

Define Saving *Gezina van der Molen and Anneke Beekman:* *History and Identity after WWII*

Abstract

This article examines the motives behind Gezina (sometimes spelled Gesina) van der Molen's efforts on behalf of Jewish children in the final year-and-a-half of World War II, her actions as head of the OPK, the Commission for War-foster Children, meaning the post-war commission in charge of finding permanent homes for about 1500 young, Jewish-Dutch war orphans, and her possible abuse of this powerful position in preventing the return of Anneke Beekman, one of these children, to a Jewish home-environment.

The Beekman case is an extreme, but not unique, example of the struggle for custody of the body and soul of a Jewish war orphan, which started in 1945, shortly after the end of WWII. Paradoxically, these young survivors who had been stripped of their Dutch citizenship by the occupation had survived their ordeal of separation from their parents with the help of good Dutchmen, and had lived, sometimes for years, in a Gentile environment, suddenly found themselves in the center of a stormy debate about their ethnicity. Their Jewish birth, which had been the sole defining aspect in their young lives, now was downplayed and marginalized by official guidelines designed not to give Jews a separate standing from other Dutchmen. This was largely the doing of Gezina¹ (sometimes Gesina) van der Molen, a deeply religious Calvinist legal mind and former

Keywords: *Ruth Samuel Tenholtz; Holocaust; Jewish orphans; Missionaries; Catholic Church; the Netherlands (Holland).*

1. Gezina (Gesina) van der Molen (1892-1978) played an important part in the Protestant Women's Movement. She was the first woman to take her Ph.D. at the Free University in 1937. In 1919 women obtained suffrage. Van der Molen's ambition to play an active part in politics was, however, thwarted. The Antirevolutionary Party refused to propose female candidates. In the Reformed Churches, women did not have a vote. During the war she played a leading part in the Resistance. She sought a responsible post after the liberation: the chairmanship of the Commission on the Custody of War Foster Children. Most of these orphans were Jewish. Van der Molen was inclined to assign the custody of many of them to Gentile foster parents. This led to a bitter clash with the surviving Jewish community. From 1947 Van der Molen served as a lecturer in international law. Her biography sheds light on a capable woman who was both ambitious and a member of the Reformed Churches - a combination not without difficulties.

She remained unmarried and established a household with her friend Mies Nolte. This life permits us to view Dutch Calvinism from unexpected and often neglected angles: those of women, the unmarried, the active core of the Resistance. The point of view of the Jewish community is of special interest. It may help to understand what Calvinism really was - and how it changed. A comparative approach will sharpen this understanding. Can Van der Molen's career be compared with that of women of the same generation, or was she a case sui generis? <http://www.inghist.nl>

http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gezina_van_der_Molen www.onderzoekinformatie.nl

resistance fighter, and the woman who took charge of the OPK (war foster children) commission in charge of deciding the Jewish orphans' future. She laid down a ground rule which insisted that marking these children as Jews would be prejudicial (Verhey (1991), p. 79; Fishman (1973), p. 3).

More than 20 years after Verhey and Fishman's strong critique of Van Der Molen is OPK leadership, Isaac Lipschitz wrote that official government policy demanded that "in the post-war Netherlands there should be no discrimination between Jew and non-Jew. This had been the German way of doing business, [and therefore, now] Jews could not be treated as members of the Jewish community, but exclusively as members of the Dutch community" (Lipschitz (2001), p. 12 [m.t.]).² This policy effectively destroyed the Jews' single advantage in claiming custody of their orphans. The moral argument that Jews had not been persecuted as Dutchmen but as Jews, and in this capacity had suffered their material and immaterial damage, had no bearing. Overall, minimizing the persecution of the Jews hampered their rehabilitation and re-integration in the fabric of society (pp.12-13).

The semantics also put the Jews at a disadvantage. The very term 'war foster children' -- *Oorlogspleegkinderen* "obfuscated the identity of the overwhelming majority of these children, who were simply Jewish [refugee] orphans" (Fishman (1984), p. 425). The argument, then, boiled down to a question of the best interest of the child without considering the unique and extremely painful circumstances under which these children had been removed from their parental homes. After all, the process of placing the Jewish refugees in Gentile households was hardly accompanied by legal paperwork. In fact, the entire transaction, because of its illegality, was secretive and dangerous, and punishable by death if discovered by the Nazi occupation. A further complication was the fact that the Netherlands did not have adoption laws. Until 1956, children who could not remain with their biological parents could be placed in orphanages or foster families which then served as legal guardians, but they could not be adopted; the biological parents could always come to claim their children, and the foster families' legal and material responsibilities toward the child in their care were limited (Spranger and De Jong (2006). n.p.).³ The absence of clear-cut guidelines governing who should ultimately be responsible for the upbringing of these young children probably contributed greatly to the entire controversy. Moreover, there was no precedent for suddenly having hundreds of children whose status had been brought about by such tragic circumstances. Gezina van der Molen's legal training ensured that she was familiar with the vagaries in the Dutch legal system concerning child custody and guardianship. This may explain why as early as 1944, with the war still on, she already designed protocols to establish the OPK, whose guidelines were to regulate the status of the children after the liberation. Her proposals were sent to the Dutch government-in-exile in London, and approved (Evers-Emde & Flim (1995) pp. 96-97; Flim, Bert Jan (1996), p. 356). Her resistance work with the children made her the person in

2 . M.t., my translation.

3 . N.p. no page number.

the right place, and while the Netherlands were under emergency rule, she allowed herself to be appointed head of the OPK commission she had essentially created.

Recently, renewed interest in Van Der Molen's activities has raised questions regarding her motives. Gert van Klinken, lecturer of church history in the Netherlands, and the author of *Gezina van der Molen's* latest and controversial biography, offers an ambiguous portrait of this woman. Hers "is a CV which few can put on the table. And yet, in retrospect her life is regarded with disdain. The reason: her absolute conviction in her own rightness. She did not watch scores of her friends die [during the war] only to meekly return the helm to the same authorities who had so clearly failed in her eyes." Carried to the extreme, she wished to see "... the ideal for which she fought during the war, continued after the liberation: a Christian Netherlands" After all, writes Van Klinken, "...she saw herself [and her group] as the best of the nation" and as a result everything could be "subservient to her high ideals." This is especially true of the way she made the solution of the Jewish war orphans "subservient to her own personal ideal." Considering that her "actions were far from democratic", much of the criticism about her leadership is justified (Gert van Klinken (2007), "Gezina van der Molen, Geprezen en Verguisd" [Praised and Vilified], n.p [m.t.]).

