*). Flyers and descriptions of the 150th anniversary exhibition, which ultimately attracted more than half a million visitors and was (rightly) appointed a PR tool for NS,⁴⁸ show that this exhibition also did not delve deeper

⁴⁵ Nederlandse Spoorwegen, ‘Information about teaching materials’, 1989, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁴⁶ Willem Wilmink and Jan Kruis, “‘Langs IJzeren Wegen’: Student Bundle’ (Inmerc B.V., 1989), Het Utrechts Archief; Willem Wilmink and Jan Kruis, “‘Langs IJzeren Wegen’: Teacher Bundle’ (Inmerc B.V., 1989), Het Utrechts Archief.

⁴⁷ M.R. Ulenreef to P.J. Van der Linden and Press Service NS, ‘Invite to meeting to hand over teaching materials’, January 1989, Het Utrechts Archief.

⁴⁸ Rinze Brandsma, “‘Treinen door de Tijd’ enorme publiekstrekker’, *De Gelderlander*, 21 June 1989, Het Utrechts Archief; “‘Treinen door de Tijd’ klapstuk NS-jubileum’, *Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, 21 June 1989, Het Utrechts Archief.

into the war history of NS than this one sentence: ‘NS had to carry out orders from the occupying forces’. This passage contrasts the otherwise very extensively described timeline from the beginning of the railways until 1989.⁴⁹ Once again, the Railway Strike and the post-war recovery were given a greater role than the complicated relationship with the German occupier. There was no mention of transports. This focus on a positive and comprehensive timeline from the railways’ inception to NS’s state in 1989 helps explain the minimal mention of WWII, as it aligns with NS’s strategy to emphasise its broader historical narrative while downplaying the more contentious aspects of its wartime activities.

Newspaper articles and TV-items surrounding this jubilee show that, just as with the 125th jubilee, it was considered a memorable and joyous event.⁵⁰ Once again, the media did not question the contents of the exhibition, the teaching materials or the memorial book. It seems that the little negative press on the anniversary covered a fatal accident involving a child on the grounds of the exhibition. This was widely reported in the media, especially regarding the question whether NS would have been liable. NS President Ploeger publicly called it a ‘dampener on the festive spirit’.⁵¹ The only exception of the media’s lack of questioning, was the publication of *Het Vrije Volk* concerning the documentary, containing a single criticism of the concealment of NS’s war history.

In summary, the 150th anniversary of NS marked a significant milestone, characterised by extensive celebrations and jubilee activities, such as the publication of a comprehensive jubilee book, the creation of a documentary, a grand exhibition, and special teaching materials for primary schools. Despite more forward-thinking and reflective efforts to cover aspects of NS war history, there

⁴⁹ Kees Holierhoek, “‘Treinen door de Tijd’ Catalogue’ (Redactionele Producties NS, June 1989), Het Utrechts Archief.

⁵⁰ ‘150 jaar Spoorwegen in Nederland’, *Camera Obscura* (KRO, 22 July 1989), Beeld en Geluid; Brandsma, “‘Treinen door de Tijd’ enorme publiekstrekker’.

⁵¹ ‘Dode werpt schaduw op NS-feest’, *Het Parool*, 22 June 1989.

were still notable gaps and selective representations, particularly in the educational materials and in the public exhibition. While the anniversary was widely celebrated in the media, there remained a notable lack of critical examination regarding the historical narratives presented by NS.

3.5 Conclusion

Throughout the period from the 1960s to the early 1990s, NS's approach to managing its public image and addressing its wartime history shows recurring patterns of silence or selective narration, and a strategic focus on technological progress. Despite scholars often describing the 1960s-1990s as a turbulent decades regarding Dutch society's interaction with WWII, with an increase of 'social recognition', NS's positioning during this period suggest a different story. NS rarely mentioned its wartime activities, and when it did, NS focussed on historical narratives like the Railway Strike or post-war reconstruction. This can perhaps be partly attributed to the PR fallout from the Rüter controversy, which possibly made NS cautious of touching upon certain historical topics. However, other factors also seem to have been an influence on NS's positioning.

NS's strategy during this period was characterised by a strong emphasis on innovation and technological progress, aimed at maintaining and increasing its relevance in a rapidly modernising world. The company's jubilees, public events, publications, ad campaigns, and educational materials all reinforced its preferred narrative, wherein WWII was a selective side character at most. The focus was on presenting NS as a forward-thinking, technically innovative company with a promising future, competing effectively with the automobile. This narrative of progress and innovation was designed to attract new customers and boost revenue, as historical associations with the steam train or wartime controversies would not serve this commercial goal. Struggling financially throughout the 1960s and 1970s

due to the rise of the car, these strategies to alter NS's public image were likely necessary for its survival.

A notable observation is the media's passive role in a critical examination of this innovation-narrative. Mainstream media outlets from the 1960s to the mid-1990s rarely questioned NS's selective recounting of its history. This behaviour contrasts sharply with the established idea of 'commotion' surrounding Dutch WWII-memory during the 1960s and early 1970s, aligning more closely with the idea of 'silence' of the early post-war years (1945-1960). Thus, it appears that both NS and the media navigated these decades without engaging in the deeper, more critical debates on wartime responsibility that might have been expected. As for NS's motivations to avoid these debates, they have been stated clearly in the previous paragraphs. The media's lack of coverage on NS's public image management could be due to the fact that economic collaboration during the war largely went unpunished or unscrutinised in the Netherlands. Therefore, the 'commotion' of these decades, likely applies more to the social and political landscape, as political collaboration was heavily scrutinised during this period. Consequently, the media likely focussed more on these (political) controversies, such as the Eichmann trial in 1961, Loe de Jong's television series *De Bezetting* and Jacques Presser's *De Ondergang*, than on NS and other Dutch companies. The absence of substantial repercussions or damaging media coverage for companies involved in economic collaboration, allowed NS to uphold its new narrative of innovation without facing significant public backlash or accountability for its wartime actions.

It was not until the very late 1980s that NS began to reflect more openly on its wartime role, mainly through the 150th anniversary publication *Het spoor* and the accompanying 150th jubilee documentary. Even then, this reflection was limited and subjected to minimal external critical scrutiny. Moreover, NS's funding of the Westerbork Memorial throughout the 1970s-1990s, although a significant

gesture, was carried out quietly, possibly to avoid drawing attention to the more controversial aspects of its history. This low-profile support allowed NS to contribute to commemorative efforts without inviting public debate about its wartime actions. This pattern slightly contrasts with the broader trend of increasing ‘social recognition’ beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the 1990s. Though there was a notable start of subtle engagement with its darker history as seen in *Het spoor*, NS did not publicly engage in larger Holocaust commemoration initiatives yet. Nevertheless, it did mark the beginning of a gradual acknowledgement of its past, therefore perhaps aligning more slowly with the common phases of Dutch memory culture.

In conclusion, the mainstream media’s lack of critical engagement facilitated NS’s ability to control its public image, combined with the lack of repercussions in Dutch society for economic collaboration. This chapter illustrates how NS managed to navigate the socially turbulent decades of the 1960s to the early 1990s by emphasising its technological advancements and future potential, thereby maintaining its relevance and avoiding the problems of its controversial past. Therefore, this chapter provides a nuanced perspective on these decades, challenging the common notion of widespread societal and media engagement with wartime responsibility and instead highlighting a continuity of silence and selective memory, at least within a company such as NS.

Chapter IV:
Facing the Past:
NS's Pursuit of Closure Regarding Its Role in the Holocaust
(1995-Present)

In 1995, L.P. Dorenbos, a Christian activist, visited *Rijden of staken? NV Nederlandsche Spoorwegen '39'-'47* (in this chapter referred to as *Riding or Striking?*), an exhibition at the Spoorwegmuseum about NS during and shortly after WWII. After visiting, Dorenbos wrote a letter to NS President Den Besten, requesting reparations for the Jewish community: 'This blood money, meticulously recorded in your bookkeeping, stains both your hands and ours.' Den Besten's response was clear: 'I reject your term "blood money" and the existence of a debt of honour of NS towards the Jewish community.'¹ This instance, among others, serves as a lens through which to explore NS's evolving public image management during the period of 1995 to the present. In this chapter, several exemplary cases will be analysed to assess how NS managed its public image regarding its role in WWII and the transports, in order to draw conclusions aimed at answering the third sub-question: *How did NS manage its public image and address its WWII role in the contemporary period (1995-present)?*

As a whole, the period from the 1990s until the 2000s marks a transition from the characteristic phases of the late twentieth century, where debates surrounding the 'right' and 'wrong' of the war gradually gave way to a more nuanced understanding. This shift was fuelled by factors such as the emergence of a new generation untouched by the war and a broader reevaluation of historical narratives in the wake of the Cold War's end in 1989.² Amidst this backdrop, the end of the 1990s saw a pivotal moment as societal awareness heightened regarding the consequences of nationalism and the need for global condemnation of the Holocaust.³ Whilst WWII commemorations and celebrations became more diffuse and open to more groups, a 'struggle for recognition' emerged. This shaped discussions and actions surrounding national remembrance and commemoration,

¹ Maurits Schmidt, 'NS aangesproken op jodentransport', *Het Parool*, 17 August 1995.

