



Universiteit Utrecht

## Selecting the past

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The relationship between archives, memory and history investigated through NIOD's war diary collection (1944 – 2010)

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## Introduction

On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1940, German troops occupied the Netherlands after a short confrontation with the Dutch army. Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch government fled to England and Arthur Seyß-Inquart became the *Reichskommissar*. Between 28<sup>th</sup> July 1940 and 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1945, the Dutch government-in-exile provided news overviews and instructions against Nazi Germany via Radio Oranje, a Dutch radio programme broadcast by the BBC's European service from London.<sup>1</sup> The director of this radio programme was Loe de Jong, a journalist and historian who had fled to London because of his Jewish ancestry and political anti-German articles. Radio Oranje broadcast Queen Wilhelmina's encouraging speeches to the people living in the occupied Netherlands and the programme secretly spread encrypted messages for the Dutch resistance. Moreover, people who lived close to military bases in the Netherlands were warned for upcoming attacks of the Royal Air Force.<sup>2</sup> Gerrit Bolkestein, the Minister of Education, Art and Science addressed the Dutch citizens on behalf of the government-in-exile on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1944.<sup>3</sup> The German occupiers forbade listening to Radio Oranje and several jammers made it difficult for people to tune in, but he was still able to reach a significant audience in the Netherlands. Bolkestein asked the Dutch people to keep diaries and record their experiences and memories of the occupation because a new institute for war documentation would be created after the war, which would be in need of varied material in order to publish scholarly publications on the 'current struggle for freedom'.<sup>4</sup>

This centre was founded on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, three days after the liberation of the Netherlands, as the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (RIOD), nowadays NIOD Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies (NIOD).<sup>5</sup> Immediately after its

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<sup>1</sup> Radio Oranje was broadcast every evening at 9pm, for fifteen minutes.

<sup>2</sup> Annemieke van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld: het ontstaan van de collectie van het NIOD* (Amsterdam 2014) 56 – 57.

<sup>3</sup> 'Minister of Education, Art and Science' is a translation of his Dutch title: 'Minister van Onderwijs, Kunst en Wetenschappen'.

<sup>4</sup> NIOD, PER.1279, *Jaarverslag 1945 – 1946, Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. Verslag omtrent de voorgeschiedenis van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, alsmede omtrent de werkzaamheden tot 31 December 1946, door het Directorium uitgebracht aan de Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Den Haag 1948), Bijlage II: Tekst van de radio-toespraak gehouden door dr. G. Bolkestein, Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, uitgezonden door Radio Oranje op 28 maart 1944.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of 'Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie' is State Institute for War Documentation. RIOD was renamed in 1999 as *Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie* (Dutch Institute for War Documentation; NIOD). In 2010, the centre merged with the *Centrum voor Holocaust- en Genocidestudies* and became *NIOD Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies* (NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies; NIOD).

foundation, employees of the institute confirmed Bolkestein's announcement and started raising awareness that they were creating a war diary collection and were in need of personal documents. Hundreds of diaries were acquired by RIOD in its first decade, but these were not all included in the archival collection. Nowadays, NIOD's diary collection consists of more than 1700 documents, making it the biggest of its kind in the Netherlands. A selection of this collection was digitized between 2007 and 2010 in a state-led subsidy programme entitled *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* (Heritage of the War) and the documented experiences of hundreds of people can now be found online. Who was in charge of the selection of the diaries back in 1945 and who decided which diaries were digitized during *Erfgoed van de Oorlog*? Have the acquisition criteria changed over the years at NIOD, and if so, why? In this thesis, I investigate the acquisition of Dutch war diaries from the moment of Bolkestein's radio speech in 1944 until the termination of *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* in 2010. In doing so, I will map the process in which they were obtained by RIOD, selected or rejected by employees of the institute for the archive, used for scholarly research in the Netherlands and selected or rejected for digitisation. I argue that the diary collection has been subjected to two major selection rounds: between 1945 and 1955, and between 2007 and 2010. By investigating how NIOD's war diary collection was created and how these diaries influenced historical studies on World War II in the Netherlands, I aim to clarify the relationship between archives, history and memory.

Diaries are interesting sources for studying this relationship because they are often seen as documented personal memories. However, many factors contribute to the creation of diaries and they are not unedited strains of thought that reveal directly what people think, know, understand or remember about their lives and experiences. People can write for specific audiences in mind, misremember or reinterpret certain events in hindsight and do not necessarily produce factually accurate narratives of the events they witnessed. These complex characteristics have led diaries to spark theoretical and methodological debates about academic issues such as the interpretation of sources and the relationship between academic historiography and public discourses of history.<sup>6</sup> Recently, this relationship has become a popular topic of historical research. According to historian Jay Winter, a so-called 'memory boom' took place in the twentieth century, which he defines as: 'the efflorescence of interest

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<sup>6</sup> Christina Morina, 'The 'bystander' in recent Dutch historiography', *German History*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2014) 101–111, 102.

in the subject of memory inside the academy and beyond it.<sup>7</sup> After the ‘memory turn’ in the 1970s, historians increasingly focused on the way in which history functions in the present. A combination of factors resulted in an explosion of memory research: technological advances in data collection made a revolution in mnemonics possible and World War II triggered a new critical history of mass-violence and oppression. The end of the twentieth century resulted in modernising processes such as globalisation and the rise of multiculturalism. In this rapidly changing world, memory is used in new ways to claim and legitimise political power. These factors led to new studies on what memory is and how it functions in society.<sup>8</sup> However, memory is a wide umbrella term and is used in many different ways in connection to many different terminologies. I use Astrid Erll’s definition of memory as ‘the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts’, because this broad definition allows me to investigate whether diaries are products of individual memory that are bound up with acts of remembering in a social context to group memory.<sup>9</sup>

Focussing on NIOD’s war diary collection allows me to investigate the interaction between diaries (private documents) and historiography (public history) on World War II in the Netherlands. By comparing the two major selection rounds of NIOD’s war diary collection, I aim to shed new light on how this diary collection was formed and how selection criteria are not only changing along with historiographical shifts, but also of influence on the formation of the collective memory of World War II in the Netherlands. It is important to note that NIOD (and RIOD)’s primary objective is not to function as an archive. Instead, it is a research institute and a ‘knowledge centre about the effects of war, the Holocaust and other genocides on individuals and society’ *with* an archive.<sup>10</sup> Researchers attached to the institute inform government bodies and individuals, organise informative activities about war violence and stimulate debates in society. Besides diaries, the institute harbours a varied collection of primary sources on World War II and an extensive library with literature on war, genocides and the Holocaust. However, because NIOD does collect, manage and make accessible archival material about World War II and it does own the biggest war diary collection in the Netherlands, I believe that the formation of this collection can be useful for studying the relationship between archives, history and memory. The issue of how collective memory is

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<sup>7</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: the Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven 2006) 1.

<sup>8</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *Memory and power in post-war Europe* (Cambridge 2002) 14-17.

<sup>9</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction’, in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin 2008) 1.

<sup>10</sup> NIOD’s website: <http://www.niod.knaw.nl/en/history>.

shaped is important in understanding how states create national identities that are crucial for political stability and social cohesion.

The long timeframe of 1944 – 2010 is useful for investigating how the selection criteria have changed over the years and how new technology is changing archival practice. The influence of archives in creating and distributing collective memory has been subject to new critical investigations, mostly conducted within the academic discipline of archival studies. Many claim that archivists traditionally highlighted the neutral and objective qualities of the archive.<sup>11</sup> This view is referred to in literature as Jenkinsonian, named after British archivist Sir Charles Hilary Jenkinson, who argued that archivists should aim to be as impartial and passive as possible in composing archives. His *Manual of Archive Administration* (1922; 1937) and educational courses reinforced the idea that archival appraisal was the responsibility of record creators instead of archivists. Archivists themselves should not be involved in the selection or interpretation of archives because they had to remain impartial, their most important job was to preserve and safeguard historical material. This view was challenged when technology advanced and record creation expanded, which resulted in making the act of appraisal a central archival duty of the archivist. However, recent archival studies suggest that this view generated a myth of impartiality that still lives among a number of archivists, and does not sufficiently take into account the power that they have over deciding which information is preserved or forgotten.<sup>12</sup> Archivists make decisions that influence which sources historians use for their research, which in turn influences what the broader public learns about history. Can archivists therefore be seen as key players in creating and distributing collective memory? Moreover, can what is stored in archives and spread through historical studies be defined as memory in the first place?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance: Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, Vol. 2 (2002), 1-19; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, 'Archives, Records and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance', *Archival Science*, Vol. 2 (2002) 171 – 185; Charles Jeurgens, 'The scent of the digital archive: dilemmas with archive digitisation', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 128, No. 4 (2013) 30-54; Randall Jimerson, 'Archives and memory', *OCLC Systems and Services*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2003) 89 – 95; Louise Craven (ed.), *What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader* (Aldershot, Hampshire 2008). Andrew Flinn, 'Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage', in: Graham Dawson (ed.), *Memory, Narrative and Histories: Critical Debates, New Trajectories. Working Papers on Memory, Narrative and Histories* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012) 19 – 36, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Flinn, 'Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage', in: Graham Dawson (ed.), *Memory, Narrative and Histories: Critical Debates, New Trajectories. Working Papers on Memory, Narrative and Histories* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012) 19 – 36, 22. Flinn, 'Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage' 21.

<sup>13</sup> Flinn, 'Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage' 21.

The first chapter examines Gerrit Bolkestein's radio message and describes the subsequent foundation of RIOD in 1945. Why was this institute created, what was its objective and why did a minister use a national radio programme to ask people to keep diaries? The second chapter describes how RIOD obtained diaries in its first post-war decade. Consulting both secondary literature and primary source material from NIOD's archive, I provide a detailed account of the war diary analyses made by the institute between 1945 and 1955. Having analysed the selection criteria, the next chapter deals with the use of NIOD's war diary collection by historians and maps the historiographical developments regarding World War II in the Netherlands, comparing these to developments in the use of war diaries. Chapter 4 is centred on the digitisation process behind *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* and the influence of digitisation on archival practice and responsibility.



## Chapter 1 Creating a centre for war documentation

Already during World War II, the Dutch people were asked by their government-in-exile to think about the aftermath of the German occupation. When Bolkestein addressed the nation in a radio broadcast of Radio Oranje in March 1944, he stressed the importance of primary source material for historians and the importance of learning about the national past in general. The government considered the war to be an exceptional and extraordinary time in national history and state officials were concerned about what would happen with people's personal memories and official documents after the war. Moreover, reliable information from the occupied territory was scarce and documenting personal memories also allowed them to get insight into what happened in the Netherlands while they were in London. Not just the government felt this sense of living through historical times; many people already started keeping diaries as soon as the war broke out. In this chapter, the process leading up to the foundation of the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie will be described and contextualised. Who came up with the plan to create a new institute for war documentation and why? What was the context in which the new war institute operated? Answering these questions will shed light on how the history of the institute and its employees impacted the formation of the archival collection in the first post-war decade (1945-1955).

### 1.1. The Foundation of RIOD

During the German occupation of the Netherlands, economic historian Nicolaas Posthumus stressed the importance of documenting the war for later generations. As a professor at the University of Amsterdam, he had founded three research institutes before the war: the Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief (Dutch Economic Historical Archive; NEHA), the Economisch-Historische Bibliotheek (Economic Historical Library; EHB) and the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute for Social History; IISG).<sup>14</sup> During the war, he met with F. Vervooren to discuss the possibilities of collecting documents and founding a new research institute for war documentation after liberation. They both believed that documentation needed to start as soon as possible in order to provide

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<sup>14</sup> Jaap Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog. De roerige beginperiode van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, 1945 - 1960* (Amsterdam 2007) 16.

later generations with reliable information about the occupation.<sup>15</sup> Vervooren irregularly and illegally published *Nederland in den Oorlog!*, a journal with a collection of newspaper articles about the war which was meant to inform people about the occupation, but which he secretly used as a pretext to collect material that he aimed to publish after the war had finished. He died unexpectedly in 1943, just after he agreed with Posthumus to work together in sharing historical material for the institute that they envisioned.<sup>16</sup>

Posthumus continued this work alone and wrote ‘Memorie betreffende de organisatie van het oorlogsdokumentatiewerk’, which he presented to the *Departement van Opvoeding, Wetenschap en Kultuurbescherming* in 1943<sup>17</sup>. The Germans had founded this ministry in 1940 and had simultaneously abolished the previous ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences. Gerrit van Poelje, the general secretary of the abolished ministry, and Jan Karel van der Haagen, who worked at the new ministry, were intrigued by Posthumus’ ideas and discussed the possibilities of preparing historical studies on the occupation.<sup>18</sup> Van der Haagen argued that collecting and publishing material on the occupation was a cultural and, above all, national duty of the Dutch government. The government was supposed to take measures to influence future historiography and this shows how exceptional these ministers believed this time period to be.<sup>19</sup> Posthumus claimed that the first step would be to found a private institute for war documentation, which would do ‘preparatory work’: collecting material, providing inventories, interviewing people about their experiences and preparing upcoming publications on the research findings. After three years, the state would become in charge of the institute and prominent historians would write official histories of the occupation and wartime.<sup>20</sup> Van Poelje and Van der Haagen established a management board (*directorium*), consisting of Posthumus, Zeger Willem Sneller (a professor in economic history) and Bernard Hermesdorf (a professor in Roman law and cultural history).

The three members of the *directorium* had their first meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1944 in a café in Utrecht. Hermesdorf and Sneller convinced Posthumus that the first step of a private organisation was unnecessary because the government paid for all the labour expenses and should bear all responsibility.<sup>21</sup> They created a new outline of the responsibilities and tasks of

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<sup>15</sup> I could not find Mr. Vervooren’s first name in any source, just the initial ‘F.’

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Upbringing, Science and Protection of Culture.

<sup>18</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.

the future institute and agreed that they would be in charge of collecting and editing all material, while a publisher would only look at the layout and distribution of books. They discussed possible topics for publications, themes to address in historical studies and ways to obtain the necessary material. An important task was the education of younger generations and the board of directors decided that an educational booklet should be published for schools. After the completion of this booklet, a book containing the names of those who were killed and imprisoned during the war, a list of the most important documents, and a scientific publication (with a translation for broader audiences outside academia) would be published, after which the institute would be abolished.<sup>22</sup>

Unaware of the plans in the Netherlands, journalist and historian Loe de Jong also came up with the idea to create a new institute for war documentation. While writing a history on the occupation entitled *Je Maintiendrai* (published in four parts between 1941 and 1945), he realised the importance of original documents and memories for historical studies. He urged Minister Gerrit Bolkestein to pursue a national centre that would collect, safeguard and publish material on the war. Thus far, De Jong had based his work on illegal magazines and his knowledge that he obtained while working as a journalist in the Netherlands. Minister Bolkestein immediately realised the importance of this centre and he took the plan to the Cabinet, who agreed to authorise him to officially create this institute immediately after liberation.<sup>23</sup> Or at least this is what Loe de Jong writes in his memoirs and what historian Jaap Cohen argues in his research on the history of RIOD<sup>24</sup>. However, RIOD's first official annual report states that Bolkestein was the one who contacted De Jong first and that they both talked about the idea to create an institute for war documentation, after which Bolkestein considered De Jong to be the best candidate for preparing the foundation of this institute. He thought highly of De Jong because of his work for *De Groene Amsterdammer*, Radio Oranje and his historical study *Je Maintiendrai*. In any case, both were interested in the idea of creating this institute and Bolkestein wrote a letter to the Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1944. He argued that the end of the war was in sight and that it was very important that the government centralised war documentation. The Cabinet quickly approved and Bolkestein delivered his speech to the Dutch people on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1944.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 19.

