

# Sociological reading of diary fragments 1940–1945 [1] [#N1]

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**Abstract:** *How could people in a civilised society like the Netherlands go on living, with the horror of the Second World War around them? This is the focal question of our research, on diaries written during the German occupation of the Netherlands, by people who are neither perpetrators nor persecuted. We are especially interested in processes of identification and dis-identification, in the associated mechanism of compartmentalisation, physically and psychologically, and in the management of emotions. We use these concepts for a sociological reading of five diary fragments.*

**Keywords:** *wartime, diaries, disorder, situations, compartmentalisation, interactions, identification*

## Introduction

For Dutch people born after 1945, as we were, the word ‘war’ means ‘The Second World War’. We grew up knowing about that war, and issues of responsibility and guilt have always confronted us; they also form the starting point of this study. How could people living in civilised societies carry out such atrocities? How could they go on living, with such horror around them? It took Western Europeans decades to answer such questions with a measure of detachment, and their answers remain a constant matter of debate.

In the Netherlands, in a recent controversy between Ies Vuijsje and Bart van den Boom, the dominant issue was: what could people know, what did they know, what did they make of this information? These questions are part of an ongoing debate (see, for Sweden in 2014, Ekman 2015), while they also feature in earlier debates. See for example the introduction of *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (2008), in which Ian Kershaw gives a review of his academic life, and an inventory of academic arguments. In his first study of the Third Reich he was struck by how little the ‘Jewish Question’ appeared to figure in the police reports that he analysed. According to Kershaw, most Germans had other things on their mind. He described their attitude as ‘indifference’, as ‘shrugging one’s shoulders or turning one’s back on an evil in recognition that one can do nothing about it, and in the feeling that other concerns are more pressing or overwhelming’ (Kershaw 2008: 7). Other scholars were critical of his notion of ‘indifference’ and preferred the term ‘passive complicity’. After a long exchange of arguments, Kershaw came to the conclusion that interpretations of the attitudes of Germans ‘cannot be taken any further’: ‘But whether the passivity of the majority reflected moral indifference, bad conscience, suppression of uncomfortable information, fear of the consequences, or tacit approval for what was being done seems to me, truth to tell, impossible to establish’ (Kershaw 2008: 11).

In this paper we do not settle this debate, but we do something else. We give a sociological reading of diaries, written in the Netherlands during the German occupation. The Germans invaded the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, and the capitulation five days later was the start of an occupation that lasted for five years. Under this new politically and physically repressive regime, without parliamentary democracy, without rule of law, the

Germans wanted to make the Netherlands a National Socialist state, aspired to indoctrinate the Dutch in the Nazi ideology, and aimed to exploit the Dutch economy (Boterman 2015: 13–19). Under Nazi law, groups like the Jews were excluded and deported, while pre-war standards of identification and loyalty were challenged and resistance was violently suppressed. It is within that often intimidating context that we position our study. In our research, we want to see what people wrote about their experiences during this period: what they wrote about the things they did, how they reflected on their thoughts and feelings, how they managed their emotions (Hochschild 2003: 88). We want to know how they dealt with the changing power relations, which resulted from the German occupation. We are interested in people's descriptions of dealing with the radical changes in their daily lives; in their stories about changes in social networks (in power relations, affect relations, loyalties) and about interactions in new situations; in the ways they use pieces of information in order to understand what is going on; in their inner life, with its sometimes tumultuous and conflicting inner choir of voices.

## Civilised people in war time: interdependencies, interactions and feelings

Norbert Elias made macro processes perceptible by studying micro processes, and at the same time his insights into broader interdependencies made interactions and feelings more understandable. In the case of the Western European civilisation process he researched interpersonal standards of behaviour in relation to processes of state formation. He demonstrated that the personal learning of drive and affect controls follows society-specific patterns. One may even speak of a 'social character' (Elias 1939).

Processes of state formation, however, are not unilinear and can be interrupted. The legitimate monopoly of violence can be conquered, making the defeated subservient to the conquerors. New rules and new laws are formulated, as happened in the Netherlands during the Second World War with the exclusion of groups such as the Jews. These new rules of behaviour were incongruent with pre-war standards of identification and loyalty, while resistance was violently suppressed.

## The research: sociological reading of diary fragments 1940–1945

Our research material is stored in the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogs Documentatie (NIOD), where more than 1700 war diaries are collected and where each week new ones arrive. We restricted our research to the publication of *Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945*, selected by the NIOD (Sjenitzer-van Leening) and published in 1954.