Van Der Molen argued that the Jewish children had long forgotten their origins and were already an integral part of their Christian foster families. Therefore, she saw no obstacle to requesting the courts to terminate the parental rights of the biological parents, and subsequently decide the child's future based merely on what she deemed to be the child's best interest. Moreover, the parents' suffering in the concentration camps would have so damaged them that they could no longer function as effective guardians of their own children. And finally, she wrote that

should the foster parents wish to raise the child, and are in a position to educate the child in keeping with his talents, the environment from which he came, and considering that the child has become an integral part of this family, we do not wish to tear loose these bonds (http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoptie_in_Nederland [m.t.]).

When the biological parents were dead, the process was even more biased toward the wartime caregivers.

The Anneke Beekman story exemplifies the struggle between the OPK and the Jewish community in the Netherlands. This toddler, in spite of her very Dutch-sounding name, was born into a strictly orthodox-Jewish family, in 1940. On the eve of their deportation East, her parents placed the child with the Moorsts, two elderly Catholic spinsters, living in Hilversum, not far from Amsterdam. There was no question that her stay there was meant to be temporary, but like the majority of Dutch Jewry⁴, the Beekmans did not survive. They were murdered in Sobibor in July, 1943

4. A full 75% of Dutch Jewry, the highest percentage in Western, Europe, were killed by the Nazis. Buses and trains-run by Dutchmen - took the captured Jews to Westerbork, and from there, trains left for Sobibor, and later Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen every Tuesday up until September, 1944 <http://www.annefrank.com>.

(Fishman (1978), p. 3). In 1945, surviving relatives came for Anneke, but acting according to Van Der Molen's OPK instructions, the child's rescuers refused to relinquish her. Subsequently, the courts rejected the Beekman family's petition, based on their youth "and because they had no children of their own." Moreover, they were secular Jews, and as such deemed unqualified guardians to raise a child born to orthodox parents. This religious argument was used time and again, often by opposite sides and often with opposite effect (Verhey, p. 178 [m.t.]). The question why a non-observant Jewish household would be less suitable to a Jewish child than a devoutly Catholic one was not answered by the OPK. Therefore, the argument of Jewish religiosity as a valid premise must be rejected. A more likely one is that the Dutch court simply was not ready to take Anneke from the Moorst sisters even though at that point the latter had already announced that they wished to have the child baptized. No injunction was issued to prevent this in spite of the Resistance's strict policies against baptism throughout the war (Flim (1996), p. 325).

Anneke's case was not all that rare. In a recent interview, Avirama Golan quoted investigative journalist Elma Verhey's as follows, "the period between 1945 and 1949 was a 'small Holocaust', [and] many hidden children in the Netherlands feel that their war began the day after the war." As Verhey saw it, neither Dutch Jewry nor Dutch society as a whole has yet begun to unveil the horrifying story of the children: not those who were deported to concentration camps and suffered from the German Nazi tortures on foreign soil, but rather those who were hidden in the Netherlands and remained alive (Golan (2005), "Their Small Holocaust" n.p).

Verhey spoke from a clear advantage. Both her 1991 book *Om Het Joodse Kind*, about the workings of Gezina van der Molen and the OPK, as well as her (controversial) 2005 book *Kind van de Rekening* about the way the Jewish organizations had handled the orphans' finances, benefited from the time which had passed. She had the advantage of perspective and, as an uninvolved party, also the objectivity to wonder why, for instance, two years had to pass before the Dutch courts made any decisions regarding the Beekman girl, and why an entire year had elapsed before any government official looked into the physical surroundings of the 4-year-old, considering her caretakers were two elderly spinsters and the potential adoptive family was young. Verhey, who is not Jewish, is one of those who hinted at missionary motivations for this oversight and based her suspicions on the fact that while the Jewish community, in the form of the *Le-Ezrath HaJeled- Het Kind ter Hulpe* (The child-aid organization) had actually been given custody, the Moorst sisters steadfastly refused to give up the child under the claim that Anneke herself refused to return to a Jewish environment. While she was aware of her Jewish birth, that was in the past and now she was Catholic, the women claimed (Verhey, p. 179). At the time the child was 6 years old, but the 'foster-aunts' took her conversion seriously to the point of relinquishing physical custody, and smuggling her out of the Netherlands in order to keep her within the Church.

The *Le-Ezrath HaJeled* was actually established in August, 1945, only a few months after the OPK opened its doors in May, 1945, and it was hoped that the Jewish organization, funded in part

by the JCC, would take over from the OPK, however, because of its strong Zionist tendencies, many Dutch Jews opposed the organization's demand that it be allowed to deal with the war orphans (<http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl/programmas>).

The motives behind saving Jewish children during WWII has often been discussed on two levels. On the one hand, there was the child's innate right to life which needed to be protected, but at times the rescue was motivated by a wish to save the child's soul through conversion. In the *verzuild-* 'pillarized'⁵ Netherlands, a society built around religious and/or political affiliation from which the Dutch Jewish community was excluded, the Jews had long learned to live with missionary efforts and other manifestations of (covert) anti-Semitism. After the war, the return to business as usual included turning a blind eye to such endemic anti-Semitism. It was, however, ever-present. Already at the Amsterdam train station, where so-called repatriating Jews were processed by the authorities and examined by doctors, "...the Mission had pitched their tents in the hope of making a few new souls" (Lipschitz, p. 15 [m.t.]). Another stumbling block to reclaiming the Jewish orphans was the fact that the post-war cabinet had a Catholic majority (www.parlement.com).