In the meantime, Van Poelje and Van der Haagen accepted the new plans that were drafted in Utrecht, and they decided on a publisher: W. Nijhoff.<sup>25</sup> Posthumus contacted historians and asked them whether they were interested in becoming involved in writing historical studies for the upcoming institute. Hermesdorf contacted prime-minister-in-exile Pieter Sjoerds Gerbrandy on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1945, by sending a letter to London from Nijmegen, which was already liberated by that time. The two groups were then notified of each other's plans and three days after the Netherlands was completely liberated, the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie was officially founded on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945. Loe de Jong contacted Posthumus (who had been his lecturer at the University of Amsterdam) and made clear that he wanted to be involved in the institute because he had had similar plans to establish a new institute himself. Posthumus responded by naming him the *chef*, the director, which he stayed until his retirement in 1979. Posthumus had been searching for someone to lead the day-to-day management of the institute because he was too busy to do this himself and during a conversation between the two their ideas were so similar that De Jong was hired immediately.<sup>26</sup>

## 1.2. Archiving the war

RIOD's mission was to write the official history of the Dutch kingdom during World War II and to collect and safeguard historical material relating to this period.<sup>27</sup> When RIOD was founded in 1945, it was not the only archive that aimed to harbour documents on World War II. However, the institute was granted special tasks and responsibilities by the government immediately after its foundation. The rather inexperienced board and staff, mostly made up of young historians and journalists, were used for special services by the Dutch government. They had to request and verify pension rights for members of the resistance, investigate stolen goods and even find documents belonging to war criminals. Although the institute made out to be independent and private, the directors needed official approval from the ministerial department of Education, Arts and Sciences (OKW – which had been re-established after the war) before they were allowed to publish anything.<sup>28</sup> A special task granted by the government was the investigation into special criminal proceedings. Many archives that had been taken over by German establishments during the occupation were abandoned after liberation when

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, 9.

the Nazi institutes that owned them were disbanded as state enemies. *Bijzondere Rechtspleging* (special criminal proceedings) needed to use the remains of these archives for transitional justice. An important section of RIOD worked at locating and accessing archives of the occupiers and (collaborating) Dutch organisations. They searched for documents that revealed information that was needed for upcoming trials and transitional justice. The archives of the German occupational institutions and the NSB (the Dutch National Socialist political party) had to be dealt with and people who had committed war crimes had to be sentenced. The necessary evidence was most likely to be found in archives, this explains how, in the very first years of the institute, RIOD employees worked together with several public bodies in acquiring documents on the war and occupation. The chaotic times following the liberation meant that historians like Loe de Jong were able to expand their authority to cooperate with the government in these matters.<sup>29</sup> The archive formation at RIOD was, especially in the early chaotic years after liberation, hardly guided from above and employees were mostly free to determine their acquisition methods. RIOD employees had to be innovative in order to require any source material.<sup>30</sup>

In an international context, RIOD was one of a kind. Similar institutes were not established in the rest of the world until 1949, when the German Institut für Zeitgeschichte was founded.<sup>31</sup> Why were the Dutch the first to establish a research institute like RIOD? Firstly, the Netherlands was a *verzuilde* (pillarised) nation before the war, meaning that society was divided into different ‘pillars’ according to different religions and ideologies, with their own institutions, political parties and cultural organisations. During the war, people from different pillars worked together in fighting for liberation or exchanging information on war developments. Many of the pillarised institutions were abolished by the occupiers and replaced by national institutions. However, the war did not mean the end of the Dutch pillarisation system and it was not until the early 1960s that depillarisation fully started. Because of this history and a widespread distaste for government intervention, an institute for war documentation had to be representative of people from all the different pillars and be independent from the state to succeed. Secondly, many Dutch people felt like the Germans threatened their national identity and history. The research institute would be an official step in investigating all the crimes that they felt were committed against them and a way to secure

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<sup>29</sup> Chris van der Heijden, *Dat nooit meer: de nasleep van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2011) 12.

<sup>30</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 8.

that historians could do their job once the country was liberated, a sense of hope in times when it was forbidden to write or speak up against the occupiers. Moreover, there was a certain predilection for the past in the Netherlands that was already visible in pre-war society but became more dominant during the war. The idea that culture (partly) defines a nation contributed to a fascination for cultural heritage and the national past. The German occupiers stimulated cultural developments and praised the national art collection, meaning that people were motivated during the occupation to cherish their cultural heritage.<sup>32</sup>

A focus on history was already visible in Dutch cultural life before the war and can be explained as a way of looking for continuity and typical quality of the Dutch nation in the light of the drastic technological, political and economic changes that modernity brought with it.<sup>33</sup> During the German occupation, this wish for stability and continuity was expressed in patriotic images of national history and anti-German sentiments. The predilection for the past was therefore not merely a result of the German occupation, but a more general reaction to modernity. However, the occupation intensified this nostalgia and triggered a patriotic appreciation for regional traditions and cultural rituals. Bolkestein compared World War II to the Eighty Years' War and this metaphor came from a need for national unity and recognition of the heroic past. Willem van Oranje (William of Orange) had grown into a mythic hero and a so-called 'father of the nation' in Dutch culture and by referring to this militant period, he aimed to trigger national pride and unity in working together to overcome the danger from outside that had entered the national borders. Paradoxically, the German *Reichskommissariat für die besetzten niederländische Gebiete* also stimulated Dutch culture and valued traditions and historical myths. This is interesting because the German state both embodied modernity in the war but also supported anti-modern sentiments in the Netherlands that triggered patriotism.<sup>34</sup> This predilection for the past also resulted in many people acting as amateur historians. The act of documenting the past was changed to documenting the present during the war, when people realised that they were living through historically important times. People felt the need to document the present and safeguard it for later generations, so many people already kept diaries and scrapbooks before they heard about Bolkestein's appeal to the people.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, 22 – 25.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, 27.

Besides a growing fascination for the past and the popularity of documenting the present, the foundation of RIOD cannot be dissociated from several larger developments in Dutch society at the end of the twentieth century. The expansion of labour movements and the internationalisation of trade and industry led to a growing need for information, which in turn influenced the popularity of libraries and archives.<sup>36</sup> Government intervention increased during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the state started to interfere with cultural life, which resulted in the establishment of the Ministry of Arts and Sciences in 1875. This ministry was renamed the *Departement van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen* in 1918 and Jan Karel van der Haagen became the head of this department in 1939.<sup>37</sup> Van der Haagen was officially in charge of the Dutch public records and cultural policy. When the Germans incorporated his ministry in the *Department van Opvoeding, Wetenschap en Kultuurbescherming*, he became able to accomplish more in terms of cultural policy than he had before the war. This can be explained by the German fascination for folk culture and their large budget for the cultural sector, which was in stark contrast to the drastic cutbacks that were made by the Dutch government in his pre-war term.<sup>38</sup>

The *Reichskommissariat* appointed Bernhard Vollmer as the new head of Dutch archives in 1940. Vollmer decided that Dutch archives should be protected against force of arms and that help should be offered in restoring damaged archives. He did not want to interfere with archival policy at the institutions he visited and tried to be on good terms with his colleagues in the Netherlands.<sup>39</sup> It is unclear what motivated Van der Haagen to collaborate with Posthumus in creating the new Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. Annemieke van Bockxmeer argues that, just like he did from the occupation, he aimed to profit from the plans to stimulate national cultural policy. He spoke to R. Bijlsma, “algemeen rijksarchivaris” at the Algemeen Rijksarchief in Den Haag (The Hague) and asked him whether he wanted to work together in collecting personal documents, like memoirs, letters and diaries, during the occupation. On 21<sup>st</sup> August 1943, Bijlsma sent Van der Haagen a draft of a call for documents, directed to the Dutch citizens and asking specifically for personal material, which would be safeguarded at the Algemeen Rijksarchief. He stated: ‘Reeds meermalen is er op geweest, dat de Nederlander er slechts bij hooge uitzondering toe komt journalen, herinneringen of gedenkwaardigheden te publiceeren; toch vormen juist deze bronnen een

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<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 25; Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, 36.

onmisbare aanvulling van hetgeen in de officieele staatsstukken en anderen akten is geboekstaafd.<sup>40</sup> The call ended with the importance of documentation for historians who would write about the war in later times. However, Bijlsma accompanied the call with a letter to Van der Haagen, in which he stated that he did not actually believe that people would give away their private memories and personal documents. Moreover, he did not think the Rijksarchief in The Hague was a safe enough place to store these sources because the *Inspecteur Kunstbescherming* (officially the ‘Inspecteur voor de bescherming van schatten van wetenschap en kunst tegen oorlogsgevaaren’) had said so in a report. Van der Haagen also objected an appeal to the Dutch people because he did not think it was possible to do this during the occupation. He was afraid that people would start sending material and that the Germans would blame them for this illegal activity.<sup>41</sup> However, even though these plans were never realised, it does help explain why Van der Haagen was on board with Posthumus’ plans to create a new national institute for war documentation where these personal sources would be stored. Posthumus wrote on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1945 that the aim of the institute was to write an objective history on World War II and to prepare this by tracking down, verifying and organising source material.<sup>42</sup>

### 1.3. Internal organisation

When RIOD opened its doors on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, a total of six employees worked at the institute. This number quickly increased to 26 half a year later and reached its peak in 1948 with total of 81 employees. About two-thirds of these were temporary staff that worked at the institute for less than two years and the institute was not grounded in an academic context or connected to a university. Most people worked in Amsterdam, but there was also a temporary building in The Hague and in Batavia.<sup>43</sup> RIOD aimed to store archival pieces in The Hague and make Amsterdam the headquarters where the organisational and research activities would be centred. Eventually, the archive was also moved to Amsterdam. Although the institute was designed to consist of people from all the different pillars in society, in reality the institute was dominantly left-oriented. The institute created its own journal that functioned as a newsletter about the institute, entitled *Nederland in oorlogstijd* (The Netherlands in Wartime). It was

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<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, 41 – 44.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, 43 – 44.

<sup>42</sup> N. Posthumus, *Nederland in oorlogstijd: orgaan van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (12 april 1946) 1.

<sup>43</sup> Boudewijn Smits, *Loe de Jong, 1914-2005. Historicus met een missie* (Amsterdam 2014) 163-164.



meant to provide updates on the work being done at the institute and to inspire people to collaborate in bringing this ‘grand, national project’ to completion. Every true Dutchman should be involved in one way or another.<sup>44</sup> Loe de Jong published articles in the first issues in which he explained RIOD’s objectives and activities. In the first issue, he stated that it was remarkable how little source material on historical periods there was left to inform the Dutch people about the past. Even though so many history books were published and archives contained so many historical documents, a closer look revealed that there was regrettably little left of the past. De Jong went on by arguing that RIOD was the first large-scale, official effort to change this. The Dutch government demonstrated that war documentation was the state’s responsibility by taking RIOD under its care. He explained that the institute had three tasks: to collect, organise and publish material on World War II. The first post-war decade was largely devoted to collecting material, as organising could be done later on while collecting needed to be done as quickly as possible.<sup>45</sup>

#### **1.4. Conclusion**

The Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie was founded on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, three days after the Netherlands was liberated from the German occupiers. The quick establishment of the institute was the result of a combination of factors. There was a hunger for information because it was difficult to get news updates in the occupied Netherlands and people wished to place their personal experiences and memories in a bigger picture. Moreover, people believed that their national history was endangered by the occupation and aimed to protect their cultural heritage by safeguarding historical material. A predilection for the past, that was already visible in the Netherlands before the war, intensified during the war and was extended to an interest in documenting the present. This fascination went hand-in-hand with a

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Ons orgaan Nederland in Oorlogstijd brengt verslag uit van den stand van zaken, publiceert grepen uit het belangrijke materiaal en wekt doelbewust op tot medewerking aan dit grootsche nationale werk, waarvan geen rechtgeaard Nederlander zich mag onttrekken. Moge het aan zijn bestemming beantwoorden.’(...) “Wat zijn wij eigenlijk over het verleden slecht ingelicht! Het lijkt vreemd, want er verschijnen nog zooveel boeken over, en de archieven zijn toch welgevuld, maar wanneer men de zaak wat nader beschouwt, dan blijkt dat er, ook van de belangrijkste perioden uit de vaderlandsche geschiedenis maar bedroevend weinig over is. Oorlogsdocumentatie is de poging, de eerste grootscheepsche officieele poging uit onze historie om het nu eens beter te doen. De regeering heeft, door het onder haar hoede nemen van het werk van Oorlogsdocumentatie, erkend dat dit een tak van staatszorg was – een nieuwe tak aan den boom der wetenschap. Men had dit werk aan particulieren kunnen overlaten. De regeering heeft, terecht, beslist dat het taak was der overheid, dit documentatiewerk te verrichten.’ In: Loe de Jong, ‘Het werk van Oorlogsdocumentatie (1)’, *Nederland in oorlogstijd: orgaan van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (12 april 1946) 1.

<sup>45</sup> De Jong, ‘Het werk van Oorlogsdocumentatie (1)’, 1.

growing desire for news and information, and war documentation was perceived as an important activity.

These factors led to different historians and ministers believing that a new institute for war documentation was necessary. Their motives were the same: to prevent important source material from getting lost or being destroyed and to educate later generations. The objective of the institute was to write an official history of the Netherlands during World War II. The Netherlands continued to be a pillarised country after the war and dealt with its history of occupation differently than other European countries. Not the state but an independent research institute was entrusted with the task to write the official history. However, the government had been included in realising the institute from the beginning and was closely involved with RIOD. The *directorium* needed official approval from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences before they were allowed to publish anything. The desire to document the recent past and the wish to educate later generations shaped RIOD's policy and the first years were devoted to collecting material. As De Jong phrased this: 'Wat verzameld is, kan niet verloren gaan.' (What is collected cannot be lost.)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, 1.

## Chapter 2 War diary analyses

In his speech on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1944, minister Gerrit Bolkestein asked the Dutch population to keep diaries and record their memories in order to enable later generations to learn about the past. In the first years of the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie's existence, the institute actively searched for documents and objects to include in its archival collection. Several techniques were used to raise awareness that the institute was in need of war diaries and a special section was devoted to collecting them. By December 1950, the institute had obtained 820 diaries. Eventually, 216 of these were sent back to the authors because they were not considered to be important enough for RIOD's archive.<sup>47</sup> This chapter describes the first round of selection concerning the war diaries that were obtained by the institute. Who was in charge of the selection of the diaries during the formative period of the institute in the first post-war decade between 1945 and 1955? Why were not all diaries that were sent to RIOD included in the archival collection, even though Loe de Jong kept promoting the importance of diaries for the institute in regular radio messages? What was the purpose of collecting diaries as historical sources?

### 2.1. Obtaining diaries

To create and expand the diary collection, RIOD needed to make people aware of the institute's existence and the importance of diaries as historical sources. Raising awareness and promoting the importance of diaries had already started during the war, when RIOD had not been established yet. Minister Bolkestein announced in his speech of 28<sup>th</sup> March 1944 that the Netherlands would establish a new centre for war documentation after the 'current crisis of the Netherlands' existence as independent nation state' was over.<sup>48</sup> If the Dutch people wanted their offspring to know about what their nation had been subjected to and had overcome, they needed to keep diaries, letters and other documents containing information about daily life. Even the most ordinary and seemingly unimportant material could be of high importance to later generations. Bolkestein urged listeners to contribute to making a historical monument of

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<sup>47</sup> NIOD, PER.1279, *Jaarverslag 1950, Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. Verslag omtrent de voorgeschiedenis van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, alsmede omtrent de werkzaamheden tot 31 December 1946, door het Directorium uitgebracht aan de Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Den Haag 1948).

