


ARTICLE

Silence and Small Gestures: Jews and non-Jews in the Netherlands (1940–1945)

Jan Burzlaff 

History Department, Harvard University, Robinson Hall, 35 Quincy St., Cambridge, MA 02138, United States
burzlaff@g.harvard.edu

Through a systematic analysis of 500 Jewish testimonies, this article seeks to expand the social and cultural history of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. Shifting the focus away from heated debates about ‘knowledge’ of the Holocaust towards wartime social interactions, it argues that prevailing notions of ‘resistance/collaboration’ and ‘rescue/betrayal’ do not fully account for the civilian obstruction of Nazi policies and many small gestures of support towards Jews. Ultimately, as a crucial addition to German and non-Jewish Dutch sources, Jewish accounts invite further perspectives on the broader landscape of Jews’ perceptions and memories of non-Jews, acts of disobedience and the effects of polarisation across Nazi-occupied Western Europe.

And you see the ones in brightness
Those in darkness drop from sight.

Bertolt Brecht, 1930¹

Within the blossoming field of Second-World-War-era European history, a comprehensive social history of the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation (1940–5) is lacking.² This article undertakes a more systematic foray into this territory by focusing on the everyday forms of social interaction and Jews’ perceptions of Dutch non-Jews. Such a perspective helps overcome the current shortcomings of our scholarly understanding of Dutch–Jewish relations and the black-and-white vision that dominates public discourse; instead, it highlights the multi-layered reactions of Dutch society to the persecution of the Jews.

To the extent that historians have analysed the occupied Netherlands, the so-called ‘Dutch paradox’ has prevailed.³ The ‘paradox’ explored why 75 per cent of the Jews in the Netherlands (102,000) perished in a country known for its liberal traditions. This abysmal mortality rate is particularly stark when compared with those in Belgium (44 per cent, 25,000 Jews) and Vichy France (25 per cent, 80,000 Jews). Historians identified several factors that contributed to the Netherlands being the site of the highest number of Jewish victims in Western Europe. First, the German police exerted an unlimited amount of control over the organisation of 103 deportation trains to the east. Second, the structure of the Jewish council, which was forced to execute German orders after February 1941, more closely resembled East European Jewish councils than those in Belgium and France.⁴ Third, the Jewish community falsely hoped for survival through compliance, which correlates to

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* (London: Methuen Drama, 2015 [1930]).

² Filip Erdeljac, ‘Local Experiences and the Second World War: New Perspectives on Mass Violence in Mid-Twentieth Century Europe’, *Contemporary European History*, 28, 3 (2019), 422–33; Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw, eds., *The Holocaust and European Societies: Social Processes and Social Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

³ See Ido de Haan, ‘The Holocaust in the Netherlands: National Differences in a Western European Context’, *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2019), 83–93; Peter Romijn, *De lange Tweede Wereldoorlog: Nederland 1940–1949* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2020).

⁴ Dan Michman, ‘Jewish Leadership in Extremis’, in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 319–40.

the late emergence of resistance networks and the country's population density, rendering hiding more difficult.⁵ A fourth reason that has often been put forward is Dutch non-Jews' passivity in the face of Jewish deportation. The survivor-turned-historian Abel Herzberg (who was liberated from Bergen-Belsen) and Loe de Jong (who escaped to the United Kingdom in 1940) painted a black-and-white picture of heroic resisters and collaborators, whose role they downplayed. During the 1990s, however, scholars began emphasising the role of non-Jews' passivity.⁶ After the turn of the century, public discourse increasingly reckoned with the national past, and the pendulum swung in the other direction. The image of a nation comprising law-abiding, and thus guilty, 'bystanders' gained traction, and research on the 'Dutch paradox' reached a consensus involving the four factors of German control, the nature of the Jewish council, the Jews' false hopes through obedience, and Gentiles' overall passivity.⁷

It is this fourth factor of indifference by non-Jews that Bart van der Boom's 2012 work has fundamentally challenged. His most vocal critic, the late Evelien Gans (1951–2018), even dubbed the ensuing debate the 'Dutch Historikerstreit', referring to the discussions that took place during the late 1980s over the singularity and the role of the Holocaust in German history.⁸ As this article thoroughly engages with van der Boom's work, his chief arguments must be briefly introduced. Based on 164 diaries, 53 by Jews and 111 by well-educated, urbanite non-Jews, van der Boom's book made a case against non-Jews' moral failure to act upon their knowledge of what happened to those Jews deported eastward. Dispelling the notion that most Dutch Gentiles were indifferent, van der Boom instead painted the picture of an empathetic public. Of the 111 non-Jewish diarists, 92 rejected anti-Jewish policies, and van der Boom argued that the German occupation morphed into a battle over the self-image of tolerant citizens.⁹ Some Dutch non-Jews would play a role in the persecution not because of indifference but rather due to 'fear, perceived powerlessness, or a misunderstanding of the facts'.¹⁰

There is much to commend in van der Boom's interpretation, which belongs to a recent trend that re-evaluates the notion of 'bystander', and social relations between Jews and non-Jews under the Nazi occupation.¹¹ Much ink has been spilt over van der Boom's narrow definition of 'knowledge', which he defined as 'subjective certainty' about the gas chambers, his evaluation of the extent of antisemitism in Dutch society and the minimal role that Nazis played in his book.¹² His work shifted focus from the 'Dutch paradox' to what he dubbed the 'Auschwitz reservation': that is, the absence of knowledge in the Netherlands about the death camps in Eastern Europe.¹³ A consensus on the 'Dutch paradox'

⁵ Ron Zeller and Pim Griffioen, *Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België, 1940–1945: Overeenkomsten, Verschillen, Oorzaken* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), 17, 654, 900.

⁶ Abel Herzberg, *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1950); Loe de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederland in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969–91). For a cogent summary, see Krijn Thijs, 'Ordinary, Ignorant, and Noninvolved? The Figure of the Bystander in Dutch Research and Controversy', in Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs, eds., *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History* (New York: Berghahn, 2019), 247–65.

⁷ A representative example is Ies Vuijsje, *Tegen Beter Weten In. Zelfbedrog en Ontkenning in de Nederlandse Geschiedschrijving over de Jodenvervolging* (Amsterdam: Augustus, 2006).

⁸ See Evelien Gans and Remco Ensels, 'Historikerstreit: The Stereotypical Jew in Recent Dutch Holocaust Studies', in Evelien Gans and Remco Ensels, eds., *The Holocaust, Israel and 'the Jew': Histories of Antisemitism in Postwar Dutch Society* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 341–74.

⁹ Bart van der Boom, 'Indifference? Dutch Bystanders to the Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 45, 1 (2017), 128.

¹⁰ For exemplary passages, see Bart van der Boom, *Wij weten niets van hun lot. Gewone Nederlanders en de Holocaust* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 11–14, 99, 173, 240, 294, 367.

¹¹ Jan Burzlaff, 'Confronting the Communal Grave: A Reassessment of Social Relations during the Holocaust in Eastern Europe', *The Historical Journal*, 63, 4 (2020), 1054–77.

¹² See Evelien Gans and Remco Ensels, 'De Inzet van Joden als "Controlegroep": Bart van der Boom en de Holocaust', *Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis*, 126, 3 (2013), 388–96; Christina Morina, 'The "Bystander" in Recent Dutch Historiography', *German History*, 32, 1 (2014), 101–11.

¹³ Bart van der Boom, '"The Auschwitz Reservation": Dutch Victims and Bystanders and Their Knowledge of the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 31, 3 (2017), 385–407.

explaining the low survival rates was reached in the late 2000s. The discussions after van der Boom's publications have then focused on antisemitism and the role of non-Jews' indifference and their behaviours – but these debates seem to have now reached a dead end. In her last interview, Evelien Gans characterised van der Boom's project as an attempt to 'defend the actions of average countrymen'.¹⁴ But even on a more methodological level, one is left wondering why 'knowledge' should even be the fundamental yardstick against which an individual's behaviour or a society's dynamics are measured. To move beyond these debates about collective guilt and moral defence, we need a fresh approach to social relations in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands.