² De Keizer and Plomp, *Een open zenuw*, 12–16.

³ De Keizer and Plomp, 18–19.

with various groups attempting to make their voices heard with the aim of recognition for their suffering.⁴

The impactful exhibition at the Spoorwegmuseum in 1995 will mark the beginning of this chapter, setting the stage for subsequent developments and reactions. Dorenbos' reaction serves as a notable example, followed by an exploration of the significant 2005 poster campaign and the ensuing official apologies. Following these events, the individual compensations offered by NS and NS's reasoning will be analysed. The chapter concludes with an examination of the aftermath of the individual compensations.

4.1 Riding or Striking? NS's Wartime Reckoning at the Spoorwegmuseum

1995 was a turning point in NS's public image management and the public reckoning with its WWII past. From 28 April until 5 June, the Spoorwegmuseum housed the aforementioned impactful exhibition *Riding or Striking?* which covered NS's actions and suffering during the German occupation. Interestingly, the title of the exhibition, *Riding or Striking?* closely resembled that of Rüter's publication: *Riding and Striking*. Although this may seem intentional, in a preliminary press statement written by the Spoorwegmuseum, the title is explained as reflecting NS's greatest dilemma during the war: how to position itself in relation to the Germans. Rüter's publication is not mentioned in the press statement, indicating that the Spoorwegmuseum and NS did not explicitly and publicly connect the exhibition to Rüter's research, at least not by name.⁵

⁴ Van Ginkel, *Rondom de stilte*, 739; Withuis, *Erkenning*, 77.

⁵ Spoorwegmuseum, 'Preliminary Press Statement Exhibition "Rijden of Staken"', 17 February 1995, Spoorwegmuseum.

The exhibition at the Spoorwegmuseum was requested by NS and displayed several documents and objects from its archives, along with materials from the RIOD.⁶ It displayed three wagons: a green one for ‘hope’, a red one for ‘battle’ and a black one for the transports. The black wagon contained invoices sent by NS to the Germans for the deported Jews, Sinti, and Roma. Furthermore, descriptive and informational texts, photos and other objects related to the persecution of these groups were displayed.⁷ According to Pieterse, NS was eager highlight this subject: ‘I think NS really wanted it at that time. They really wanted to pay attention to that. Thought it was time to pay attention to that too. And they fully cooperated.’⁸

This cooperation can also be seen in the concurrent rendition of *Koppeling* of 5 May 1995 which came with an extra 8-page catalogue of the exhibition at the Spoorwegmuseum. *Koppeling* was – and still is – NS’s internal newspaper, sent to all NS employees.⁹ Although the exhibition had been ongoing for some time when May 5th’s *Koppeling* was published, it can be considered a solid marketing choice to attach a catalogue about an exhibition on NS’s actions during wartime, to a (internal) newspaper that was published on Liberation Day. Furthermore, the catalogue was available free of charge to visitors of the exhibition, making it a publicly accessible catalogue. The catalogue was a co-production of the Spoorwegmuseum and the editors of *Koppeling*, thus assuring that both NS and the Spoorwegmuseum had a say in the contents. A black-and-white copy of the catalogue can still be found on NS’s website, thus making it accessible to the public to this day.¹⁰

⁶ *Koppeling*, ‘Rijden of Staken? NV Nederlandse Spoorwegen ’39-’47’ (Nederlandse Spoorwegen, 1995), 8.

⁷ ‘Bundled Photos of Exhibition “Rijden of Staken”’, 1995, Spoorwegmuseum.

⁸ Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse.

⁹ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 170.

¹⁰ ‘Oorlog en fusie | Over NS | NS’, Nederlandse Spoorwegen, accessed 3 June 2024, <https://www.ns.nl/over-ns/wie-zijn-wij/geschiedenis/oorlog-en-fusie.html>.

As Jan-Willem ter Avest, then Head of Communications at the Spoorwegmuseum, stated in the colophon of the catalogue, referring to the exhibition: ‘No subject remains undiscussed. The black pages from the war years of NS, the transports of Jews, are also discussed. But we do not pass judgment. We only provide the facts. On that basis, the visitor must form his own judgment.’¹¹ Pieterse, when discussing her knowledge on the exhibition during her interview, described it more forwardly, stating that the exhibition and accompanying catalogue contained ‘some pretty serious things, which, if you look at the image of the railway company, can be quite damaging’.¹² This observation aligns with the Spoorwegmuseum’s and NS’s intention of not concealing anything. According to Ter Avest, it would have been too easy to assign blame in retrospect. Thus, the exhibition and catalogue were a ‘factual representation’ of NS’s handling of WWII. He added that this approach was possible because: ‘The distance to the past is now large enough. This allows us to look at the past from a new perspective. Not of: right or wrong. But: what actually happened?’¹³ This newfound possibility of a ‘factual representation’ suggests that earlier attempts of narrating NS’s WWII history could have been coloured due to being too close to the war itself. That would imply that, for example, Rüter’s publication may have been less of a factual representation than the 1995 exhibition. Either way, the intention of the *Riding or Striking?* was to provide a statement of facts, without providing judgment of right or wrong. The exhibition aimed at being a historical curation of the role of NS in WWII, that still appeared to be much more critical than before, albeit at a more detailed level.

For example, *Koppeling*’s extra catalogue combined a ‘factual’ historical retelling of NS during WWII with stories of former NS-employees, or children of

¹¹ *Koppeling*, ‘Rijden of Staken?’, 8.

¹² Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse.

¹³ *Koppeling*, ‘Rijden of Staken?’, 8.

NS-employees, reflecting on their war experiences. Henk Langbroek, 73 years old at the time of the interview, used to work at the NS's general control. He recalled a Jewish coworker wearing the Yellow Star. Another coworker offered him a hiding place, which he refused. Later, they received a card from him from Kamp Westerbork and never saw him again. Langbroek commented: 'But what angers me most afterwards, is the attitude of the people just below the top [of the NS management]. That they allowed themselves to be so easily manipulated [by the Germans]. I still don't understand that.'¹⁴ This testimony is exemplary of the catalogue's and exhibition's contents breaking the earlier pattern of solely highlighting positive NS WWII memories, by openly criticising the actions of NS management during the war. The texts that dealt with the factual, historical events during the war, were also noticeably critical of NS's role. Regarding the transports, the editors wrote: 'In these assignments, the management does not consider it necessary [...] to formally protest. [...] By running these trains, the NS management shows that it pays little attention to matters that have no impact on NS itself.'¹⁵

However, Langbroek's testimony and the historical texts were juxtaposed by, for example, Theo Polet's interview. Polet, 71 years old, who had worked for NS as a volunteer for six months, stated that the reporting on NS during the war had been one-sided: 'As an outsider, it is impossible to assess the situation at that time afterwards. [...] NS had no choice. And wherever possible, NS employees resisted. [...] NS employees have done more than many other comparable groups.'¹⁶ Polet's statement balanced the critical reflections of Langbroek and the historical texts with a perspective that emphasised the complexities and constraints faced by NS during the war.

¹⁴ *Koppeling*, 4.

¹⁵ *Koppeling*, 4–5.

¹⁶ *Koppeling*, 7.

Interestingly, in one of the concept versions of the historical texts for the catalogue, an unknown editor added a comment to the preliminary text on the transports of Jews (Figure 4.1). The text reported NS's handling of the transports, though three quarters of the text covered NS's role in the resistance, therefore creating an unbalance in the narrational tone. Consequently, the editor commented sharply: 'Four paragraphs on a black page [NS's role in the transports]. Three of them are positive for NS. Aren't we justifying it this way?'¹⁷ This comment further indicates that the people working on the exhibition and the catalogue assessed NS's role critically. It broke the pattern of highlighting almost solely the positive memories of NS and WWII and instead marked the beginning of public reflection on NS's role. It remains a mystery whether the aforementioned comment came from a Spoorwegmuseum editor or someone from NS. However, what is clear, is that it was taken into account. The concept texts that the comment referred to, can still be found in the final version of the catalogue; though they were repositioned, making a clearer distinction between the transports and the resistance and thus creating a more defined and balanced narrative with a sharp separation between the two.

¹⁷ Spoorwegmuseum, 'Bundled document of texts and storylines for "Rijden of Staken"', 1995, 4, Archives of Spoorwegmuseum.