We limited our analysis to the diaries of people who had not participated in the perpetration of any form of wartime persecution, or had been persecuted. They could be called 'bystanders', but that notion gives the false impression that they remained aloof. That, however, is not possible in an autocratic regime, where people are forced to choose a position (Boterman 2015: 21, 22). The concepts 'perpetrators', 'victims' and 'bystanders' suggest a static order that didn't exist. People could more or less co-operate or resist, people could change in that respect – depending on repression or food shortages. Bystanders could become victims or perpetrators; in the words of De Swaan, they could become 'people of the regime' (De Swaan 2014: 134). If one takes a continuum, with perpetrators on one side and victims on the other, our diary writers may be placed in the

middle – for the time being. That does not mean that they had a neutral or passive attitude towards the Germans, but they could not keep from participating in daily life: they had to make choices all the time.

One more limitation: our study only covers the first three years of the war. A reason for doing so is the call of the Dutch government in exile in 1944 for the Dutch population to write diaries, in order to record what happened during wartime. That request may have changed the attitude of diary-writers, who came to realise that their writings could play a role in the perception of the war by later generations. There is one more reason to emphasise the earlier years of the war: it was especially in these years that people had to accommodate and to re-orientate themselves in society. In that episode confusion and dilemmas are particularly outspoken.

The use of the *Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945* has specific difficulties. The selection of diaries and fragments is not accounted for by the editor. As regards the choice of the diaries, it is typical of the period of publication that there were different opinions about which diaries should be included. Up to the 1960s, the NIOD was in favour of presenting a positive national self-image. It wanted to show the resistance of the Dutch and therefore to exclude diaries of collaborators (compare Cohen 2007).

War diaries have been studied more often, in particular by historians (for example, Blankevoort and Voolstra 2001; Van den Boom 2012), but we feel that this earlier research did not fully exploit their richness. Van den Boom wants to refute the thesis that the Netherlands were a 'deportation country', which gives him a selective view. Moreover, as a researcher he takes a quasi-naive point of view. He wants to take the diaries for granted, and does not recognise the significance of second thoughts, contradictions and dilemmas in the documents; he does not acknowledge the existence of psychic processes like the suppressing of unpleasant ideas. We, on the contrary, expect that inconsistencies in the diaries and topics raised or implied between the lines lend themselves best to understanding people's experiences (compare Baggerman and Dekker 2004).

We are aware that diaries written during wartime have difficulties of their own. People censor themselves, out of fear and anxiety. [2],[#N2]. On the other hand, the functions of diaries are especially articulated in times of war, because of the large social transformations and the changing frames of reference in these periods. In such anxious days, diary writers need their diaries more than ever in order to establish a grip on what is going on. This function of the diaries makes them particularly interesting for researchers.

We do not aim to give a representative image of the diary fragments, but we use them as cases which can give us understanding of more general responses and coping mechanisms. We wondered how far we could come by examining the diaries with an open sociological mind, guided by relevant sociological theories and sensitising concepts. We focused on processes of identification and dis-identification (see also De Swaan 2014) – do loyalties shift, are new division lines defined between 'us' and 'them'; on the associated mechanism of compartmentalisation, physically and psychologically – how does compartmentalisation function as a way of social and emotional coping with incongruent settings, as a strategy for living in different moral universes, in different interactional domains (De Swaan 2014: 128); on the management of feeling, what Arlie Hochschild calls 'emotion work', when the consistency among situation, conventional frame and feeling is somehow ruptured (Hochschild 2003: 96).

Our focus is on the little events of the daily life of people, which is different from that of De Swaan whose centre of attention is the perpetrators, and the state and its role in separating 'we', the regime and its protégés, from 'them', groups who are targeted as victims. Processes of identification with the 'in-group' and dis-identification with the 'out-group' are promoted by compartmentalisation, which is supported by the regime's propaganda campaigns. Local and situational decivilisation takes place, while outside these compartments civilised behaviour remains the norm (De Swaan 2014: 127).

De Swaan speaks of an interchange between public rituals and propaganda on one side, and citizens' perceptions and feelings on the other side (De Swaan 2014: 122, 123). In our research material we learn more about these perceptions and feelings than about the Nazi regime. The diaries demonstrate how people play active roles in processes of compartmentalisation – physical and emotional – and (dis)identification, sometimes in line with the official doctrine of the state, sometimes out of line.