<sup>48</sup> Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog*, 21.

the collected source material, which would help the current population remember and later generations imagine or empathise with life during the occupation. The choice of words in the speech suggest that Bolkestein was aiming to touch national pride as he announced that he needed ‘the best men and women’ to safeguard the national past.<sup>49</sup> He wanted people to be aware that even though it might seem pointless to keep track of everything that was going on in their lives in a time when their country was occupied by German troops, and writing a detailed account of daily life might not seem like making an effort against this occupation or seem like a step towards liberation, later generations would benefit tremendously from having these detailed descriptions. He explained that once the war was over, the government would make sure that a special committee of archival and historical experts would design the new centre and that they wanted the collection to be as complete as possible. Simple descriptions of daily life were needed for the ‘first ever governmental effort to document an important and threatening moment in national history.’<sup>50</sup> In this respect, he valued both the past and the future with regard to the present, as he states that writing a diary might seem unimportant in the present but would be crucial for later generations in the future.

Loe de Jong later wrote in his biography, and revealed in interviews, that he had written the speech and had given it to Mr. Bolkestein. Nevertheless, because the speech was delivered by a minister and broadcast through a radio programme that was also used by the Queen for her patriotic encouragements, the request had an official and perhaps nationalistic air to it. A minister already highlighted the act of remembering the past as important during the time when that past was still the present. Moreover, Loe de Jong paid special attention to it in his radio talks for Radio Oranje, and the magazine *Nederland in Oorlogstijd* and several

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Wil het nageslacht ten volle beseffen wat wij als volk in de jaren hebben doorstaan en zijn te boven gekomen, dan hebben wij juist de eenvoudige stukken nodig – een dagboek, brieven van een arbeider uit Duitsland, een reeks toespraken van een predikant of priester. Eerst als wij er in slagen dit eenvoudige, dagelijkse materiaal in overstelpende hoeveelheid bijeen te brengen, eerst dan zal het tafereel van deze vrijheidsstrijd geschilderd kunnen worden in volle diepte en glans. Dat ik diegenen onder U die zich willen wijden aan dit ogenschijnlijk zo weinig betekende, maar voor het nageslacht zo hoogst belangrijke verzamelwerk, met klem de nodige voorzichtigheid en behoedzaamheid op het hart druk, spreekt vanzelf. Er is in Londen reeds veel materiaal bijeengebracht, maar meer, veel meer hopen wij aan te treffen in Nederland, wanneer het uur der bevrijding slaat. In afwachting daarvan kunt Gij thans reeds Uw deel bijdragen tot het grote historische monument, dat, zo hoop ik vurig, eens door de beste mannen en vrouwen in ons midden zal worden opgetrokken – den levenden ter herinnering, het nageslacht ter bezieling.’ NIOD, PER.1279, *Jaarverslag 1945 - 1946, Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. Verslag omtrent de voorgeschiedenis van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, alsmede omtrent de werkzaamheden tot 31 December 1946, door het Directorium uitgebracht aan de Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Den Haag 1948), Bijlage II: Tekst van de radio-toespraak gehouden door dr. G. Bolkestein, Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, uitgezonden door Radio Oranje op 28 maart 1944.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

art exhibitions referred to the plans. After the war, De Jong continued to update the Dutch nation on the progress of the centre during weekly radio broadcasts.<sup>51</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1945, he speculated that many people must have kept diaries during the war. ‘Als ze maar niet verloren gaan! Als het nageslacht dat onschatbare materiaal maar onder ogen kan krijgen.’<sup>52</sup> Fortunately for him, when he checked his mail the following week, he needed a special *bakfiets* (delivery bicycle) to collect the 80 diaries that had been sent to the newly established RIOD, along with letters containing information about other people that might have kept diaries. In order to encourage the others to also send their material, RIOD collaborated with the *Regeringsvoorlichtingendienst* (Netherlands Government Information Service) in promoting the centre through experimental media. They placed advertisements in magazines and journals, created 8000 posters (which they hung in official buildings like post offices) and spread a so-called *vouwgids* (foldable guide) with a call for personal documents.<sup>53</sup> Besides diaries, people also sent photographs, (illegal) journals, reports, movies, brochures, poems, propaganda leaflets, a uniform, letters, newspapers, German books, forms, drawings, objects from concentration camps, music, plays and maps.<sup>54</sup>

In order to promote the institute, RIOD employees also tried a door-to-door technique where they spread informative leaflets about the centre and its mission to houses in Amersfoort, Gulpen (Limburg) and Broek op Langendijk. Along with the leaflet, they put reply cards in mailboxes, allowing people to contact the institute for free when they had documents or information that they thought might be interesting. However, RIOD employees concluded that this technique was not worth the effort and the costs and should not be expanded to the rest of the country.<sup>55</sup> They do not specify why this technique was not to be used in other parts of the country but it quickly became apparent that most people who sent in their diaries responded to the radio talks by Loe de Jong. Dolf Cohen already stated in the second quarterly report of 1946 that he had little faith in the door-to-door technique, as he had noticed that personal contact with people led to the most valuable material.<sup>56</sup> Loe de Jong wrote in *Nederland in Oorlogstijd* that his biggest concern was to not be able to reach people

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<sup>51</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 289.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 292.

<sup>53</sup> NIOD, PER.1279, *Jaarverslag 1945-1946, Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. Verslag omtrent de voorgeschiedenis van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, alsmede omtrent de werkzaamheden tot 31 December 1946, door het Directorium uitgebracht aan de Minister van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Den Haag 1948).

<sup>54</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 298.

<sup>55</sup> NIOD, *Jaarverslag 1945-1946*, 17-18.

<sup>56</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, ‘Kwartaalverslagen Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie’, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly report 1946, Dr A.E. Cohen – Kwartaalverslag April – Juni 1946.

and therefore to lose valuable material forever. Because half of the Dutch population did not own a radio in 1946, he tried advertising in Catholic and Protestant magazines and a 'politically left-oriented and big-city newspaper' with an advertisement that was designed by the *Regeringsvoorlichtingendienst* in April 1946. However, he concluded that this promotion technique was also not worth the investment as the results were unsatisfying.<sup>57</sup> The radio stayed the most effective medium to draw attention to RIOD's diary collection and after every talk by Loe de Jong the flow of incoming diaries increased.

## 2.2. A special diary collection

The importance of diaries as historical sources was reflected by RIOD's internal structure: a special section was created in 1946 and they were treated as a separate category of archival material. In the first quarterly report of that year, the secretary states that the diaries form a special department within the institute, with separate correspondence administration. Moreover, it is stated that the radio messages in which De Jong specifically asked for diaries were a big success, leading to more than 200 diaries being sent to RIOD in the first year.<sup>58</sup> Adolf (Dolf) Cohen became the head of RIOD's diary section in March 1946. As a historian specialised in medieval history, he obtained his doctorate in 1941 (the last PhD student to be guided by the famous historian Johan Huizinga, who died in 1945). Cohen had met Loe de Jong at a conference for history students in 1936 and immediately expressed his interest in RIOD after the liberation. He became in charge of the selection and rejection of the diaries that were sent to the institute. Because of the large amount of diaries, he regularly met with staff from other departments within RIOD and updated the others on his progress.

Once employees of the institute were aware of the existence of a diary, they tried to acquire it for examination. De Jong signed most correspondence between the institute and authors of diaries as *chef* (head) of the institute, a minority was signed by Cohen. A default letter was created which was sent to authors, explaining the relevance of the diary as a historical document for the institute and ensuring that privacy would be protected and nothing would be done with the diary without permission of the author.<sup>59</sup> In the default letter,

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<sup>57</sup> Loe de Jong, *Nederland in oorlogstijd: orgaan van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (10 mei 1946) 1.

<sup>58</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 1<sup>st</sup> quarterly report of 1946, 'Kwartaalverslag secretariaat'.

<sup>59</sup> 'Het is u wellicht bekend, dat het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie van regeringswege is belast met het verzamelen van alle gegevens welke betrekking hebben op Nederland in oorlogstijd. Zo stelt het Instituut zich onder meer ten doel ten behoeve van het nageslacht een uitgebreid dagboekenarchief aan te

De Jong states that the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie is entrusted with the task of collecting information on the Netherlands in wartime by the government. Moreover, he explains that the institute is creating a diary archive to allow later generations to form an image of everything the Dutch nation had to go through during the occupation. To create this archive, he asked everyone to send his or her diaries to the institute, after which RIOD would decide whether they were important enough to be recorded for posterity. De Jong promised that the diaries would not be used for publication without written approval from the author, and that they would be treated with the outmost discretion. The letter ends with a sentence that once again connects the war diary to national memory: 'I would like to thank you on behalf of the directors of the institute and express my conviction that an extensive diary archive, like nothing else, will make future generations realise what 'our people' have been through.' This default letter helps explain the goal that RIOD had in mind for the diary collection. It was meant to educate later generations and to record personal memories of a nation in wartime so that people, who had not experienced it, would know what this was like. Correspondence between the institute and authors and quarterly reports reveal that they also had another goal for the diaries envisioned: to write a history of the Netherlands during World War II. De Jong sent a letter with the same promises and expression of gratitude to authors when people notified him that they knew someone who had kept a diary. People would often write to the institute after listening to De Jong's radio talks or after getting acquainted with the institute via posters, leaflets or other people and they would not just send in their diary but explain that they had kept one and they were unsure whether it would be of any importance to the institute. In that case, De Jong would ask them to send the diary either permanently or temporarily for examination. If the author agreed to send the diary to the institute, RIOD paid for shipping expenses and sent a confirmation of receipt, followed by a default letter where

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leggen, opdat de latere generaties zich een beeld zullen kunnen vormen van al, wat ons volk gedurende de bezetting heeft moeten doorstaan. In verband hiermede is door middel van pers en radio verschillende malen tot particulieren het verzoek gericht, hun dagboeken aan het Instituut ter inzage te doen toekomen, opdat kan worden nagegaan of het voor het nageslacht van belang is, dat ze geheel of gedeeltelijk worden gecopieerd. Ik zou het bijzonder op prijs stellen, indien ik dit enige tijd ter inzage zou mogen ontvangen. Hieraan wil ik twee toezeggingen verbinden: ten eerste, dat niets uit het dagboek zal worden gepubliceerd vóór uw schriftelijke toestemming verkregen is: ten tweede, dat wij deze aangelegenheden strikt vertrouwelijk behandelen. Er staan wellicht in het dagboek persoonlijke mededelingen. U kunt er zeker van zijn, dat het vertrouwen, dat U ons bureau schenkt, niet zal worden geschonden. (...) Gaarne wil ik U, mede namens het Directorium van het Rijksinstituut, bij voorbaat mijn dank betuigen voor Uw hulp, daarbij mijn overtuiging uitsprekend, dat niets zo goed in staat zal zijn als een uitgebreid dagboekenarchief om het nageslacht te doen beseffen, wat ons volk in de afgelopen jaren heeft doorstaan.' NIOD, Archief 703 - Correspondentie Dagboeken, Doos 1: Dagboekcorrespondentie 0-85, Map 0. Beeck-Calkoen -v. Limburg Stirum.

the author was thanked once again for contributing to the task of educating later generations on what happened during the occupation in the Netherlands.

Once the diary was in RIOD's possession, Cohen would read and analyse it. His daily routine mainly consisted of shifting through the diaries and deciding whether they were suitable for photocopying at a cursory reading (only when he was in doubt about their value, would he read them thoroughly). He numbered them all with the help of the secretariat and prepared a selection for photocopying. He admitted that it was difficult to lay down a standard for the suitability of diaries and that he did not use strict rules in deciding the precise definition of diaries. It is interesting to note that Cohen also selected diaries about the war that had been composed in hindsight. He argued that these were often less thrilling but contained interesting analyses of personal events. He only accepted diaries that were personal and he was not interested in scrapbooks with news overviews. These had been popular during the occupation because people had little access to news and often collected whatever news item they could get hold on. In times of crisis, people focus more on the news and international developments and this was noticeable by the many people who sent this type of diary to RIOD. Cohen was interested in personal experiences and reactions to events of both the elite and ordinary people. If he believed that a diary (or part of it) was valuable to the institute, it was brought to a photocopier who made a photograph of the whole diary or selected fragments.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> 'Half maart werd ik op het instituut zelf te werk gesteld aan de oorlogsdagboeken. Toen ik begon, bedroeg het aantal der ingekomen, toegezegde en aangevraagde oorlogsdagboeken tezamen 225. Mijn werkzaamheid bestaat thans voorlopig in het schiften naar geschiktheid voor fotocopieëring (dit berust op een tamelijk oppervlakkig doorlezen, behalve in twijfelgevallen) van de ingezonden exemplaren en, bij gebleken geschiktheid, in verder gereedmaken voor de fotografische behandeling. Bij de paginerings van de dagboeken ontvang ik hulp van het secretariaat. Het schiften levert in de meeste gevallen geen grote moeilijkheden op, ofschoon het onmogelijk is van vaste normen uit te gaan. Formele bezwaren laat ik niet gelden; evenals eigenlijke dagboeken neem ik ook achteraf samengestelde verslagen op; in deze laatste stukken komt veelal minder spanning tot uiting, doch zij verhalen de gebeurtenissen en omstandigheden vaak interessanter. Wat de materiële schifting betreft, op de voorgrond staat dat het gegeven verslag persoonlijk moet zijn. Louter plakboeken en nieuwsverzamelingen van de Engelse radio leg ik terzijde, tenzij de vormgeving iets bijzonders heeft. Verder heb ik mijn normen opzettelijk ruim gesteld. Zowel bijzonderheden omtrent persoonlijke belevenissen als individuele reacties op omstandigheden en maatregelen laat ik tot hun recht komen, ook als ze afkomstig zijn van op zichzelf onbelangrijke en slecht ingelichte mensen. Aldus immers dragen deze dagboeken bij tot onze kennis van wellicht symptomatisch belangrijke en/of regionaal voorgekomen gebeurtenissen en wordt het nageslacht zo grondig mogelijk aangaande de heersende opinie en stemming ingelicht. Na het schiften en fotocopieëren van de oorlogsdagboeken – een mede door de noodzakelijke administratie ervan en door voortdurende controle omvangrijke arbeid – zal een grondige bestudering ter aanvulling met persoonlijke gegevens moeten volgen.' NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 4<sup>th</sup> quarterly report 1948, 'Afdeling Bronnenpublicaties – Kwartaalverslag over 1 Oktober tot 31 December 1948, Dagboeken', 4.



Halfway 1946, the ‘overwhelming busyness’ at the diary section had transitioned into a quieter period, due to the decreasing amount of incoming diaries and correspondence with (alleged) authors. Cohen had asked the secretariat to respond to every person who wrote to RIOD concerning new diaries and tell them that they would be requested to send their material in due course but not straight away because of the large amount of diaries already in need of an analysis at the institute.<sup>61</sup> The amount of incoming diaries kept on decreasing during 1946, but there were still many diaries that needed to be read and analysed. This abundance allowed Cohen to start a stricter selection policy and ‘become choosier’, and he rejected many diaries that he had first been unsure about and had set aside for a while.<sup>62</sup> In the second quarterly report of 1946, he devoted a short essay to his selection process and the difficulty of obtaining certain types of diaries, as well as the issue of representation. He still accepted diaries in which shocking events happened and was hoping to find more diaries in which authors were subjected to exceptional circumstances, made intellectual observations or demonstrated self-criticism, but he was sad to conclude that these were rare (‘Met bijzondere vreugde echter begroet ik de helaas relatief zeldzame dagboeken van goede opmerkers met een behoorlijke dosis zelfkritiek en zuiver gevoel voor verhoudingen en omstandigheden, alsmede van landgenoten die in werkelijk uitzonderlijke omstandigheden hebben verkeerd.’)<sup>63</sup>

Additionally, the ‘enemy’ diaries, written by former members of the NSB for example, were a different category of interest. It regretted him that precisely the types of diaries that interested him most were never voluntarily sent to the institute but only received after rather laborious negotiations or through the agency of personal contacts. In the spring of 1946, he was unconvinced that the diary collection at that time was representative of the Dutch nation in wartime. He claimed that there were serious lacunas and that it was necessary to come up with an assessment system in which the diaries were judged on their level of importance. He claimed that certain people were less likely to have kept diaries, but that he was glad to have found some written by members of the resistance. Diaries written by Dutch people who had fled to England, allied soldiers and people from the West Indies were ‘painfully missing’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly report 1946, ‘Kwartaalverslag secretariaat’.