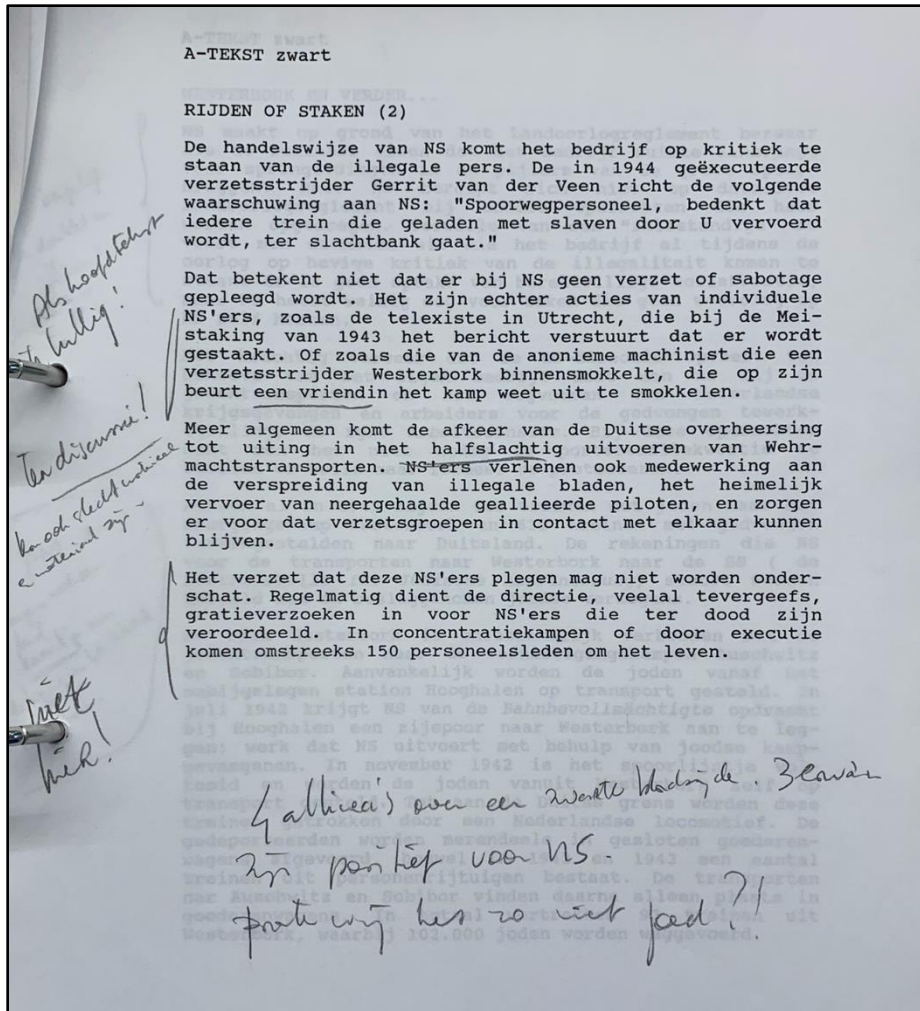


Figure 4.1. Anonymous editor's comments on the provisional texts for *Riding or Striking?*¹⁸

In summary, *Riding or Striking?* Provided a nuanced and balanced narrative of NS's WWII-history. The three wagons for 'hope', 'battle' and the 'black pages' in the exhibition and the interviews and historical texts in the catalogue of *Koppeling* displayed both sides of NS's history. This representation included more critical

¹⁸ Spoorwegmuseum, 4.

reflections than ever before, marking a significant shift towards a more open and comprehensive account of NS's wartime actions. However, the intention of a distanced, nuanced retelling of NS's history without a focus on right and wrong, did not necessarily match visitors' eventual experiences.

4.2 Deflecting Blame: NS's Response to Requests for Reparations

According to Jos Zijlstra, at that time a historian for the Spoorwegmuseum and closely involved with the exhibition and its contents, former staff members who visited *Riding or Striking?* were shocked: 'They have their memories, and now something is being added to those. That makes them angry. "You were not there," they said to me.' On the other end, visitors left flowers at the black wagon, likely to pay tribute to the victims of the transports.¹⁹ This contrast in reactions to the exhibition underscores the not so nuanced perceptions of the visitors, despite the Spoorwegmuseum's and NS's intentions.

The disparity in reactions peaked with L.P. Dorenbos, a visitor of the exhibition, mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, who wrote a letter in 1995 to NS President Den Besten after having learnt – from the exhibition – that NS had invoiced the Germans for transporting tens of thousands of Jews. Dorenbos requested reparations for the Jewish community in the form of a fund that would pay for the travels of Jews from Eastern Europe to Israel. His reasoning: 'This blood money, meticulously recorded in your bookkeeping, stains both your hands and ours.'²⁰ The letter that Den Besten wrote in response, was very clear: 'I reject your term "blood money" and the existence of a debt of honour of NS towards the Jewish community. Therefore, I refuse to honour your request for restitution of travel

¹⁹ Lidwien Dobber, 'Kom niet aan ons spoor', *Trouw*, 27 May 1995, 49.

²⁰ Schmidt, 'NS aangesproken op jodentransport', 3.

expenses in any way.’²¹ This statement can be seen as a direct distancing of NS from moral responsibility regarding its role in the transportations. In his reasoning, Den Besten wrote, among other things, that the Germans would have managed without the NS management anyway, thus shifting focus away from NS’s specific actions. After all, according to Den Besten, throughout Europe, the train had become an instrumental symbol of the extermination camps. The Germans had successfully deported people using trains across the continent, regardless of whether local railway management cooperated. Den Besten continued: ‘One could almost forget that it was not the Railways that were the root of the evil, but the deranged Nazi ideologies.’²² This sentence was almost a direct copy of a speech months earlier given by his predecessor, Ploeger.²³ It indicates a strong effort to minimise NS’s culpability by highlighting the broader Nazi machinery. Moreover, according to the NS President, the role of NS after the war had been sufficiently addressed, which can be seen as an attempt to close this chapter of its history, avoiding further scrutiny or reparations.²⁴ In summary, Den Besten’s response to Dorenbos appears to have been aimed at deflecting blame and limiting NS’s accountability, whilst also marking it ‘case closed’.

Four years after the exhibition, in 1999, a second request for reparations was rejected by NS. The writer, from Coevorden, suggested that it would be a commendable gesture from the NS management to compensate the few remaining camp prisoners, who had received no financial compensation for their forced labour – the construction of a railway line near Kamp Westerbork – performed for NS during the war. Again, NS’s response was brief and firm, stating that NS had taken

²¹ Schmidt, 3.

²² Schmidt, 3.

²³ Manfred Gerstenfeld, ‘Apologies for Holocaust Behavior and Refusal to Do so: The Dutch Case in an International Context’, *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18, no. 3/4 (2006): 39; Schmidt, ‘NS aangesproken op jodentransport’, 3.

²⁴ Schmidt, ‘NS aangesproken op jodentransport’, 3.

no initiative in the creation of this railway line or the use of forced labourers, and therefore saw no reason to respond to the request for financial compensation. NS reiterated the ‘deranged Nazi ideologies’ as the true culprit.²⁵

Strikingly, when considering the 1990s as a period of ‘recognition’, both requests and the consequent refusal of NS to honour them, had little to no impact for NS. As Barnouw recalled in his interview, both Dorenbos’ and the Coevorden resident’s request quickly fizzled out. Both Barnouw and Pieterse speculated that the requests came between 10 and 20 years too early to be effective.²⁶

4.3 NS’s Apology and Ambivalence: The CJO Poster Campaign

Despite the first requests for reparations having little to no impact on NS’s public image and how it addressed its role in the Holocaust, developments in the international community proved that WWII was all but in the past. In 2000, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, an intergovernmental organisation, adopted a declaration which encouraged the remembrance of the Holocaust, and education and research on the subject, marking the topic ‘case open’ on an international scale.²⁷

In this evolving context, by 2005, the 60th Liberation Year of the Netherlands offered an opportunity for renewed reflection and a potential for acknowledging participation in the Holocaust. The Centraal Joods Overleg (CJO; Central Jewish Consultation), in close collaboration with NS, organised a poster campaign. From September 29, two posters would be displayed at 66 NS stations, reminding people of the deportations of Jews by train.²⁸

²⁵ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 174.

²⁶ Interview with David Barnouw; Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse.

²⁷ ‘Stockholm Declaration’, *IHRA* (blog), accessed 9 June 2024, <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/stockholm-declaration>.

²⁸ ‘CJO Postercampagne’, accessed 18 April 2024, <https://postercampagne.cjo.nl/>.