Using these concepts makes it possible to interpret the experiences of individuals from a sociological perspective – to make connections between their behaviour, thinking and feeling, to link these entities with their social networks and interactions. Such a sociological reading may be seen as complementary to a psycho-analytic approach, which focuses in particular on the inner world of individuals.

We selected five diary fragments, which lent themselves to exercises in sociological reading – actually we had a wide choice. In order to become more familiar with the diary writers and to get a better understanding of the fragments which we analysed, we looked at the original diaries from which the fragments are taken.

These exercises in sociological reading demonstrate the worth of 'doing much with little'. They can be seen as a possible strategy to analyse rich and promising research material like the diaries.

## Exercises in sociological reading

### Fragment 1 Changing situations in a changing world: confusion, chaos, bewilderment, searching for orientation

In the diary fragments dating from May 1940, the early days of the war in the Netherlands, one can read how people become alarmed and how they respond to their first fear, when existing social relations fall apart and new threatening social relations emerge. In less than five pages, a farmer, 19 years old, living in Limburg in the south of the Netherlands, who is clearly not used to writing, gives an emotional, extensive and poetic description of his interactions with other people during the first days of the war. He depicts his attempts to determine his own social position and how he draws lines between the people with whom he identifies and from whom he wants to distance himself (*Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945*, 1954: 15–19).

The farmer follows his customary routine. He harnesses his horse, but his action is disturbed by planes flying overhead. He is still in the mood of a normal day and doesn't think of war. The baker in his work clothes shouts to him: 'Do you think we have war?' The farmer laughs at him and yells back that the planes are on an exercise. But when he sees 'high in the air the planes fly like silver birds', he slowly realises that something is going on. Everybody is in the street, talking, discussing and shouting, trying to decide what's going on.

Later he meets a beautiful girl, with a heavily laden bicycle. 'I feel very sorry for her, she can hardly push her bicycle. She is tired, she is probably from the besieged town of Weert.' He wants to help her, but she becomes angry and is suspicious of his intentions. The farmer describes more refugees from Weert as 'a bunch of prisoners who are let loose. Nobody takes the lead, everyone has run away without planning, everyone only out for himself. [...] citizens and farmers, old and young, rich and poor, everyone the same, agitated and nervous, shouting and yackering at each other.' He describes how former hierarchical relations fall apart, and existing social differences disappear in this new situation.

The farmer writes also about his encounters with the Germans. How they come along, on tanks, bicycles, motor vehicles, on horse and by foot, air planes zoom overhead. 'A bullet hits the ground and he wants to pick

it up, but a German starts to scold him: 'Stupid Dutchman and spy. Just like a sermon. I curse that man in secret and I go indoors.' It is clear: the Germans are the conquerors, the Dutchmen are defeated. The German permits himself to act in a debunking way, while the power relations do not allow the Dutch farmer to utter his anger. Comparable scenes repeat themselves. The farmer sees how a German soldier kisses a girl. 'We are not allowed to do so, but they get the opportunity', is his jealous remark, typical of someone who feels humiliated by people who behave as conquerors. And as witness to the new power relations, a German cannon is placed in the garden of his farm, targeting the town of Weert. The Germans are in control.

In a very short time the young farmer comes to realise that it is war. He has a keen eye for the changes in social relations, which make ordinary interactions obsolete and which demand questioning and reflection. He encounters distrust instead of trust, rudeness, humiliation – but also solidarity. He describes his feelings of embarrassment about this new subjugated position as one of the besieged, and his attempts to manage his feelings (2003: 88). The young farmer gradually positions himself in this new social world, making compromises and concessions, giving and taking. In doing so he creates new social relationships, clinging to the old ones. On 14 May he writes: 'Everything is going back to normal.' He is wishing the war away.

## Fragment 2 The social character of a guilty conscience

On 5 March 1941 a young student, nineteen years old, receives the documents to apply for a new study grant. This time he also has to declare that he is non-Jewish. Not signing this so-called 'Ariërverklaring' means that he has to discontinue his studies and look for a job. He is a reflective man, used to thinking about his behaviour, thoughts and feelings, used to articulating and discussing them. He is deeply religious and reads ancient philosophy. At the start of the war he describes his distressed mood, how he tries to forget about it by being extremely busy and how he sees that behaviour as cowardice; how pleased he is about the resistance at the University of Leiden against the firing of Jews from public employment.