Haya Brasz related how Jews were mistreated and/or cursed by fellow Dutchmen in 1945, but rationalized these events. Their apologetic attitude is a case in point and may explain why the Moorst sisters were so successful and why the Jewish organizations took so long before turning to court action to place Anneke in a Jewish environment (*Le-Ezrath Ha'Am*, XX-XXI).⁶

In defense of the many good Dutchmen who risked their lives, saved scores of Jewish children, and returned them to their families, I include the text from two authentic postcards in my possession which show that notwithstanding guidelines already sent out to the Gentile families or the war-parents' wish to raise their young charges, they acknowledged the morally inalienable rights of the biological parents and relinquished the children, in spite of their personal difficulty to do so. The first postcard was written a few days after my parents' own liberation, in April, and shows that virtually my father's first act was the search for his daughters. The second note is dated six weeks later, May of the same year, and shows the relationship between the adults, and the child and her rescuers. It also shows how long it took to bring the little girl in question home. She is actually my older sister and was born in the same year as Anneke Beekman. Up to 1945 their

5. Pillarization: In Dutch : Verzuiling. A phenomenon characteristic for the Netherlands and Belgium - the organization of society in four pillars, a Catholic, a Protestant, a Liberal and a Social Democratic pillar (NL). The pillars have their own church, political party, newspaper, radio, labor union, school etc. The term emerged during the Interbellum. <http://www.zum>

6. This paper was printed in editions of 500 by Dutch Jews who had been hidden in the South of the Netherlands, the first area to be liberated, and distributed by the advancing (Jewish) Allied soldiers who handed out copies any time they found Jewish survivors, in an attempt to establish contact between those still alive. Some interesting columns in the paper are items concerning Jewish identity, such as news from Palestine, information about Jewish holidays, lists of survivors looking for relatives, and names of contact persons in every town.

stories are similar,⁷ but in my sister's case, the Dutch family returned their young charge and maintained loving contact with her until "mother Dekker" died in the late 1990s. She was there to walk her war-child to the wedding canopy, side by side with the two mothers of the couple, and at her funeral, she was eulogized by both her biological son and her war-child. Secondly, the note shows how my father wanted to resume his routine, did not define himself as a victim of the war, and knew that the Dutch government did not see him as such. This is first-hand, documented proof and bears out what Brasz and Fishman discussed. "The history of the Jewish war orphans in the

7. Date unclear Dear Mr. & Mrs. D.;

My name is ---- and I have been told that you are taking care of a Jewish child called J. C. I.. She answers to the name of Marianne. We heard this just now after endless investigation in Leeuwarden, but I am stranded before the Ijssel. We will try to reach you, but this is difficult. Perhaps you can pass through Nijverdal? Military documentation is under way. Can you please reply to this note as I am close to desperation

Nijverdal, May 28, 1945

Dear Mr. & Mrs. D.;

Since last week we are all together again and slowly we are adjusting. Marianne liked the car ride from your house to ours, but everything is so strange for her and foreign. She keeps on talking about you all, about Ermelo (the town), her sisters and brothers and father and uncles and aunts. She compares all the time. It is sweet. Nijverdal with Ermelo. "We have a big house in Ermelo too." She is adjusting a little and plays with other children in what is left of our garden. We stand facing life in shock. We do our best to make a new beginning, but it is all so very difficult. A large part of the village has been destroyed. We would like to leave this place, but how? I have applied for several positions, and have forwarded my diplomas, but so far without success. It may be months before anything will be happening in business, and help is forthcoming for war victims only. Anyhow, our little family, thank G-d is whole, and that is a great blessing, in spite of all the suffering. How are you, dear Mrs. D., now that your protégé is not with you any more? We well understand that this is very difficult for you, but you have truly done an extraordinary thing and we will never forget what the H. family and the D. family have done for us. We hope to send you a longer letter very soon, and meanwhile remain with friendly regards, and a big hug from Marriane.

* m.t the original was written in tiny script on the back of a postcard – see illustration.



שנתון "אמן" – תשס"ט – כרך י"ד

Netherlands testifies to the overriding desire of the Dutch Jewish community to survive” and this survival was predicated on remaining in the Netherlands, as in 1946 there was little talk of Zionism there. The battle for every single one of the orphans caused a painful fracture in the belief that the Dutch People and the government would see returning these children to surviving relatives or their social environment as a sacred obligation (Fishman (1973), p.1).

Where the biological parents went searching for their children, the situation was less complicated. This was especially true if parents recovered their children very shortly after the war ended, before the OPK had managed to contact all the Gentile families who had hidden children. However, the longer the search went on, or the later it started, the more difficult it became to claim the children. Both Golan and Verhey related several cases where biological parents, returning from the camps, were denied the custody of their children by the Dutch courts, and my own family had to deal with one childless couple who for several years begged my parents to leave one of my sisters with them, as they had rescued her and as such felt entitled to raise her. Although there was no recourse to legal action, the emotional toll was considerable. Statistically, the chance that the Jews would survive the persecution and deportation was poor, and most Dutchmen who took in Jewish children realized this, for better or worse. To begin with, a full 50% of the Jews in hiding were betrayed. According to Joop Sanders fewer than 10,000 Dutch Jews survived in hiding, and out of those, about 4,000 were children. Deduct the more or less 1500 orphans, and there are 2,500 children with 6,000 adults looking for their offspring (Sanders (1992), p. 75). This information emphasizes that not only were very few Dutch Jewish households intact after the liberation, but percentage-wise, the number of Jewish minors in need of a home was overwhelming. Adults, on the eve of their deportation, and aware that they might never return to claim their children, sometimes made pacts with relatives and friends to the effect that whoever survived would raise the children of the other. However, when adult survivors tried to gain custody, this quest proved far from simple.⁸

Whenever the Beekman case comes up, Rebecca Meljado’s name is mentioned as well. Her fate was initially perhaps more harrowing than Anneke’s, for she was shuttled back and forth between the Jews and the Gentiles. She was removed from her elderly savior’s house and temporarily placed in the Jewish orphanage. Friends of her parents had been given custody, but Rebecca never reached their home. In 1948 she was “abducted for the third time” and disappeared for several years. Only in 1954 was she rediscovered with the help of Dutch and Belgian police”. Actually, both Anneke and Rebecca were hidden in the same Belgian convent, but the former was whisked away as the police were pounding on the front door, and once again eluded discovery (Verhey, pp. 180-181; www.time.com/time)

8 . This also shows that the children were seen as an integral part of the Jewish community and allowed to go into hiding with the understanding that they would return to the Jewish community. Where claims were successful, children were raised by uncles and aunts, or neighbors. Some grew up in families where the parents were not much older than themselves.