<sup>62</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarterly report 1946, ‘Dr A.E. Cohen – Kwartaalverslag Juli – September 1946’.

<sup>63</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly report 1946, ‘Dr A.E. Cohen – Kwartaalverslag April – Juni 1946’.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Het zal noodzakelijk zijn voor elk dagboek een uit verschillende overwegingen samengesteld waarderingscijfer vast te stellen. Bovendien zijn sommige belangrijke categorieën onvoldoende vertegenwoordigd (de dagboeken van den burgemeester en den gijzelaar doen sterk naar meer verlangen) of ontbreken geheel.’ (...) ‘Voor een representatief beeld – afgezien dus van onze door bijna elk dagboek toenemende feitenkennis – hebben we niet zozeer veel als wel velerlei nodig. Welke waarde elk afzonderlijk dagboek met al zijn persoonlijke

Arie Treurniet, head of the section for ‘research on prisons and concentration camps’, wrote a call for diaries by people who had been imprisoned during the war and published it in *Nederland in Oorlogstijd* in 1946, entitled: ‘don’t forget!’.<sup>65</sup> He asked every former political prisoner to write their memories down and send them to RIOD because more material was needed for the future historiography. He explained that diaries from prisons and camps were very rare but that they did exist, and that the institute already possessed a few. ‘These personal memories will be critically organised and edited later on. For now, the same applies to the diaries as to war documentation in general: collect!’<sup>66</sup>

As more diaries were sent to RIOD, Cohen was able to reject more diaries than before and eventually about one tenth of all the diaries did not make it into RIOD’s collection. Due to the high costs of copying diaries, originals were more welcome and sometimes when an author corresponded that they wanted to keep the original and leave a copy to the institute (as was often the case), the diary was rejected. It is important to note that diaries written by (former) members of the NSB or supporters of National Socialism were not rejected because of their ideological background. Cohen aimed to gather diverse material in order to inform later generations on the different sentiments, motivations, emotions and opinions of the Dutch citizens during World War II. However, diaries by NSB members were often not sent in by the authors themselves, but obtained through the Bijzonder Gerechtshof. During the first post-war years, the scarcity of paper increasingly became a reason to not photocopy a war diary. The shortage of paper resulted in extra critical reviews and more diaries that were rejected if they did not add new facts or perspectives to the already existing collection. The diary section was incorporated in the new section ‘Afdeling Voorbereiding Publicaties’ (Department of Preparation for Publications) and Cohen gained new responsibilities besides the diary collection. In the last three months of 1946, Jitty van Leening joined this section and she became responsible for collecting and inventorying RIOD’s growing diary collection (she married on 16th July 1947 and was referred to as Mrs. Sjenitzer or Sjenitzer-van Leening afterwards). She kept asking herself the question: ‘what should be incorporated in our collection?’ and she actively searched for new documents to be included.<sup>67</sup> Although she

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eigenaardigheden voor de toekomstige oorlogsgeschiedschrijving heeft, kan in een aparte studie worden onderzocht en ten dele beschreven’. Ibidem.

<sup>65</sup> A Treurniet, ‘Het werk van Oorlogsdocumentatie (2): de afdeling onderzoek gevangenen en concentratiekampen’, *Nederland in oorlogstijd: orgaan van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (26 april 1946) 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>67</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 316.

became in charge of the selection, she was still supervised by Cohen. He was busy investigating German archives and a shift in diary selection is noticeable. Only diaries written by people of special rank or status, or written during remarkable circumstances were highlighted in the reports as great acquisitions. These were gradually prioritised over diaries of 'ordinary' people.<sup>68</sup> In 1947, Loe de Jong resumed his radio calls and there was a slight increase in incoming diaries as result. This increase was, although 'delightful', 'not entirely welcome' because the budget for photocopying diaries had been reduced from 20,000 guilders to 8,000 guilders.<sup>69</sup>

This budget cut meant that Sjenitzer-van Leening had to select stricter than before and she did this by categorising the diaries and checking which categories were strongly or weakly represented in the current collection. She continued Cohen's latest policy of specifically looking for diaries 'of exceptional quality' and did not accept diaries within categories that were already well represented. Cohen was satisfied with the number of NSB diaries and stated that RIOD now owned a 'representative and interesting' collection of those.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Sjenitzer-van Leening organised the photographs of the copied diaries, numbered them and archived them in special boxes. When Miss E. Verkade joined the department in April 1947, Sjenitzer-van Leening was able to focus exclusively on the diaries and leave other tasks of the publications preparations to Verkade, Cohen and typists.<sup>71</sup> She was the only one at the institute who was allowed to work on the diaries to protect the privacy of the authors. In times of absence (due to illness or, in 1948, due to the birth of her son) work on the diaries stopped until she returned. She was glad to notice the number of incoming diaries was decreasing again and made an inventory of the diaries that were sent to RIOD and started cataloguing the archival selection. Money was a problem, as more diaries than ever expected were still being sent to the institute and the costs for copying them were high (small diaries were typed out by Miss Metz, a typist at the institute). Cohen stated that it was useless to regret photocopying 'mediocre' diaries earlier when that meant that better diaries could not be copied due to budget cuts later on. Moreover, he emphasised that now was the time to collect as many important diaries as possible, because another opportunity like this would never arise

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<sup>68</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 4<sup>th</sup> quarterly report 1946, 'Dr A.E. Cohen – Kwartaalverslag Oktober – December 1946'.

<sup>69</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, '1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly reports 1947, Afdeling Voorbereiding Publicaties – Kwartaalverslag Januari – Maart 1947, 'Dagboeken', 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarterly report 1947, 'Afdeling Voorbereiding Publicaties – Kwartaalverslag over April – Juni 1947'.

again. Diaries were still sent to the institute in large numbers because of continuous and intensive promotion and Cohen tried to record the 'representative and important' diaries all on microfilm, even if the budget did not allow them all to be photocopied.<sup>72</sup>

In order to accurately describe the diaries, Sjenitzer-van Leening sent a questionnaire to the authors, asking them about their social, religious and political background and information regarding the period, place and context in which the diaries were written. The questionnaire was filled in and sent back by the majority of the people (78 percent) and Sjenitzer-van Leening started reading diaries and selecting interesting parts in 1947 for the first publication of the diaries: a collection of diary fragments. In 1948, the number of diaries increased again slightly due to more radio speeches by De Jong and Sjenitzer-van Leening focused more and more on the selection of diary fragments for the upcoming publication. The name of the 'Afdeling Voorbereiding Publicaties' was changed into 'Afdeling Bronnenpublicaties' (Source Publications) in the third quarter of 1948, of which Dolf Cohen remained in charge. Sjenitzer-van Leening returned from pregnancy leave during this time and continued working on the diary publication and the catalogue. By the end of 1948, she and Cohen had rejected 210 diaries altogether: '25 percent because of obvious poor quality and 75 percent because of relatively unsatisfactory value'.<sup>73</sup>

### **2.3. Diary analyses**

In 1949, updates on the diaries were mentioned separately in the quarterly reports from the 'Afdeling Bronnenpublicaties' and the diaries were therefore treated as a distinct section of the institute again. From this year onwards, Sjenitzer-van Leening wrote the quarterly reports instead of Cohen, who had taken this responsibility thus far because it belonged to the department of which he had been in charge. She started reading all the diaries that were included in RIOD's collection thoroughly and made note of the metadata of the diary: the size, described time period, mentioned places, factual information, style and type of diary and personal information about the author. She later used this information to write a general evaluation ('algemene beoordeling') about the reliability and value of the diary for the publication. She also used this data for a subject catalogue. Any questions she had after reading the diaries were asked to the authors and discussed with Posthumus, De Jong and Cohen

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<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 7.

<sup>73</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 'Afdeling Bronnenpublicaties – Kwartaalverslag over 1 Juli tot 30 September 1948'; 'Afdeling Bronnenpublicaties – Kwartaalverslag over 1 Oktober tot 31 December 1948, 'Dagboeken', 4.

during a meeting in 1949. The analyses she wrote were printed on special forms and not solely meant for the internal selection regarding the publication. According to her, they would also enable future researchers to study the war diaries from whichever angle they preferred. However, the analyses were for the greatest part written with the specific upcoming publication of diary fragments by RIOD in mind.<sup>74</sup> The number of incoming diaries decreased and the selection criteria got stricter again. Sjenitzer-van Leening noted: ‘Hierbij moge opgemerkt worden, dat de qualiteit der nieuw binnenkomende dagboeken in de loop van de tijd zeker niet achteruit is gegaan. Alleen dagboeken van groot belang worden, in tegenstelling uiteraard met de beginperiode, nu echter nog geaccepteerd’; (Although the quality of incoming diaries was still relatively high, only the ones that were of great importance were now accepted, in contrast to the earlier days.)<sup>75</sup> She provided RIOD employees and historians Jacques Presser and Ben Sijes with specific diaries in 1949 and 1950 for their research projects and these were the first cases in which the diaries were used for actual historical research. The authors of the diaries were asked for their permission.<sup>76</sup>

Because time limitations restricted my ability to examine every single war diary analysis harboured in NIOD’s archive, I chose to focus on the analyses written by Sjentizer-van Leening, because these were dated and I could place them in their historical context. Additionally, I studied a random sample of the undated war diary analyses. After studying 124 analyses written by Sjenitzer-van Leening and 100 undated analyses, I have distinguished several categories of value that were attached to the diaries. Unfortunately, Sjentizer-van Leening only analysed the diaries that were already included in RIOD’s archival selection so I could not find analyses of rejected diaries, and therefore I did not have documents stating specifically per rejected diary why it was sent back to the author and not included in the archive. However, based on the existing analyses I was able to see why diaries *were* considered to be important and that also reveals crucial information about how RIOD selected. Diaries were included in the collection if they had one or a combination of the following: detailed descriptions of daily life in the Netherlands during the occupation; information on regional developments during the occupation; factual information on the occupation and more broadly World War II; an account of a psychological reaction to the occupation and war or a sketch of the atmosphere; a relatively rare topic or author (for example, diaries written by political prisoners, Jewish people, politicians or other well-known people of high social ranks).

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<sup>74</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, ‘Verslag over de maanden Januari t.m. Maart 1949. Dagboeken’.

<sup>75</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, ‘Kwartaalverslag Dagboeken – Derde kwartaal 1949 (20 October 1949)’.

<sup>76</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, ‘Kwartaalverslag Dagboeken – Tweede kwartaal 1950’.

The institute aimed to collect diaries from diverse social groups on varied topics to represent the Dutch citizens in wartime as broadly as possible. Cohen and Sjenitzer-van Leening seemed to be specifically interested in diaries that described the everyday life of people in detail, and dismissed collections of newspaper articles or journals that consisted of unemotional and impersonal facts and figures. The analyses by the latter reveal that the diaries were judged on their content and the use of language. She would often write that a diary was badly written, clumsy, or of little importance to historians. She wrote that people often overestimated the historical value of their diaries.<sup>77</sup> According to Sjenitzer-van Leening, a diary was most likely to be categorised as ‘valuable’ or ‘important’ if it contained a well-written, personal response to the experienced events.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

Between 1945 and 1955, RIOD collected diaries for two main reasons: to write an official history of the occupied Netherlands and to transfer war experiences to later generations through first-hand accounts. RIOD was primarily a research institute and its archive was mostly for internal use. Therefore decisions about the collections were made internally and not documented for broader audiences. The institute was on a mission to write history after a war that had just barely finished and employees had other priorities than drafting formal acquisition plans, so they were less focused on archival guidelines. They mainly aimed to safeguard sources and documents that they feared would be destroyed, forgotten or lost if they did not actively search for them in both the Netherlands and Germany.<sup>78</sup> RIOD had decided from the outset that the original diaries should be returned to their authors and that they would only be temporarily in the possession of the institute in order to make copies. They chose to make photocopies because many diaries were written on paper of poor quality and photographing the diaries would preserve them and prevent them from decaying. Authors were sent a letter in which promises were made that nothing would be published without consent. Photocopies of the diaries were stored in a safe with the idea that they would stay

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<sup>77</sup> ‘De waarde van het dagboek is, afgezien van een weinig plaatselijk nieuws, op zichzelf; het is alleen illustratief voor de zelfover-/geringschatting van menige dagboekschrijver, die al te spoedig meent, dat zijn werk objectieve historische waarde heeft.’ NIOD, Archief 703 – Correspondentie Dagboeken, Doos 14, Dagboeken correspondentie en analyses, Map 1 (Dagboekanalyses 1-100), Nr. 1 (A.J. van der Aa).

<sup>78</sup> Interview Annemieke van Bockxmeer, 28 July 2016, NIOD.

there until – decades later – nobody would have objections against using the diaries for scientific research.<sup>79</sup>

The selection criteria used to decide which diaries were to be included in the archival collection grew stricter over the years as more diaries than ever expected kept coming in. The special diary section, first led by Dolf Cohen and later by Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening, chose not to include all diaries because of paper shortage, high photocopying costs (authors wanted their original diary back after it was studied at the institute) and the value of their content. The value of diaries was measured against RIOD's research agenda and diaries that were considered most important contained: facts and names of people that were hard to gather from official sources, detailed descriptions of daily life, information on local or regional developments or a psychological and emotional response to the occupation. RIOD employees, especially Loe de Jong, emphasized the uniqueness of the diary collection and its importance for writing historical studies on World War II. This profound interest in the diary collection seemed to fade after the 1950s. A possible explanation is that, during the 1950s, the institute gained a better insight into the German *Reichskommissariat Niederlande*, which was in charge in the Netherlands during the occupation. Trips to Germany resulted in many documents that revealed how the occupying force worked and the attention of most RIOD employees shifted from war diaries and the experience of Dutch people to the German occupiers. Annemieke van Bockxmeer adds that Dolf Cohen, who was formally in charge of the diary department, was subject to a shift in personal interests over the course of the first post-war decade. Of Jewish decent, he had gone into hiding during the war and had little access to news items and international developments in those years as a result. 'Cohen desired to look beyond the borders for information and he wished to know more about the German occupiers that had forced him to go into hiding. When he started taking trips to Germany and he found out how many documents and sources there were left there to gather, his attention shifted to this task instead of the diaries'.<sup>80</sup> He already noted in 1947 that the diaries might not form the most important collection of the institute, but were essential in keeping the spirit of the Netherlands in occupation alive.<sup>81</sup> After 1954, when the first publication based on the diary

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<sup>79</sup> Jong, 'Het werk van Oorlogsdocumentatie (3)', 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> 'De dagboeken vormen geen op de voorgrond tredend deel van het geheel van de verzamelingen van het instituut. Even groot als de plaats die ze innemen bescheiden is, is echter hun belangrijkheid voor het levend houden van de stemming en van het dagelijks leven in Nederland gedurende de bezettingstijd; even groot ook is de vreugde van het werken met dit materiaal.' NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 'Afdeling Voorbereiding Publicaties – Kwartaalverslag over October – December 1947, Dagboeken'

collection was published, the diaries weren't mentioned separately in the quarterly reports anymore.