He describes his troubled emotions and how he makes a decision in broadly three weeks. His first reaction is: I know what the right thing to do is, that is to send everything back, but it is so difficult. He wonders about the value of his seemingly good principles. He is afraid that he doesn't dare to do what he thinks is right. On the one hand there are his conscience and his honour, but on the other hand there are his intellect and the interests of himself and others. It is the ethical against the rational perspective. In his reflections the student refers a few times to the reactions of people around him, and before deciding what to do he wants to talk to some friends. And he asks God to give him the strength to do his moral duty.

First of all, it will be difficult to persuade his father, who is in favour of signing and who wants him to finish his studies. Then there is his friend Marina, who is opposed to consenting. He is struggling with himself and he asks God for inner strength. On 28 March he writes in his diary: 'I will sign. But I will never forgive them' (*Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945* 1954: 89). On 29 March he has indeed taken the decision to sign, after several conversations with friends and acquaintances. One of their arguments has particularly affected him: 'Signing is in your own interest, but as a student, and in particular as a student with a grant, one also has a public responsibility to finish one's studies – both towards society and towards the government.' Another friend gives a variant of this argument: one doesn't only study because of one's own pleasure in reading Homer and Plato, but also in order to give others a share of the things one has learnt. The attraction of these arguments is their altruistic undertone, which helps him to come to a conclusion.

He makes his final decision in a pure mood, after his friend Reina has played Schumann's *Traumerei* and *Kind im Einschlümmern*. Suddenly he feels what he ought to do. He goes for a walk, and cries while he is walking: How to be sure that I am not moving into a slippery slope? He fixes a card above his desk, with the



text: 'Remember'. Just like the advice of one of his counsellors, who recommended him to sign, but to recall each day what an unholy thing he has done by doing so.

The student ends his contemplations with the statement that he is not ashamed. He feels a deep sorrow, but he is sure that he has done the right thing. He thought that signing was the easiest course of action, but now he thinks differently. Signing while maintaining his inner pureness – he sees that as the most difficult course.

And his difficulties are repeated. On 7 September 1942 he has to sign again, this time in order to declare that he is informed that accepting the grant involves the obligation to comply with the orders of the Germans. His troubles are less articulated than the year before.

He thinks of not signing, but that these foolish *Überaffen* are not worth the trouble. He makes a cynical joke: 'Come on, have a look. I have to sign a piece of paper. Come and see what I will do.' Is not-signing not *Principienreiterei*? And again and again he asks himself if this is a form of self-deception (190).

In the Netherlands in 1940 teachers were obliged to sign the *Ariëverklaring*. Of the 200,000 civil servants, fewer than one per cent refused to do so (Presser 1985: 51). This fragment shows how a young man dealt with his emotional tensions and how he expanded his inner dialogue by talking to other people. Before signing he reproaches himself for his indecision, and when he has signed he remains ashamed and tries to legitimate his decision.

But living with one's conscience is a social process. See also the words of a Dutch secretaris-generaal who signed and reproached the Dutch authorities for not anticipating the coming catastrophe. He regrets his signing of the *Ariëverklaring* and justifies his behaviour as follows: 'It was however indeed somehow in the air in those days, that people signed' (Presser 1985: 31, 32).

### Fragment 3 When pragmatism wins

The third fragment is from a housewife who is worrying about her son who is a prisoner of war, and complaining about the lack of food and the chilly weather.

29 June 1943: 'When will we hear anything from him? It is bad with the vegetables, people are waiting in long queues and most of them still have nothing and it's very expensive.' And without a pause or change of tune: 'Quite a few Jews went away again. I have been in their houses, it is terrible, they have to leave everything. [...] Today I got one pound of tomatoes for 50 cents at the greengrocer.' Four days later, 3 July: 'It is still cold and chilly. We still haven't heard anything from Henk [her son, CB/RvD] [...] Truus and I have been in the houses of the Jews, but there was not much to get, for the best things were already gone, such as underwear and linen, the nearest neighbours are the first to be there, I only have some little things and Truus has a scooter and some other children's toys.' (*Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945*: 309, 310).

This fragment gives a good impression of her concerns, a mixed bag of worries: her son, the lack of food. She shows some empathy for the persecuted Jews in her neighbourhood, who are forced to move, leaving everything behind. But four days later she is looking, with another woman, in the abandoned houses for things she can use herself. The empathy seems to have gone, or her pragmatism wins: that becomes in each case the dominant tone in her inner chorus of voices.