Figures 4.2 and 4.3 *The posters from the CJO campaign.*²⁹

Months before, the CJO and NS had entered into a conversation about the difficult role of NS during WWII. According to the CJO, NS desired to acknowledge this role. This resulted in the poster campaign.³⁰ However, interestingly, NS declared beforehand: ‘This campaign should be seen independently from possible apologies. We want to reflect on our rather unsightly role back then.’³¹ Concurrently, in the run-up to the official start of the poster campaign at train station Muiderpoort, the event had already garnered extensive media coverage. In newspapers, NS made it clear that the initiative for the campaign originated from the CJO, and that its

²⁹ CJO, *Poster 1: The Train to Auschwitz Used to Leave Here*, 1995, Poster, 1995, <https://postercampagne.cjo.nl/>; CJO, *Poster 2: In '40-'45 the Jews Had to Get out... Who Now?*, 1995, Poster, 1995, <https://postercampagne.cjo.nl/>.

³⁰ ‘CJO Postercampagne’.

³¹ ‘Postercampagne NS over rol bij deportatie van joden’, *De Volkskrant*, 20 September 2005, NexisUni.

contribution was merely to provide the space for the CJO's posters; the space being NS's stations.³² NS also explained its rationale for participating in the campaign, which mainly entailed an acknowledgement of its 'contribution' to the transportations being a black page in its company history; something which NS now wanted to be open about.³³ In fact, NS 'didn't want to evade its role'.³⁴

Thus, these statements seem to have been more about acknowledgement than about implementing concrete implications, as NS emphasised the need to reflect on its historical actions without necessarily committing to any specific reparations or apologies. However, on 29 September at station Muiderpoort – the train station from which 11.000 Jews were transported to Kamp Westerbork – NS surprisingly contradicted its earlier stance of the campaign being independent from possible apologies, and publicly apologised. NS President Aad Veenman announced on behalf of NS:

Together with representatives of the Jewish community in the Netherlands, NS wants to reflect on this part of its past on this 29th of September. It is the first time we do this in this context, and I say this with sincere regret. How can this be explained? Let us not argue about the deeper cause. The timing is also irrelevant. After all, we can only judge with the knowledge and insight of the present. What is important is that we dare to face the full reality of our history. Acknowledging that, despite all possible nuances and qualifications, our role at that time cannot always be described as entirely commendable.

[...]

By naming our role at the time, we can also close a painful chapter from our past. Then we can look at each other better and with renewed trust.

[..]

³² 'Posters op NS- stations laten deportatie zien', *Trouw*, 20 September 2005, NexisUni.

³³ 'Posters herinneren aan jodenvervolging', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 19 September 2005, NexisUni.

³⁴ 'Deportatiefoto's op treinstations', *De Telegraaf*, 19 September 2005, NexisUni.

Must the present-day NS apologise for this? There can be differing opinions on this. It has already led to unwelcome disputes in the media. It can come across as too easy of a gesture. It can be interpreted as yet another contribution to the “apology culture”. And all this on a subject that is so delicate and evokes so many emotions, both in Dutch society and within our company. Perhaps it can never be right.

[...]

In the here and now I can only make statements that fit today’s context. That is why I now offer my sincere apologies from the bottom of my heart and in all modesty on behalf of NS to the Jewish community and the other groups involved.³⁵

One aspect that stands out in this speech is NS President Veenman’s acknowledgment of the timing and relevance of reflecting on NS’s past actions. Veenman expressed regret that this reflection took place for the first time in this context, indicating a belated recognition of the need to address this aspect of NS’s history. However, his comments on the timing being ‘irrelevant’ seem to attempt to direct attention away from potential criticisms or discussions about why this acknowledgment did not occur sooner. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of NS’s role at the time, despite nuances, demonstrates a willingness to confront the uncomfortable truths of the past.

However, why would NS suddenly apologise, when stating just days earlier that its participation in the campaign should be ‘seen independently from possible apologies’? Manfred Gerstenfeld, a prominent scholar on antisemitism, provided a possible explanation in his article “Apologies for Holocaust Behavior and Refusal to Do so: The Dutch Case in an International Context”. Gerstenfeld’s explanation is based on personal correspondence with Joost Ravoo, Director of

³⁵ Aad Veenman, ‘CJO Postercampagne - Toespraak President-Directeur NS’, accessed 18 April 2024, https://postercampagne.cjo.nl/?page=postercampagne§ion_id=12.

Communications at NS during the time of the apologies. According to Ravoo, the request for the poster campaign prompted NS to reexamine the issue of the wartime transportation of Jews. He acknowledged that, despite increased attention to the deportations in recent years, NS had never formally apologised for its role. Ravoo proposed to Veenman that NS offer contrition to the Dutch Jewish community. Veenman consulted with two other NS Board Members, after which the decision to apologise was made collectively. According to Gerstenfeld, there was an additional undercurrent at play: all four of them had joined NS relatively recently, coming from outside backgrounds and thus not entrenched in the traditional culture of the railways, which historically prioritised internal protectionism.³⁶

Additionally, when taking a closer look at Veenman's speech, a third reason for the apology can be discerned. As Veenman clearly stated: 'By naming our role at the time, we can also close a painful chapter from our past.' This suggests that beyond external incentives or personal circumstances, NS was motivated by a desire to draw a line under its historical involvement. By publicly admitting its role in the deportation of Jews, NS may have sought to signal that it had addressed its past wrongdoing and were ready to move forward. This could be interpreted as a strategic manoeuvre to pre-empt further criticism or scrutiny regarding its wartime actions. Notably, the focus of the speech is on publicly recognising and confronting NS's past rather than on taking actionable steps that might address the consequences of its wartime activities or provide direct restitution to affected individuals and communities, thus making it easier to attempt to 'close the painful chapter' by merely delivering the speech. Barnouw's own accounts of the opening of the campaign, for which he was invited, support this interpretation. In his interview, he recalled the NS President saying: 'We've done this now, and now we

³⁶ Gerstenfeld, 'Apologies for Holocaust Behavior and Refusal to Do So', 40–41.

don't need to talk about it anymore.'³⁷ It would take approximately another ten years before NS was forced to publicly 'talk about it' again.

4.4 NS and Individual Compensations for Victims of WWII Transports

The reopening of the discussion on NS's role can partly be connected to a publication in *De Telegraaf*. On 27 June 2015, *De Telegraaf* covered NS's role in the transportations of Jews, whilst highlighting the fact that a recently established foundation was preparing a lawsuit in the United States against NS and the Dutch State for its role in the Holocaust deportations. Lawyer Herman Loonstein argued that NS, unlike the French Railways (SNCF) which had previously acknowledged guilt and offered compensation, had not provided restitution to Holocaust survivors and their descendants. Under American pressure and inspired by the legal actions against the SNCF, the foundation hoped to obtain legal redress through the U.S. judicial system, expecting that an American verdict would be recognised in the Netherlands, as had happened with the American verdict for the SNCF. Furthermore, Loonstein sneered 'at the response of NS to his request for compensation for Holocaust survivors and relatives of Jews murdered by the Germans', therefore indicating that he had legally requested NS for reparations.³⁸

The article inspired Salo Muller, whose parents were deported by NS and were murdered in Auschwitz, to approach NS in 2016. In his memoirs *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen (The Fight with the Nederlandse Spoorwegen)*, published in 2020, he provides a detailed account of his struggles for compensation from NS as he perceived them, outlining the timeline and various obstacles he

³⁷ Interview with David Barnouw.

³⁸ 'Pact met de duivel; Joodse stichting bereidt in Amerika proces voor tegen NS en Staat wegens uitvoeren van deportaties', *De Telegraaf*, 27 June 2015, NexisUni.

faced.³⁹ While Muller’s book mainly consists of personal recollections, it also includes extensive e-mail correspondence with NS. NS would likely not have allowed the book’s publication if the e-mails were forged or altered, though there is no certainty of the correspondence being complete. Still, the mention of NS President Roger van Boxtel in the “Acknowledgments” further suggests that NS publicly approved of the book. Moreover, Rutger Hamelynck – former Head of Brand and Reputations at NS – made no objections related to Muller’s publication during his interview.⁴⁰ The following paragraph will primarily rely on the e-mail correspondence. Nevertheless, as said, the correspondence may not fully represent the entirety of the discussions between Muller and NS.