## Chapter 3 World War II in Dutch memorial culture and historiography

Although World War II ended over 70 years ago, interest in the events between 1940 and 1945 has not faded. The war is still commemorated globally every year and is the topic of countless new books, movies, plays, exhibitions, research projects and television series. However, the symbols that are used to represent the war, the focus on certain topics in media and history books, and the lessons attached to the war at national events have changed over the years. Consequently, the way in which the war is commemorated nowadays is very different from the first post-war years. In order to understand the influence of war diaries on the way in which World War II is commemorated in the Netherlands, it is important to understand that the memory narrative in which the war is remembered has changed drastically over the years and is not static. The central themes have changed, historians ask different questions and different groups of people are in the centre of attention.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the relationship between history and memory needs to be addressed before I can investigate how digitisation might influence the impact of NIOD's war diary collection on memory of World War II in the Netherlands. In the previous chapters, the establishment of the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie and the creation of the diary collection were described. In this chapter, the use of the diaries for scholarly research in the Netherlands will be investigated in order to map how the diary collection was included in historical studies. How have historiographical developments influenced the use and popularity of war diaries in the Netherlands?

### 3.1. Shifts in memorial culture

In the first decades after 1945, World War II was publicly commemorated as a national event and a period of oppression and resistance, which had nevertheless ended with a stronger and more united country. The focus was on progress and moving forward in the many monuments, movies, novels and schoolbooks.<sup>83</sup> The earliest Dutch war monuments and memorials were meant to express sentiments of hope, sacrifice, courage and the will to fight for the future. Older symbols of the national past were used to incorporate the war in the existing historical narrative, and the language used to commemorate the events was often

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<sup>82</sup> Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 18.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, 7.

inspired on traditional religious, nationalistic and political terms. The discourse of a united Netherlands that had resisted the German occupier was meant to stimulate social and national cohesion, and was useful in light of the Cold War and the perceived threat of communism.<sup>84</sup> At commemorative events, the war was described as a story of national resurrection and heroism, and the suffering of specific groups was subordinated to the suffering of the Netherlands as a whole.<sup>85</sup> Because the Netherlands had to be rebuilt after the devastating war, politicians and Queen Wilhelmina stressed the importance of unity, and aimed to not single out certain groups (like veterans or victims) because everybody had to work collectively to rebuild the nation state.<sup>86</sup> However, several novelists and poets actively countered this memorial culture and portrayed the war as meaningless, destructive and purely devastating in their art. Still, because of this dominant focus on unity, there was little public space to highlight individual stories and the way in which the occupation had impacted individual lives.

Between 1965 and 1975, changes in Dutch society led to a shift in memorial culture. New generations fought against their restrictive parents in a rebellious youth culture. Additionally, a rising level of welfare and a decline of religious influence on life resulted in more different voices to be heard in a new memory narrative of World War II, in which more attention was paid to the diversity of war experiences. Different groups demanded to be acknowledged as victims of the war and to be addressed in public commemorations.<sup>87</sup> As a result, different themes, symbols and visual representations became dominant in memorials and monuments and the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust became the centre of attention in commemorative narratives. A turning point in history was the trial of Nazi SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, during which survivors were invited to share their experiences in court. This meant a break in history because the survivor's emotional stories were brought into the public sphere and used as evidence to convict a person of his crimes. There were many conflicting opinions about the nature and consequences of the Holocaust and many aspects were still unknown to most people. The cultural changes of the 1960s and '70s did not provide the emergence of discussion about the Holocaust but showed more concession about what the war had meant, and a shared belief that similar events should never happen again became dominant. This 'never again' sentiment was reinforced by the large number of films, documentaries and books on World War II that were created or published

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<sup>84</sup> Eva Moraal, *'Als ik morgen niet op transport ga, ga ik 's avonds naar de revue'. Kamp Westerbork in brieven, dagboeken en memoires (1942-2010)* (PhD dissertation; Amsterdam 2013) 20.

<sup>85</sup> Moraal, *'Als ik morgen niet op transport ga'*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog*, 10.

<sup>87</sup> Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 33.

during this period. For instance, Anne Frank's diary was turned into a successful Broadway show (*The Diary of Anne Frank*, 1959) in the United States and the American television series *Holocaust* (1978) attracted hundreds of millions of viewers worldwide.<sup>88</sup> In the Netherlands, television series *De Bezetting* (The Occupation) was broadcast on national television with four episodes a year between 1960 and 1965, which was written and presented by Loe de Jong. This television series was very popular and attracted many viewers.

This change in memorial culture was of influence on the use of war diaries as historical sources, as more attention to individual stories of suffering became more central to public commemorative narratives in the Netherlands. The rise of the welfare state, the process of depillarisation, a rebellious youth culture and advances in psychiatric and psychological sciences with regard to suffering and post traumatic stress disorder resulted in more public space for varying war experiences. During the 1970s, a focus on perpetrators shifted to acknowledging victims and personal stories of suffering received widespread attention. With it, testimonies and first-hand accounts became more included in collective memory of World War II.

### **3.2. Historiography of World War II**

The changing narrative in which World War II was commemorated in the Netherlands went hand in hand with a shift in historiography. From describing the development of war historiography in the Netherlands, it becomes clear that the scholarly use of war diaries has been subjected to several changes in historical discourse. Between 1945 and 1960, Dutch historians often treated the German occupation as a very unexpected, sudden and exceptional period in national history.<sup>89</sup> Oppression and resistance were the overarching themes and typical of these historical accounts is the moral judgement of who had been 'right' (*goed*) and who had been 'wrong' (*fout*) during the war.<sup>90</sup> People were trying to make sense of what had happened and they were trying to come to terms with the present. At RIOD, Loe de Jong, who had already become a well-known person in the Netherlands during the war due to his radio talks for Radio Oranje, kept on speaking on the radio on a weekly basis after the liberation. His voice became a familiar sound in Dutch households, illustrated by an interview

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<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, 37.

<sup>89</sup> J. C. H. Blom, *In de ban van goed en fout. Geschiedschrijving over de bezettingstijd in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2007) 11.

<sup>90</sup> Blom, *In de ban van goed en fout*, 12.

published in newspaper *De Waarheid* in 1946, in which he is referred to as ‘de bekende overzichtgever van Radio Oranje’ (the famous overview provider from Radio Oranje) and RIOD’s archive is described as a collection that is on its way to becoming an important archive for later generations.<sup>91</sup> In 1947, newspaper *De Tijd* published a call for documents on behalf of RIOD, arguing that there would be few readers who would not have heard of the institute and Loe de Jong’s work.<sup>92</sup> RIOD acquired a reputation of being an unconventional institute that worked with unprecedented archival methods and had new notions about how to document the past.<sup>93</sup> Because the state was connected to this institute and the most well known historians worked there, its publications were of a certain authority.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, its connection to the government meant that RIOD contributed profoundly to the making of a certain image of World War II.<sup>95</sup> The first scholarly publications on World War II that the institute produced received widespread attention: *De April-mei-stakingen van 1943* by Pieter Jan Bouwman (1950), *De Februaristaking. 25-26 februari 1941* by Ben Sijes (1954) and *Rijden en staken. De Nederlandse Spoorwegen in oorlogstijd* by Adolf Rüter (1960). This was beneficial to RIOD’s reputation as a prominent voice in telling the history of the Dutch kingdom during World War II.

Initially, four authors (one from every *zuil*) were expected to write the official history of the Dutch kingdom during World War II. However, because it proved to be hard to realise this, RIOD decided in 1954 that Loe de Jong should be appointed to write this official history. His project was often referred to as ‘The Main Work’ (*Het Hoofdwerk*) or ‘The Historical Work’ (*Het Geschiedwerk*). De Jong first calculated that he would need six years to complete this project, but quickly extended this to seventeen years. Eventually, it would take more than 30 years for the entire publication to be finished. The series of twelve books that form *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (published between 1969 and 1994)

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<sup>91</sup> Unknown, ‘Het Rijksinstituut voor oorlogsdocumentatie. Een gesprek met drs. L. de Jong’, *De waarheid*, 27-02-1946.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Het is voor de toekomstige geschiedschrijving echter niet minder interessant en belangrijk, dat men weet, wat in deze sombere jaren de belevenissen zijn geweest van den doorsnee Nederlander. Goede geschiedschrijving immers moet berusten op de ervaring van het geheel volk. Teneinde dit te bereiken heeft R.V.O reeds herhaaldelijk een beroep gedaan op alle Nederlanders, die tijdens den oorlog een dagboek hebben bijgehouden, om dit dagboek ter copieering aan het instituut af te staan. (...) Twijfelt u of uw dagboek geschikt is, zend het toch gerust in. Als het niet geschikt zou zijn, krijgt u het in dank voor de inzage retour. Over het algemeen kan dit worden gezegd: het Instltuut is niet meer geïnteresseerd in de feiten en in het nieuws van de oorlogsjaren, doch alleen in bijzondere persoonlijke ervaringen.’ Unknown, ‘“s Lands kroniek: Hebt U een oorlogsdagboek? Denk dan eens aan het R.V.O.’, *De Tijd: dagblad voor Nederland*, 06-02-1947.

<sup>93</sup> Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, 9.

received positive responses and the work is still known in the Netherlands as the most important publication on World War II. Beyond the framework of the institute, a large-scaled publication on World War II was completed in 1954 when the fourth and final part of *Onderdrukking en verzet* ('Oppression and resistance'), a collection of history books written by many different authors ranging from historians to politicians, was published. The first part had been published in 1949, the second in 1950 and the third in 1952. Every time a new part was finished, many newspapers commented on it and praised it for being a new standard work in Dutch historiography. When the final part was published and the project was completed, widespread media reports celebrated this. One of the few critics was Dolf Cohen, who argued that, contrary to what many people believed, history of World War II was part of general history and should not be treated as an isolated phenomenon or rupture in history. Cohen believed that *Onderdrukking en verzet* was written too quickly after the war and that the authors therefore lacked the necessary distance to critically examine the past. He and De Jong had conflicting opinions on how the history should be written and researched. As head of the section for the preparation of publications, Cohen believed that original sources should first be gathered and published before they could be interpreted and incorporated in historical studies. Cohen believed that historiography should be prepared by RIOD and De Jong believed that historiography was part of a social debate in society and should be written as quickly as possible.<sup>96</sup>

When Dolf Cohen left RIOD in 1960 for a professorship at Leiden University in medieval history, his departure was criticised at RIOD: didn't he feel obligated as a Jew to work on the history of World War II? And shouldn't he finish his work of preparing the final publications?<sup>97</sup> This sense of responsibility is reflected in the fact that the earliest publications on the Holocaust were mostly written by Jewish people, meant to describe the fate of Jews during the war. The Holocaust was perceived at this time as part of Jewish history more than of national history.<sup>98</sup> An important publication on the extermination of the Jews was *Ondergang: de vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse jodendom, 1940 - 1945*, written by Jacques Presser and published in 1965. Presser took a stand on the idea that many Dutch people had resisted the Jewish deportation and extermination. He demonstrated that this was untrue and his book was shocking for many people, the important consensus on what the war had meant

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<sup>96</sup> Ibidem, 267.

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem, 269.

<sup>98</sup> Ido de Haan, *Na de ondergang. De herinnering aan de Jodenvervolging in Nederland 1945-1995* (Den Haag 1997) 23.

to the Netherlands was broken.<sup>99</sup> Jacques Presser, who had been Loe de Jong's history teacher at secondary school, based much of his research for *Ondergang* on diaries and memoirs written by Holocaust survivors.<sup>100</sup> In the 1980s, historical studies on World War II were increasingly aimed at fitting Dutch history in a broader, international context. Additionally, more personal recollections of war experiences were published from the 1980s onwards due to the change in discourse from perpetrators to victims, peaking in the 1990s.<sup>101</sup> The idea that the victims of World War II were varied and heterogeneous was important for war diaries as a source, because those are seen as stories that can give insight in how the war impacted specific groups or individuals.

### 3.3. War diaries as historical sources

How have these changes in memorial culture and historiography influenced the use of diaries as historical sources? In the nineteenth century, historians studied diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and other first-hand accounts to describe the lives of great historical figures. These sources were viewed as reliable because they contained direct testimonies of historical events and eyewitness accounts. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that a historiographical debate started taking shape on the reliability of these sources. It became clear that authors often (either consciously or subconsciously) altered facts or narrated them in a certain way that favoured them, and diaries, autobiographies and memoirs gradually became unpopular sources for historians that tried to recover 'what had happened' in the Rankean sense.<sup>102</sup> After the war, first-hand accounts were valued for the insight they gave in lives during the occupation. Loe de Jong explained in the third issue of *Nederland in Oorlogstijd* that RIOD's diary collection was initiated because of the belief that the history of ordinary people should also be written.<sup>103</sup> The institute was aware of a debate about whether history had been

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<sup>99</sup> Van Vree and Van der Laarse, *De dynamiek van de herinnering*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Van Bockxmeer, *De oorlog verzameld*, 54.

<sup>101</sup> Moraal, 'Als ik morgen niet op transport ga', 28.

<sup>102</sup> Rudolf Dekker, 'Wat zijn egodocumenten?', *Indische letteren*, Vol. 8 (1993) 101 – 112, 106.

<sup>103</sup> 'Is de geschiedenis niet te vaak een verzameling „belangrijke” feiten, waarbij het „onbelangrijke” leven van den gewonen man – tenslotte de hoofdinhoud van alles wat „geschiedt” – vergeten wordt? Deze vraag is reeds meermalen gesteld. Oorlogsdocumentatie heeft met het daardoor opgeworpen probleem van meet af aan rekening gehouden. Wij hebben getracht de lotgevallen van het gewone Nederlandsche gezin, voor later te bewaren door het aanleggen van een zoo groot mogelijke verzameling dagboeken. Oorlogsdocumentatie ziet terug naar het verleden, zij het ook een recent verleden, maar het houdt het oog ook gericht op de toekomst. Het vraagt zich telkens af: wat zullen de wetenschappelijke onderzoekers over een eeuw aangaande Nederland in den tweeden wereldoorlog willen weten? Wij kunnen voor hen niet de conclusies trekken. Zij zullen zelf hun oordeel wenschen te vormen. De in die oorlogsjaren bijgehouden dagboeken zullen hen helpen. In het doorsnee-dagboek wordt, zoo zou de huidige lezer oordeelen, „niets bijzonders beschreven” – al kan het schrijven soms op een bijzondere wijze zijn gedaan. De

focussed too much on ‘important’ facts, while the lives of ordinary ‘unimportant’ people were forgotten and RIOD aimed to save the experiences of ordinary Dutch families in a diary archive to be able to study the past with the question in mind: what would historians want to know about World War II in a century’s time? He stated that people might not realise the importance of diaries at that time because the topic was still the present and people remembered how they felt during the war, because they experienced it themselves. In the future, however, the historical importance and value of these diaries would increase.

