

Constructing Memory Through Communal Praying

How the Orders of Service of Special Occasions Contribute to the Functioning of Amsterdam's Esnoga as a Site of Memory

Marjolein Uittenbogaard

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the function of Amsterdam's Portuguese Synagogue (Esnoga) as a site of memory for the Sephardic community. Besides providing a historiography of this community in Amsterdam and discussing the postwar development of the memory of the Holocaust in the Netherlands, concepts from memory studies and a framework for psalm analysis are employed to analyze the communal praying in three of the Esnoga's Orders of Service of special occasions from the period 1961 (the Eichmann trial) until 1989 (the fall of the Berlin Wall). This analysis illustrates how the Esnoga is a space in which the Sephardic community can performatively engage with their collective shared knowledge of the past: the mythic past as well as the recent past of the Holocaust. In this way, memories are constructed and expressed which constitute the group's sense of unity and identity. The memorialization of the past and visions for the future are reconstructed in the Orders of Service in four ways: the psalms and prayers transmit memories over generations; the act of communal praying continually invests the psalms and prayers with new meanings; they provide a distinct, Godly view of reality; and they structure a feeling of communality across time and space. The communal praying in the Orders thus illustrates how the Esnoga allows for the transmission of memories through external symbols by acting as a site of memory in which the identity of the Sephardic community is expressed, transmitted, and affirmed.

KEYWORDS

cultural memory, Holocaust memory, site of memory, communal praying, Sephardic Jews, Portuguese Synagogue.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since its completion in 1675, the Portuguese Synagogue (Esnoga) has functioned as a sign of Jewish identity in Amsterdam and has become one of the most important Jewish heritage sites in Europe (Stoutenbeek and Vigeveno 2017, 45-46). The history of the Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam begins after the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, when many Jews fled from Spain and Portugal to Northern Europe and eventually to Amsterdam. The Union of Utrecht (1579) ensured freedom of conscience in the Dutch Republic, resulting in a climate of relative religious freedom which has become the cradle of what Po-Chia Hasia and Van Nierop (2002, 8-9) see as the myth of 'Dutch tolerance' that continues to be a powerful construct of Dutch identity.

Sephardic Jews, as well as Central and Eastern European Ashkenazim Jews, did enjoy greater fundamental freedom in the Netherlands than in the rest of Europe, although this only extended to the private practice of religion initially (Stoutenbeek and Vigeveno 2017, 14). The public practice of Judaism was only permitted later, which enabled the building of the Esnoga by the architect Elias Bouman for the Sephardic community in 1675. Built in the typical Dutch style of Calvinist churches, this unique building has since its completion served as a model for many other Sephardic synagogues worldwide (Stoutenbeek and Vigeveno 2017, 46-47).

The economic and social position of Jews improved since 1796 due to their emancipation, which legally made them full Dutch citizens (Liemburg 2016, 70). Anti-Semitism, however, was never fully absent in Dutch society. From the 1930s onwards, the threat of Nazi anti-Semitism grew, which resulted in an influx of Jewish refugees to the Netherlands. At the time of the German occupation, 140,000 Jewish inhabitants lived in the Netherlands. What followed was the systematic isolation, deportation, and murder of approximately 102,000 Dutch Jews (Gerstenfeld 2014, 151). Although Dutch Jewish property was oftentimes plundered, the Esnoga survived the war almost undamaged, due to the patrol of Jewish and later Dutch guards that protected it (Vlaardingerbroek 2013, 36-37). After the liberation of the Netherlands, the surviving Jews convened in the Esnoga for a special service on May 9, 1945. They were faced with the devastation of their community and the looting and desecration of their properties (De Haan 1997, 64). As the center of Jewish life resettled in the south of Amsterdam and migration to Israel and America continued, the old Jewish quarter lost its everyday use (Stoutenbeek and Vigeveno 2017, 38). Despite an eventual stabilization, the costs of maintaining the Portuguese Synagogue and its grand library, the Ets Haim, became too great and in 2003, its care was put in the hands of the Cultural Heritage of the Portuguese Jewish Congregation (Vlaardingerbroek 2013, 43). Nowadays, the synagogue continues to be a place of worship, while also being open for tourists visiting Amsterdam's Jewish Cultural Quarter.