### Fragment 4 Identification and compartmentalisation

This fragment shows how ordinary life goes on, the consciousness of the continuing horrors of war notwithstanding. A 46-year-old salesman from Amsterdam sets off on a beautiful summer day, 20 June 1943, with his family to the Betuwe, in the Dutch countryside, to pick cherries. He finds that the trams aren't running, the eastern and southern parts of the city are fenced off: 'Good God, a new *razzia* (round-up), there goes our beautiful day.' His own inconvenience dominates. But he keeps up his spirits; they walk to the station, the train runs, a shout of joy: 'We will leave this place of misery for a day.' But he still realises what is going on in Amsterdam: 'Many people in the train don't even know what is happening in Amsterdam. The last Jews are being rounded up, swept together into a heap and carried off like cattle.' He shows a lot of empathy: 'They have to suffer a lot, separated from wives and children. Maybe they are not a pleasant people, but they still are human beings.' In spite of his compassion for the horrible fate of the Jews, he thinks about them in a collective depreciative way. And then, without any transition: 'But we are on our way to Tiel. Dora is already waiting for us. How peaceful it is in such a little provincial town. The breakfast table waits for us. How lovely it is here, the beautiful orchards. Life is like a dream.' His mood is fluctuating between his own happiness at this summer day and his compassion for the horrors of the Jews. 'And in Amsterdam the Jews are swept together into a heap like cattle. Their bundles on their backs, the blankets with them. Days before, they have prepared their belongings. But their departure must have been very hard. Leaving their home, their friends. And we are eating cherries, one basket after the other, and we laze away the day. How gorgeous it is here.'

Back in town the *razzias* are still going on. 'The hunt continues. And we are carrying our precious load home.' And he goes on about the cherries for about half a page: their joy about their rich harvest is the dominant mood. He manages to enjoy the day without forgetting what is going on in Amsterdam: how the Jews are being herded together and carried away. (*Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945*: 304–7)

## Fragment 5 Humiliation, jealousy (physical, social, sexual), confusion, shame

A 27-year-old doctor writes to his wife (or fiancée?) from the Army War Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*) in Utrecht on 1 July 1943 about his confusion after a visit from a physician, a weighty man with steely blue eyes, in a uniform covered with gold medals, accompanied by a handsome seventeen-year-old in white navy uniform with curly dark hair and a cheeky face, 'both correct in every inch, with a military fighting spirit. The vitality was pouring out of them.' This upsets the doctor greatly: the contrast between the starving sickly people and these strong handsome men is intolerable: 'These guys: they are sitting in the sun, they have been with women (the sexuality shone from their eyes), they wage war, have weapons, are militant, able-bodied [...] these two handsome beasts glowing with health and virility. I was raging.' Why? Humiliation: 'The misery of being occupied. We with our bleak faces, our thin bodies, without medals. Disabled ... that these guys are going with women, are sitting in cars and waging war, but *especially*: that they are having it off with women, that enrages my male instinct beyond description. Especially that guy: I would like to destroy him. After this visit I was still fuming for an hour. My patients did not recognise me anymore, they fell silent. And the worst thing was that I felt that the real cause of my feeling of humiliation was not these two men but my own stupid very unchristian passion. My sin was humiliating me.' (*Dagboek fragmenten 1940–1945*: 314, 315).

The writer of this fragment gives a clear description of the situation – the visit of the physician with his young assistant, and the sharp contrast between these strong vital men and the weak sickly bodies of the prisoners. What is interesting is the shift of his emotions from anger to shame and guilt. In his turbulent inner chorus of emotions – compassion, anger, passion – the feeling of sin becomes the stronger voice.

## Concluding reflections

Reading and reflecting on these and other diary fragments we see a great variety in ways of thinking and doing, in behaviour, feelings and morality, and within many people a fluctuating and multi-layered inner chorus of voices. The fragments also show clearly the social embedding of what the writers are thinking and doing: their behaviour and reflections are ingrained in their social relations and webs of meaning, in the networks of the persons with whom they live, work and talk, with whom they identify or from whom they want to disengage themselves.

Take the example of the *Ariërverklaring*. Or take the man who takes a trip with his family to the Betuwe, in the countryside, and is enjoying a day of relaxation and eating together, while in Amsterdam the *razzias* are going on. He is surrounded by his friends and family, and directs himself towards their words and behaviour and the interactions with them. This man has different tones in his words and deeds, dependent on the situation; his inner chorus is multi-layered.