Chris van der Heijden argues that there was relatively little interest in concentration camp testimonies in the Netherlands in the early post-war years because there was a mentality of ‘moving on’ and recuperation.<sup>104</sup> Exceptions are Abel Herzberg and Loden Vogel (pseudonym of Louis Tas), whose diaries received widespread attention. Herzberg published parts of his diary in *De Groene Amsterdammer* in September 1945, which were later bundled and published as *Amor fati* in 1946 (reprinted twice in the next four years) and wrote two more books based on his diaries written in concentration camp Bergen-Belsen: *Tweestromenland: Dagboek uit Bergen-Belsen* (1950) and *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging* (1950).<sup>105</sup> Vogel/Tas published his autobiography *Dagboek uit een kamp* in 1946.<sup>106</sup> Without a doubt, the most famous Dutch Jew who kept a diary during World War II is of course Anne Frank, whose diary was sent to historians Jan Romein and Annie Verschoor-Romein by her father Otto Frank in 1946. They believed the diary should be published and this eventually happened in 1947. The rather optimistic atmosphere of the diary, popular theatre and movie adaptations and the universal message associated with her writings explain in part why she was able to become an international icon and symbol for the Holocaust.<sup>107</sup>

At RIOD, Sjenitzer-van Leening started selecting diary fragments for Ben Sijes, a historian who was working on a research project on the *Februaristaking* (February strike) at the

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huidige lezer heeft het beschrevene immers aan den lijve ervaren. Hij weet wel wat de gewone man dacht bij een razzia en bij de radio-inlevering en bij het nieuws van de begonnen invasie van Normandië. Hij was immers *zelf* die gewone man. Maar hoe verder wij van de jaren '40 – '45 verwijderd zullen raken, des te groter zal de historische waarde worden van al datgene dat honderden Nederlandsche mannen en vrouwen in eenvoudige taal en meestal voor zichzelf alleen hebben opgeschreven, in cahiers, in schriften, op losse vellen – hun reacties op het nieuws, op de dagelijksche zorgen, - hun hunkeren naar de verlossing, die eindelijk kwam. ‘ In: L. de Jong, ‘Het werk van Oorlogsdocumentatie (3)’ in: *Nederland in Oorlogstijd: orgaan van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1946) 1.

<sup>104</sup> Van der Heijden, *Dat nooit meer*, 142.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, 131.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*, 133.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*, 304.

institute, in July 1948.<sup>108</sup> In 1958, the term ‘ego-document’ was introduced in the *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie* by Jacques Presser to describe a ‘first-person text’.<sup>109</sup> Nowadays, there are several definitions for the term ‘ego-document’ but in the most cases it is used to describe a text which represents a ‘self’, like diaries, autobiographies, family chronicles, travel accounts and letters.<sup>110</sup> Presser turned to these types of documents for his research project that resulted in *Ondergang* because he aimed to ‘speak up for all those thousands now doomed to eternal silence, whose last cries of despair went unheard, and whose ashes no one was allowed to gather up.’<sup>111</sup> In 1950, he started his research on the history of Dutch Jews during the German occupation, commissioned by RIOD. He turned to the institute’s diary collection and was aided by Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening in acquiring these. Additionally, he interviewed many people and he encountered the difficulties of basing historical research on personal testimonies and memories. ‘He was faced with people whose memories were so painful that they could not recount or even want to remember them, but also with people who unconsciously, but more often consciously changed and rewrote their memories.’<sup>112</sup>

The shift in historiography and memorial culture influenced the use of diaries because individual war experiences and first-hand accounts written by victims of the Holocaust were increasingly incorporated in public discourse. Interest in ‘people’s history’ increased in the 1960s when European historians aimed to democratise history.<sup>113</sup> This ideal was grounded in the idea that history writing focused too much on the Great Men with the result that many voices were never heard and ‘history from below’ became an influential research agenda. During the 1970s, the increased use of ego-documents was followed by a revived historiographical debate on the usability of these sources. This process went hand-in-hand with the rise of cultural history and the history of ideas, as cultural historians were interested in other aspects of ego-documents because they asked different questions about the past than traditional political and social historians. Amongst other things, they were interested in the composition of the text and the way in which ‘the self’ and ‘the personal’ were represented.

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<sup>108</sup> The February strike was a general strike led by the Communist Party of the Netherlands against the persecution of Jews and against the Nazi occupation in 1941.

<sup>109</sup> The first definition Presser used for ‘egodocument’ was: ‘Die historische bronnen, waarin de gebruiker zich gesteld ziet tegenover een “ik” of een enkele keer (Caesar, Henry Adams) een “hij” als schrijvend en beschrijvend subject voortdurend in de tekst aanwezig’. He later used the definition: ‘Die documenten, waarin een ego zich opzettelijk of onopzettelijk onthult - of verbergt...’ In: Dekker, ‘Wat zijn egodocumenten?’, 101.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, ‘In Relation: The ‘Social Self’ and Ego-Documents’, *German History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2010) 263–272, 263.

<sup>111</sup> Fulbrook and Rublack, ‘In Relation’, 265.

<sup>112</sup> Kaspar von Greyerz, ‘Ego-Documents: The Last Word?’, *German History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2010) 273–282, 275.

<sup>113</sup> Alistair Thomson, Michael Frisch and Paula Hamilton, ‘The memory and history debates: some international perspectives’, *Oral History*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1994) 33–43, 33.



Discourse analysis and theories on gender - associated with this 'cultural turn' - made these sources suitable for research.<sup>114</sup> However, many people argued that life stories are unreliable because memory is unreliable. When people write about their past experiences, their memories are distorted, biased, shaped by official narratives and influenced by retrospective versions of the past. Diaries are often seen as closer to reality than memoirs and autobiographies, because they consist of testimonies and recent memories, in contrast to the latter two categories that are often written relatively long after the events actually occurred. It is of course questionable whether this is true: diaries can also consist of memories of long-ago events and people are always very selective in what they include and exclude from their diaries. Some diaries can be written for the 'author' to come to terms with events and process recent or more distant events, but some are written with a specific or broad audience in mind.<sup>115</sup>

These criticisms became less of an issue after the memory boom resulted in an explosion of scholarly studies on the relationship between memory and history. Instead of being perceived as a problem, memory became a subject for historians, centred on the relationships between individual and collective remembering and between memory and identity.<sup>116</sup> The idea that scholars should not seek to discover 'one single, fixed and recoverable history' but research the different layers of individual memory, the 'plurality of versions of the past' and precisely the distortions of memory in order to understand the different voices in history, resulted in ego-documents being studied extensively again.<sup>117</sup> Diaries allow historians to reconstruct different experiences from people with varied backgrounds and help them understand the ways in which these people processed events and developments internally (their reflection on their experiences). This is precisely why RIOD valued them as historical sources, as my previous analysis of the early selection criteria pointed out: to gain knowledge of the personal experiences, reactions, opinions and emotional responses of Dutch people during the occupation. In that sense, RIOD employees were ahead of their time in reasoning why diaries were valuable sources for historians and society at large. However, I do not argue that RIOD collected diaries because they aimed to study them within the framework of memory studies. At RIOD, the focus in the first years was on collecting material. They aimed to collect as much as they could to safeguard source material from being destroyed or getting lost and they decided to organise, work through and publish the material later on. At the diary

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<sup>114</sup> Von Greyerz, 'Ego-Documents: The Last Word?', 278.

<sup>115</sup> L.J. Dorsman and P.J. Knegtman, *De menselijke maat in de wetenschap. De geleerden(auto)biografie als bron voor de wetenschaps- en universiteitsgeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2013) 20.

<sup>116</sup> Dorsman and Knegtman, *De menselijke maat in de wetenschap*, 34.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, 33.

section, the personal nature of the documents resulted in a strict privacy policy where nothing was to be done with the diaries without permission from the author and only a very select group of people was allowed to study the diaries.

During the 1980s, publications regarding war diaries were mostly diaries that were published individually or historical studies that were based on individual diaries.<sup>118</sup> On the contrary, recently a trend is noticeable where *Alltagswissen* and *Lebenswelt* are important notions: the sociology of knowledge, and more specifically a history of the knowledge of the Holocaust. Ego-documents are important in this field because they enable historians to investigate several diaries and compare the ‘frames of references’, ‘social knowledge’ and ‘experiential horizons that informed the worldviews, decisions and actions of contemporaries.’<sup>119</sup> A large-scale investigation into war diaries was published in 2001: *Oorlogsdagboeken over de Jodenvervolging*, edited by Anne Voolstra and Eefje Blankevoort. For this publication, a group of thirteen history students of the University of Amsterdam studied seventy war diaries and wondered what non-Jewish people knew about the persecution of the Jews. All the diaries they studied came from NIOD’s archive. A similar research question was the subject of *Wij weten niets van hun lot* (2012) by Bart van der Boom. Van der Boom studied 164 Dutch war diaries to answer the question what ordinary people knew and thought about the persecution of the Jews. He was drawn to this question because the Netherlands had the highest percentage of deported Jews in Western Europe and this led many people to claim that the Dutch people hadn’t resisted the Holocaust because they chose to look away instead. Van der Boom argues that the diaries of ordinary Dutch people reveal that ‘the ordinary Dutchman’ was not indifferent to the persecution of the Jews, but uninformed. They did not know well enough what was happening to the Jews to act on it.<sup>120</sup> Van der Boom’s argument was quite controversial and criticised in the Netherlands; it triggered a debate between historians and drew public attention to NIOD’s war diary collection.

Interestingly, NIOD’s interest in war diaries peaked during the late 1940s and 1950s. After the publication of *Dagboekfragmenten*, the war diary collection is not mentioned separately in the quarterly reports anymore and the focus in the annual reports is on other types of archival documents. Nonetheless, the collection is still popular nowadays— one of the

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<sup>118</sup> A famous diary that was written in Westerbork and published individually was *In dépôt* by Philip Mechanicus, published in 1964. David Koker’s diary, written in concentration camp Vught, was published in 1977 and reprinted in 1983. Etty Hillesum’s diary, written during her time in concentration camp Westerbork was published in 1986 as *De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum 1941 – 1943*, by Klaas A.D. Smelik

<sup>119</sup> Morina, ‘The ‘bystander’ in recent Dutch historiography’, 106.

<sup>120</sup> Bart van der Boom, ‘We waren onwetend, niet onverschillig’, *De Volkskrant*, 25-04-2012.

most popular collections of the institute, based on the online archive system or archive slips that people use when they request material in the study room at NIOD. The website has registered the requests to view war diaries in the last eight years and these numbers show that the war diary collection is the third most popular archive at the institute on average.<sup>121</sup>

### **3.4. Reception of *Dagboekfragmenten***

An important publication on the war diary collection is *Dagboekfragmenten 1940 – 1945*, not only the first publication based on RIOD's diary collection but also the only one of this kind by the institute itself. Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening initiated this publication in 1947 because she believed she had gathered enough diaries for a representative overview and finished her more technical, preparatory tasks of organising the diary section. In selecting fragments for the publication, Sjenitzer-van Leening preferred to include diaries that were written on specific topics, such as concentration camps.<sup>122</sup> She paid special attention to diversity in geography, background and topics of the fragments and expanded her original selection when she felt like it was not accurately representing the Netherlands during the occupation.<sup>123</sup> She wrote to RIOD's *directorium* with a proposed selection for the publication in 1951, which was discussed during the board meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February. When she finished her work in 1952, she had selected fragments from over 600 diaries. Sjenitzer-van Leening presented a draft to the *directorium* and was told that she should reduce the manuscript (that consisted of 700 pages) by 40 percent. Moreover, a discussion on the content broke out, as De Jong stated that he had been very distraught by the fragments of NSB diaries, whereas Cohen stressed that they were valuable in creating a contrast between the different points of view that had co-existed in the Netherlands during the occupation. Sjenitzer-van Leening wrote to the board on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1953 that she could not fulfil her task as an academic if she had to decrease her selection and she left RIOD as a result of this conflict. De Jong was appointed to finish her work, but he became convinced that her initial selection had been correct and when the book was finally published in 1954, it consisted of 638 pages.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with René Pottkamp, 15-08-2016 at NIOD.

<sup>122</sup> Archief 701, 1134, 'Afdeling Voorbereiding Publicaties – Kwartaalverslag over 1 Januari tot 31 Maart 1948, Dagboeken', 8.

<sup>123</sup> NIOD, Archief 701, 1134, 'Kwartaalverslag Dagboeken – Eerste kwartaal 1951'; 'Kwartaalverslag Dagboeken – Tweede kwartaal 1951'; 'Kwartaalverslag Dagboeken – Vierde kwartaal 1951'.

<sup>124</sup> Cohen, *Het bewaren van de oorlog*, 78.

Based on articles in Dutch newspapers between 1954 and 1965, the book received positive reviews. Friesian newspaper *De Friese Coerier* reported on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1954 that the publication would undoubtedly be of great historical significance because this was the first time in history that people could learn about the past based on up-to-the-minute news described by ordinary Dutchmen, instead of dry historical facts and official documents.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the newspaper article explained that some names had been changed to protect the authors and that they had all been asked for permission before fragments of their diaries were published, and that these fragments had been chosen from a varied group of people from different backgrounds and with different political ideals and experiences. In case readers were wondering how the institute got hold of the diaries from people who had been on the ‘wrong side’ during the war, it was explained that they came from files from Special Criminal Proceedings and that only fragments written by those who had either died or were untraceable had been published.<sup>126</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad* wrote on the same date that even though the names had been changed in the publication, it was evident that some authors were easily recognisable from the fragments. According to this newspaper, the book was valuable because it allowed readers to experience the war through the lives of many different people, aided by the chronological order in which the fragments were published and the different personal styles of the authors. The excerpts from diaries by former members of the SS and NSB should not overshadow the other fragments, as these ‘ordinary’ descriptions were argued to be fascinating and moving as well. Precisely the little everyday things of life were well captured in the diaries and represented the experiences of “our people” during the war. The article praised Sjenitzer-van Leening for her ‘gifted’ selection of fragments, which exceeded *la petite histoire* and formed a complete whole: that of a nation that did not flinch during a total war.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, *De Tijd* devoted an article to the book and claimed that ‘the entire suffering of four years of war and four years of a horrible occupation were reflected in the book.’ It was like hearing the entire Dutch nation about their fears, frustrations, anger and powerlessness, hope, disappointment and eventually joy after the liberation. ‘No other document, no historical

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<sup>125</sup> ‘Volgens het Rijksinstituut zal dit nieuwe boek zonder twijfel in latere eeuwen van grote historische betekenis blijken te zijn, omdat men nu voor het eerst in de geschiedenis niet alleen droge jaartallen en veldslagen op school kan laten onderwijzen, maar met de “heet van-de-naald” door de gewone Nederlanders beschreven avonturen tevens het nageslacht een levendige indruk van zijn voorouders kan geven. (...) “Wij menen, dat deze verzamelde uitgave een unicum in de gehele wereld is”, zo vertelde dr L. de Jong, chef van het instituut.’ In: ANP, ‘Unieke uitgave in de wereld: Bezettingstijd herleeft in dagboekfragmenten’, *Friese koerier: onafhankelijk dagblad voor Friesland en aangrenzende gebieden*, 20-11-1954.

<sup>126</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>127</sup> Unknown, ‘Met hartebloed geschreven: Dagboekfragmenten uit de oorlog aaneengesmeed tot een epos’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 20-11-1954.

work and no description could make us feel and remember so directly what the Netherlands have experienced in those four years of the war and it has been an excellent decision to publish this collection.’<sup>128</sup>

Five days later, *De Leeuwarder Courant* stated that the book had received widespread attention and quoted *De Groene Amsterdammer* that the collection, despite of it being made up of so many different fragments, has become an ‘impressive unity’ and that it felt like all those people became one after reading the book, despite all the different views, reactions, opinions and emotions expressed by the different authors.<sup>129</sup> That same day, *Limburgsch Dagblad* wrote that, contrary to most history books, *Dagboekfragmenten* told the story of ordinary citizens because Loe de Jong believed that an overview of Dutch life during the occupation based on diaries went much deeper than an objective, historical study. Additionally, the newspaper praised the book for being representative of the majority of the Dutch who had experienced World War II and that RIOD’s collection of over 1100 diaries was a ‘unique treasure in the history of historiography’. The book was described as one of the best studies on World War II published since the liberation.<sup>130</sup> This opinion was also expressed in *De Telegraaf*, where the diaries were said to portray the eventful period in a fascinating and realistic manner because the fragments were ‘so real, straight from the heart and unaffected’. Especially the little grammar mistakes made the publications ‘rock-hard human’.<sup>131</sup> The next reference to *Dagboekfragmenten* in a newspaper was made thirty years later, in *Het vrije volk*. The article stated that the more testimonies were gathered, the better the image would be of what had happened during the war. Now was the time to write down memories because in a few decades there would be nobody left alive who would have actually experienced the war. ‘Fortunately, *Dagboekfragmenten* was reprinted because it’s a book that every family should have in their possession.’<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> J.O., ‘Dagboekfragmenten 1940-1945’, *De Tijd: dagblad voor Nederland*, 20-11-1954.