In this article, I inquire into the Esnoga's function in Amsterdam's Sephardic community's cultural memory. To do so, I analyze how the communal praying in the Esnoga's Orders of Service of special occasions contributes to the functioning of the Portuguese Synagogue as a site of memory for Amsterdam's Sephardic community. An Order of Service is a booklet that contains the program of a religious service and the content of the communal praying. The three Orders that I analyze were preserved in the Allard Pierson Archive's Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana and originate in 1973, 1975, and 1985. They were written for special occasions, such as commemorations. In my analysis of communal praying, I mostly focus on memories relating to the Holocaust, due to the high relevance of this topic in the period from which the Orders originate. This is because

they were written in the years following the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, in which the interest in Holocaust memory was growing, but before the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, which resulted in a new dynamic between Western European Holocaust memory and Eastern and Central European memories of twentieth-century totalitarianism (Mark 2010, xv-xvii). Although much has been written about the development of Dutch Holocaust memory in this period, the Esnoga's memorial function has not been substantially considered. Previous research on the Esnoga mainly focused on its (art) historical, architectural, and historic-cultural (Belinfante et al. 1991; Vlaardingerbroek 2013; Liemburg 2016) significance. My article therefore contributes to the understanding of the functioning of this synagogue in the transmission of group identity and the processing of collective experiences after the Holocaust, as well as the role of communal praying as a mnemonic device in these processes. In doing so, I draw on ideas from the field of memory studies, such as the concept of 'sites of memory' and theories of the transmission of memories through symbols. Moreover, I use Matthew E. Gordley's framework of psalm analysis for the examination of communal praying in the Orders of Service.

In the following sections, I first lay out the theoretical framework of cultural memory studies that my article is situated in, as well as explain the methodology for my analysis of the Orders of Service, and critically assess the Orders of Service themselves as primary sources. Thereafter, I provide an overview of the development of Holocaust memory in the period from which the Orders originate. I then analyze the Orders using Gordley's framework and theories of cultural memory to assess how memory is constructed and transmitted through communal praying. Lastly, I provide some final remarks on how communal praying works as a mnemonic device in the functioning of the Esnoga as a site of memory and discuss the implications of this research.

CULTURAL MEMORY AND SITES OF MEMORY

In the first half of the twentieth century, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs developed the concept of 'collective memory', which he understood as the sociocultural frameworks that guide and shape individual memory, based on shared versions of the past (Erl 2011, 15). Halbwachs' notion was heavily criticized, for instance by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, who argued that only individual beings can have memories (Koselleck 2001, in Bottici 2010, 340). Eventually, the literary scientist Aleida Assmann (2006, 211) introduced a substitution for Halbwachs' term. She argues that humans do not only acquire memories through lived experiences, but also by interacting and communicating with other people. This dynamic can result in what she defines as four different 'formats of memory', which specify Halbwachs' 'collective memory' into individual, social, political, and cultural memory. This last format, cultural memory, is the subject

of my research. As the cultural theorist Jan Assmann (2010, 110-111) defines it, cultural memory conveys the collective knowledge of a group on which their collective identity is formatted. Aleida Assmann (2006, 220-221) sees this collective knowledge not as a static given, but instead as a continuous dynamic process of remembering and forgetting. As the mnemonic needs of a society shift over time, the selection of vital items for shared remembering may change, and events of past significance may fade from public commemoration or be rediscovered.

As opposed to individuals, Aleida Assmann (2006, 215-216) argues, groups do not ‘have’ a memory, but they construct one depending on the needs of their specific time and place. This memory is then transmitted through external symbols which serve as reminders of a certain vision of a shared past. Thus, according to the literary and cultural scientists Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009, 1), cultural memory is a continuous process whereby memories are shared through a body of reusable symbols such as texts, images, places, and rituals, specific to a certain society at a particular time, which serve to convey a feeling of communality across time and space. The repetition of these symbols therefore contributes to the sense of a stable collective self-image over time.

Remembering, according to Erll and Rigney (2009, 2), is an active engagement with the past. If memory is no longer engaged with and ceases to generate its own reproductions in new forms, it becomes obsolete (Rigney 2016, 68). The crystallization of memory in reusable symbols facilitates engagement through a continual process of learning, identification, and organized commemoration. Symbols which can prove to be of an especially powerful and enduring nature are sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*. This term was first coined in 1989 by the historian Pierre Nora and further defined in his 1996 volume *Realms of Memory*. In his definition, “a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (Nora 1996, xvii). Hence, sites of memory are symbols for the cultural memory of a community, which have retained this status either through their significance for the group or through temporal authority.

While Nora’s understanding of this concept is quite broad, the historian Jay Winter proposes a narrower conceptualization of sites of memory as material places. Winter (2010, 61), building on Jan Assmann’s previously mentioned definition of cultural memory, proposes that sites of memory function as places where groups of people engage in public activity in which they express the shared knowledge that constitutes the group’s identity. Adding to this, Erll and Rigney (2009, 4-5) and Rigney’s (2010, 345-346) perceptions of sites of memory, which follow Nora’s idea of

these sites not necessarily being actual locations, refocus on the significance of the remediation of these sites. The remediation of shared versions of the past creates, stabilizes, and renews these sites as it repurposes the cultural practices performed by the community, continually investing them with new meaning. Thus, by commemorating at sites of memory, people inherit the past meanings attached to them, while also generating new meanings through the remediation of cultural practices. This ensures the continued engagement with and relevance of the memories of these sites of memory.