In this article, I propose to shift focus from van der Boom's notion of individual 'knowledge' of the Holocaust to social relations. Van der Boom has paved the way for a bottom-up study of Dutch Gentiles and Jews, but I will undertake a more systematic analysis of social interactions in the Netherlands between 1940 and 1945 as experienced and remembered by Jewish survivors. It is only recently that historians have begun including multi-layered perspectives on Jewish survival and resistance activities.¹⁵ Katja Happe's survey of the Holocaust in the Netherlands, the most comprehensive to date, also invites new perspectives on the lived experiences of Jews and non-Jews.¹⁶ Despite their presence in existing studies on the wartime Netherlands, Jewish sources have rarely been analysed, a gap that is only now beginning to be addressed.¹⁷ Thus, I will explicitly turn to the perceptions of those who experienced the persecution in the occupied Netherlands – Jews themselves.¹⁸ How did they perceive non-Jewish neighbours, friends and strangers? A closer focus on such representations and perceptions will systematically integrate Jewish sources into the historiography and elucidate how the Dutch experience fits into and expands on the broader socio-cultural history of Nazi-occupied Europe. The Dutch case advances our understanding of Jews' perception of non-Jews, the polarisation of societies under Nazi rule and the importance of local dynamics in fleeting acts of support.

My article draws upon an analysis of more than 500 video testimonies, diaries and postwar memoirs by both deported and non-deported Dutch Jewish survivors. They were given or written in Dutch, Hebrew, English, German and Yiddish as early as 1940 and as recently as the late 2000s.¹⁹ For

¹⁴ See 'Evelien Gans (1951–2018): "Achter Racisme en Vrouwenhaat Duikt ook Altijd Weer Antisemitisme Op"', <https://www.vn.nl/uiteindelijk-ben-je-toch-de-ander/>

¹⁵ Bob Moore, *Survivors: Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Peter Tammes, 'Survival of Jews during the Holocaust: The Importance of Different Types of Social Resources', *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 36, 2 (2007), 330–35. An early work in that sense has been Bert-Jan Flim, *Omdat hun hart sprak: Geschiedenis van de Georganiseerde Hulp aan Joodse Kinderen in Nederland, 1942–1945* (Amsterdam: Kok, 1997).

¹⁶ Katja Happe, *Viele falsche Hoffnungen. Judenverfolgung in den Niederlanden 1940–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2017), 100–224. For non-Jews, see Dan Michman, 'Changing Attitudes of the Dutch to the Jews on the Eve of the Holocaust', in Joseph Michman, ed., *Studies on the History of Dutch Jewry* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 247–62. For rescue, see Dan Michman, 'Introduction: Beyond "Righteous Among the Nations"'; and "Altruism": On Rescuers and Rescue Activities During the Shoah', in Dan Michman, ed., *Hiding, Sheltering, and Borrowing Identities: Avenues of Rescue during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017), 9–20.

¹⁷ Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel, 'Being and Belonging: Benno Premsele, Joop Voet, Sándor Baracs, and the Holocaust in Nazi-Occupied Amsterdam', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 21, 3 (2019), 418–35; Bas von Benda-Beckmann, *Het Oranjehotel: Een Duitse Gevangenis in Scheveningen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2019). Evelien Gans, *Jaap en Ischa Meijer: Een joodse geschiedenis 1912–1956* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008) is another pioneering work.

¹⁸ For the lived experiences of deported Jews, see only Willy Lindwer, *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992); Anna Hájková, "'Poor Devils" of the Camps: Dutch Jews in Theresienstadt, 1943–1945', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 43, 1 (2015), 77–111. For the use of Jewish documents within the Netherlands, see Ben Braber, *This Cannot Happen Here: Integration and Jewish Resistance in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Ido van Haan, 'Prominent Jews: the Absence and Presence of Jews in Postwar Netherlands', *Historein*, 18, 2 (2019). A model in studying perceptions is Havi Dreifuss, *Relations Between Jews and Poles: The Jewish Perspective* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017) and, for diaries, Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days. Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Ten testimonies from the Wiener Holocaust Library (WHL), London, from the 1950s; forty diaries from the Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust en Genocidestudies (NIOD), Amsterdam; fifteen testimonies from the Ghetto Fighters' House

narrative purposes, I will introduce twenty-six survivors who shed light on typical perceptions of non-Jews. Inevitably, the notion of ‘typical’ is difficult in the context of personal perceptions and intimate memories, a challenge reinforced by the stark socio-economic differences that existed among Jewish survivors – consider only the often indigent Jews who had immigrated from Eastern Europe, wealthy German Jews and well-assimilated Dutch Jews whose lineage could be traced back centuries. The question of ‘representativity’ also reflects the constitution of the archives themselves: who was able to record their perceptions during the war or give testimony in its aftermath.²⁰ We also know that Jewish emigrants, and German and Austrian refugees in particular, survived in larger numbers than Dutch-born Jews, both in hiding and after deportation.²¹ To overcome as much as possible these archival and methodological difficulties, my sample will include different life stages – from a survivor who was just four years old during the war to one who was sixty-eight; a range of socio-economic and religious criteria; and Dutch-born Jews as well as those with immigrant backgrounds. I am aware that selecting a sample means leaving much out, and no sample can claim to gauge and represent the Jews’ overall perceptions of the Holocaust in the Netherlands. It is also necessary to keep in mind that survivors narrate and recall the behaviours of their non-Jewish peers in a more flattering light than those who were betrayed, deported and subsequently murdered would do. Various factors, including the chance to encounter people ready to help, played a role. But analysing the most diverse sample possible and focusing on these perceptions are the only way forward.²² In this article, my primary goal is to examine Jews’ perceptions and memories of Gentile help. This should be done not only for the occupation’s later stages, a common focus in studies on organised resistance, but for other years too. I also seek a socio-economically diverse cross-section of society, moving beyond van der Boom’s often well-to-do diarists in the Netherlands.

Taken together, Jews’ anecdotal perceptions coalesce into a coherent picture of a large group of non-Jews who performed miniature acts of solidarity to support their Jewish peers, often with life-saving consequences. They lay bare a social phenomenon that Jacques Sémelin describes for Vichy France as ‘social reactivity’, that is ‘the wide range of small gestures of aid and protection offered to Jews by individuals, whether or not they already knew each other’. Sémelin initially elaborated the concept to discern forms of civilian disobedience and non-cooperation across Nazi Europe before applying it to the case of Vichy France, arguing that such gestures of aid by the French population helped the 220,000 non-deported Jews (75 per cent) survive the war. Sémelin’s arguments have enjoyed a mixed reception, and scholars around Robert Paxton have emphasised the continuities between the refugee policies of the 1930s and Vichy’s xenophobic legislation, questioned the degree to which the French population was keen on supporting Jews before the onset of the deportations eastward during the summer of 1942 and the generalisations from thirty or so sources to explain survival rates.²³ In what follows, I will refer to ‘social reactivity’ not to explain survival – the focus of many studies – but to shift our attention to the social dynamics *before* deportation, a central benefit of

Archives (GFH), Israel, from the 1950s and 1960s; the entire collection of Dutch Jews and some Protestants (236) from the Fortunoff Video Archive (HVT), New Haven; 200 video testimonies from the Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the USC Shoah Foundation (VHA), recorded in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

²⁰ See ‘Theme 5: Witnessing in Dialogue: Testifiers, Readers, and Viewers’, in Simone Gigliotti and Hilary Earl, eds., *A Companion to the Holocaust* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 449–553.

²¹ See Peter Tammes, ‘Surviving the Holocaust: Socio-Demographic Differences Among Amsterdam Jews’, *European Journal of Population*, 33, 3 (2017), 293–318, who shows that immigrants, particularly Poles, youth and women, had better survival chances because they were more likely to hide or flee. For Theresienstadt, Hájková, ‘“Poor Devils” of the Camps’ reaches the same conclusion.

²² One recurrent point of criticism remains the ‘representativeness’ of the sample used, but as this essay hopes to demonstrate, the best remedy is to combine scales of analysis and as many testimonies as possible.