During the war, both girls had been cared for by elderly, unmarried, deeply religious Christians of small means, and it is unlikely that these women could have orchestrated or financed the international disappearance of their charges without help from the Church. The only motive that makes sense is one of religious fervor. The Catholic Church had a vested, dogmatic interest in keeping these children from returning to Judaism, and in smuggling the girls across the border, the foster mothers lost the children more permanently than if they had been in the Netherlands with their legal (Jewish) guardians so that visits might have been possible, as it happened with my own sister. And so, the claim that they wanted these girls as their own children does not stand.⁹

A major obstacle to the return of the orphans to the Jewish community was the ethnic make-up of the commission in charge of placing the children. The Jews in the OPK commission were a minority, and their beliefs ran the gamut from orthodox to liberal, Zionist, or unaligned, so that not all even identified as Jews. On paper all denominations were represented, but in fact, non-Jews were in agreement concerning their religious interests, while the Jews represented diverse points of view. Gezina van der Molen clung steadfastly to her principles of viewing the Jewish children as Dutch only, attaching no importance to their Jewish birth, or their parents' convictions. As a result, the Jewish community remained impaled on the horns of the dilemma of going against the families which had kept the children from a certain death and insisting that "the problem of the war orphans was a Jewish one, and that under the tradition of Dutch law each religious community was entitled to autonomy in its own affairs" (Brasz (1995), pp. 66-69); Fishman (1973), p. 2). Notwithstanding this law, Gezina van der Molen remained intransigent and refused to reconsider her position regarding the orphans' identity and ethnicity. Her Christian beliefs included missionary convictions, and this constituted the gravest blow to the Jewish community. OPK's standpoint, as manifested by Van der Molen's inability (or unwillingness) to understand Jewish identity in the secular sense greatly hampered claiming Jewish orphans from non-orthodox homes, and Jews who had intermarried were at a disadvantage as well. Their claims for custody of orphaned relatives were viewed with disdain, and once Jewish ethnicity could be ignored, Van der Molen was free to insist on the child's best interest as the only parameter. The latter was adhered to up to declaring parents who had been through the camps unfit to raise their children, and at times to claim abandonment based on the parents' incarceration in the camps (Evers-Emden (1995), pp. 96-99). Again, the problem was Van Der Molen's reputation as a woman of principle and a respected resistance fighter. She had saved many Jewish children, and her emergency appointment to head the OPK commission may have been construed by her as a first step into government. In any event, the OPK with Van Der Molen in control was a major cause for the long, drawn-out battles fought over the children and their often tragic outcome for the adult survivors as well as the children themselves (Verhey, pp. 181-182).

9. Many Dutch war children remained in contact with their Gentile saviors. My own sisters did, and were walked to their wedding canopy by three mothers. My second-cousin's bride was walked to the wedding canopy by the nun who had kept her safe from the day she was three weeks old until she was 4.

Something of Van Der Molen's motives and beliefs emerges from letters she wrote to Abraham de Jong- later Avraham Yinon, who was at the center of the Jewish opposition to Van Der Molen's OPK leadership. From a letter dated July 1st, 1946, it emerges that Van Der Molen and De Jong had been slugging things out in the newspapers, and her letter was a private response to this very public disagreement.

I thank you for the article about our children in the NIW the Jewish Weekly. Beyond saying that I understand your need to respond to my own article from the weekly Trouw (a Christian weekly newspaper), I won't say anything because we will never see the end of it. Only two things I want to tell you. My emphatic expression concerning the heavy sacrifices made were underlined because I wanted to foreground them. You know that on this point I am hardly sentimental and that I hardly ever allude to the dangers which were connected to the underground activities. But, on the other hand, this does show that has too often been forgotten or marginalized. All those who sacrificed in this manner, have the right to hear a few words of recognition, even if this does not happen very often.

You say to me that you can count at the most 7 Jews on our commission. I remember, that in Palestine you talked of 6, and I wonder who has meanwhile been "promoted" (her quotation marks). Of course, my latter comment is not that important, but this is: if you do not consider 3-4 of the members of our commission as Jews, than neither are a large number of our children, in the same sense, for they were born to parents with similar points of view as these gentlemen; it is for this reason that I have never been able to grasp your reasoning on this point. You say that you do not grasp mine, and I believe you.

More and more do I come to the realization that we shall never find a middle ground, in spite of all our good intentions. The most recent commission meeting was an eye-opener in that respect for me and at the same time it was greatly disappointing. After our private conversation the other day, I thought that I could count on a different attitude on your part, without setting aside our basic differences. Let me remind you that you have always underlined this difference of opinion, but never the way it came to the fore at the meeting. The fact that concerning [one of the orphans] your point of view saw a complete victory is due to my own loyalty to the opposition [members] on the commission, but this is hardly appreciated, and has not led to a more temperate attitude on your part. I have many more examples [of opposition behavior] which clearly show my own sincere wish to achieve an honest and loyal cooperation [with the Jews]... I regret that our differences of opinion widen the distance between us, and while in your circles there is much talk of anti-Semitism, I wonder if the same circles do not suffer from a strong anti-Christianism.

This letter shows the depth of the Jewish-Gentile rift over identify and ethnicity, but it also shows a woman deeply convinced that she is the only person capable of making the right choices.

On July 27th of the same year, Van Der Molen wrote De Jong again, this time in reaction to the demonstrative walk-out of the Jewish OPK members. She expressed her regrets of this act, yet reiterated her love for the "Jewish child" and accused De Jong and the Jewish community of breaking off their cooperation.

Although we often disagree on the best interest of the individual child, for the most our decisions have been taken in the spirit of you and yours (the Jewish community). We have

seldom hesitated to break bonds which were as close and dear to the child as those with his biological parents. We have acted in this manner in spite of broad opposition nationwide, and in spite of the feeling that we have given in too often to Jewish pressure groups such as yours, and yet we have not succeeded in gaining your trust. This is painful to me. Personally, I am wholly convinced that we do everything in our power to find the rightful solution for every problem in our path. It must be understood that we are not allowed to lose sight of the psychological repercussions for the children which are the result of our decisions.