In this article, I consider the communal praying in the Orders of Service as symbols through which the cultural memory of the Sephardic community is transmitted. The communal praying in the Orders illustrates the community's continued active engagement with the past, as it contributes to the reaffirmation of group identity through the prayers and psalms' textual elements, the spatial dimension of their utterance in the Esnoga, and their ritualized nature. Drawing on the discussed conceptualizations of sites of memory, the synagogue constitutes a place where public activities such as services and communal praying contribute to the passing down of memories over generations. The remediation of these cultural practices, in which groups express their shared knowledge, ensures that the psalms and prayers are continually invested with new meaning while also passing on their past significance. Moreover, following Nora, the Esnoga's functioning as a symbol of cultural memory illustrates the dynamic of its temporal authority and group significance, in terms of (im)material value, to the Sephardic community. This temporal authority stems from the Esnoga's long existence and almost unbroken religious usage. Its material significance originates from its architectural international renown, tangibility as a symbol of Jewish historical presence in Amsterdam, and monumental status as one of the few Jewish buildings that survived the Second World War. Lastly, its immaterial significance results from its public function as a European Jewish heritage site and sign of Jewish identity in Amsterdam, as well as its function for the Sephardic community as an institute for learning and the transmission of Jewish identity through services and education, which is supported by the knowledge preserved in the synagogue's famous Ets Haim library (Stoutenbeek and Vigeveno 2017, 36: 43: 45-47). This cultural significance of the Esnoga has made it into "a symbolic element of the memorial heritage" (Nora 1996, xvii) of Amsterdam's Sephardic community that dynamically structures the memories and cultural practices remediated there.

MEMORY AND COMMUNAL PRAYING

To analyze the communal praying in three Orders of Service, I employ theologian Matthew E. Gordley's framework for psalm analysis. He originally developed it to examine the teachings and

meanings of didactic hymns, specifically the Jewish *Psalms of Solomon*, and the way they construct a vision of reality that operates on multiple communicative levels (Gordley 2014, 372-373). The similar cultural origin and ritual function of both the *Psalms* and the prayers and psalms of the Orders allows for the usage of Gordley's framework for the analysis of my case studies. In this analysis, I examine the Dutch version of the psalms and prayers sentence by sentence, and in their entirety.

Setting out from the premise that psalms function as vehicles of memory and therefore contribute to the development of a shared identity, Gordley (2014, 369: 373) distinguishes between five registers in which a psalm can function: the temporal, spatial, cognitive, attributive, and imperative dimension. These dimensions function to dissect the mnemonic potential of what Erll and Rigney (2009) call the symbols of memory. For this article, I focus on Gordley's first three dimensions due to their ability to demonstrate the shared vision of the past and perception of reality which reaffirm the group identity of Amsterdam's Sephardic community. The temporal dimension, Gordley (2014, 373) argues, affirms shared memories, myths, and narratives about the biblical and historical past, and serves to remind the community of their shared goals for the future. It thus recalls the chronological connection that runs between the Jewish past, present, and future. The spatial dimension alludes to places according to Gordley: it refers to earthly spaces, such as the city of Jerusalem, of Biblical, historical, or contemporary significance, as well as heavenly spaces. Lastly, Gordley proposes the cognitive register as a device through which a vision of reality is created by making claims about the natural world. These claims are often centered on divine intervention. As opposed to the other registers, the cognitive register makes direct statements about God instead of using metaphors. Using these conceptualizations, I analyze the cultural practices that invest the communal praying with meaning, thereby demonstrating the Esnoga's function as a site of memory where shared knowledge is expressed through public activity.

The Orders of my research contain the content of services of special occasions held at the Esnoga. These services were 'special' due to their dedication to specific events, in this case commemorations and jubilees. The dedication of the services, following Aleida Assmann (2006), signifies the cultural memory of the community, as it reflects the mnemonic needs of the group and their selection of what was deemed vital for remembering. Thereby, drawing on Erll and Rigney (2009)'s theories, the dedications indicate that the services remediate this cultural memory in performative acts of remembrance, which illustrates the mnemonic power of the services as well as the Esnoga's function as a site of memory.