<sup>129</sup> Unknown, ‘Uit andere bladen: fragmenten van één geheel’, *Leeuwarder courant: hoofdblad van Friesland*, 25-11-1954.

<sup>130</sup> ‘De grote charme is, dat geen der schrijvers het vermoeden had dat hun dagboek ooit door heel Nederland gelezen zou kunnen worden. Zij schreven niet om het effect, zij legden het er niet dik bovenop om hun manuscript „verkoopbaar” te maken, zij schreven op wat hun hart op dat moment beroerde. Zij legden de wijze waarop het Nederlandse volk de oorlog onderging vast op een manier die geen historieschrijver hun ooit zal kunnen verbeteren.’ In: Unknown, ‘Publicatie van Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie - Nederlanders schrijven zelf de Meidagen. Historie van wereldoorlog’, *Limburgsch dagblad*, 25-11-1954.

<sup>131</sup> Unknown, ‘Met stompjes potlood, kroontjespennen en schrijfmachines: boeiende bladzijden uit 100 oorlogsdagboeken met stijl- en taalfouten recht uit het hart. Realistisch beeld van harde strijd’, *De Telegraaf*, 20-11-1954.

<sup>132</sup> Unknown, ‘T Hoe en ‘t waarom blijft ons interesseren. Oorlog leeft voort in niet te stuiten stroom boeken’, *Het vrije volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*, 03-05-1985.

In the introduction of a reprinted version of *Dagboekfragmenten 1940 – 1945*, Harry Paape, director of RIOD from 1979 until 1990, wrote that RIOD's employees wanted to do more than acquire official military and political documents. Historians had focussed too long on kings and queens, state officials and religious and political leaders, and the time had come to focus on ordinary people and their experiences.<sup>133</sup> Paape argues that this publication was the first in the Netherlands to consist of personal diary fragments of World War II and that the collection was popular immediately after its release. It was reprinted twice in 1955. However, as the Cold War climaxed and people became more occupied with international relations, attention for World War II soon faded. Yet during the 1960s it increasingly became a hot topic again, especially for the younger generations that had not (consciously) experienced the war.<sup>134</sup> According to Paape, this revival of interest from the 1960s onwards was due to different factors, among which the trials against Adolf Eichmann and Erick Rajakowitsch and the publication of several memoirs. Moreover, the generation that had experienced the war began to look back and study this tragic period in history.<sup>135</sup>

### 3.5. History and memory

The idea that reading diaries allows later generations to experience what previous generations have been through has been suggested by Loe de Jong, Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening and Dolf Cohen at RIOD and in the newspaper reviews of *Dagboekfragmenten*. When people write down their experiences and reflections on their lives, these can later be viewed as memories of past events. When these memories are used in historical studies and shared through research projects, newspaper articles and books, does this mean that private memories are becoming public, collective memory? In other words, how does NIOD's war diary collection fit in the broader memory narrative of World War II in the Netherlands? There are many theories on the way in which people remember the past collectively and how memories can be linked between individuals. Maurice Halbwachs, a sociologist who died in 1945 but whose work on collective memory was published posthumously, wrote a foundational text for this new field of research. He argued that individuals remember in social frames. People always remember in a

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<sup>133</sup> 'Het is een bekend verschijnsel dat bij het klimmen van de leeftijd de gedachten zich meer gaan richten op het verleden, dat men zich gaat verdiepen in zijn eigen, vaak vervaagde, herinneringen aan gebeurtenissen uit lang vervlogen jaren en dat men poogt die herinneringen aan te vullen door, waar dat mogelijk is, meer over die gebeurtenissen, over de oorzaken en achtergronden ervan, te weten te komen.' In: T.M. Sjenitzer-van Leening (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboeken 1940-1945* (Amsterdam 1954; 1985) vi.

<sup>134</sup> Sjenitzer-van Leening, *Oorlogsdagboeken*, x.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibidem*, xi.

social context and what they remember is therefore always socially constructed. Alison Landsberg adds: ‘with the aid of mass cultural technologies, it becomes possible for a person to acquire memories that are not his or her ‘natural’ or biological inheritance and thus to feel a sense of kinship with people who might otherwise seem very different.’<sup>136</sup> This feeling of kinship is important in modern nation states because nations are ‘imagined communities’ and its members do not all know each other personally. The idea that they share a past, values, culture and therefore an identity is important for maintaining social cohesion and a sense of unity.<sup>137</sup> When politicians and historians worked together to create a collection of war diaries for later generations, were they collecting documents to help later generations, who did not experience the war, to collectively remember it? In order to answer this question, it is important to understand the relationship between history and memory.<sup>138</sup>

Since the beginning of historical writing, the difference between history and memory is debated. An often-heard argument is that history has different aims, namely to determine ‘what actually happened’. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer states that ‘objective knowledge can only be arrived when there has been a certain historical distance, when is it dead enough to have only historical interest’, an argument perhaps shared by Dolf Cohen who believed that there should be a historical distance between the period and its investigation.<sup>139</sup> However, the distinction between history and memory was blurred due to recent theoretical developments within historiography and the historian’s objectivity came under fire. Remembering the past and writing about it no longer seem the innocent and objective activities they once were taken to be. In both cases, conscious and unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion are always at the basis. Historians have considered different aspects of the past to be important in different times and places, and this context is important in investigating how, and by whom, memories are shaped.<sup>140</sup> The present influences the past and it is tempting to believe that we remember the past, but the truth is that we *think* it. We construct and reconstruct it based on what we find important in the present.<sup>141</sup>

NIOD’s war diary collection demonstrates that memory and forgetting are inextricably bound up with each other. This idea is not new but important in understanding

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig (eds.), *War Memory and Popular Culture. Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* (Jefferson, NC 2009).

<sup>137</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London 1983) 8.

<sup>138</sup> Olick, *The collective memory reader*, 177.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibidem*, 178, 183.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibidem*, 188-189.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*, 193.

the role of the historian in shaping collective memory. When individuals remember, they have to forget other things because we are highly selective and our memory capacity is limited by neural, cultural (focus and bias) and psychological (oppression of painful memories) constraints. This dynamic is also visible on the level of collective memory, and nation states always choose not to include certain events and narratives in history and commemoration practices because for everything that is remembered, even more has to be forgotten and otherwise there wouldn't be a single interpretation to be given to the past and the unity of the nation would be in danger.<sup>142</sup> Aleida Assmann distinguishes two modes of remembering: active and passive. She argues that societies create a 'canon' of its most prestigious historical items and stories, which carries out the *past as present*, meaning that they are meant to catch attention and make a lasting impression, therefore to be actively remembered. Meanwhile, the institutions of passive memory, archives, preserve the *past as past*, meaning that the objects and stories stored there aren't publicly remembered as much. The process of canonisation decides which small percentage of verbalised and recorded memories is 'repeatedly re-read, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented.'<sup>143</sup> The 'relics' are stored in archives, but this does not mean that they are unmediated. They are just not selected for the canon and open to new contexts and interpretations. With canonisation, Assmann means that a 'sanctified' status is given to the texts (and to persons, artefacts and monuments): they are set apart from the rest and charged with the highest value, making them universally important and outlived by generations who keep on interpreting them and keeping them alive in collective memory.<sup>144</sup> Nation states create narratives around these canons in which the past is taught and explained through schoolbooks, monuments, commemorations and festive days. The narrow selection is presented in a timeless framework, and the other documents are stored in archives or left to vanish and slide into oblivion. Historians visit these archives and write historical studies based on the preserved documents, after which their studies can find a way into the public historical narrative.

Personal memory is situated in the brain but can be shared once it is verbalised and externally located in objects that serve as reminders of lived experiences; war diaries are examples of such objects. Yet in the process of writing a diary, personal memory is not first exclusively shaped in the brain and then in its totality transferred to an object. It is, in José

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<sup>142</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Canon and Archive', in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin 2008) 97.

<sup>143</sup> Assmann, 'Canon and Archive', 98 – 99.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*, 100.



van Dijck's words: 'the result of a complex interaction between brain, material objects, and the cultural matrix from which they arise.'<sup>145</sup> Diaries may be seen as mediated memories or devices by which people seek to establish their own identities in the face of their larger surroundings, and they are not fixed representations of personal memory; just like that memory is never fixed but constantly negotiated within the cultural frames of society.<sup>146</sup> If we accept this process, how might war diaries influence collective memory of World War II in the Netherlands? From the outset, these diaries were envisioned to be included in historical studies, but more also more broadly in transferring emotions and experiences to later generations. An interesting term in this context is 'postmemory', defined by Marianne Hirsch, who argues that trauma can be inherited on an 'inter-, intra- and transgenerational' level.<sup>147</sup> Especially in conflicted areas, people claim to 'remember' what others have done to 'them' (the group they identify with), even though they were not alive to witness those events. People who own the memories are the people who lived through them, who have a first-hand recollection of the events (in this case the people who wrote the war diaries). But when they die and subsequent generations remember their memories, the concept of ownership and authorship changes. People then do not become the author or owner of their memories but they inherit them. Interestingly, this 'postgeneration' acknowledges that their memories are not lived memories but distant from the actual events. 'This describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.'<sup>148</sup>

In this particular context, the word trauma is problematic because the diaries do not all contain aspects of trauma and this term has a complicated history that I do not address in this thesis. Notwithstanding, I do believe that the concept of postmemory is important for understanding the relationship between war diaries and memory. During World War II, people wrote their experiences and memories down in diaries and these were later shared in historical studies and published in books and newspaper articles that were read by many Dutch people. Reviews of *Dagboekfragmenten* praise the diary collection for enabling others to 'live' the experiences of others and for later generations. In this sense, the diaries were meant to do more than transfer information and teach objective history: they were meant to transfer memories. Annette Wieviorka states that testimony was primarily about knowledge after

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<sup>145</sup> José van Dijck, 'Memory matters in the digital age', *Configurations*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2004) 349 – 373, 350.

<sup>146</sup> Van Dijck, 'Memory matters in the digital age', 361-362.

<sup>147</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* (New York 2008) 33.

<sup>148</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

World War II. However, ‘today the purpose of testimony is no longer to obtain knowledge. Time has passed and the historian does not trust a memory in which the past has begun to blur and which has been enriched by various images since the survivor’s return to freedom. The mission that has devolved to testimony is no longer to bear witness to inadequately known events, but to keep them before our eyes. Testimony is to be a means of transmission to future generations.’ Interestingly, this has been the goal from the outset for RIOD’s war diary collection. Because shifts in memorial culture have led to an increased interest in witness testimony and first-hand accounts have become popular in commemorative culture, I believe that the diaries now have the effect that was envisioned by RIOD.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

The history of World War II was written within different historiographical trends between 1945 and 2016. In the early years after liberation, when the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie was created and started collecting material, the focus was mainly on the Dutch occupation and the roles of the political leaders in the war. The memorial culture was mainly about moving forward and trying to make sense of what happened in a national context, highlighting unity and social cohesion. Historiographical trends influenced the way in which historians valued war diaries and after the ‘cultural turn’ interest in ego-documents was revived. As the life of ‘ordinary people’ and history from below became more highlighted within historical studies and witness testimony, personal war experiences and the traumatic events of World War II became more dominant in memorial culture, the diary became a more popular source for historians. Interestingly, you could argue that a focus on the suffering of the nation as a whole was changed to a focus on the suffering of certain groups, whereas recent historical publications and commemorations suggest that the suffering of ‘ordinary people’ has become a popular research topic.

The first historical publication based on NIOD’s diary archive was *Dagboekfragmenten 1945 – 1950*, by Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening. This book was published in 1954 and received public attention in newspapers and radio bulletins. The critical responses were positive and newspapers commented that it allowed people to ‘relive’ those years and would allow people who had not experienced the war to imagine what it had been like. The diary collection does contribute to the shaping of a collective memory of World War II in the Netherlands, a possibility not entirely unimaginable in 1946, when Loe de Jong stated: ‘Ik weet het: er wordt

al veel opgebouwd en over tien jaar zullen van de geslagen wonden alleen nog maar in de harten der mensen littekens over zijn. Des te noodzakelijker is het werk van Oorlogsdokumentatie: volkeren vergeten snel. Sneller soms nog dan mensen.’<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> This can roughly be translated to: ‘I know, so much is already being rebuilt and in ten years time only the scars in people’s hearts will be left of the pain that was caused. That is why RIOD’s work is necessary: nations forget quickly, even quicker than people.’ In: Loe de Jong, *Nederland in oorlogstijd: orgaan van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdokumentatie*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (7 juni 1946) 1.

## Chapter 4 Archives, digitisation and memory

In 2007, NIOD started digitising its diary collection as part of a larger, state-funded project entitled *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* (Heritage of the War). The aim of *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* was to make as much information as possible available on World War II in the Netherlands to a large audience and to safeguard historical material by storing it digitally and preferably online.<sup>150</sup> The programme, which was completed in 2010, was divided up into 211 smaller projects, which were subsidized by the Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport (Ministry of National Health, Well-being and Sports - VWS) with a total of 23 million Euros. In 2010, VWS published the results in the book *Erfgoed van de Oorlog. De oogst van het programma*, which was distributed to history teachers, public libraries, museums and archives. One of the subprojects was 'Oorlogsdagboeken' (War Diaries) which was managed by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library of the Netherlands – KB). Afterwards, a selection of NIOD's diary archive was digitised and made available online. Why did NIOD decide to digitise part of its diary collection and who was in charge of the process? Which selection criteria were used to decide which diaries were to become digitised or made available online?

By investigating NIOD's current acquisition policy for war diaries and by mapping the process in which part of the collection was digitised during *Erfgoed van de Oorlog*, I aim to investigate how digitisation is influencing the management and use of NIOD's diary collection. The 'digital turn' is currently reshaping the role that archives and archivists play in the production of historical knowledge and this chapter will investigate the relationship between archives, history and memory further. Will the influence of the war diary collection on Dutch memory of World War II change now that more diaries are becoming available online?

### 4.1. Archives and memory

After the 'memory turn', the position of archivists in society has been investigated with new interest, especially within the field of archival studies. An often-heard argument is that the traditional Jenkinsonian view, that emphasised the neutral, objective and evidential qualities of archives and the passive, impartial and passive roles of archivists, was challenged by the

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<sup>150</sup> See the official website: <http://www.tweedewereldoorlog.nl/bronnen/erfgoed-van-de-oorlog/>.

impact of technology and the expansion of record creation. The act of appraisal became a more central duty of the archivist and along with it the idea that archivists practice the power to decide which information about the past is kept or forgotten became more dominant.<sup>151</sup> The choices of archivists are always influenced by society and vice versa and the archive is the basis of what can be said in the future about the present when it will have become the past. This has always been the case, according to Aleida Assmann, as archives were created as bureaucratic organisations to serve the ruling class with the necessary information to build up provisional stockpiles for the future and to symbolically legitimise political power at the same time. The archives of data were needed for state bureaucracy, to determine strategies to organize the future and to control the past. Archival memory of history, then, is preceded by archival memory as governance in the form of testaments, certificates, and documents that serve and authenticate claims relating to power, ownership and descent. In the Middle Ages, princes, monasteries, churches and cities preserved those documents that served to legitimize groups and institutions.<sup>152</sup>

However, the political archives made way for historical archives, which originated in the French Revolution when the violent break with the past brought forward a new historical consciousness. Historical archives contain relics of the past that are considered to be of historical or scholarly interest, but which are no longer of immediate use to the dominant memory narrative in society and are therefore not canonised. Historical scholarship is based on the historical archive and because archivists are selective, historians have to adjust their research questions to the extension and range of the archives.<sup>153</sup>

What is stored in historical archives is materially preserved and catalogued; it becomes part of an organizational structure, which allows it to be easily sourced. As part of the passive dimension of cultural memory, however, the knowledge that is stored in the archive is inert. It is stored and potentially available, but it is not interpreted. This would exceed the competence of the archivist. It is the task of others such as the academic researcher or the artist to examine the contents of the archive and to reclaim the information by framing it within a new context. The archive, therefore, can be described as a space that is located on the border between forgetting and remembering; its materials are preserved in a state of latency, in a space of intermediary storage (*Zwischenspeicher*). Thus, the institution of the archive is part of cultural memory in the passive dimension of preservation. It stores materials in the intermediary state of “no longer” and “not yet,” deprived of their old existence and waiting for a new one.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Flinn, ‘Archives and their communities’, 22.