I am saddened that the Jewish members of the commission turned to the Minister of Justice and that his letter hints that the commission's decisions run counter to Dutch family law. This seems like a political step to me and meant to underscore the walkout. I cannot imagine that you are serious in this charge. You know that the commission tends to accept the unanimous wishes of the [children's] relatives on condition that the courts concur [with these wishes]. You also know that we try to take into account the clear and obvious belief system of the [biological] parents. You also know that if it is deemed necessary to place the child in a different family, the child is then placed in a Jewish environment.

In her own words, the rights of potential Jewish guardians are low on the pecking order, and obstructed by many legal barriers. The relatives must agree which of them should raise the child, then the courts must approve this choice and get the OPK agreement on the matter. And finally, should the Gentile family decide that they do not wish to raise the Jewish child any further, the Jewish community may then assume guardianship. This hardly sounds like a helpful protocol, designed to find a truly acceptable solution, palatable to the Jewish community as much as to the Gentile rescuers. Moreover, calling the Jewish community a pressure group is highly prejudicial, and hardly promises cooperation. It really is no wonder there was so much strife and the cooperation broke down when the Jewish members of the commission simply resigned en bloc. It seems that Van Der Molen's conclusion to stick by her guns is characteristic, and so is the statement that it is merely unfortunate that De Jong cannot understand the rightness of her path.

I regret your inability to accept that there are Jews, and thus also parents of our children who have a different outlook than the one you and yours see as the one and only right one. There is no point to continue this discussion. We shall continue our work in the same spirit and with the same objectivity which we have observed thus far.

These letters paint a portrait of a woman wholly convinced of the righteousness of her path, and may be interpreted as intransigent, and even intolerant. Her repeated use of the term "our children" suggests a sense of ownership, or perhaps love toward the children, but it certainly suggests that she felt that she had earned the right to decide their fate, based on her own endangerment on their behalf. It is the writing of a woman motivated by her own view of right and wrong, and the sense that parenthood can even be a prize awarded for services rendered.

The third letter is different. It is dated June 29, 1948. De Jong had already made aliya and was living in Israel, at "Meshek Jeladim Pardess Hanna Palestine". He was running a home for orphaned children whom he had taken to Israel together with his biological family. The Jewish

State had been declared and was in the middle of its first official war of existence. Van Der Molen's salutation at the top of the letter is no longer formal and official. "Dear Bram" she wrote, an affectionate diminutive for the tedious-sounding Abraham.

For some time now I wanted to write to you, but I kept putting it off, since I thought that the post to Palestine would not get through in any case. I wish to inform you that I sympathize with the struggle in Palestine. I am of the opinion that the United Nations should offer Israel not only moral, but also military help against the illegal attack from the Arab side against her. After all, the United Nations obliged both sides to accept the partition of Palestine (an act which I mourn) and in case one of the parties decides not to accept this decision it is only reasonable that the other party be protected from an attack of the other party. In my eyes it is a scandal that our country has not yet recognized the State of Israel, even though I know fully well this is a result of a fear of the reaction of the Moslem population in the Dutch Indies. In my opinion, this should not be an argument. I vent these opinions time and again in election speeches given at this time at various venues, and the reaction is always a friendly applause. Meanwhile, the situation in Palestine remains precarious and we are deeply moved by the lack of unity in the Jewish camp, as emerges based on the actions of the Irgun Zeva Leumi. How awful that in this life-and-death struggle there is also an internal lack of cooperation. Still, I hope from the bottom of my heart that the Jews will be equal to the struggle and that finally there will be found a quiet place on earth where they can continue their admirable renewal. Our heart goes out to Palestine and as I already told you, we hope to return there in the near future.

I am sometimes asked if it is true that baptized Jews are excluded from the society in Israel and that they do not have civil rights there. I deny that this is so, strongly. After all, the State of Israel underwrites full freedom of religion and I believe that baptized Jews are even members of the Haganah. The State of Israel must realize that these people can be both enthusiastic members of the Jewish commonwealth, while accepting the religious precepts of Christianity. (From original and unpublished letters by Gezina van der Molen, the Institute for research of Dutch Jewry, Hebrew University, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem).

This last statement shows the depth of her inability to understand Jewish identity.

Van Der Molen ends with some news of the OPK. "There are still some 40 Jewish children in non-Jewish families, and we have to make a decision about them. Within the year we expect to end our activities." She does not say how she will decide in their case, then signs the letter with a personal, and cordial greeting from herself and her Catholic, female partner, M. Nolte.

The two official letters from 1946 are filled with legal jargon which make them tedious reading even beyond the old-fashioned language. They reveal Van Der Molen's beliefs vis-à-vis the rights of Jewish children as Jews, namely that these are secondary to other interests, and she censors anyone who wishes to predicate every decision regarding the children on the fact of their birth. Even her third letter, which was sympathetic on the one hand and extremely friendly toward the newly born Jewish State, here, too, there was an undertone of censorship and lack of understanding.

Verhey has always claimed that Van Der Molen set out to help the Jewish children in the hope of saving not only bodies but souls. And while it is true that Van Der Molen joined the child-rescue work rather late, in 1943, when the majority of Dutch Jewry had already been deported, it is also true that well before that, Van Der Molen was a staunch anti-fascist who had refused to sign the Aryan-act in 1942, and as a result could not work as a civil servant. Moreover, as long as trains left the Netherlands for unknown destinations in the East, she continued to give talks in churches and other venues, urging fellow Dutchmen to take in Jews, both adults and children. The latter was a rather dangerous endeavor, but according to Miep Nolte, her lifelong friend and roommate, she never wavered and was not betrayed (<http://www.hdc.vu.nl/Inventarissen>).

Gezina van der Molen was vocal about her convictions and active in the distribution of illegal newspapers. Her legal career has proven her to be a champion of equality for women, in all walks of life. Yad VaShem recognized her efforts on behalf of the Jewish children and in 1998 honored her as a Righteous Gentile, and yet, she remains a controversial and disputed figure.

Not long ago, the Dutch Catholic Radio Broadcasting Corporation, *KRO*, showcased her life story and in the on-line promo for the program, freely translated into English, headlined it as “Praised and Vilified”, and rhetorically asked, “With the Good Guys During the War, with the Bad Guys after?” (http://profiel.kro.nl/2007/0502van_der_molen). I asked the Dutch historian Bert Jan Flim to help me out in settling the Van Der Molen controversy either way, be it on the praise or vilification side. This is his reply:

Gezina van der Molen and Avraham de Jong had a love/hate relationship. It is true that she could never fathom the meaning of Jewish identity, but she possessed a deep understanding of human dignity and its corresponding broad set of values and norms. I do not believe that she sought to place Jewish orphans with Dutch Reform families in a bid to win souls (B. J. Flim, personal communication, March 17, 2008).