The Orders consist of psalms from the Torah, standardized prayers, and prayers written specifically for the service. There is no documentation as to who composed the Orders, nor where the prayers originate from or who wrote them. The psalms are displayed in every Order in both Hebrew and Dutch, but the prayers are only translated into Dutch in the 1973 and 1975 Orders. The prayers of the 1985 Order are only included in Hebrew. Two out of four of these prayers have been translated by Naama Reuven, but this does not measure up to the authenticity of the translations in the Orders themselves (See Appendix A). One drawback of these Orders is that the sermons delivered during the services are not documented in them. However, the content of the prayers and psalms, as a valuable source of the Sephardic community's cultural memory, provides ample material to focus this research on.

DUTCH HOLOCAUST MEMORY BETWEEN 1961-1989

To understand the context in which the Orders of Service have been written, the changes that occurred in the Dutch culture of remembrance concerning the Holocaust between 1961 and 1989 need to be explained. When assessing these reconstructions of national memory, Frank van Vree's (2013, 2) notion that memory serves ideological needs, such as the preservation of national unity, is of importance. National memory is Aleida Assmann's main example of what she calls 'political memory'. Recalling her view of memory as a dynamic process, national memories are constructed following the ideological needs of a time by recalling or obscuring elements that safeguard the integrity of the nation and strengthen its positive self-image (Assmann 2006, 217). The changes in Dutch memorialization that I discuss hereafter reflect this dynamic.

From the immediate postwar period until the 1960s, the experiences and testimonies of the Jews had no place in the Dutch postwar idea of collective suffering of the nation and the myth of war-time national resistance (Duindam 2018, 9). In what memory scholar Michael Rothberg (2009, 10-11) calls a model of competitive memory, which leads to a milieu in which a competition for recognition leads to a hierarchy of 'winning' and 'losing' memories, the Dutch battle for recognition was won by narratives of resistance. The historical reality of Dutch collaboration and the ensuing Jewish destruction was largely obscured. This tendency fits into the European trend of silence surrounding Jewish stories of horror in the immediate postwar period as observed by sociologist Marek Kucia (2016, 97).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Dutch memory of WWII began to transform. Historian Ido de Haan (1997, 2) describes that although memories of the persecution and destruction of the Jews were never completely absent in Dutch discourses on WWII, from the

1960s onwards these memories were more present in societal debates, memorialization, and historiography. After the Eichmann trial, De Haan (1997, 170-171) argues, the Holocaust became an often-discussed topic, and the question of Dutch guilt in the destruction of the Jews reared its head. Despite these trends, De Haan (1997, 177) notes, the testimonies of survivors themselves were still met with reluctance due to the gruesome nature of their experiences. The remainder of the period until 1989 was characterized by a slowly evolving national memory that distanced itself from the myth of resistance and recognized its contested past (Lagae, Vanden Borre, and Van Nieuwenhuyse 2016, 32).

Despite this growing recognition, De Haan (1997, 156) writes, the Jews lacked agency over their narrative in Dutch national memory. The experiences of the Holocaust were often formulated in terms of the trauma of the whole nation, making the Dutch Jews one of the many victim groups who suffered from this trauma. Thus, although the Holocaust became part of social debates and the Dutch culture of remembrance, Jews, as survivors and witnesses, were not vital actors in this debate. As such, a national narrative was constructed in which the pain of Jews was recognized, but which continued the idea of ‘collective suffering’ to maintain national stability.

THE ORDERS OF SERVICE AS MNEMONIC DEVICES

1973: The twenty-five-year existence of Israel

The special service that took place in the Esnoga on May 6, 1973, was dedicated to the twenty-five-year existence of the State of Israel. Included with this document was a slip of paper which functioned as proof of being allowed to enter. This shows that the service was not accessible to everyone. Moreover, this slip states that, although organized by the Sephardic Jewish community, this was a joint service of the three Jewish congregations in the Netherlands. This means that the memory expressed in this service, while still adhering to Sephardic shared knowledge, might have been generalized somewhat to also appeal to the other congregations. The choice of location signifies the importance of the Esnoga as the public face of the Jewish community in the Netherlands for all three of these congregations based on shared perceptions of its temporal authority and (im)material significance.

This Order of Service encompasses five psalms and four prayers, both in Hebrew and Dutch. Due to the dedication of this service, the texts are mostly internationally oriented, except for the nationally oriented prayer for the Dutch Royal Family and the government. There are three internationally oriented prayers in the Order that address different actors related to the State of

Israel that the devotees want God to protect: the state itself, those who died in battle, and the active soldiers of Israel.