²³ For a book forum in English and these points of critique, see Jan Burzlaff, ‘Introduction’, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 39, 2 (2021), 236–45, and 246–86 for four insightful essays. Parting ways with Sémelin’s small selection of sources, this essay strives for a larger sample.

Sémelin's approach to Jewish sources.²⁴ As for Vichy France, social reactivity, a phenomenon at play in all parts of the Netherlands, overlaps with but does not fully represent Dutch non-Jews' support of Jews, notably 'rescue', 'pre-war networks of cooperation' and 'social resources'. As crucial as those networks proved for Jewish survival, they do not fully account for temporary acts of support and countless, accumulative gestures of sympathy revealed by Jewish accounts, even by those ultimately deported. Social reactivity will therefore allow us to reassess the shifting roles of Dutch Gentiles from the Jewish perspective.

To be sure, the history of the Nazi-occupied Netherlands is well researched. Still, first, Jewish perceptions and memories of non-Jews' betrayal and support, even most fleetingly, provide nuance to the trope of Dutch accommodation with the Germans before 1943. In particular, in his still influential *De Arbeidsinzet*, Ben Sijes argued that Dutch Gentiles were only willing to help Jews significantly after 1943 when they were drafted for forced labour and often went into hiding themselves.²⁵ Second, Jewish testimonies reveal an increasing polarisation of Dutch society after 1940. We know that about half of those who went into hiding were betrayed.²⁶ Yet the polarisation that the occupation triggered morphed simultaneously into small acts of support to Jews as a means of opposition and civil disobedience by perhaps an equally large group of Dutch non-Jews. All told, these voices of Jewish survivors are an important addition to ongoing efforts to write a multifaceted history involving non-Jews' behaviours and organised rescue.

Small Gestures, or When Silence Means Support

Social reactivity in the Netherlands was an omnipresent phenomenon. With remarkable consistency, the vast majority of the 500 Jewish testimonies available to us portray non-Jews as 'very good people', as Erna Bindelglas, who turned fifteen in 1945, put it. Before she went into hiding in Amsterdam in early 1943, paid for by her Polish-born father, Bindelglas found herself in a hospital during a raid. The practising physician, Dr Peters, a staunch anti-Nazi, counted on the Nazi fear of diseases to protect his patient. The doctor 'put a sign on our door: scarlet fever', thus successfully warding off the Gestapo agents.²⁷ In the same vein, the 1954 testimony of the German Jewish immigrant Dr Auerbach, who was fifty-three years old in 1940, is replete with vital gestures of support from non-Jewish Dutchmen. The writer Bepp Otten and the Jewish social democrat Lena Lopes Dias – the first secretary of the Women's Union of the Socialist Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*) – arranged for four hiding places for Dr Auerbach and his wife around Hilversum in North Holland. A pious carpenter, who had heard about the danger to the couple, then built a closet hideout that allowed the Auerbachs to evade a house raid. Another time, seized by a policeman on the street, Auerbach successfully appealed to his being 'a good Dutchman' (*ein guter Holländer*). Yet the most crucial act of solidarity saved Auerbach in the summer of 1944 after several infectious diseases ailed him. In great pain, he resolved to go to a hospital where the physician on duty, Dr Schepel, agreed to treat his interstitial cystitis. The chief nurse and the entire staff were complicit in this surgery.²⁸

Many survivor accounts illustrate just how widespread this type of social reactivity was in Dutch communities. Its various forms included supportive interactions with both strangers and familiar faces. Take the story of Shaul S., who was born in Rotterdam in 1925 and later lived with his orthodox family in remote Middelburg in the southwestern part of the Netherlands. Until late 1941, little changed in his daily life despite the expansion of anti-Jewish legislation. 'The Dutch would let me enter the

²⁴ Jacques Sémelin, *The Survival of the Jews in France, 1940–44* (Oxford: Holt, 2019), 193, and Jacques Sémelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 84–8; Christina Morina, 'The Imperative to Act: Jews, Neighbors, and the Dynamics of Persecution in Nazi Germany, 1933–1945', in Morina and Thijs, *Probing*, 148–68.

²⁵ Ben A. Sijes, *De Arbeidsinzet. De Gedwongen Arbeid van Nederlanders in Duitsland 1940–1945* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1966).

²⁶ Marnix Croes and Peter Tammes, 'Gif laten wij niet voortbestaan', *Een Onderzoek Naar de Overlevingskansen van Joden in de Nederlandse Gemeenten, 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2004).

²⁷ Erna Bindelglas, USHMM, RG-50.060.0007.

²⁸ Dr. Jacob Auerbach, WHL, PIII/18, 4.

movie theatres from the back door, as they knew me'. Under Nazi rule, it became increasingly difficult for Jews to obtain food. Shaul recalls that the local baker 'would save me the best cakes in his shop, and tell me biblical stories about my nation, which was ironic, as we never talked about this at home'. He describes the forced relocation of several hundred Jews from Middelburg to Amsterdam in March 1942 as a spontaneous gesture of friendship and solemnity: 'a large portion of the population gathered along the side of the road . . . As we passed, the men took off their hats in a farewell gesture and thus escorted us in silence to the train station'.²⁹ Ultimately, Shaul was deported to Auschwitz and forced to clean up the Warsaw ghetto's rubble. One could argue that his deportation occurred in part not because of non-Jewish indifference in Middelburg, but rather because his father had repeatedly refused to go into hiding. As with van der Boom's findings in non-Jews' diaries, what stands out in these testimonies is the wave of verbal support across the country. For instance, a Jewish woman named Ilse L. relates that after the mandatory Jewish star was introduced on 29 April 1942, many men took off their hats and often told her how 'proud you should be to wear that star'.³⁰ Ilse's experiences during the first two years of the occupation are consistent with the vast majority of Jews of all ages and immigration and socio-economic backgrounds.

Such widespread social reactivity accords with van der Boom's view of public condemnation of the Jewish persecution but goes against his image of Dutch Gentiles largely failing to help Jews because they did not know about the genocide. Instead, Jewish accounts highlight how small, voluntary actions increasingly followed these expressions of sympathy and that non-Jews' initial acquiescence to German policies transformed into what Margrit R. calls 'less open opposition', with two notable peaks in 1940–41 and the last six months of the war. Her testimony is filled with examples of social reactivity, such as her description of a Dutch carpenter who cemented holy books into his walls for safekeeping – books that Margrit R.'s father, the former president of the Orthodox Party, Agudat Yisrael, cherished the most.³¹ Meanwhile, in Tilburg, the twenty-two-year-old Frances L. safely gave birth to two infants in late 1942 under the care of a non-Jewish physician. A complicit mailman then took one of her newborns to a Gentile neighbour to hide.³² Small acts of support, here in the form of temporary shelter, seem to have increased in frequency even more so in the autumn of 1944 when an Allied victory loomed large. In Zeist, a Jewish émigré from Hamburg named Edith G., then forty years old, arranged hiding places for her children in 1942. Although she did not have to wear the star because a Dutch policeman, in a most fortunate coincidence, lacked information about her parents, she decided to go into hiding herself in the autumn of 1944. In February 1945, Gestapo officers arrested a group before her very eyes; 'they wanted bikes – so they lined up people. A Dutch guy told me to put a scarf over my head and run. I did so, and the first house took me in. I waited for two hours until it was over'.³³

Half of all the accounts that I analysed mention such spontaneous, rather than organised, acts of providing shelter at a critical moment. In the case of Edith G., the unknown man judged that she looked Jewish due to her dark hair and, sensing her panic, decided to react; then, strangers let her wait out the raid in their home. Similar gestures were made by a Protestant minister who hid Jews in Weesp, a city in North Holland, and by a Catholic who sheltered his Jewish neighbours in southern Limburg for several hours.³⁴ But temporary shelter often evolved into a more stable support system. During the summer of 1942 in Amsterdam-Zuid, after the Social Democratic neighbours of twenty-year-old Miep Lakmaker had witnessed the police take her mother away, they let her stay with them for ten days. This was not the first time that Miep's mother was threatened with deportation – she had once successfully softened other policemen by appealing to their sense of 'Dutchness'. After hiding with farmers in Limburg, where she

²⁹ Shaul S., HVT 3546, 1993.