Nevertheless, history has proven that in the Beekman case, Van Der Molen certainly stood behind the Moorst sisters (the foster mothers) in their struggle to retain Anneke and help her convert. She strongly opposed legal action against them and appealed to Cardinal De Jong¹⁰ for support. “It would be regrettable for all of us if we were to be forced to participate in the prosecution of Dutch women who during the difficult years of occupation put their own safety in jeopardy for the sake of saving the life of a child”, she wrote (Verhey, pp. 181-182). The Church leaders preferred to remain officially uninvolved, but their *laissez faire* attitude sent a strong message to the Moorst

10. Utrecht - Archbishop Johannes de Jong, who in 1946 was appointed Cardinal by Pope Pius XII, during WWII became a formidable opponent of Nazi ideology, Nazi-Germany, and its henchmen in the Netherlands. He spoke up for the persecuted Jews. De Jong died 50 years ago and the recent anniversary of his death was used to commemorate his outspokenness during the German occupation of the Netherlands, 1940-1945. On July 26, 1942, priests at all Roman Catholic churches in the country read the pastoral letter by De Jong protesting the deportation of Jews, and encouraging them to use the alms collection to help the Jews. . In a reprisal, the Germans rounded up about 200 Jews who had converted to Roman Catholic faith. Date published: Sunday, October 23, 2005 www.godutch.com/windmill/newsItem.asp?id=830.

sisters that their actions were not against Church teachings. (p. 182). As the government quickly gave up even the semblance of searching for Anneke, and Queen Wilhelmina did not see fit to intervene in any way, it became possible to have her secretly baptized in 1949 (Fishman (1978), p. 4).

That the Moorst sisters did not act alone emerged from a correspondence from 1947 which brought to light that the political clout of the Catholic Church was behind their actions. The women turned to Alexander Fievez, a Catholic government Minister¹¹, and complained that to them it seemed as if

...all the Jews in our country occupy a privileged position. ...The foster mothers, by putting our lives in the balance have earned a right to this child. We know of quite a few such children who suffer under the negative attitude [meaning that children were returned to a Jewish environment] of the [OPK] commission and who will doubtlessly grow up into embittered adults. The Jews will then undoubtedly blame the Christians for this too (Verhey, p. 183).

The “negative attitude” alluded to in the letter relates to the fact that foster families were not automatically awarded custody of the Jewish orphans they had sheltered. If nothing else, this letter leaves little doubt as to the women’s attitude toward the Jews, and suggests that they may have saved the child’s life out of mixed motives. The saving of the “soul” may have been the more important aspect, as there is little evidence that the Moorst sisters merely longed to raise a child as their own. To begin with, they did not keep her in their home, and allowed her childhood to pass in uncertainty as she was whisked from caregiver to caregiver and place to place for years. They certainly robbed her of the chance to know of her Jewish heritage. The idea that the Moorst women were motivated by religious fervor rather than love for a small girl is reinforced by the fact that they played a role in the Rebecca Meljado disappearance as well (p. 184).

With the disbanding of the OPK commission in 1949, and the placement of most orphans in a more or less permanent environment, the whole controversy might have died down, but in 1953 a new scandal broke; this time in France, and at its center, once again, the Catholic Church and Canon law, in a pitched battle to supersede the laws of the land (p. 185). The case concerned two small French-Jewish boys who had disappeared under circumstances similar to those of Beekman and Meljado. Eventually the two brothers were traced to a convent which specialized in converting Jewish children, and released in the custody of their Israeli aunt (p. 185). This was, of course, the Finaly case, which made international headlines, including the Netherlands, where an indignant Dutch press exploded with headlines like “Abduction shakes France; Rising anti-clericalism; Tragedy in France: Two Jewish children baptized and abducted to Spain”, but soon enough there was the realization that the Netherlands had its own scandal and Anneke Beekman returned to the

11. Fiévez, Alexander Helenus Johannes Leopoldus (1902-1949) was twice a member of the Dutch cabinet after the war. The Catholic party was extremely influential, and Fievez served as Minister of War and Marine warfare. He held a position of great power during the 3 years he served in this high position (<http://www.inghist.nl>).

national headlines, first in a scathing editorial in the *NIW*, *Nieuw Israelitisch Weekblad* (*New Jewish Weekly* [m.t.], and later in the general press headlined as “the Dutch Finaly Case” (p. 185-186). And so, finally, seven years after the war ended, Anneke Beekman became the poster child for the struggle of the Jewish community’s right to raise its children, for the child with the Dutch-sounding name, more than Rebecca Meljado, symbolized the Jewish community’s battle for a unique ethnic identity.

For a year the polemic raged in the Dutch media in both the Christian and Jewish press. Catholic clergy openly supported the idea that practicing Catholics could be allowed to act according to their conscience and against the legal government of a country, in order to save a soul. An open statement to that effect, made by Cardinal Alfrink¹² set off a flurry of reaction in Protestant and Jewish circles (*De Haagse Post* [*Hague Post*] (1954), quoted in Fishman (1984), n.p.).

In terms of Jewish identity, the Beekman case ended badly. Anneke remained underground, and lived across the Dutch border until she came of age. Legally her own guardian at that point, she returned to the Netherlands and the public eye in 1961. She was interviewed on television, appeared wearing a large cross, and when questioned, professed to know nothing about Jews or Judaism. She only reiterated time and again that her Catholic kidnappers had actually been her saviors and she had embraced Catholicism out of conviction. Now 67 years old, she lives in France, has raised a family, admitted to being a little less wholeheartedly Catholic and somewhat less distant from her Jewish relatives, in an interview she gave to the *NIW* on the occasion of her 60th birthday (personal communication, J.C.I. Warradijn-Samuel, April 12, 2006).

And Gezina van der Molen? Van Klinken asks rhetorically whether “society can function without a woman of her type” and answers that “in times of prosperity and stability, we certainly can. As soon as general guidelines of justice are no longer recognized in the street,.... things begin to look different.”