The psalms of this Order feature the three dimensions of Gordley's framework that I employ in this article. Firstly, the cognitive dimension is evident in the direct claims made about the nature of reality as shaped by the hands of God. In the psalms, God is praised or asked to provide guidance to His followers and give them strength to battle their enemies. Secondly, most of the psalms praise Jerusalem and connect this city with the mythic past or important values. In Psalm 122, for instance, the spatial dimension of the historic place of Jerusalem is metaphorically connected to themes of justice and peace. Lastly, in the psalm by Jesaja, the past, present, and future of the Jewish people are brought together in a vision of how God will reunite the diaspora Jews and help them conquer the neighboring states of Israel. This psalm invokes a vision of reality which ties together different periods and places to shape a sense of a common past and formulate a common goal for the future. Following Erll and Rigney (2009)'s and Rigney (2016)'s argumentation, the employment of these different dimensions functions to not only transmit memories of a shared ancient past through symbols which are imbued with new meaning by their relation to the present but also to create a feeling of communality across time and space.

The prayers of this Order are partially standardized, and partly written for this service. The scholar of Jewish history Bart Wallet (Cohen and Wallet 2018, 18: 23-24) writes that the prayer addressed to the Royal Family and the government is part of a centuries-old tradition, based on the Jewish desire to prove their patriotism and trustworthiness as Dutch citizens. During the service on the Shabbat, this prayer is recited in every Dutch Sephardic synagogue to ask for the prosperity of the Royal Family and the government. Before the war, this prayer was passionately recited at almost every service, but in the postwar period, it transformed into a standardized, weekly prayer (Cohen and Wallet 2018, 28). This reflects the Jewish postwar disappointment in the authorities and Dutch society failing to aid the Jews during and after the war (Gerstenfeld 2014, 162-163). The prayer illustrates how a cultural practice hands down meanings from the past, namely the Jewish loyalty to the Dutch state, but it also exemplifies the dynamic of remembering and forgetting in how memories can stop being relevant to contemporary concerns (Rigney 2016, 68). Although the prayer's significance has faded, its standardized nature ensures its continued existence.

Besides the Jewish loyalty to the Dutch government, prayers dedicated to the State of Israel have been included in services since the establishment of this state in 1948 (Cohen and Wallet 2018, 28). The three prayers dedicated to Israel contribute to the reaffirmation of group identity through

Gordley's temporal dimension: they commemorate the recent past and construct a common future through the active pursual of the realization of a Jewish state. These prayers, following David Duindam (2018, 9), convey a vision of the Jewish self-identity as active agents of their fate. This subverts what De Haan (1997) notes as the lack of Jewish agency over their narrative, albeit not in the national sphere but within the community. The identity that is thus constructed, as Jan Assmann (2010) argues, relies on the collective knowledge of the group about their struggle for an independent state. As this service was a joint ceremony of different Jewish congregations, it illustrates how this shared past and the future goal of an independent Jewish state unify different groups within Judaism.

1975: The three-hundred-year existence of the Esnoga

The second Order of Service originates from August 22, 1975. The service was dedicated to the three-hundred-year existence of the Esnoga and is a celebration of the Sephardic community's material heritage. The service was attended by princess Beatrix, who during that period worked to improve the relationship with the Jewish community, as her marriage with the German prince Claus, who had served in the Wehrmacht during WWII, had damaged this relationship (Cohen and Wallet 2018, 99-101). The presence of Princess Beatrix might have imbued the service, and especially the standardized prayer for the Royal Family and the Dutch government, with a greater significance concerning the assertion of Dutch citizenship and belonging for the Jews that her presence implied.

The Order is composed of a Dutch and Hebrew version of an opening and closing hymn, two psalms, and three prayers. While the opening hymn is based on Psalm 118, the closing hymn appears to have been written specifically for this service. Therefore, the opening hymn will be discussed with the psalms and the closing hymn with the prayers. As in the Order of 1973, one of the prayers is dedicated to the Royal Family and the Dutch government, and one to the State of Israel. The third prayer thanks God for His protection of the synagogue and narrates a short history of the Sephardic Jews in the Netherlands.

The communal praying of this Order, recalling Erll and Rigney (2009), repeats several symbols of Jewish memory through performative, ritualized engagement, which contributes to the passing down of a sense of a stable collective identity over generations. The Order begins with the opening hymn, which constitutes short praise of the Lord. The psalms of this Order are less elaborate than those in the Order of 1973. The first of the psalms educates the audience on God's love. The second psalm, Psalm 100, shapes a vision of reality by making claims about the world, for instance about the creation of humanity. Although both psalms embody Gordley (2014)'s cognitive

dimension, their temporal register is unclear, as no allusions are made to historical events. The psalms and hymns of this Order mostly engage with the cognitive dimension and thus primarily serve to convey and reassert the godly worldview on which their sense of self is established.