The variation in responses we found in the diaries is not wholly dependent on social position, role or habitus, on interdependencies or situations. What we see is that people are embedded in social relations, but also relatively autonomous in their feelings and behaviours (Elias 2012; Van Daalen, 2007a, 2007b, 2013). We do not find confirmation of Erving Goffman's (1983) famous, deterministic adage: 'Not men and their situations, but situations and their men'. The diaries depict people who are confronted with situational tensions: they experience ambivalence, embarrassment. They create situations in mutual contact, they continually react to each other, and in these situational contacts shape their behaviour and emotions. They play active roles in dealing with their experiences and circumstances, and have difficulties with inconsistencies in their inner life and their social relations. Then they are engaged in the complex task of emotion management (Hochschild 2003), of giving direction to the sometimes tumultuous and conflicting inner chorus.

People ponder their considerations, they are selective in the things they acknowledge or deny, they distort or repress their memories and impressions. And they create borders between the different contexts in which they live; they compartmentalise their lives.

Fragment 3 shows a shift of some empathy with the Jews to a looking for useful goods in their vacated houses: the empathy is gone, the perspective is changed into an egoistic-pragmatic one. It was a partial and temporary identification, which makes way for pragmatic considerations about the usefulness of the relinquished property. Now the writer is with a friend or neighbour in the abandoned houses, it is another social situation, and that influences which voice becomes dominant.

Especially in turbulent times like war, people are confronted with situations and interactions that embarrass them in some way or another. The social world in which they live is no longer clear, and they have to consider their own thoughts, actions and feelings. In these circumstances they shape stories that make life bearable for themselves; they try to create harmony between the world outside and their consciences, their personalities and earlier lives. These stories demonstrate how they see their experiences, and the concepts they use in doing so; how they interpret and motivate their own actions, and how they evaluate and justify their behaviour. Writing their diaries, they create a story about their life and how they try to manage it, in order to get a grip on the events, and on themselves (see also Brinkgreve 2014).

Reading the fragments, one cannot distinguish sharply between black and white, between civilised or uncivilised. The picture is more complicated, more fragmented, situationally conditioned and multi-layered, and above all more diverse. People are not made of one piece. In one situation their behaviour is empathetic, in another situation they behave without any understanding of the feelings of other people. There is variation



between people, and inside people. That lack of a kind of unity makes concepts like ‘social character’ and ‘habitus’ problematic.

Referring to the theme of the conference: the question is whether we can speak about ‘social character’? Is there something that makes the Dutch different? The diary fragments do not enable us to answer that question. That question demands another kind of research.

Reflecting on our fragments, we especially see the differences, but a comparative study could possibly discover a specific Dutch way of managing emotions, a typical Dutch habitus. If there is a notion of social character, it is perhaps in relation to how people are socialised into dealing with emotions.

Our thoughts come close to Tom Inglis’s approach in his book *Global Ireland* (2011). In trying ‘to find out what makes the Irish different’, using sameness and difference as theoretical framework, he shows the importance of social context. ‘Individuals emphasise and play out their sameness and difference according to the social context.’ (Foreword: xii). That is also our conclusion, with an accent on the importance of interactions and situations.

For us, the value of a sociological reading of the war diaries lies in demonstrating the complex relationship between ideas, feelings and behaviour, resulting in a large variety in responses. Unravelling the behaviour, ideas and feelings of Dutch people living during the Second World War, showing the importance of social interactions and its influence on psychic mechanisms such as repression, compartmentalisation and partial and fluctuating identification, provides a better understanding not only of their responses, but also of contemporary reactions on the crises of today.

A final note. In Western Europe, there has indeed been peace for the past 70 years, but elsewhere wars have continued. Today the endless stream of refugees confronts us starkly with the effects of war in other, often distant countries. The present crisis suggests that our reactions and these of the people around us are comparable to the reactions of people living between 1940 and 1945, who were confronted with the consequences of war and repression but were not directly struck by them themselves.

## Endnotes

1. We want to thank Stephen Mennell for his conscientious editing. [\[#N1-pt1\]](#)
2. In the book about Leo and Tineke Vroman written by Mirjam van Hengel Tineke looks back to the Second World War: ‘Most of the things you kept secret, even in your diary, because of fear of the Germans who could find it. You couldn’t write what you wanted’ (2014: 190). [\[#N2-pt1\]](#)

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## Biographies

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