³⁰ Ilse L., HVT 0967, 1987.

³¹ Margrit R., HVT 0773, 1986.

³² Frances L., HVT 1901, 1991.

³³ Edith G., HVT 0571, 1985.

³⁴ Howard O., HVT 2439, 1993; Max H., HVT 1329, 1989; Leonard Vis, USHMM, RG-50.030.0559.

barely escaped being raped, Miep quickly made her way back to Amsterdam and remained with these neighbours between September 1942 and mid-February 1943.³⁵

Social reactivity also took the form of both speaking up and deciding not to speak.³⁶ Warning a Jewish acquaintance of an impending round-up through a nod on the street or preventing someone from entering a building where a raid was underway were common actions, especially in towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.³⁷ Many testimonies indicate the existence of what one could call 'silent groups': not silenced in the sense of a censored and muzzled population under foreign rule, but rather referring to different groups' use of silence in addition to active rescue.³⁸ For instance, in 1942, the parents of Marguerite M., a then twenty-two-year-old non-Jewish woman, were hiding fifteen Jews in their home in Haren. When Marguerite travelled by train with a hidden child, the little girl let slip that she was Jewish. Promising not to report them, all passengers kept quiet.³⁹ In October 1944, Keetje Frank, a sixty-eight-year-old woman who hid in no fewer than eight places during the war, was evacuated from Ottersum in the wake of Allied advances and travelled with fellow villagers to Gendringen, near the German border. Nobody gave away her identity.⁴⁰ These examples of silence, which are absent from official records, indicate that Dutch non-Jews performed widespread gestures of support or, at least, displayed benevolent indifference. Such findings also align with what Froukje Demant characterised as 'sympathising' but 'passive' (*sympathiserend passief*) Gentiles in the Twente region, near the German border. Although non-Jews perceived the persecution of the Jews as horrible but inevitable, Demant writes, Jewish accounts demonstrate that even the smallest acts of solidarity went a long way, often unbeknown to these immediate helpers.⁴¹

Therefore, what historians have uncovered as non-Jews' overall accommodation (*aanpassing*) with the occupiers, important as it was, does not accord with these small acts of kindness and their long-lasting implications.⁴² Providing one's papers to strangers was another significant act of social reactivity. Fleeing Amsterdam on 28 July 1942, the thirty-year-old professional dancer Karel Poons took shelter with a non-Jewish friend in Huizen until his liberation in May 1945. Once, in a shop, a stranger offered Poons 'good papers'. After Poons's friend told him that this man, a German communist émigré, was himself hiding up to thirty Jews, Poons readily accepted his offer. In Amersfoort, eighteen miles from Huizen, a nobleman agreed to lend Yehuda Marshand his name after May 1940, which proved crucial to Marshand's survival in the first three years.⁴³ Winnie S., a

³⁵ Miep Lakmaker, WHL, PIII/785, 2. Similar trajectories for Bloeme Evers-Emden, VHA 5088 and Janny Moffie, VHA 4538. On sexual violence, see below.

³⁶ For 'silence', which has been criticised, in my view unfairly, see Sémelin, *The Survival of the Jews*, 259. See also Pierre Laborie, 'Éloquence du silence', in Luc Capdevila and Patrick Harismendy, eds., *L'engagement et l'émancipation: Ouvrage offert à Jacqueline Sainclivier* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 333–41. For a similar approach to nonconformity and witnessing, see Laurie Marhoefer, 'Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939–1943', *The American Historical Review*, 121, 4 (2016), 1167–95.

³⁷ This finding confirms Peter Tammes, 'Associating Locality-Level Characteristics with Surviving the Holocaust: A Multilevel Approach to the Odds of Being Deported and to Risk of Death among Jews Living in Dutch Municipalities', *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 188, 5 (2019), 896–906. For more examples, see Sybilla F., HVT 1855, 1991; Simon F., HVT 4405, 2007; Alice/Aliza Tischer/Peretz, GFH, 238; Betje Bilha Cohen, YVA, O.77/354.

³⁸ For a different use of 'silence' (*stille*) regarding women in the resistance, see Marjan Schwegman, *Het Stille Verzet: Vrouwen in Illegale Organisaties: Nederland 1940–1945* (Amsterdam: Socialistische Uitgeverij, 1980).

³⁹ Marguerite M., HVT 2474, 1992.

⁴⁰ Keetje Frank, NIOD, 244, 734, 10ff.

⁴¹ Froukje A. Demant, *Verre Buren: Samenleven in de Schaduw van de Holocaust*, PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2015), <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.477581>.

⁴² For a useful overview of this narrative, see Wichert ten Have, *1940: Verwarring en Aanpassing. Leven in bezet Nederland* (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2015). In a classic piece, Gerhard Hirschfeld argued that the first phase of the occupation paved the way for a later resistance, but the same was true for grassroots social reactivity: Gerhard Hirschfeld, 'Collaboration and Attentism in the Netherlands 1940–1941', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, 3 (1981), 467–86.

⁴³ Yehuda Marshand, USHMM, RG-50.120.0101. If we can trust his recollection, his decision to go into hiding in 1940 pre-dates the earliest known incident. See Joel S. Fishman, 'On Jewish Survival during the Occupation: The Vision of Jacob van Amerongen', *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 33, 2 (1999), 160–73.

Protestant woman born in 1925, handed her papers over to an unknown Jewish girl in the western Netherlands, then declared them lost. Later on, her job in a city hall helped her to produce blank IDs, which her fiancé passed to the underground.⁴⁴ As this young woman's story illustrates, gestures of immediate help towards Jews often evolved into full-fledged socialisation with underground networks. Still, they appear to be only the tip of an iceberg that proves difficult to measure quantitatively.

Fundamentally, what stands out in Jewish accounts is a different kind of 'knowledge': not *knowledge* about the ongoing genocide itself, as van der Boom described, but non-Jews' *awareness* of who was involved in efforts to aid Dutch Jews. These influential instances of social reactivity suggest a much broader foundation of civilian acts of non-compliance and tacit obstruction – a foundation that was, indeed, as all-encompassing as other responses to Nazi rule. Over the last two decades, scholars have expanded our understanding of behaviours under Nazi rule, both pro-German ('collaboration') and anti-German ('resistance' or 'underground'). In this vein, recent studies on collaboration have highlighted the dynamic relationship between local collaborators and the Nazi authorities and considered 'collaborators' independent actors with their own interests.⁴⁵ The broad range of situational behaviours applies well to the Netherlands and social reactivity. Here, historians could use the concept to revise the traditional view of the population's wait-and-see attitudes after the German invasion in May 1940. The strike on 25–7 February 1941 is usually presented as the first and only public protest against anti-Jewish raids in Amsterdam after a calm accommodation period. Some testimonies, indeed, reflect on those workers who were devoted to 'their Jewish proletariat counterparts'.⁴⁶ But this person-to-person obstruction of Nazi policies, by any means possible, was frequent before the strike and only grew after it, as Nazification efforts turned coercive.⁴⁷ Across Europe, the Nazi occupation exacerbated existing social, religious and political divisions.⁴⁸ Dutch Jewish accounts indicate that in the Netherlands, a steady process of polarisation unfolded, through which the Gentile population split into those who supported their Jewish compatriots and those who participated in the occupation system in some way – the latter partly influenced by subtle Nazi propaganda. As Alfred B. puts it, 'the attitudes of the citizens went beyond apathy, as with those who became Jew hunters'.⁴⁹ Despite or precisely because of the numerous denunciations and instances of betrayal, there is much evidence that myriad small gestures existed before 1943 and increased at the same rate as and perhaps faster than those in favour of either the ongoing persecution or organised resistance after the summer of 1943.