The central prayer of this Order is the prayer for the Esnoga. It provides insight into what Aleida Assmann (2006) sees as the selection of vital items for shared remembering in the Jewish memorialization of the Sephardic community's history in Amsterdam. It mentions their forefathers' flight from Spain, the protection of the Dutch rulers, the Holocaust, and contemporary Jewish struggles. This prayer illustrates the memory that the community has constructed for itself, and how it is transmitted in the place-specific medium of prayer. Thereby, it asserts the significance of the Esnoga for this community as a world-famous synagogue and as a source of divine inspiration and strength, which illustrates both the material and spiritual power of this place for the community as a site where, in Winter's understanding, memories are transmitted and imbued with new meanings through the public activity of communal praying. This performative engagement with memory through the remediation of external symbols, according to Erll and Rigney (2009), ensures the continued relevance of this site of memory. As this prayer makes evident, the Portuguese Synagogue has "by dint of human will" and "the work of time" become "a symbolic element of the memorial heritage" (Nora 1996, xvii) for Amsterdam's Sephardic community. Lastly, the Order concludes with the closing hymn. Following Aleida Assmann (2006)'s argumentation, the closing hymn, as an external symbol, serves as a reminder of the memory of the mythic past that the group has constructed for itself. It narrates a shared vision of Jewish history by addressing several subjects of this past, such as the uniqueness of the prophet Moses, and connecting these to the shared desire for the future: God's salvation at the end of days. The Order thus ends with one last reassertion of Sephardic identity which links the commemoration in the Order's central prayer of the historical past of this community in Amsterdam to the distant, mythic past and the community's future.

1985: The forty-year commemoration of the liberation of the Netherlands

On May 5, 1985, the service of the third Order took place. This service was dedicated to the forty-year anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands, but its psalms and prayers are in effect dedicated to the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. By 1985, this tragedy had made its way into the public sphere of commemoration and education. However, as De Haan (1997) notes, the Holocaust was incorporated into the Dutch myth of 'collective suffering' of the nation. The tension between the dedication and the actual content of this service, between what Aleida Assmann would call the 'national memory' of the Netherlands and the 'cultural memory' of Amsterdam's Sephardic Jews, illustrates how Jewish adherence to this national myth might have

been a way to privately commemorate their perception of the past and exert agency over their memories, without breaking with the narrative of national unity.

The Order consists of five psalms and four prayers, which are dedicated to those who perished during WWII; the Royal Family, the Dutch authorities, and the municipality of Amsterdam; the State of Israel; and the Israeli Defense Army. While the psalms are displayed in both Hebrew and Dutch, the prayers only include a Hebrew version. I propose that this could be because the content of the prayers is more private than in the other services. By not translating the prayers, chances would have been higher that no outsiders could get to know the memory of this event that circulated among the community and was transmitted through communal praying. Moreover, in this way, the Sephardic community retained agency over their memory, in contrast to the national memory of the Holocaust at that time.

All five psalms of this Order are connected to contemporary events and ideas, and virtually no temporal or spatial dimension is given. As a result, comprehending the psalms does not require an understanding of the mythic past or historical figures, but instead necessitates knowledge of WWII and the Holocaust. The first two psalms, Psalms 10 and 40, display a high degree of desperation and vengeful feelings. They express their desire for God to protect His followers and bring harm to those who endanger them. These feelings refer to the Holocaust: the Jews ask God to bring justice upon those who have fallen and to protect the Jews from further harm. The other three psalms, 117, 188, and 67, which form the end of the service, are more hopeful. They discuss the power, mercy, and love of the Lord, and narrate that God will protect His people, the Jews. These psalms function to empower the Jews: although they have suffered, God is on their side and will let no further harm befall them. All the psalms of this Order work in Gordley (2014)'s cognitive dimension to formulate a vision of God's might and contribute to the reassertion of their group identity as God's people. Moreover, the psalms refer to the Holocaust without mentioning this tragedy by name, nor employing the temporal register to allude to the past. In doing so, the psalms display their function, as described by Erll and Rigney (2009), as external symbols of memory which pass on the past meanings attached to the text, but also generate new meanings due to their usage in specific contexts, such as this service dedicated to the commemoration of WWII. Following Aleida Assmann (2006), the psalms of this Order thus illustrate the function of these reusable symbols in the continuous dynamic process of remembering and forgetting. As the vital items of remembering change over time, the psalms serve as vehicles which can take on new, additional meanings. The continued relevance of the Esnoga, where this continuous remediation of cultural practices takes place, is therefore safeguarded as it takes on the new meanings added by the mnemonic devices of the psalms while ensuring a feeling of communality through its

temporal authority and group significance. This, according to Erll and Rigney (2009) and Winter (2010), creates, stabilizes and renews the continued importance of the Esnoga as a dynamic site where knowledge is shared, and self-identity is expressed through acts of remembrance.