When Muller sent his first letter to NS on 17 March 2016, claiming reparations for him and his wife, who suffered a fate similar to Muller, Hamelynck responded: ‘Your request for compensation once again demonstrates that the consequences of the war will never be forgotten and that the dark chapters in NS’s history remain an open wound. We are very aware of this.’ Hamelynck went on to list the WWII-remembrance initiatives in which NS was involved and stated that Veenman’s speech at the poster campaign still, over ten years later, reflected NS’s position on this matter. Hamelynck thus avoided Muller’s request by redirecting attention to NS’s remembrance policies that were already in place.⁴¹

It is true that at that point NS was widely involved in remembrance initiatives, including those related to the transports. For example, it had been contributing to the development of the Westerbork Memorial since the 1970s and supported the placement of freight wagons on historical rails at Westerbork. Furthermore, NS financially contributed, to this day, to the Spoorwegmuseum, which constitutes about 20% of the Spoorwegmuseum’s income. Ever since 2013,

³⁹ Salo Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen* (Uitgeverij Verbum, 2020).

⁴⁰ Anne Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck, Filmed interview, 31 May 2024.

⁴¹ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 16–17.

the Spoorwegmuseum had housed the permanent exhibition *Beladen treinen* (*Loaded Trains*), which focussed on the deportations of Jews; an exhibition of which NS was glad that it had a permanent place, according to Pieterse.⁴² In the wooden luggage wagon, located in the far back of the outer part of the museum, diary entries of survivors were played on a loop, accompanied by harrowing information on the transport that the survivor had been part of. NS had also participated in and had financially contributed to the ‘Anne Frank Route’, a project to commemorate Jewish deportations along the railway from Hooghalen to Germany. Additionally, NS collaborated, to this day, with the Westerbork Memorial, the National Committee for 4 and 5 May, the Dutch Auschwitz Committee, and the Sobibor Foundation. Moreover, in 2013, NS had initiated the creation of *Piraten* (*Pirates*), a children’s book on the occasion of the unveiling of the Jewish Children’s Monument in Rotterdam, where NS laid wreaths every year during the commemoration. Finally, ever since 2018, NS established a partnership with the National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam, providing archival materials, historical objects, and financial support.⁴³

This enumeration is not an exhaustive list of NS initiatives, but rather a selection of some contributions it has made in recent years, some of which were highlighted by Hamelynck in his correspondence with Muller. However, Hamelynck explicitly stated to Muller that the financial contribution NS was making to the initiatives should not be seen as reparations in any form: ‘They are meant to keep the story of WWII alive.’⁴⁴ In his interview for this thesis, Hamelynck repeated: ‘A long time, NS’s answer had been that we do a lot of things. That really is true. Money was given to dozens of initiatives, but never to an

⁴² Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse.

⁴³ Barnouw, Mulder, and Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945*, 176–80; Knoop, Interview with Evelien Pieterse; Jessica Durlacher, *Piraten: een verhaal over de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (De Bezige Bij, 2014).

⁴⁴ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 21–24.

individual. Always to a collective or a remembrance.’ The official NS policy was ‘herdenken, eren en leren’, or: ‘remembering, honouring, and learning’.⁴⁵ Months later, on 18 October 2016, Muller addressed NS President Roger van Boxtel directly, again asking for individual reparations.⁴⁶ Van Boxtel, logically, answered in a similar manner as Hamelynck and added: ‘As terrible as it is, NS does not accept individual reparations or claims because the company has chosen to commemorate and remember collectively.’⁴⁷ Thus, almost exactly six months after Muller’s first letter, NS still adhered to its original response and policy of commemorating and remembering.

Muller, who had several journalistic contacts, enlisted *Nieuwsuur*, a popular news programme grounded in investigative journalism, to create a segment on NS and his quest for justice. As Hamelynck recalled, this broadcast was a catalyst for NS, forcing them into a reaction due to the negative press.⁴⁸ Shortly after the segment aired, NS and Muller had a conversation, in which Van Boxtel informed Muller that there was still no possibility for NS to offer reparations, partly due to a negative recommendation from the Board of Supervisors.⁴⁹ Later on, NS, through its legal representation Pels Rijcken, officially denied all claims of liability for the transports.⁵⁰

However, 27 November 2018 marks an important turning point in NS’s management of its public image and policy regarding the transports. Muller and his lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld met at NS headquarters with Roger van Boxtel and legal experts from NS. In the conversation, Muller threatened to litigate if NS would not comply, something which he believes triggered NS to yield. Van Boxtel responded

⁴⁵ Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck.

⁴⁶ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 24.

⁴⁷ Muller, 25.

⁴⁸ Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck.

⁴⁹ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 29–33.

⁵⁰ Muller, 46–47.

that, after internal deliberations, NS was willing to proceed with a one-time payment for survivors and descendants.⁵¹ Hamelynck however, attributes this ‘yielding’ to several other factors, of which Muller is only a small part.⁵² In his interview, Hamelynck recollects several interesting aspects of his time as Head of Brand and Reputations at NS. Having worked there from 2013 until 2023, he experienced the developments surrounding Muller first hand and was responsible for the PR policies during this period. This is also the reason that he was the first point of contact for Muller.

According to Hamelynck, the internal discussion on NS’s role in the Holocaust had already been ongoing for quite some time when Muller contacted them. Moreover, Hamelynck recalled having received around 3,000 requests for financial reparations, most of which dated from before Muller’s request, therefore indicating that Muller was not the start of this process. Additionally, before Muller, NS had already been approached by a Dutch lawyer who had specifically requested NS for individual reparations and had suggested that NS could legally be held accountable for its role, which marked the beginning of NS’s evaluation of its legal position regarding the Holocaust, though this was kept internally.⁵³ Although Hamelynck refrained from naming the lawyer, he stated that the lawyer’s request was covered by *De Telegraaf*. Knowing that this took place before Muller, Hamelynck was most likely referring to Loonstein, who was mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Barnouw speculated that NS’s yielding was also partly due to Van Boxtel’s earlier prominent career in politics, making him more ‘receptive’ to societal issues whilst also knowing how to mitigate them.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Muller, 55–56.

⁵² Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck.

⁵³ Knoop.

⁵⁴ ‘Pact met de duivel; Joodse stichting bereidt in Amerika proces voor tegen NS en Staat wegens uitvoeren van deportaties’.

⁵⁵ Interview with David Barnouw.

In any case, what can be deduced from respectively Muller's, Hamelynck's, and Barnouw's perspective, is that there were several factors contributing to NS's decision to provide individual compensations, demonstrating a complex interplay of societal, legal and internal dynamics that influenced NS.

Shortly after, NS's decision was widely covered in the national media.⁵⁶ Furthermore, an independent Committee with 'neutral people' – the Committee Individual Compensation Victims WWII Transports – was appointed, a 'joint decision' of NS and Muller.⁵⁷ When asked why NS chose to publicly express the decision as 'joint' when it was clear that NS had already started the process of (legally) assessing its role in the Holocaust before Muller's request, Hamelynck had a three-layered response. First, as time went on, it became more and more clear to NS 'that there was a certain expectation from descendants [of victims], so it was this society that we listened to really well,'⁵⁸ indicating that NS recognised a growing societal expectation to address its history with the Holocaust. Second, the advancing age of both the transport survivors and the victims' descendants added urgency to addressing the issue.⁵⁹ For example, Muller, being a descendant of victims, was already over 80 years old during this process. Third, Salo Muller was the perfect figurehead for NS. Muller 'had clear demands and was able to articulate them very well', whilst also being a direct descendant of victims, 'which fit really well with the story already in place'. Furthermore, Muller's timing matched NS's perception of the societal urgency to address its role in the Holocaust and the internal processes that were already taking place at NS after Loonstein's demands.

⁵⁶ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 57; NOS, 'NS gaat schadevergoeding betalen aan Holocaust-slachtoffers', 27 November 2018, <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2261129-ns-gaat-schadevergoeding-betalen-aan-holocaust-slachtoffers>.

⁵⁷ 'Individuele Tegemoetkoming | Tweede Wereldoorlog | Over NS | NS', Nederlandse Spoorwegen, accessed 20 May 2024, <https://www.ns.nl/over-ns/dossier/ns-tweede-wereldoorlog/individuele-tegemoetkoming.html>.

⁵⁸ Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck.

⁵⁹ Knoop.

According to Hamelynck, whilst still acknowledging Muller's individual efforts, the joint decision 'could have just as easily been with someone else'.⁶⁰ This suggests that NS's 'choice' of Muller as its figurehead was a calculated move to align its public image management with societal expectations, demonstrating a strategic approach to addressing its historical accountability.

After the establishment of the Committee, it was tasked with drafting an advisory report for NS regarding the 'individual compensations'.⁶¹ Interestingly, NS itself decided who could be the recipients of the compensations, it being the survivors of the transports or the descendants/widowed of the victims. In addition the transports were defined as: 'Trains that were driven specifically for the purpose of the occupier's purge operation (especially Jews, Roma and Sinti - these people/groups were documented by the occupier). Trains for which NS has sent invoices to the occupier.'⁶² This indicates that NS had a significant role in determining the eligibility criteria and scope of the compensations, ultimately shaping the parameters of accountability for its historical involvement.