Furthermore, these Jewish testimonies challenge the traditional top-down picture of persecution by revealing the existence of grassroots support. Social reactivity was one such process, involving a wide range of Dutch men and women from working-class families in Amsterdam, greengrocers, intellectuals and poor farmers in Friesland to a baron in Veghel, North Brabant. Shared enmity against the Nazis helped Dutch Gentiles to recognise and interact with each other.⁵⁰ For the political and socio-economic elites, the BBC broadcast by Queen Wilhelmina (1890–1962), who asked Dutch

⁴⁴ Winnie S., HVT 1120, 1987; Marion L., HVT 0638, 1985.

⁴⁵ See the NIOD's project on the Dutch resistance: 'Very Ordinary or Quite Special? New Views on People in the Resistance during the German Occupation of the Netherlands 1940–1945', <https://www.niod.nl/en/projects/very-ordinary-or-quite-special-new-views-people-resistance-during-german-occupation>. For an excellent example of the complex notion of 'collaboration', see Christoph Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941–1944* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011). For a recent survey, see Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, 'Kollaboration im Zweiten Weltkrieg und im Holocaust – Ein analytisches Konzept', *Docupedia-Zeit-geschichte* (2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.1444>.

⁴⁶ Shaul S., HVT.

⁴⁷ Happe, *Viele falsche Hoffnungen*, 53–74. For the European context, see only Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), which is representative of many works on the fate of indifference during the war.

⁴⁸ See Tatjana Tönsmeier, 'Besatzungsgesellschaften. Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Erfahrungsgeschichte des Alltags unter deutscher Besatzung im Zweiten Weltkrieg', *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.663.v1>.

⁴⁹ See Alfred B., HVT 1939, 1990; Anton and Marion P., HVT 1099, 1988; Frieda Belinfante, USHMM, RG-50.030.0019; Edmond B., HVT 2592, 1991. For betrayal more generally, see below.

⁵⁰ Hermina A., HVT 1360, 1990; Jetse S., HVT 0481, 1985.

non-Jews to help their persecuted neighbours, appears to have been influential. In North Brabant's high society, anti-German, rather than pro-Jewish, sentiments fuelled social reactivity, as 'the baron and baroness were sheltered from life. They didn't know what Jewish people were'.⁵¹ Gestures of help also depended on the financial resources that Dutch non-Jews could draw upon and on emotional responses to wartime hardships. While supplying Dr Auerbach and his wife with groceries, their non-Jewish helpers regularly suffered from panic attacks.⁵² Concerning Amsterdam, Jewish testimonies align with Peter Tammes's findings that lower-skilled and unskilled workers had better survival chances because their non-Jewish peers tended to support them.⁵³ Thus, financially struggling individuals and groups, often with an immigrant background, could frequently count on perceived class solidarity.

However, despite or precisely because of all these differences among Jewish survivors, such as the low level of integration of Jewish immigrants, social reactivity is all the more remarkable. Each testimony has to be located in a specific culture of memory, and over the last twenty years, scholars have highlighted the links between individual and communal memories, as well as their communicative use.⁵⁴ In our case, the large overlap between prewar middle-class Jews and the social reactivity of middle-class non-Jews is noticeable: owing to similar and thus relatable social expectations, middle-class Gentiles are particularly well represented in Dutch-born Jews' accounts, including those of heads of the local post offices, mayors, Protestant ministers, Catholic teachers, lawyers, small business owners, physicians and well-to-do artists.

Nevertheless, the testimonies reveal that, at one point or another, citizens from different socio-economic backgrounds embraced social reactivity towards both Dutch-born and immigrated Jews. Here lies one significant difference between rescue and social reactivity: the former involved, at one point or another, financial resources, either from non-Jewish rescuers or from the persecuted paying for their often short-lived protection; the latter could – but crucially did not have to – involve money. This widespread, ever-increasing phenomenon went beyond paid rescue, resistance networks and pre-war connections.

Grassroots Contexts and Shifting Roles: Reassessing Dutch Non-Jews in the Occupied Netherlands

In the study of Nazi-occupied populations, one runs the risk of either romanticising social relations between Jews and non-Jews or ascribing too coherent a cluster of motives for non-Jews' participation in the persecution. For the Netherlands, this polarisation of apologetic and accusatory views was particularly stark until the late 2000s. This is also because various kinds of sources shed a differential light on Dutch society. On the one hand, basing his study on postwar criminal files, the survivor Pinchas Bar-Efrat argues that it was less ideological enthusiasm than greed and financial gain that prompted betrayal. He asserts that 'latent' or 'veiled' antisemitism was ubiquitous, but its geographical extension remains open.⁵⁵ On the other hand, studies on rescue, often on the regional level, have tended to focus on religious divisions. In this vein, Herman van Rens demonstrates that in the predominantly Catholic, southernmost province of Limburg, often small, closed-off Protestant communities rescued Jews. The latter often survived, van Rens concludes, because Protestant elites took decisive actions locally.⁵⁶ As

⁵¹ Rudolf F., HVT 2486, 1993, nuancing Jord Schaap, *Het recht om te waarschuwen: over de Radio Oranje-toespraken van koningin Wilhelmina* (Amsterdam: Anthos, 2007), who argued that most people decided not to believe these speeches.

⁵² Auerbach, WHL, 6.

⁵³ Tammes, 'Surviving the Holocaust', 310.

⁵⁴ Among many, see Ulrike Jureit, *Erinnerungsmuster. Zur Methodik lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews mit Überlebenden der Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1999), 322; Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

⁵⁵ Pinchas Bar-Efrat, *Denunciation and Rescue: Dutch Society and the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017).

⁵⁶ Herman van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg. Joden en Sinti in Nederlands-Limburg tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2013).

this section will argue, Jewish testimonies connect both ends of this spectrum of attitudes, resulting in an intimate portrait of Dutch society on the local level. Social reactivity more accurately represents the interreligious and intercommunal dynamics than the traditional dichotomy of betrayal and rescue.

To consider Jewish perspectives is to move to the local level and grassroots interactions, an ongoing shift in Dutch historiography.⁵⁷ Such a shift shows that intimacy with members of one's community, Jews and non-Jews alike, played a crucial role. Take the example of Betsy H., born in the northeastern town of Hoozevee in 1917. In the autumn of 1942, while hiding with her niece in Rijnsburg, located roughly halfway between The Hague and Amsterdam, she witnessed 'the daily heroism of ordinary people'. In particular, she praises thirty-seven-year-old Johannes Post, who came to hide her niece, 'said how to do it, and everyone listened. A simple farmer made so much sense'. Betsy H. would later join a resistance group and carry messages under a false name before her arrest and subsequent deportation to the camp of Ravensbrück and a satellite camp of Dachau in July 1944 – not as a Jewish woman, but as a Gentile resistant.⁵⁸

To be sure, Johannes Post, to whom Betsy H. refers as a 'simple farmer', was one of the two leaders of the Nieuwlande rescue and resistance organisation alongside Arnold Douwes, an itinerant gardener. Bob Moore and Johannes Houwink ten Cate have recently edited Douwes's diary kept in Nieuwlande, a close-knit rural community of 700 residents involved in hiding hundreds of Jews, resistance fighters and German deserters. It shares with Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in France the distinction of being one of only two locations that Yad Vashem has honoured for rescuing Jews.⁵⁹ Betsy H.'s remark thus calls for closer attention to non-Jews' motives. Of course, survivors often did not know or recognise the motivations or background of their helpers. But while networks, both formal and informal, were essential, two arguments make a case for social reactivity as a more appropriate concept. First, even in Nieuwlande, many individual Gentiles did not know (or often did not want to know) what activities other farms were engaged in. The nature of such rescue networks was at best diffuse, often top-down, and even the most active and visible rescuers were involved in other social networks. Second and relatedly, involvement in rescue networks did not prevent other acts of social reactivity. For instance, local dynamics of friendship and enmity could also play into the Jews' favour. Hiding on a farm some thirty miles west of Amsterdam in 1942, Erna Bindelglas states that she believed all villagers 'knew my Jewish identity'. She relates the following incident:

I didn't look like a Dutch farm girl, but no one spoke of it. We lived near a forest. . . . It was too late to go to the hut as two collaborators were outside the farm. The sons then pushed me into a cabinet. The collaborators came in and asked if there was a twelve-year-old girl there. All the neighbours were outside and would have killed them if they took me. They hated collaborators.⁶⁰

Here, the hatred of the Dutch collaborators contrasts with the degree of communal cohesion. Mr Corte, the former owner of a chemistry plant who had fled Cologne in 1937, reflects the feelings of many survivors: 'Dutch people around us in hiding knew who we were, but never said anything'.⁶¹ Indeed, providing for large numbers of people, as in the most famous case of Anne Frank and her family hiding with eight other people, 'could raise suspicions because so many groceries had to be purchased' – but, as survivors recall, such suspicions were not necessarily passed on to the Nazis.⁶²

⁵⁷ See Geraldien van Vrijtag Drabbe Künzel, *Een Stad op Drift. Hilversum tijdens de Duitse Bezetting* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2020); Joep Boerboom, *Beroofd Volgens de Regels. Het Lot van Zeven Joodse Ondernemers in Deventer* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2020); Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, eds., *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (New York: Berghahn, 2017).