Besides the standardized prayers, the prayers of this Order have as their focal point the commemoration of the Holocaust. The standardized prayers largely embody the same mnemonic qualities as the earlier Orders, with the addition that the prayer to the Royal Family is now addressed to Queen Beatrix, as this Order originates from after her coronation in 1980. Despite the previously mentioned resistance against him, her husband Claus is included in the prayer as well. Moving on, the central prayer of the service consists of an excerpt from a psalm from Ecclesiastes and then discusses the Holocaust (see Appendix A). It demonstrates the memorialization of the Holocaust amongst the Sephardic community. The prayer contains forceful language and explicitly states the horrors that transpired, such as the brutal deportations of kin and friends to concentration camps. Not only grief is expressed, but also anger and feelings of revenge, which are formulated in a cognitive vision of reality in which God will avenge the Jews. This prayer, following the Assmanns' conceptualization of cultural memory, functions to transmit and express the memory of the Holocaust and helps to reaffirm a shared identity based on loss, trauma, and suffering. The prayer also formulates a common goal for the future: seeking vengeance for their loved ones. In doing so, the prayer follows Duindam (2018, 9)'s theory of the Israeli narrative in which the Jews are emancipated from passive victims to active agents of their fate.

This Order's other translated prayer, dedicated to the Israeli Defense Army, implores God to protect the Israeli army in the name of the mythic Jewish forefathers, thereby recalling the opening prayer's vengeful message, and demonstrating the active role of the Jews in battle. Both translated prayers draw on the temporal and cognitive dimension in their structuring of a shared past and common future, while calling on God for divine intervention. Using these tools, the prayers serve as a powerful, emotional instance of Gordley's conceptualization of communal praying as vehicles of memory to transfer and express memories amongst the Sephardic community. Moreover, drawing on Erll and Rigney (2009) and Aleida Assmann's (2006) theories of cultural memory, by linking the shared past and the common future together through the narrative of the emancipation of Jews, a strong feeling of transgenerational and transnational Jewish communality is established which reinforces the shared knowledge that constitutes the group's identity. The Esnoga, as an important site of Jewish worship and memory, thus functions as a space in which emancipating memories are shared to contribute to the construction of a positive self-image that bridges time and space. The significance of the synagogue as having survived WWII intact,

thereby functioning as a symbol of Jewish historical presence in Amsterdam, and its location within Amsterdam's old Jewish quarter, the historical heart of Jewish life in Amsterdam, support the transmission of these memories, as the meanings of the Esnoga's material survival and the memories of loss attached to the site are complemented with new memories of active survival and agency.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have analyzed how the communal praying in three Orders of Service of special occasions has contributed to the functioning of the Portuguese Synagogue as a site of memory for Amsterdam's Sephardic community. The analysis of the Orders shows how the psalms and prayers function as mnemonic symbols which transmit a certain vision of reality and a shared sense of past, present, and future by remediating narratives about the past, framing and contextualizing struggles of the present, and providing common goals for the future. This shared past is based on the mythic past of the Torah, the distant past, such as the historical relationship between the Sephardic Jews and the Royal Family, and the recent past, primarily the Holocaust and the proclamation of the State of Israel. The vision formulated for the common future mostly engages with themes of revenge for the Holocaust and glory for the State of Israel. The psalms and prayers transmit this in four distinct ways. Firstly, the psalms and prayers transmit and reassert the memory of the mythic and recent past to a new generation by repeating the established narratives and myths. Secondly, the act of communal praying continually invests the prayers and psalms with new meanings, which ensures their continued relevance. Thirdly, they provide a shared view of reality, which is steered by religious convictions and a Godly worldview. Lastly, the repetition of the psalms and the ritual of praying structure a feeling of communality across time and space, thus ensuring a basis for the community's sense of unity. The Sephardic community's performative engagement with their memory of the shared past is specific to the time and place of commemoration. As the synagogue's temporal authority and (im)material significance to the community have made it into 'a symbolic element' of their 'memorial heritage' (Nora 1996, xvii), the expression of Amsterdam's Sephardic community's shared knowledge through the public activity of communal praying creates, stabilizes, and renews the Esnoga's function as a site of memory. The communal praying that is recorded in the Orders illustrates how this space allows for the transmission and remediation of memories through external symbols, which are continually invested with new meanings. In doing so, the Esnoga's multifaceted significance, based on its material and spiritual value for the Sephardic community, is linked to shared views of the community's history in Amsterdam, their relationship with the Dutch state,

the painful memories of the Holocaust, and to a future that is constructed through emancipating narratives of agency and revenge.