On 26 June 2019, the advisory report was presented publicly to NS and Muller. During the presentation, NS President Van Boxtel acknowledged the complexity of dealing with NS's wartime past and emphasised the importance of recognising and addressing the suffering caused. NS would accept the recommendations put forth by the Commission, including providing compensation to the aforementioned groups. Additionally, NS would commit to conducting historical research into its role in the transports during the war and would consider in what way there could be a collective expression of recognition for the large group

⁶⁰ Knoop.

⁶¹ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 57–68; Nederlandse Spoorwegen, 'NS stelt commissie in over individuele tegemoetkoming Tweede Wereldoorlog', accessed 28 April 2024, <http://bit.ly/2DLcpDz>.

⁶² Commissie Individuele Tegemoetkoming Slachtoffers WOII Transporten NS, 'Advies Individuele Tegemoetkoming', 3.

of transported individuals for whom no descendants could claim individual compensation. Van Boxtel concluded by expressing NS's commitment to honouring the victims and continuing efforts to learn from the past.⁶³

Finally, it is noteworthy that NS decided to call the payments 'compensations', instead of 'reparations'. According to Hamelynck, the reason to call it an individual compensation, was because it was only meant to compensate, essentially making his answer a logical fallacy. He added: 'We had to hear that a lot of times, with the compensation arrangement. If you pay, aren't you then [wrong]?' Directly after, Hamelynck re-clarified that the individual compensations were not an admittance of guilt or accountability.⁶⁴ This indicates a minimising approach by NS, recognising the moral obligation to provide support to the victims and their descendants without explicitly accepting legal liability or framing the payments as formal reparations. By doing so, NS mitigated potential legal ramifications while still addressing the historical injustices that it perceived society expected of NS. In the concise words of Veraart: 'The sharp rejection of any form of legal liability means, among other things, that NS does not have to submit to any form of public accountability and can therefore retain full control over its own narrative, both with regard to its own past and to the "moral design" of the restoration of rights.'⁶⁵

⁶³ Commissie Individuele Tegemoetkoming Slachtoffers WOII Transporten NS, 'Advies Individuele Tegemoetkoming'; Roger Van Boxtel, 'Press Statement Roger van Boxtel', 2019; *Presentation Individual Compensation Victims WWII Transporten NS*, accessed 20 May 2024, https://players.brightcove.net/2652457984001/6ds8tDnjb_default/index.html?videoId=6052578945001.

⁶⁴ Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck.

⁶⁵ Veraart, 'Rechtsherstel als moreel design', 52.

4.5 The Aftermath of the Advisory Report

In October of 2019, Van Boxtel sent out a letter to survivors or descendants, in which he apologised on behalf of NS for its role during the war and stated that NS ‘will not look away from it’s past’.⁶⁶ Stakeholders could make a claim for individual compensation until 5 August 2020. In the end, 5498 requests for compensation by NS were approved, resulting in a payout of 43 million euros. Additionally, 5 million euros were allocated for collective remembrance, with financial support provided to Kamp Westerbork, Kamp Vught, Kamp Amersfoort, and the Oranjehotel by NS.⁶⁷ Furthermore, as advised by the Committee Individual Compensation, NS has since committed to conducting historical research into its role in the transports during the war, as it could ‘deepen [NS’s] own reflection on this episode in the history of the company, contribute to the historical perspective on the war years in the Netherlands and thus also do justice to the feelings of other victims of transports on behalf of the occupying forces, who did not benefit from the individual compensation on which this advice has been issued are eligible.’⁶⁸ After a ‘proposal for pilot research’ in 2020, the preliminary report by NIOD (the RIOD’s successor) on NS’s role during WWII was published in 2022 and a final report on this subject will – probably – be published in 2026.⁶⁹ The central question of the research is ‘the functioning of various levels of government, departments and individuals of [NS] during the occupation, as well as its involvement in and

⁶⁶ Muller, *Het gevecht met de Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, 88–89.

⁶⁷ ‘NS keert ruim 43 miljoen euro uit aan overlevenden en nabestaanden Holocaust’, *Het Parool*, 3 June 2021, NexisUni; ‘NS steunt herinneringscentra Tweede Wereldoorlog’, accessed 28 May 2024, <https://bit.ly/2Yxjj9t>.

⁶⁸ Commissie Individuele Tegemoetkoming Slachtoffers WOII Transporten NS, ‘Advies Individuele Tegemoetkoming’, 12.

⁶⁹ Savenije and Vastenhout, ‘Beladen transport’: ‘NIOD gaat onderzoek doen naar De Nederlandse Spoorwegen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog’, accessed 27 May 2024, <https://www.niod.nl/nl/nieuws/onderzoek-naar-de-nederlandse-spoorwegen-tijdens-de-tweede-wereldoorlog>.

responsibility for carrying out (transport) assignments ordered by the Germans during the course of the war.’⁷⁰

Additionally, NS has bundled all public information on NS’s role and reckoning on its website, under the title of the ‘NS during WWII’-dossier.⁷¹ The earliest record of the webpage detailing NS’s involvement during WWII, retrieved through historical web research, dates back to November 24, 2020. While this does not definitively indicate the absence of the website before this date, it suggests that prior to this, there were no traces of the webpage. Subsequently, the website has been archived 13 times without any alterations to its content or layout. Thus, it appears that the informative webpage has not been updated – at least content-wise – since the second half of 2020. This timing aligns with the deadline for submitting individual compensation claims, which was August 5, 2020.⁷² This could imply that NS may consider it a closed chapter for now. However, it is possible that the NIOD’s research in 2026 will open up the chapter once more.

Finally, when reaching out to NS for an interview to explore its perspective on NS’s role in the Jewish transports for this thesis, the request was not declined outright. Instead, it was conveyed that the current NS spokesperson, Geert Koolen, would need to ascertain who within NS still possessed sufficient knowledge on this subject to represent the company. Eventually, the inquiry led to a referral to Rutger Hamelynck. Although Hamelynck was no longer employed by NS, he remained the individual with the most expertise on this topic, according to Koolen.⁷³ This suggests that the knowledge regarding this subject (the transports and how NS has dealt with them publicly) is highly person-dependent, to the extent that a former

⁷⁰ ‘NIOD gaat onderzoek doen naar De Nederlandse Spoorwegen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog’.

⁷¹ ‘NS tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog | Over NS | NS’, Nederlandse Spoorwegen, accessed 19 April 2024, <https://www.ns.nl/over-ns/dossier/ns-tweede-wereldoorlog>.

⁷² ‘NS keert ruim 43 miljoen euro uit aan overlevenden en nabestaanden Holocaust’.

⁷³ Anne Knoop, ‘E-Mail Correspondence with Geert Koolen’, Personal Communication, May 2024.

employee should be consulted. When questioning Hamelynck about this, he responded that there was no such thing as a loss of knowledge when he left NS, as this knowledge was ‘relocated’ to institutions such as the NIOD and the Spoorwegmuseum. He regarded this relocation of knowledge about NS’s WWII-history to independent institutions as a positive development. He emphasised the importance of independently securing this information for future generations and acknowledged that external institutions were better equipped to provide neutral and objective reflection than NS itself. As he stated, ‘I find that a very healthy development.’⁷⁴

4.6 Conclusion

Throughout the examined period from 1995 to the present, NS has navigated a complex path in engaging with public discourse and acknowledging its wartime role, particularly amidst the broader context of social recognition from the 1980s onwards. Initially, NS’s approach reflected a reluctance to fully acknowledge its complicity in wartime activities, exemplified by Den Besten’s firm denial of moral responsibility in 1995, in response to Dorenbos’ request for reparations. This attitude contrasted starkly with the growing societal awareness and discourse surrounding the need for recognition and reconciliation with various groups affected by WWII during this period. Moreover, it conflicted with the more critical approach as seen in the contents for the 1995 exhibition and accompanying catalogue *Riding or Striking?*, the very reason that Dorenbos initially contacted Den Besten.

However, as societal attitudes evolved and external pressures rose, NS gradually shifted towards a more nuanced acknowledgment of its wartime role with

⁷⁴ Knoop, Interview with Rutger Hamelynck.

a seeming desire to close this subject. Collaborative efforts such as the poster campaign with the CJO and the *Loaded Trains* exhibition at the Spoorwegmuseum, as well as eventual compensations for victims and descendants, demonstrated a growing willingness to engage with public discourse and acknowledge its controversial role. Yet, NS's responses remained cautious and at times resistant, as seen in its initial reluctance to associate the poster campaign with apologies in 2005, and its initial reaction to Muller's requests. The fact that NS publicly called the payments for victims and descendants in 2019 'compensations' instead of 'reparations' highlights an ongoing trend of cautiousness towards its role in the transports, perhaps fearing further litigation when officially admitting culpability. It made the compensations a moral gesture instead of a legal necessity. Nevertheless, the refusal to admit culpability might also be linked to NS being convinced of having had a mixed and difficult role during WWII, resulting in horrible *and* heroic memories.