⁵⁸ Betsy H., HVT 1277, 1989.

⁵⁹ For an analysis, see Bob Moore, 'Understanding Everyday Rescue: Insights from the Diary of Arnold Douwes', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 34, 2 (2020), 183–205; Bob Moore and Johannes Houwink ten Cate, eds., *The Secret Diary of Arnold Douwes: Rescue in the Occupied Netherlands* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019).

⁶⁰ Bindelglas, USHMM.

⁶¹ H. Corte, WHL, PIII/774; Jacob Soetendorp, WHL, PIII/801.

⁶² Alfred B., HVT; for Anne Frank, see Barbara Lederman Rodbell, USHMM, RG-50.030.0192.

To blend in, probably few went as far as the farmer Liestroth did who ostentatiously placed a framed photograph of Hitler on his mantelpiece. While several Jews, whom he had supported before, were in hiding on his farm in Winterswijk, two of his daughters 'were going out with German soldiers for a cover-up . . . The youngest daughter was about twelve years old. She had a girlfriend whose father was a Gestapo agent, a Dutchman. The girl was smart enough not to talk about it'.⁶³

These examples challenge the traditional thesis of a Dutch society acquiescent to the Nazi occupiers, inspired by centuries-long tolerance among subcultures of Catholics, Protestants, socialists and liberals.⁶⁴ First, Liestroth's example of civil disobedience on the local level invites further research into the relationship between obstruction and religion. He considered himself a devout Protestant and an honest citizen, and therefore took a considerable risk to save several Jewish lives. To a certain degree, religious affiliation and the Christian churches can help account for such social reactivity, at least for what Jews interpreted as non-Jews' motivations. Recent research has demonstrated that antisemitism tended to be weaker in Catholic strongholds, themselves a minority in the predominantly Protestant country; in the same vein, as we have seen, Protestant minorities in the province of Limburg banded together to help Jews.⁶⁵ But such a spatial distribution of support based on religious minorities can only go so far in explaining social reactivity. To consider Dutch society beyond a Jewish/Christian binary, we must also include non-religious and atheist groups. Community leaders, both religious and secular, drove local responses and displayed social reactivity towards Jews on a local scale. Their role appears to have been to convince and even force some in the community to support Jews – and this willingness could well erode over time.⁶⁶ Individual acts were also often motivated, and thus interpreted by Jews, by wider humanitarian ideals, such as the *noaberplicht* ('neighbour duty'), a sense of obligation towards neighbours which was particularly strong in the rural northeast.

But the question remains: how can one explain how many otherwise law-abiding citizens came to be inclined, even most fleetingly, in helping the persecuted outside rescue networks? Contrary to expectations, recent research demonstrates that in those places where electoral support for the National Socialist Movement (NSB) was high, deportations were low.⁶⁷ Apart from religious and secular traditions, Jewish accounts seem to indicate that one additional factor for social reactivity might be the fact that, after 1941, fervent supporters of Nazism evolved in stark contrast to the socially reactive communities: communities that bonded over anti-German sentiments, which also meant support towards Jews and escalating refusal over forced labour.

This polarisation within Dutch society played an influential role. Jewish accounts illustrate that the immediate environment influenced social reactivity, as we have seen with *noaberplicht*: the smaller the locality, the higher the likelihood of support appears to have been. For instance, Abraham Polak, born in Harlem in 1921, arrived in Beets, a village located twenty-two miles northwest of Amsterdam, in September 1944. At first, he lived with a family in an old watermill; then he obtained a labour exemption from Beets's municipality. He worked at the local grocery store, later joined the Dutch resistance and interpreted for shot-down English pilots, who gave him a revolver. Though he carried false papers,

⁶³ Herbert K., HVT 1680, 1988; Sophie F, HVT 1788, 1991.

⁶⁴ Clearly propounded in Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁶⁵ Ultimately, it proves difficult to determine non-Jews' motivations in a clear-cut way. For this literature, see Robert Braun, 'Religious Dominance and Empathy: Catholic Antisemitism in the Low Countries', *Theory and Society*, 49 (2020), 387–415; Jan Ridderbos and Geert Hovingh, *Predikanten in de Frontlinie: De Gevolgen van Deelname aan het (kerkelijk) Verzet in Nederland tijdens WO II* (Barneveld: Vuurbak, 2015); Bob Moore, 'Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in the Netherlands during the Holocaust in Comparative Perspective', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 124, 4 (2011), 492–505.

⁶⁶ Jan Bank, *God in Oorlog. De rol van de Kerk in Europa 1939–1945* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2015); Robert Braun, *Protectors of Pluralism: Religious Minorities and Resistance to Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Marcel Poorthuis and Theodorus Salemink, *Een Donkere Spiegel. Nederlandse Katholieken over Joden Tussen antisemitisme en Erkenning 1870–2005* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2006).

⁶⁷ Tammes, 'Associating Locality-Level Characteristics with Surviving the Holocaust'.

Polak's Jewishness was an open secret in this locality of 200 residents.⁶⁸ In another case, after escaping from a train headed to the transit camp of Westerbork in 1943, the thirteen-year-old Leonard Vis went into hiding in Huizen thanks to his sister's contacts with the underground. There, Vis met his grandparents, aunts and uncles in this 'little fishing village, . . . where everybody knows each other'.⁶⁹ Also reporting from Huizen, the dancer Karel Poons recounts how Isaac, a Jewish man married to a Protestant woman, was arrested. Then 'he did something that no proper Dutch *Bürger* (citizen) would ever do – lying to get away with it. When he was asked if he had four Jewish grandparents, he lied'. Nobody denounced him, and no investigation ever ensued.⁷⁰

But betrayal was never far away despite or even precisely because of these intimate dynamics. A few months later after having eluded arrest, Isaac began to hide twenty-eight people before dismissing his non-Jewish girlfriend. His disappointed lover ran to the Dutch police, hoping for personal revenge and perhaps 7.50 guilders of bounty (approximately £56.40 or US\$70 today) for every captured Jew.⁷¹ While a friendly policeman warned some who visited the hideout, including Leonard Vis, most of the twenty-eight Jews were deported to Westerbork.⁷² Further northwest, in Amsterdam, Karel Poons's brother-in-law handed all his money to a Protestant minister, only to be chased away the next day and transported to Auschwitz a few months later. Most infamously, Anne Frank and her family were betrayed on 4 August 1944.⁷³ The extent of such instances of betrayal is challenging to research, as most victims perished in camps in Nazi-occupied Poland. Additionally, post-war files capture only those officially tried for collaboration and war crimes in the Netherlands.⁷⁴ Having emigrated from an assimilated Viennese family, the twenty-two-year-old Frances, her husband and the two babies she delivered in hiding found themselves in Tilburg. Next door lived a man who told everybody who wanted to hear it that he could 'smell Jews', but he was on friendly terms with Frances's family. 'This neighbour was responsible for thirteen Jews being picked up by the Gestapo – he was never prosecuted for it afterwards'.⁷⁵

National Socialist and antisemitic sentiments did certainly influence some betrayers, and the degree of antisemitism has repeatedly occupied an important place in Dutch historiography. His critics have accused van der Boom of ignoring it altogether.⁷⁶ But such transgressions do not dominate Jewish testimonies, even those given by people who were ultimately deported. The case of Huizen rather indicates that motives, including greed, were rooted in interpersonal and communal relations.⁷⁷ Selma E., later known as one of only nineteen Dutch survivors from the death camp Sobibor, went into hiding in late 1941, the only one to do so within her extended Orthodox family. Her English teacher took her to the first of three hiding places before she was arrested for a poorly fabricated passport in January 1943. Meanwhile, her three brothers contacted a non-Jewish man with whom Selma had fallen in love, but 'he took their money and then did nothing for them'.⁷⁸ Here, greed and emotional bonds converge, as

⁶⁸ Abraham Polak, NIOD, 244, 1469; Rosenberg, GFH, 237; Shlomo Wachner Ganor, YVA, O.33/5795.