Dutchmen, no matter what their origins or conviction, are in search of attitudes which can withstand the erosion of social stability. If the signs do not lie, Van Der Molen’s Calvinist beliefs may yet enjoy a comeback: to be principled, have clear opinions of justice and injustice, and to be unafraid (Van Klinken (2006), pp. 380-385).

I am much less sure than Van Klinken that society needs a person so strongly convinced that the yardstick by which she measures justice is the only accurate one I could have been easily

12. Alfrink, Bernardus Johannes (1900-1987) Priesthood: Ordained, August 15, 1924. Episcopate: Elected titular archbishop of Tiana and appointed coadjutor of Utrecht, May 28, 1951. Consecrated, July 17, 1951, Utrecht, by Paolo Giobbe, titular archbishop of Tolemaide di Tebaide, nuncio-internuncio in the Netherlands. Apostolic administrator of Utrecht, September 8, 1955. Transferred to metropolitan see of Utrecht, October 31, 1955. Military vicar of the Netherlands, April 16, 1957. Cardinalate: Created cardinal priest, March 28, 1960; received red hat and title of S. Gioacchino, March 31, 1960. President of Episcopal Conference of the Netherlands. Resigned pastoral government of archdiocese, December 6, 1975. Death: December 16, 1987, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Buried, St. Catharina metropolitan cathedral, Utrecht. <http://www.tldm.org>.

convinced that her religious Calvinist fervor motivated her to take missionary liberties with her position of power over the fate and faith of the Jewish orphans, However, the 1948 letter to Bram de Jong makes me wonder In the end, I suggest that while she may have lacked the ability to gauge the depth and scope of Jewish identity, its all encompassing influence on a person, and the indelible sense of belonging to a unique group in the heart of many extremely secular Jews, she sought to act upon her sense of obligation toward mankind, and this included the Jews. In this manner, they could not be seen by her as a separate part of society, but rather as integral members of the human race. Gezina van der Molen acted out of deeply felt humanitarian motives when she smuggled scores of small, helpless toddlers and infants out of the building where they were imprisoned, away from their parents, while awaiting deportation to Westerbork, the East, and certain death. Her actions were carried out with a great amount of danger to her personal safety, but this did not deter her. If these children were little warm bodies first and Jewish only after that, she acted in a similar vein after the war, in her capacity as head of the OPK.

Many of her decisions at the helm of the commission for the war orphans were infinitely painful and unjust in the eyes of the Jewish community and members of the general public, who saw returning the Jewish orphans to their community of origin as a debt of honor to the memory of their murdered parents. Separating the adult survivors from the only reminders of their lost relatives was beyond painful, and cruel in the light of so much [Jewish] suffering and loss. Furthermore, it is a historical tragedy that her absolute vision of right and wrong could not see this, but if Van Klinken set out to focus on “Gezina van der Molen as an exponent of her generation”, he is correct in saying that she did not melt into the crowd, but belonged to a rare strain of humanity, namely one of the few who were willing to stand up for the rights of man, and in that framework, those of the Jews (Van Klinken (2006) p. 11).

Based on Van Der Molen’s letter to Avraham Yinon from 1948; the fact that Yad VaShem, after careful examination of the facts, saw fit to honor her with the highest non-military distinction awarded by the State of Israel; Mies Nolte’s claim that Van Der Molen’s path was determined by her horror of what had transpired during World War I, which she saw as a failure of Christianity to stand up for the rights of man (<http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl/programmas>); and finally because in the end it all boils down to reading what was in Van Der Molen’s heart, I concur with Flim: Gezina van der Molen’s actions were the result of what her single-minded belief system allowed her to define as the best interest of the child. In her eyes, it was their suffering which had to be ameliorated first. For this she could wound the survivors, and as she wrote, she was willing to sever any bond, if attaching a child to a different one meant this would serve that child’s best interest.

From the Jewish point of view, Van Der Molen’s role as head of the OPK was far from heroic, and she certainly was no Solomon, although at times she was expected to be. Perhaps history would have been better served had the OPK never been established in the first place, and had the hidden children been allowed to return to their birth environment in the same helter-skelter way they had

been removed from it, or had the committee been the result of a Jewish initiative. Her own insistence upon establishing this commission, then, is a charge which could be laid at Gezina van der Molen's door, but the question of ulterior motives remains in doubt. Hindsight is a luxury, and as Flim said, both sides made mistakes. In fact, Avraham Yinon-de Jong, fellow OPK member, even chastised himself in later years for his "terrible fanaticism" in having demanded that "every Jewish child return to a Jewish environment", and despite his strong opposition to Van Der Molen's way of dealing with the orphans, he never accused her of having been motivated by ulterior motives in her decisions regarding them. Perhaps this was so because he knew how she had turned a blind eye to the Jewish initiative of smuggling orphans into mandatory Palestine (Haaretz, March 7 (2003). Avraham Yinon's grandson, Ran HaCohen recalls that his grandfather often spoke about their disagreements, but always insisted that Gezina van der Molen was not an anti-Semite (personal communication, Ran HaCohen, April 4, 2008).

Hopefully, with the renewed interest in her story, more primary evidence will surface which may tip the balance in the direction of praise or vilification of this single-minded and unusual figure.

WORKS CITED:

- Adoptie in Nederland (2008). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 18, 2008, from http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoptie_in_Nederland
- American Jewish Committee Archives* (2007). Retrieved February 9, 2007, from http://ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1954_8_WestEurope.pdf
- Anonymous (1953, March 19). Bewering dat de ouders van Anneke Beekman het kind afgaven, is onjuist. *Haagse Post*, no page number.
- Anonymous (1954, March 26). De toekomst van Anneke Beekman. *Nederlands Israelitisch Weekblad* (NIW), no page number.
- Ben-David, E. (Ed.), *Center for research on Dutch Jewry*. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from http://dutchjewry.net/main/projecten/projecten_archiefmateriaal_artikel1.htm
- Bogaarts, M. D. (2007). Fiévez, Alexander Helenus Johannes Leopoldus (1902-1949). *Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis*. Retrieved January 25, 2007, from <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/Index/bwn5/fievez>
- Brasz, H. (1985). Introduction to the facsimile. In A. J. Van Der Leeuw (Ed), *Le-Ezrath Ha-Am Het Volk Ter Hulpe: Het Eerste Joodse Blad in Nederland* (pp. XX-XXI, 1945). Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Brasz, H. (1995). *Removing the yellow badge* (B. Kaldenback, Trans.). Jerusalem: The Institute for research of Dutch Jewry.
- Cardinal De Jong remembered for his pronounced anti-Nazi views (2005). *goDutch.com*. Retrieved January 23, 2007, from <http://www.godutch.com/windmill/newsItem.asp?id=830>
- De toestand na de oorlog (2006). *www.verzet.org*. Retrieved January 29, 2007, from <http://www.verzet.org/content/view/602/35/1/4/>
- Evers-Emden, B., & Flim, B. J. (1995). *Ondergedoken geweest. Een afgesloten verleden? Joodse "kinderen" over hun onderduik vijftig jaar later*. [I was a hidden child. A walled-up past? Jewish "children" on their hidden years, fifty years after]. Amsterdam: Kampen, Kok.

- Fishman, J. S. (1973). Jewish War Orphans in the Netherlands—the Guardianship Issue 1945-1950. *The Wiener Library Bulletin* (Vol. XXVII, New Series, 30/31). London: The Eastern Press Ltd.
- Fishman, J. S. (1978). The Anneke Beekman affair and the Dutch news media. *Jewish Social Studies*, XL (1), p. 4.
- Fishman, J. S. (1984). The war orphan controversy in the Netherlands; Majority-minority relations. In J. Michman and T. Levie (Eds.), *Dutch Jewish History* (p. 425). Jerusalem: Institute for research of Dutch Jewry.
- Flim, B. J. (1996). *Omdat Hun Hart Sprak: Geschiedenis van de georganiseerde hulp aan Joodse kinderen in Nederland, 1942-45*. (Because their Heart Spoke: History of the organized help to Jewish children in Netherland, 1942-45, [my translation]). Kampen: Kok.
- Gezina van der Molen (1892-1978). *KNAW Onderzoek Informatie*. Retrieved January 23, 2007, from <http://www.onderzoekinformatie.nl/en/oi/vrouwenstudies/vrouwenbeweging/OND1295130>
- Gezina van der Molen (2007). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gezina_van_der_Molen
- Golan, A. (2005). Their small Holocaust. *Haaretz*. Retrieved January 26, 2007, from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=265290&contrassID=2&subContrassID=15&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y>
- HaCohen, R. (2003, March 7). בחזרה אל הולנד הנעדרת, בעקבות סדרת הכתבות על הולנד מאת אבירמה גולן. (Back to Absent Holland, in response to a series of articles by Avirama Golan [my translation]). *Haaretz*. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from www.haaretz.com.
- Klinken van, G. (2006). *Strijdbaar en omstreden. Een biografie van de calvinistische verzetsvrouw Gezina van der Molen*, [Combative and controversial. A biography of the Calvinist woman of the resistance, Gezina van der Molen, my translation]. Kampen: Boom.
- Klinken van, G. (2007). Gezina van der Molen, geprezen en verguisd [praised and vilified]. *Historisch Café*. Retrieved March 18, 2008, from <http://www.historischcafe.nl/column20070110.php>
- Lipschitz, I. (2001). *De kleine Sjoa: Joden in naoorlog's Nederland* (The little Shoah: Jews in the post-war Netherlands-my translation). Amsterdam: Mets & Schilt.
- Molen van der, G. (1946-1948). *Original and unpublished letters*. Jerusalem: The Institute for research of Dutch Jewry, Hebrew University, Mt. Scopus.
- Nolte, M. E. (1995). Inventaris van het archief van G.H.J. van der Molen (1910-1975). *Historisch documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme (1800-heden)*. Retrieved March 23, 2008, from <http://www.hdc.vu.nl/Inventarissen/268%20Molen%20GHJ%20van%20der.pdf>
- Periode 1945-1958: 'Rooms-Rood' (2007). *Parlement & Politiek*. Retrieved January 27, 2007, from <http://www.parlement.com/9291000/modules/f66ygrfj3>
- Rivkin, M. D. (1954). *The Jews and Judaism in post-war Amsterdam*. Unpublished MA thesis, Amsterdam.
- Run van, G., & Nijland, Y. (2008). Vragen onbeantwoord: Traumaverwerking. *Geschiedenis*. Retrieved, March 23, 2008, from <http://geschiedenis.vpro.nl/programmas/2899536/afleveringen/21978840/items/22063756/>
- Sanders, J. (1992). Opbouw en continuïteit na 1945. J. Michman, H. Beem & D. Michman (Eds.), *Pinkas: Geschiedenis van de Joodse Gemeenschap in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Kluwer.
- Schorr, D. L.(1954). *De verdwijning van Anneke Beekman en Rebecca Meljado. Witboek*. Amsterdam: De Nederlandsch-Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap en de Portugees Israelitisch Kerkgenootschap.
- Spranger, A., & Jurriën de Jong (2006). Half a century of adoption history in the Netherlands. *Web Magazine*, 31. Retrieved March 18, 2008, from www.cbs.nl/en-GB/menu/themas/veiligheid-recht/publicaties/artikelen/archief
- The Abduction of Anneke (1955). *time.com*. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,807952,00.html>

Bela Ruth Samuel-Tenenholtz

The Anna Frank Center USA (2007). Retrieved January 27, 2007, from http://www.annefrank.com/2_life_timeline_5.htm

These Last Days Ministries (2005). Retrieved February 10, 2007, from <http://www.tldm.org>.

Verhey, E. (1991). *Om Het Joodse Kind*. Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar.

Vreebrug, M. (2007). *Profiel: Gezina van der Molen*. Retrieved March 1, 2008, from http://profiel.kro.nl/2007/0502_van_der_molen/intro.aspx

Weinreb, F. (2007). Opmerkingen over requisitoir de gruyter. *Friedrich Weinreb Web Site*. Retrieved January 25, 2007, from http://www.geocities.com/fweinreb_documentation/gruyter.html.

Zentrale für Unterrichtsmedien (2007). Retrieved January 26, 2007, from <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/histdic/lowcountries/hdnlper.html#pillarization>