The results of my research have three implications for the understanding of Dutch Holocaust memory, and the study of cultural memory. First, besides adding to the knowledge of the Esnoga's position in the memorial culture of the Sephardic community, my analysis provides novel insight into the memorialization of the Holocaust amongst Amsterdam's Sephardic Jews, who lacked agency over their narrative in the national Dutch memory of the Holocaust in the discussed period. The memories that are transmitted in the communal praying display a heavily emotional, vengeful relation to this shared recent past. Their attempted prevention of the dissemination of these memories illustrates the continued difficulty for Dutch Jews in voicing their experiences of the Holocaust, despite the growing attention to it between 1961 and 1989. Second, my analysis adds to the knowledge of the dynamic of the Royal Family in the memorialization of the Holocaust. The prayers dedicated to them embody centuries-old memories of the Jewish relationship with this family, but these ties have severely lost their significance in the postwar period. Developments concerning this postwar relationship can be discerned from its memorialization as expressed in the Orders. Third, my analysis of the Orders of Service illustrates how communal praying contributes to the (re)construction and transmission of cultural memory. The examination of documents such as Orders of Service holds great promise for improved insight into how within religious communities, which have often existed for centuries, systems of learning and identification contribute to a feeling of communality which traverses enormous periods, reaching back into mythic pasts, while connecting these pasts to recent events and future goals.

In the systematic analysis of cultural memories of religious communities, Gordley (2014)'s framework of psalm analysis, of which I have demonstrated a broader application, could be valuable. The documented acts of communal praying can provide insight into the shifting mnemonic needs of religious communities through the selection of psalms and the content of prayers, which demonstrate the dynamic process of what is deemed worthy of remembering, and what is forgotten. By analyzing the mnemonic device of communal praying, for instance in Orders of Service, we can gain insight into the development of the view of reality of religious communities and how they construct cultural memories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Petra van Dam, Naama Reuven, Leah Niederhausen, Sara Herrebout, Gijs Timmerij, the Editorial Team of *Junctions: Graduate Journal of the Humanities*, the anonymous peer reviewers and all others for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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Appendix A

1. Translation of ‘Gebed voor de zielenrust van onze broeders en zusters die omgekomen zijn in de tweede wereldoorlog’, as documented in: *Programma voor de bijzondere dienst in de synagoge der Portugees-Israëlietische Gemeente te Amsterdam: ter gelegenheid van de veertigste verjaardag van de bevrijding van Nederland: 5 mei 1985/14 Ijar 5745*. Amsterdam: [publisher not identified], 1985. Translated by Naama Reuven, October 5, 2021.

The first section is an excerpt from Ecclesiastes: ‘Ecclesiastes 7 / Hebrew - English Bible / Mechon-Mamre’

‘All of the souls of the people of Israel. Who were massacred in the years of the Holocaust (39-45). Six million men and women, boys and girls, old and young, who were brutally murdered in their home towns, cities and villages, and the rest were led like lambs to the slaughter to the concentration camps, and died in various deaths, and burned to ashes in the furnaces of the death camps in Germany, Poland, and the rest of the countries, by the hands of the murderer Germans and their murderer helpers from the rest of the countries, that were in one decision to exterminate, kill and destroy the Jewish nation and wipe any trace of Judaism, and consume any person who shall be in the name of Israel.

God of vengeance, judge of the earth, please remember the rivers of blood that were spilled as water, the blood of fathers and sons, mothers and their babies, teachers, and students, and return seven times the repayment to their oppressors. The scream "shema Israel (Jewish prayer)" that was cried by those who were taken to death will not be silenced, and the moan of the tortured will rise to your throne. To avenge, fast, in our time in front of our eyes, the blood vengeance of your holy sons and daughters, the pure and saint, who could not have a grave (meaning a Jewish burial in this context).’

2. Translation of ‘Zegenwens voor Israëlische verdedigingsleger’, as documented in: *Programma voor de bijzondere dienst in de synagoge der Portugees-Israëlietische Gemeente te Amsterdam: ter gelegenheid van de veertigste verjaardag van de bevrijding van Nederland: 5 mei 1985/14 Ijar 5745*. Amsterdam: [publisher not identified], 1985. Translated by Naama Reuven, October 20, 2021.

‘May the one who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon bless the soldiers of the Israeli Defence Force, who stand guard of our country and the cities of our god, from Lebanon till the prairie, in land, air and sea.

My god give our enemies who come to destroy us many maladies. God all mighty will save and preserve our soldiers from any distress and any illness and send blessing and success in all of their advances. (God) would exterminate all of our haters and would grace them (IDF soldiers) with the crown of victory.’