⁶⁹ Leonard Vis, USHMM, RG-50.030.0559; L. Ziekenoppasser–Sjouerman, NIOD, 244, 1596 and 814.

⁷⁰ Karel Poons, USHMM, RG-50.030.0183. Meijer Emmerik, NIOD 244, 1966, 5ff.

⁷¹ Ad van Liempt, *Hitler's Bounty Hunters: The Betrayal of the Jews* (New York: Berg, 2005).

⁷² Poons, USHMM; see also Hella D., HVT 2516, 1993; IM Leman, NIOD, 244, 411, 31ff. For similar stories, see Guus van Meershoek, Jos Smeets and Tommy van Es, *In de Frontlinie: Tien Politie mannen en de Duitse Bezetting* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015).

⁷³ The latest controversy is Gerard Kremer, *De Achtertuin van het Achterhuis. Verraad Anne Frank Ontrafeld* (Soest: Lantaarn B.V., 2018).

⁷⁴ See Bar-Efrat, *Denunciation*, 10–14.

⁷⁵ Frances L., HVT; Tzvi Harry Klafter Eyal, YVA, O.3/3454. At least 700 intermarried Jews were sent to extermination camps: Bar-Efrat, *Denunciation*, 17.

⁷⁶ Most vocally in Gans and Ensel, eds., *The Holocaust, Israel and 'the Jew'*.

⁷⁷ Still classic: Ronald Havenaar, *De NSB tussen Nationalisme en 'Volkse' Solidariteit. De Vooroorlogse Ideologie Van de Nationaal Socialistische Beweging in Nederland* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1983); Esther Keijl-Coronel, VHA 4924; Jack L., HVT 1604, 1991.

⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that Engel's decision was an early one, at least seven months before the deportations started; similarly, the brief mention of sexual barter calls for more attention: Zoë Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

is the case in the twenty testimonies that recount instances of betrayal in intimate settings and subsequent rescue as a profit-oriented enterprise, sometimes within one household.⁷⁹ The accounts show that Jewish women tended to switch hideouts more often, growing to sense imminent danger, particularly extortion and sexual violence.⁸⁰

But for each instance of betrayal in personal accounts, several cases of social reactivity appear, though it is unlikely that most Dutch Gentiles went as far as the twenty-one-year-old Protestant Marion P. In 1941, she talked the SS out of taking several Jewish children. Soon after, she spent six months in jail for distributing bulletins of BBC broadcasts. Once freed, she took in several Jews in need and, when a pro-Nazi Dutch policeman threatened to expose her, she killed him on the spot.⁸¹ More common is the experience of Gigi Kray, a divorced, well-to-do Jewish woman in her early forties. After placing her daughter Brigitte with a host family in Alkmaar, she went into hiding with a working-class family in Hilversum in May 1943. Soon, she realised that the family had struck a deal with local Gestapo officers to rob her. Fleeing the doomed house, she found shelter with a friendly widow and relied on Mr Neefs, a jeweller, who saved her valuables.⁸² Although the underground provided Jews with new addresses, it could not prevent extortion and physical violence in hiding places.⁸³ Here, both small and more significant small gestures of help became crucial in Jews' survival.

A careful analysis of Jewish testimonies also provides a more sophisticated picture of Dutch government officials. Since the 1970s, scholars have echoed Jacques Presser's stance that officials contributed more than most groups to the persecution, mainly the Dutch police, the railways and the civil service, which remained in place after May 1940. Indeed, these civil servants appear to have been more accommodating than those in other occupied countries.⁸⁴ However, we still lack a comprehensive picture of those who, at times, hindered the deportation of their Jewish neighbours. A case in point concerns the figure of the reluctant police officer.⁸⁵ Survivors recall that many of them practised a broad range of benevolent gestures, ranging from mailing a note thrown off a deportation train to looking the other way during a routine check of papers in Hilversum or helping Jews escape during a round-up in Amsterdam-Zuid.⁸⁶ It was not uncommon for some officers to voluntarily inform Jews about imminent round-ups and house searches, hide belongings or even escort someone from one hideout to another.⁸⁷ Jack P. speaks of a Dutch official who would visit him at his hiding place to listen to the forbidden BBC – 'a man who was not really a Nazi, but rather an official who simply wanted to get rich'. In many cases, these acts of sharing information in critical moments were embedded in local battles over power. Ilse F. recalls that when the local 'Dutch Nazi mayor . . . decided to find the Jews',

⁷⁹ Selma E., HVT 0042, 1980; Rosel B., HVT 0871, 1992. For the substantial literature on hiding across Nazi Europe, see only Susanna Schrafstetter, *Flucht und Versteck. Untergetauchte Juden in München: Verfolgungserfahrung und Nachkriegsalltag* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015); Richard Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface: The Not-So-Hidden Jews of Nazi Berlin, 1941–1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2019); Natalia Aleksion, 'Gender and the Daily Lives of Jews in Hiding in Eastern Galicia', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, 27 (2014), 38–61, and her forthcoming book.

⁸⁰ Ilse Elisheva Rozenberg, YVA, O.3/5810; Hilda G., HVT 2482, 1993; Miep Lakmaker, WHL.

⁸¹ Marion P., HVT 0754, 1986, and HVT 1097, 1988 who is the well-known Marion Pritchard-van Bisbergen.

⁸² Gigi Kray, WHL, PIII 769; Emmerik, NIOD, 34 and 43.

⁸³ Katya Gusarov, 'Sexual Barter and Jewish Women's Efforts to Save their Lives: Accounts from the Righteous Among the Nations Archives', *German History*, 39, 1 (2020), 100–111.

⁸⁴ Jacques Presser, *Ondergang. De Vervolging en Vernietiging van het Nederlandse Jodendom*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1965); Cor Lammers, *Vreemde Overheersing. Bezetten en Bezetting in Sociologisch Perspectief* (Amsterdam: B. Bakker, 2005); David Barnouw, Dirk Mulder and Guus Veenendaal, *De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in Oorlogstijd, 1939–1945. Rijden Voor Vaderland en Vrijheid* (Zwolle: WBooks, 2019). For elected officials such as mayors, see Peter Romijn, *Burgemeesters in Oorlogstijd–Besturen onder Duitse Bezetting* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2006) and Nico Wouters, *Oorlogsborgemeesters 40/44: Lokaal Bestuur en Collaboratie in België* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004).

⁸⁵ For a similar assessment, see van Meerhoeke, Smeets and van Es, *In de Frontlinie*.

⁸⁶ Alfred B., HVT; Corte, WHL, 3, 4.

⁸⁷ Ilse L., HVT 0294, 1984; Elsa and Kurt S., HVT 2261, 1991; Sara T., HVT 3436, 1995; Isidor Bob Trijbetz, YVA, O.33/9335.

the Dutch police wanted to support them. ‘They would get there just ahead of the mayor and quickly say “hide”. This happened to me – I was able to hide in a camouflaged area of the attic’.⁸⁸

Dutch policemen also appear in Jewish testimonies as forgers of false papers which ‘were very hard to duplicate’. These small acts of support by officials could lead to them joining informal resistance networks, as with those who did not hold office.⁸⁹ Hetty D., born in 1930 to a non-religious Jewish family, is an excellent example. Upon her father’s decision to flee from the Jewish quarter in May 1943, she was taken by a member of the underground to a Protestant family near the German border. She describes the following event that occurred during an Allied attack in early 1945: ‘we went to the neighbour’s shelter at first, then ended up retreating to our own basement because the neighbours didn’t want a Jewish girl with them. A border guard was our ally and never said a word about me; otherwise, I wouldn’t be here today’.⁹⁰ Her experiences encapsulate two interrelated phenomena at work in wartime Dutch society: the tacit silence within the surrounding community and the support of a policeman complicit in this knowledge.

