

## Tensions among Victims

### Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the role of the general characteristics of pre-war Dutch society in facilitating the victimisation of a substantial number of its citizens. Now, we have to take the next step and provide the general characteristics of being victimised, while in chapter 3 the specific war-fate of the victims in their most common Dutch environment: the city of Amsterdam, will be described.

Discussions about victims of a genocide and of the Shoah, in particular, quickly resort to debating tricks like accusations of 'blaming the victims' through to the chutzpah of the 'self-hating jew' or of 'antisemitism'. They are unavoidable, but let's try to forget them for a while after making the following remarks.

It is not always understood, for whatever reason, that there is also a victims – victims hierarchy, not just a victim – perpetrator one or even a hierarchy among perpetrators. It was not the daily experience of camp inmates as only victims or perpetrators. This subject will also be discussed in the next chapter while paying special attention to the relations between the Sephardim (called 'Portuguese jews' in the Netherlands) and Ashkenazim. But why?

Firstly, because it does not happen enough; secondly, because chapters 5–11 are devoted to the many scientific complications of the Sephardim hunt by specific perpetrators; thirdly, because specific sources became available to help create a rather original story; and fourthly, because the remarkable situation highlights the story of a minority within a small Dutch minority with serious mutual tensions during and after the war.

However, before describing this specific Dutch drama, it is necessary to provide a broader context and first answer some more general questions.

### How to Become a Shoah Victim?

It is often repeated that the "principle of the Final Solution was neither persecution nor punishment but obliteration – the attempt to make the jews vanish from the world".<sup>1</sup> For many reasons from the beginning this was an

immoral state project, comparable to smashing atomic bombs and using weapons of mass destruction, but also an utopian and impractical venture in view of its aim.

The jews in, for instance, the UK, USA or Soviet Russia could never have been caught by the Nazis as those countries were not conquered except in Nazi dreams of world domination. And it actually had a contradictory effect: no obliteration, but new life. These 'untouchables' could rightly strengthen themselves by transforming this immorality into a strong moral weapon (for some even with the addition: 'of mass destruction'<sup>2</sup>). The dialectics of the victim – perpetrator relationship through persecutions is demonstrated here in its purest form.

After the war the opportunity to go back to basics and solve the most serious problem of two world wars was soon missed. The typical Cold War propaganda to transform Stalin into a greater jew hunter than Hitler clearly demonstrates this. The former could never have made a deal with Hitler with jews as means of exchange. Even if he had been prepared to do so, directly after 1917 they were all changed into worker-citizens and were not registered as jews (if at all) according to any definition (rightly, as in most Western countries: 'religion is opium for the people'; religion became private business; separation of church and state etc.). In the Soviet Union jews did not exist publicly, and they were not alienated as in the highly-civilized Holland etc.

Last but not least: even in conquered countries only some of the jews could be caught. In Holland 75%, in neighbouring Belgium 40%, and in neighbouring Denmark almost 0%; even in Germany itself, only 23% of the jews were caught. And the survivors could strengthen their position in an unprecedented way.

Therefore, instead of discussing principles, we have to begin practically answering the given question. First comes the effect of what Arendt mentioned:

... the totalitarian ruler 'persistently insults another ... until everybody knows that the latter is his enemy, so that he can, with some plausibility, go and kill in self-defence'.<sup>3</sup>

By all the means of modern state propaganda, the Nazis exploited nonsensical stories told by religious, learned and antisemitic circles for decades: thus 'the other' was created; 'they' attack 'us' and, therefore at last, 'we have to strike back by all available means'. If Arendt had lived today, she would have made a principal amendment to her statement: it is not only a highly popular game in despotic or totalitarian regimes, but in 'western democracies' as well.<sup>4</sup>