While NS's engagement with public discourse has evolved over time, especially during this period, it has often been reactive rather than proactive, driven by external pressures such as (threatened) legal actions and public scrutiny. The cautious reactivity of NS was provided with an additional explanation by Hamelynck in his interview:

What is often forgotten by the outside world is that everything you say about WWII, and specifically about the transports of Jews, has a significant impact on your own people. Your own employees. [...] After all, during World War II, there were many victims, within NS as well. [...] For example, trains were also targeted by the Allied bombings, and hundreds of NS employees lost their lives while doing their jobs. So, there are many facets to the same story, which make it not so straightforward. [...] NS was partly a victim itself, and therefore, for some NS

employees, it is also very difficult to accept that so much attention and money is dedicated to commemorating, honouring, and learning about Jewish victims.⁷⁵

In any case, despite making strides towards acknowledging its wartime role, NS's responses at times have not fully aligned with broader societal expectations for genuine reconciliation and restitution, despite its own claims of being attentive to these societal developments. In this regard, NS's journey reflects both progress and ongoing challenges in navigating the complex terrain of social recognition, historical accountability, and the possibility of litigation.

⁷⁵ Knoop.

Chapter V:
Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings

The following four sub-sections will summarise the key findings regarding NS's management of its public image related to its role in the transportations, as illustrated in Chapter II, Chapter III, and Chapter IV respectively. Consequently, several aspects of continuity and discontinuity throughout the complete periodisation will be highlighted.

5.1.1 Public Image Management from 1945 until 1960

NS, a company characterised by a technocratic, hierarchical structure with a strict discipline and a deeply ingrained culture of obedience, agreed to a 'loyal cooperation' with the Germans shortly after Dutch capitulation. Amongst other things, NS facilitated the deportation of Jews, Sinti, and Roma, whilst also participating in acts of resistance like the Railway Strike. Shortly after the liberation, NS managed its public image by emphasising acts of resistance and commemorating fallen employees while downplaying its agency and moral responsibility in the deportation. NS publicly attributed the transports to external factors, such as a lack of government orders and having to follow German demands to appease them. Therefore, NS created its own selective narrative of WWII.

During an external governmental investigation (1947-1956) into wartime actions, NS attempted to downplay its role and emphasise limited knowledge and agency, but the Commission's revelations and subsequent media coverage highlighted NS's passive stance during the war, resulting in significant but brief public criticism. Concurrently, NS attempted to influence Rüter's war documentation to align with NS's narrative, insisting on changes in the manuscript to downplay its cooperation with the Germans and to highlight its resistance efforts. Nevertheless, NS ultimately failed in shaping the publication to its upheld narrative,

as Rüter published the book without NS's approval, again leading to significant public criticism and a brief media storm.

5.1.2 Public Image Management from 1960 until 1994

During the Railways' 125th anniversary in 1964 and only four years after Rüter's publication, NS strategically redirected public attention from its WWII role by focussing on the history and technological advancements of the railways, selectively historicising its early days by using the steam train as a symbol of the past, whilst also highlighting future innovations to compete with the rise of the car. NS largely omitted its wartime history during the anniversary celebrations.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, NS strategically engaged with the Spoorwegmuseum, indicating the potential to control the narrative surrounding NS's (wartime) history. Concurrently, NS silently supported the Westerbork Memorial, perhaps to avoid drawing attention to the dark aspects of its history while still participating in commemorative efforts. During this same time period, NS undertook a comprehensive corporate image rebranding initiative, characterised by significant PR efforts and market research aimed at modernising its public image and distancing itself from historical associations such as the steam train. NS notably steered clear of revisiting its history during the campaigns aimed at enhancing its appeal as a modern transportation alternative and at increasing its travellers. The campaign serves as an extension of the trajectory NS started at the 125th anniversary.

Again, during the 150th anniversary celebration in 1989, NS meticulously constructed its public image through extensive jubilee activities and publications. Although they contained some of the earliest efforts to address NS's history with the transports, such as Van den Noort's chapter in *Het spoor*, the activities and publications mostly emphasised a positive historical narrative. This reflects a strategic focus on shaping a favourable public perception of NS.

5.1.3 Public Image Management from 1995 until the Present

During the *Riding or Striking?* exhibition at the Spoorwegmuseum in 1995, NS presented, in cooperation with the Spoorwegmuseum, a nuanced and significantly more critical narrative of its WWII history. This approach reflected a deliberate shift towards a more transparent public reckoning with its role in the transports. Nevertheless, NS avoided taking a moral stance by stating that the exhibition and catalogue were solely a factual narration of history. It was up to the visitor to form moral judgement. L.P. Dorenbos was one of the visitors who did exactly that. In response to his request for reparations, the first official request to NS, NS President Den Besten shifted the blame for the transports to the ‘deranged Nazi ideologies’, thereby denying a moral debt of NS. This response, which was largely repeated to another request, deflected NS’s possible accountability and can be seen as an attempt to close the chapter on NS’s wartime role.

However, NS’s participation in the CJO poster campaign in 2005 marked a significant moment in its public image management regarding its WWII history. Initially framing its involvement as separate from apologies, NS ultimately did issue a public apology, creating a pivotal shift towards acknowledging its historical role, though likely with a strategic aim of managing public perception and seeking closure on a contentious chapter in its past.

After ten years of relative calmness for NS, the 2015 coverage of *De Telegraaf* about a possible lawsuit on NS’s accountability for the transportations and Salo Muller’s public advocacy for reparations, public scrutiny and public demands for NS’s accountability was reignited. These events resulted in NS’s agreement to individual compensations. These compensations were thoroughly researched and advised by the Committee Individual Compensation Victims WWII Transports, appointed by NS. NS has since committed to all advised aspects, including paying 43 million euros to victims and descendants of the transports of

Jews, Sinti, and Roma. However, the decision to call the payments ‘compensations’ instead of ‘reparations’ underlines NS’s ongoing trend of cautiousness, perhaps fearing further litigation.

5.1.4 Continuity and Discontinuity

Throughout these periods, both factors of continuity and discontinuity can be discerned regarding NS’s handling of its wartime past. Firstly, the corporate culture within NS appears to be a constant factor over these years. While it previously exerted significant influence over the company’s operations, including how it responded to controversial issues, the corporate culture still plays a role in dealing with the past today, albeit to a lesser extent. Hamelynck outlined in his interview that NS’s approach to the past is still partly influenced by employees who have a connection to WWII, such as through acts of resistance. These employees would find it uncomfortable if NS were to fully repent and neglect the heroic aspects of its history; an opinion NS actively considers. Thus, it is evident that a company is also bound by its internal corporate culture in dealing with the past.

Additionally, there is a noticeable trend of public reactive engagement with the past. NS often waits to publicly react rather than acting proactively; a phenomenon evident throughout the periods. However, while proactive public actions are rare – NS seldom takes public steps that are not first raised by an external factor – there is proactive internal management of the past. Various strategies are internally created to construct and control a historical narrative, which is then selectively and strategically communicated externally. Examples include initiatives such as documenting the Railway Strike, anniversary celebrations, and advertising campaigns.

In addition to these examples of continuity within NS’s public image management, there is also frequent discontinuity. Interestingly, this discontinuity

almost always coincides with an external actor. While NS's corporate culture has a continuous influence on engaging with the past, NS Presidents from outside this corporate culture, acting as breakpoints, also influence how the past is addressed. Examples include Goudriaan, who filed a (possibly vindictive) complaint about, amongst other things, the transports during WWII to the NS Purge Committee; Veenman and the three NS employees who had been relative newcomers and were involved in the apologies in 2005; and Van Boxtel, whose prior political career may have heightened his receptiveness to societal issues, which could have influenced the decision to proceed with individual compensations. Other external actors throughout the periods, such as Salo Muller, L.P. Dorenbos, A.J.C. Rüter, and the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee, also create breakpoints by publicly questioning NS's constructed narrative critically, often forcing NS to respond.

5.2 Implications for Existing Research on Crisis Communication

The comparison of NS's public image management with crisis communication theory rather than image repair theory is based on the broader and more comprehensive nature of crisis communication. Crisis communication theory provides an overarching framework that encompasses how companies communicate with stakeholders, manage media coverage, and mitigate reputational damage during times of crisis or controversy. This approach allows for a more detailed analysis of NS's interactions with various external actors since 1945. On the other hand, as explained in the theoretical framework of this thesis, image repair theory focusses specifically on the strategies and tactics organisations use to repair their reputation after a crisis, therefore being complementary to crisis communication. These strategies have been thoroughly illustrated throughout the empirical chapters using exemplary cases that highlight NS's its public image management.