A Nation of Two Tales? Reconciling The Old and Opening Up New Perspectives

Writing the history of the occupied Netherlands can be akin to moving around the spotlight – but events and groups that drop from sight do not disappear altogether. The Netherlands, which saw the highest death toll of West European Jews (104,000), both produced the highest number of *Waffen* SS volunteers and the second-highest number of documented rescuers of Jews. At least 100,000 Dutch people out of nine million saved Jews, as recorded in Yad Vashem’s ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ database, and the hiding of Jews heavily depended on clandestine networks after 1943. This essay has attempted to move beyond top-down Nazi persecution policies and organised rescue by Dutch non-Jews. The polarisation of views on Dutch history has occurred in part because scholars traditionally divided ‘Dutch’ history from ‘Jewish’ history. While the gap has begun to narrow in the last ten years, not least thanks to Bart van der Boom, Jewish testimonies are still rarely analysed in field-defining works. Such personal accounts, which should be widely studied, not only inform us about Jews’ choices and perceptions, but also reveal the social fabrics in which these Jewish experiences were embedded. True, the Holocaust in Western Europe was a ‘deliberate project’, as Ido de Haan reaffirms. However, neither the ‘Dutch paradox’ nor van der Boom’s focus on ‘knowledge’ tells us much about the intimacy of local dynamics and Jews’ perceptions of non-Jews before deportation. For that, we must look to survivor testimonies.

The notion of social reactivity explored in this essay suggests a different timeline for Dutch society. For although ‘negligence, social distance, career motives, and malice’ did exist, and about 50 per cent of the Jews in hiding were denounced,⁹¹ many small acts of kindness and support occurred simultaneously throughout the war, with notable peaks in 1940/1 and after the autumn of 1944.⁹² A nuanced discussion ought to do more than exonerate or provide comfort for large swaths of Dutch society, or for that matter, the European population. In 2021, seventy-six years after the war, a responsible public history, neither ‘black-and-white’ nor ‘grey’, has emerged that tackles how these local processes help explain variations of survival. By shifting the focus from the eventual *outcome* of the Holocaust – a prevailing theme in most studies – to wartime social *processes*, this essay has offered a first probe into these silent cracks in what historians usually present as a broad national unity held together, despite unrest and chaos, by the Dutch elites.⁹³ To begin with, confusion did not prevent non-Jews from

⁸⁸ Jack P., HVT 1758 and 0601, 1982; Ilse L., HVT. See also Hinke Piersma, *Op Eigen Gezag. Politieverzet in Oorlogstijd* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2019).

⁸⁹ Eduard T., HVT 2003, 1992; Edith G., HVT 0571, 1985. See de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, vol. VI, 453.

⁹⁰ Hetty D., HVT 0874, 1991.

⁹¹ De Haan, ‘The Holocaust’, 90.

⁹² Expanding the first (situational helpers) and third (empathy) of four factors of rescue in: Lawrence Baron, ‘The Dynamics of Decency: Dutch Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust’, Frank P. Piskor Faculty Lecture, St Lawrence University (1985), 6.

⁹³ See Romijn, *Burgemeesters in Oorlogstijd–Besturen*.

making both immediate and long-term decisions.⁹⁴ Unlike the much-debated extent of public support for Vichy's antisemitic policies before the summer of 1942, the Netherlands seems to have witnessed a more linear process of non-Jews' disobedience after May 1940.⁹⁵ Jewish testimonies indicate that many non-Jews, at one moment or another, chose fleeting acts of solidarity over open protests and active resistance. As Gentiles understood that anti-Jewish measures were non-negotiable, these supportive interactions, as temporary or modest as many were, became part of broader civil disobedience. Under Nazi rule, all behaviour had the potential to be of political significance, as other studies on daily life during the war demonstrate.⁹⁶ In this regard, traditional perspectives on organisational continuity and adaptable elites poorly accommodate these grassroots gestures that opened cracks in the fabric of society and built bridges between societal pillars (*verzuiling*), a common self-image of the Dutch society in the 1930s.

Jewish testimonies indeed allow us to find a middle ground between non-Jews' incomplete understanding of the Holocaust, as van der Boom described, and the alleged passivity of most non-Jews. Obedience under Nazi rule not only meant other attitudes than indifference among different Dutch subcultures; overall compliance with the law could also accommodate small acts of kindness towards Jews by entire villages, neighbours and their extended families, strangers on the street and ambivalent officials. If we consider that for each of the estimated 28,500 Jews in hiding (*onderduikers*) at least ten non-Jews became sympathisers or silent accomplices,⁹⁷ estimates drawn from these testimonies suggest that at least 285,000 Gentiles partook in a solidifying 'conspiracy of silence' – and this number does not account for all those Jews who did not seek refuge.⁹⁸ Further comparative studies drawn from Jewish testimonies will be needed not only for the Netherlands, but also Western Europe and Central Europe. I am thinking in particular of Denmark, Belgium, Italy and France, both on the regional and local level, which will help us better understand (and perhaps) reevaluate the role that the responses of non-Jews played over time. They will prove crucial to affirm or refine the case for widespread social reactivity that I have made here. Above all, the notion of social reactivity in the Netherlands, an occupied country that fractured along the lines of approval or dismissal of anti-Jewish policies and the Nazi persecution, invites us to provide nuance to rigid notions such as 'collaboration' and 'resistance'. In this sense, 'complicity' designates not only more or less active participation in the Nazi crimes, but also grassroots acts of support towards the persecuted Jews, no matter how effective or ineffective they eventually proved to be.

Acknowledgements. The article won the 2021 *New Horizons in Jewish Studies Graduate Student Essay Prize*, awarded by the UC Irvine Center for Jewish Studies. I thank the jury for selecting my essay and the audience for their engaging responses. For inspiration, helpful feedback and discussions, I also wish to thank Heinz and Christa Burzlaff, Kate Docking, Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel, Daphne Geismar, Christian Gerlach, Katja Grosse-Sommer, Karianne Hansen, Hester Higton, Nicole Jordan, Dan Michman, Philip Nord, Derek Penslar, Jacques Semelin, Dan Stone, Peter Tammes as well as the European History Graduate Seminar at Harvard. The editors and staff of *Contemporary European History* around Ludvine Broch and the three reviewers improved many details and allowed me to refine the overall argument: many thanks for your engagement. I dedicate this article to the memory of Wisa Scheffer (1920–2014).

⁹⁴ Among others, Chris van der Heijden, *Grijs Verleden. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2001), 15, controversially painted a bleak picture of 'human deficits'.

⁹⁵ Vicky Caron, 'Review of Jacques Sémelin: The Survival of the Jews, 1940–44', *Journal of Modern History* 92, 2 (2020), 444–7.

⁹⁶ Laura Fahrenbruck, *Ein(ver)nehmen. Sexualität und Alltag von Wehrmachtsoldaten in den besetzten Niederlanden* (Göttingen: V & R, 2018).

⁹⁷ This number was first mentioned in Wolfgang Benz, 'Prolog', in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Überleben im Dritten Reich. Juden im Untergrund und Ihre Helfer* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003), 11–51. Appropriately, the third section reads 'Different Motives: Paid Help, Risk and Self-Interest'.

⁹⁸ Sémelin, *Survival*, 268; Marnix Croes and Peter Tammes, 'Gif laten wij niet voortbestaan', 174–6. For an incriminating sense of 'complicity', see Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Westport: Greenwood, 1999), 113.

Cite this article: Burzlaff J (2023). Silence and Small Gestures: Jews and non-Jews in the Netherlands (1940–1945). *Contemporary European History* 32, 401–415. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S096077732100076X>