NS's public image management in the context of its role in WWII, specifically the transportations, can be analysed in relation to Fearn-Banks's five-stage model of crisis management.¹

- (1) Detection of the crisis:** NS has faced ongoing public image challenges related to its historical involvement in WWII. The detection of the crisis – its controversial wartime legacy, especially its involvement in the Holocaust – occurred in the immediate post-war years. After carefully constructing a heroic narrative that was upheld by both Jongstra and Hupkes, the Parliamentary Inquiry and Rüter's publication revealed a different perspective of NS's wartime involvement, marking the beginning of NS's public image crisis related to its wartime narrative.
- (2) Prevention:** Historically, NS's initial response to its wartime legacy was more about prevention of negative publicity rather than proactive preparation for addressing the crisis openly. For many years, NS attempted to downplay its wartime role and selectively shape historical narratives to mitigate or prevent reputational damage.
- (3) Containment:** NS's approach to containment has evolved over time. Initially, the company tried to contain negative publicity by emphasising its post-war resistance efforts and downplaying its wartime collaboration. However, as public scrutiny intensified, NS began to engage more directly through institutional collaborations and acknowledgments of its historical role, albeit cautiously.
- (4) Recovery:** The recovery phase in NS's crisis management can be seen in its efforts to rehabilitate its public image through strategic initiatives such as corporate rebranding and anniversary celebrations focussed on

¹ Fearn-Banks, *Crisis Communications*, 4–8.

technological advancements. These efforts aimed to shift public attention away from its contentious past towards more positive aspects of its corporate identity.

(5) Learning from the crisis: NS's journey towards learning from its crisis is evident in its gradual shift towards more transparent engagement with its historical role. Initiatives like the 1995 exhibition and subsequent apologies and individual compensations indicate a learning process wherein NS began to acknowledge its historical responsibility more openly, albeit while still maintaining a cautious approach, likely to avoid litigation.

While NS's approach to crisis communication regarding its wartime controversies can be effectively analysed using Fearn-Banks's model, it is important to note that this model typically views a crisis as a singular event, such as a product failure, boycott, or strike.² In contrast, the crisis related to NS's public image management and its wartime role is an ongoing issue that has persisted for decades, periodically intensifying due to various internal and external factors. Essentially, it is the same underlying crisis manifesting in different forms over time, partially guided by social developments, external actors, and internal dynamics. Therefore, Fearn-Banks's model does not fully cover NS's public image management, as it does not adequately address the complexities of a long-term, evolving crisis. The ongoing nature and accompanying strategies of publicly dealing with historical controversies, as seen with a company like NS, require further exploration in future research.

² Fearn-Banks, 1–2.

5.3 Implications for Existing Research on Dutch Memory Culture

WWII is a hotly debated topic in Dutch academic historical literature; extensive research has been conducted on what happened during WWII and its implications for contemporary society and our memories of the war. However, this thesis is the first comprehensive study on the subsequent corporate handling of WWII, specifically in the context of public image management by NS. It demonstrates how capricious the memory of WWII is and how this memory is intertwined with various factors such as shifts in societal attitudes, external scrutiny, and internal corporate dynamics. NS, as a case study, has at times deviated in behaviour from broader Dutch memory culture. However, this deviation can also be linked to the societal trend of focussing more on political rather than economic wartime collaboration, as economic collaboration was not punished in the Netherlands.

Therefore, the periodisation of Dutch memory culture concerning WWII is not as uniform as it may seem. The perspective varies depending on the specific actor involved in the discourse. Companies, for instance, take a different stance compared to museums, memorial institutions, journalists, and other societal entities. This variation in periodisation reflects a complex relationship between diverse internal and external factors, such as company culture, media coverage, external inquiries, and the ability to shape or alter historical narratives. NS stands out as a significant example, illustrating the influence of these dynamics on its public engagement and image management related to its controversial wartime role.

5.4 Prospects and Social Relevance

As direct victims and descendants of the Holocaust era reach old age, the responsibility of preserving the memory of this tragic period falls increasingly on institutions that can ensure its transmission to future generations. In this context, NS emerges as a potential mnemonic institution due to its historical involvement in

the transportation of Jews, Sinti, and Roma and its acknowledgement of this role. As a mnemonic institution, NS possesses the capacity to preserve the memory of the transportations through its documentation, commemorative efforts, and educational initiatives. Moreover, NS can and will have to play a crucial role in preserving the communicative memory of victims and descendants in a more stable form as cultural memory, as the victims and descendants are passing away. As these personal recollections fade, NS assumes a certain responsibility in cultural memory preservation. Furthermore, the fading of communicative memory *within* NS, such as the memory of the employees involved with resistance acts, will likely open up the corporate culture of NS in relation to WWII, creating more opportunities to engage in honest and transparent reflection.

In any case, drawing from Jan Assman's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, NS can serve as a repository of shared knowledge, ensuring that the lessons of the Holocaust exist beyond individual recollections, especially regarding the transports. By actively engaging with communicative memory through educational programs, memorial sites, and commemorative events, NS can facilitate the transmission of cultural memory across generations, thereby contributing to the ongoing dialogue on historical accountability and collective remembrance. As the conservator of its wartime history, NS has the ongoing potential to shape the narrative surrounding the Holocaust in Dutch memory culture, encouraging understanding, empathy, and a commitment to never forget the atrocities of the past.

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Appendix I – Overview of Institutions and People

Institutions

CJO – Centraal Joods Overleg, or ‘Central Jewish Consultation’

NIOD – Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies, or ‘Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (successor of the RIOD)

NS – Nederlandse Spoorwegen, or ‘Dutch Railways’

RIOD – Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, or ‘National Institute for War Documentation’

Spoorwegmuseum – Railway Museum

NS Presidents and Their Active Years (Chronological)

Note: this table only contains the NS Presidents who were mentioned in this thesis.

Therefore, this is an incomplete overview.

Name	Active
Goudriaan, J.	NS President from 1938 until 1940 and from 1944 until 1945
Hupkes, W.	Acting NS President from 1940 until 1944, NS President from 1945 until 1947
Den Hollander, F.Q.	NS President from 1947 until 1958
Lohmann, J.	NS President from 1958 until 1967
Ploeger, L.F.	NS President from 1979 until 1992

Den Besten, R.	NS President from 1992 until 2000
Veenman, A.	NS President from 2002 until 2008
Van Boxtel, R.	NS President from 2015 until 2020

Additional People Related to NS (Alphabetical)

Name	Role
Andrioli, F.D.	Head of the 150th Anniversary Preparations
Giesberger, G.F.H.	NS Head of Exploitations and Liaison for the highest German railway official (the 'Bahnbevollmächtigte')
Hupkes, G.	NS Chief of Internal and External Relations during the 1980s
Jongstra (first name/initial unknown)	NS Press Officer
Joustra, G.	Chairman of the Dutch Association of Transport Personnel (union)
Landskroon, F.P.A.	Treasurer of the Dutch Association of Transport Personnel (union)
Muller, S.	Holocaust survivor, known for his advocacy efforts to seek reparations from NS for its role in the Holocaust

Ravoo, J.	Director of Communications at NS at the time of the official NS apologies in 2005
Rüter, A.J.C.	Author of <i>Riding and Striking</i> (1960)
Van Rijckevorsel, W.F.H.	NS Head of Transportations
Van Winter, P.J.	Chairman of the Directory of the RIOD

Appendix II – Overview of Interviewees

Name	Role / Expertise	Location	Date
Barnouw, David	Holocaust expert, author of <i>De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945</i> , specifically the chapters on NS's handling of its WWII history	Amsterdam	02/5/2024
Hamelynck, Rutger	Former Head of Brand and Reputations NS	Amsterdam	31/5/2024
Houwink ten Cate, Johannes	Holocaust expert with a specific focus on the persecution of (Dutch) Jews	Amsterdam	29/5/2024
Koolen, Geert	NS Spokesperson	Amsterdam	31/5/2024
Pieterse, Evelien	Head Curator at the Spoorwegmuseum	Utrecht	03/5/2024
Veenendaal, Guus	Former company historian of NS, expert on the history of the (Dutch) railways, author of <i>De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd 1939-1945</i> , specifically the chapters on NS's history, company culture, and NS's relationship to the German occupier	't Harde	08/5/2024

Note: Geert Koolen was not interviewed but was present at Rutger Hamelynck's interview and granted approval on behalf of NS for the usage of this interview.