<sup>152</sup> Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 328.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*, 106.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*, 103.

This is an interesting theory in respect to NIOD's war diary collection. Diaries that were sent to RIOD weren't stripped of their context and stored without interpretation in an archive but they were collected with a specific goal in mind and analysed and described by the diary section. Even though the documents were selected for historians to interpret them later on, Dolf Cohen and Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening judged the incoming documents on their contents and ranked their value, leading them to send documents back that did not serve the objective of the collection. Moreover, this selection method demonstrates that the diaries were both stored for historical interpretation but also interpreted immediately during the process of acquisition. This shows that RIOD aimed to be, and was, both types of archives, which had to do with the two main objectives of the institute: the diaries were selected for historical research (historical archive) and for teaching later generations about the national past (political archive). De Jong already stated that it was unclear which research questions future historians would ask and Cohen emphasised that there should be historical distance before the history of World War II would be written. In this way, the documents were left for historians to interpret but already selected with specific goals in mind, so it could be argued that RIOD was passively contributing to creating cultural memory.

Precisely how can selecting diaries for later generations be seen as influencing cultural memory? The way in which we remember the past is constructed within social frames and several archivists argue that archives are fundamental to the establishment of the frames in which people remember. The choices that archivists make are influenced by the society they live in, and the information that is chosen and preserved in archives will influence these frameworks.<sup>155</sup> These choices go further than picking the documents that should be included in the collection: the finding aids and the descriptions of records also have an influence on what scholars select and how findable sources are. Thus, archives form an intersection between the past, the present and the future because in the present, archivists decide which knowledge future scholars will have of the past.

Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups and societies. And ultimately, in the pursuit of their professional responsibilities, archivists – as keepers of archives – wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before

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<sup>155</sup> Ibidem, 93.

they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use.<sup>156</sup>

Every period has its own principles of selection and evaluation and what is regarded as refuse in one age may seem as valuable information in the next.<sup>157</sup> However, it is important to keep in mind that there are many different kinds of archives: national archives, regional and local archives, business archives, private archives, museum archives, research archives, etc. These do not all have the same objectives and position in society and thus have different levels of influence on shaping cultural memory. Moreover, there are strict rules, regulations and laws concerning archives and not every type of historical research is based on archives. Nonetheless, the influence of the composition of archives on historiography should not be overlooked.

#### **4.2. The digital turn**

The archives of war are changing. Whereas historians used to be dependent on military reports, newspapers, official correspondence and ego-documents that were stored in a certain systematic way, nowadays there is a vast amount of sources available in the digital sphere due to technological advances. This means that it's getting increasingly difficult for archives to decide which (digital) sources are incorporated in collections, but it also means that historians have to face new challenges in covering more recent events, selecting from a broader range of sources. Facebook pages, Twitter-accounts, photos on Flickr and Instagram, blogs on WordPress and Tumblr, videos on YouTube and Vine, online forums and websites all make information available to societies on a larger scale and influence the social and political perception people have of the world.<sup>158</sup> Besides the rise of digital sources, new technologies also allow older documents to be stored for longer – sometimes indefinite – periods of time and digitised archival material can lead to new types of research. It can also reach a broader and different public. These revolutions in information technology not only change archival collections, they also change the role of archivists in society.<sup>159</sup>

The first generation of electronic record archives in the 1970s and early 1980s consisted of a few machine-readable data files and electronic archival programmes.

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<sup>156</sup> Schwartz and Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power', 3.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibidem*, 330.

<sup>158</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia", *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2000) 28.

<sup>159</sup> Schwartz and Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power', 6.

Computerised documents were often statistical files or questionnaires and working with a computer was still new and relatively rare. Fundamental changes in information technology resulted in more texts, graphics, images and voice recordings being converted into electronic formats and the second generation of electronic archives came into existence.<sup>160</sup> Twentieth-century inventions provided new memory aids that shifted the boundary between the present and the past. Cinema and documentary films, radio and television and technological advances in terms of making computers user-friendlier led to a digital revolution. How does this ongoing digital revolution impact archival practice? Archivists construct interfaces, defined by Margaret Hedstrom as ‘a surface lying between two portions of matter or space, forming their common boundary’, between the past and the present through selecting sources, representing documents and collections and deciding who can access the collection. These interfaces are human constructions and thus not impartial or neutral.<sup>161</sup> When people visit an archive online and they want to see an overview of the collection or request source material, everything they see and experience was designed by people with a specific goal in mind, just like in traditional archives. However, the people who get the biggest say in the online design are usually web designers, software engineers and computer programmers. Archivists could become more active players in this field but they should be aware of the fact that their decisions will impact society’s options for accessing the past.<sup>162</sup> Although larger amounts of sources and data can be stored digitally than in analogue storage systems, archivists will still select which material they will digitise (first) and have to describe them within archives, which means that only certain types of information are included in the digital sphere, although it may seem sometimes like ‘everything’ is available online.<sup>163</sup>

Archives have changed with every new stage of technological development of recording media. What is visible now, is that new technologies have not only increased the quantity of documents, but have also created new kinds of archives.<sup>164</sup> In the age of digital storage systems and new media types, the growing gap between ‘the amount of externalized information’ and ‘internalizable knowledge’ becomes wider. ‘As the capacity of computers is doubled every two years, the external storage capacity of the digital age has expanded even further, while the human capacity for memory remains the same due to its neural

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<sup>160</sup> Terry Cook, ‘Easy to Byte, Harder to Chew: The Second Generation of Electronic Records Archives’, *Archivaria*, Vol. 33 (1991-1992) 206-216.

<sup>161</sup> Margaret Hedstrom, ‘Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past’, *Archival Science*, Vol. 2 (2002) 21-43, 26.

<sup>162</sup> Hedstrom, ‘Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past’, 33.

<sup>163</sup> Schwartz and Cook, ‘Archives, Records, and Power’, 15.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibidem*, 341-343.



constraints.<sup>165</sup> Because the archive was originally invented as an organisation that saved information in fixed and written form for later usage, the basic structure of the archive is changing due to modern technologies. Electronic registration forms, hi-tech machines with ever expanding storage capacities and automatic ways to process, transfer and access information in the fastest way ever: the digital age is inventing new forms of archiving. ‘Archivists are the professionals who are entrusted with the task of selecting and conserving cultural memory. We must therefore consider the practical side of conserving cultural documents, in order to establish how the new electronic storage media will affect the relationship between permanence and decay, recording and conserving’.<sup>166</sup>

In 2010, the overall girth of information available on the Internet was estimated five million terabyte (the human brain can store one to ten terabytes of information). This repository of information is growing every day and not only consists of ‘born-digital’ data but also of digitised analogue material. Edwin Klijn, project manager at NIOD of the new digitisation network *Oorlogsbronnen*, states that the memory of nations used to be stored in archives, libraries and museums but is nowadays being absorbed in the ‘global village’ of the Internet. In 2008 it was estimated that only two to three percent of the collections of Dutch heritage institutions was digitised.<sup>167</sup> The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library of the Netherlands - KB) aims to have all their material about the Netherlands (about 730 million pages) available online by 2030 and many museums now have parts of their collection online in digital format. Archives were the first of this sector to create digital databases in the 1990s. They mainly aimed to digitise material for people who were looking for genealogical data, other heritage institutions at that time mainly experimented with virtual exhibitions on a small scale to attract audiences. Later on, the goal of digitisation was to give people the opportunity to access collections from home and to safeguard material online in case the original decayed, which is called: ‘preservation imaging’.<sup>168</sup> Many labour-intensive aspects make digitising entire collections more difficult than it might seem. Scan equipment has become less expensive but experienced and skilled people are still needed to handle this professionally. A popular new development is the so-called Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, which aims to recognise words and letters within the scanned documents, making it possible for people to search for specific words within the text of scans. OCR allows

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<sup>165</sup> Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, 104.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*, 13, 337 – 338.

<sup>167</sup> Edwin Klijn, ‘Van “oud” geheugen naar digitaal brein: massadigitalisering in de praktijk’, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2012) 56 – 67, 56.

<sup>168</sup> Klijn, ‘Van “oud” geheugen naar digitaal brein’, 57.

kilometres of archival material to be examined on the computer, but there are difficulties that problematize the usage of this software. The material of a document can be hard to scan, some fonts are hard to read by the computer (for instance, gothic letters or unclear handwriting) and the software sometimes misreads words, which of course influences the search engine results.<sup>169</sup>

Globalisation, digitisation and the rapid development of new media all contribute to a shift in the ways in which memories are distributed and shared. The system in which memories are both created and shared can be seen as ecology: a system where different actors influence how memories appear and exist in society. Andrew Hoskins distinguishes a ‘connective turn’ in modern history, which he describes as a ‘post-scarcity culture’.<sup>170</sup> Born-digital information shapes a new knowledge base or ‘information infrastructure’ in which new information is being distributed via new media platforms and this changes the way in which people learn about the past. The immediacy, increased volume and ubiquity of this new type of information may lead to less reflection and a more complex archive with less distance to the events it harbours information on. ‘There is a greater risk that valuable records will be lost and a greater chance that sensitive materials will slip through into the public domain. Faster history is not better history.’<sup>171</sup> In the digital age, older documents that have been digitised later on might be easier to find for people because they can search online on different websites and do this from home instead of by visiting an archive, asking for an inventory, speaking to the staff and leafing through the documents themselves in order to find relevant information. New technology allows people to digitally search *through* documents as well, searching for keywords and relevant information without having to read the entire piece. However, Hoskins claims that something important is lost in this process: the context. When you can search for specific information by typing in a key word, you might be more likely to dismiss the information that does not address your immediate request, even though this context is highly valuable and important for historians who try to investigate the past.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, search engines work with the metadata attached to documents and they do not show the document’s place in the archival structure. Information created on new media will likely be typed and edited invisibly several times by several people, very different from handwritten documents

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<sup>169</sup> Ibidem, 59 – 60.

<sup>170</sup> Andrew Hoskins, ‘Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn’, *Parallax*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2011) 19-31, 20.

<sup>171</sup> Andrew Hoskins article, ‘Digital records take something precious from military history’, *The Conversation*, 04-02-2015.

<sup>172</sup> Hoskins article, ‘Digital records take something precious from military history’.

that contain a more visible strain of thoughts and authenticity. The same applies for the material of which a document or source is made. For example, one of the war diaries at NIOD was written on cigarette rolling papers from the Tjimahi internment camp close to Bandung. This is not possible to see in the digital copy. ‘Digitisation is usually not just the making of a digital copy of an analogue document, but rather the creation of a new informational object.’<sup>173</sup>

### 4.3. Diary acquisition at NIOD

When Annemieke van Bockxmeer started working for NIOD in 1989, she became the first professional archivist at the institute. ‘When I started working for NIOD, archivists were classified as *laagopgeleid* (lower-educated) or *hoogopgeleid* (highly-educated) within archival sciences. At NIOD, it quickly became clear that there were no highly educated archivists working for the institute and that there was a need for an archival specialist to be in charge of the archives. I decided that I was willing to get a degree and become this person, and that is what happened. When I graduated, I started working for NIOD as a trained archivist.’<sup>174</sup> She began organising the diary collection in 1997 in a special team. An official archival acquisition plan was drafted and the archive was professionalised. When asked about the selection method of diaries in the first years at RIOD, she explains that the priorities were very different then and the context of the first post-war decade had its effect on the acquisition. ‘RIOD combined a list of the diaries they had received with a wish list. When we organised the archive, we noticed that the numbering of the diaries was rather odd: some number seemed to be missing. Then we noticed that these numbers had been given to diaries that the institute wished to obtain one day but never actually had.’<sup>175</sup>

In order to investigate how the selection criteria for war diary acquisition have changed over the years I, interviewed Gertjan Dikken, who is currently responsible for archival acquisition at NIOD. He explained that a lot has changed since the first years of NIOD. The photographs of the war diaries that were taken in the first ten years are still stored in the archive, but they are of relatively poor quality and quite small. These war diaries were sent back to the donors after being photographed. Against all expectations, war diaries are still sent

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<sup>173</sup> Charles Jeurgens, ‘The Scent of the Digital Archive’, *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 128, No. 4 (2013) 30-54, 34.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Annemieke van Bockxmeer, 28-07-2016, NIOD.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Annemieke van Bockxmeer.

and brought to the institute on a weekly basis. Dikken's first selection criterion is that the diary should not be a collection of newspaper clippings or memoirs. Moreover, it should be an original diary and not a copy or edited version, he only accepts copies or edited diaries in rare cases. 'Diaries are personal documents and they are always coupled with emotions. Furthermore they are unique and a reliable source for researchers. In obtaining diaries, I am dealing with a second generation and people sometimes find it difficult to distance themselves from the diaries of their relatives. In order to avoid possible discussions, I prefer to have the original so that I can show that certain things were indeed mentioned in the diary, in case anyone ever doubts this.'<sup>176</sup> Moreover, NIOD is equipped with special archive-rooms that are tailored to storing historical documents: the temperature and humidity are regulated, the archive folders, boxes and labels are acid-free and they are stored in a dark basement where they will not be affected by light. Copies or transcripts of diaries do not need these conditions so he would rather reserve the space for originals.

When a diary is submitted to the institute, Gertjan Dikken reads it superficially and someone else prepares a description. An important task of an archivist is describing archival pieces and selecting the necessary data for inventories. Dikken explains that context is key in this process and whenever a new war diary is submitted, he interviews the donor and saves the information for the person who is in charge of disclosing the metadata. Contrary to NIOD's selection between 1945 and 1955, Dikken does not decline diaries based on their content. His only criteria are that diaries should be written approximately during World War II, they should be written by a Dutch citizen in Europe or The Dutch Indies and they should not be scrapbooks or memoirs but actual diaries. Memoires are sent to the library section and do not fall under his routine. When a diary is submitted and the donor is interviewed, an agreement is signed between NIOD and the donor concerning copyright and rights concerning digitization. It is then placed in a special depot where it will wait for approximately six months while it is disclosed for the inventory. Afterwards, it will be placed in another archive where it will be numbered and only then will it officially become part of NIOD's archive. From then on, people can request it in the study room. Dikken does not actively search for diaries; he practices so-called 'passive acquisition'.

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with Gertjan Dikken, 11-08-2016, NIOD.

#### 4.4. Digitising NIOD's diary collection

Ellen van der Waerden was project manager of *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* (EvdO) while she was working at VWS between 2005 and 2010. Edwin Klijn was project manager of newspaper digitisation at the KB and Jasper Faase was in charge of the digitisation of war diaries, also working at the KB. For this thesis, I asked them about their experiences and ideas on the digitisation of NIOD's war diaries. In EvdO, the war diaries of different archives and institutions were collected and digitised. A selection was published on the website *Het Geheugen van Nederland* (The Memory of the Netherlands - GvN).<sup>177</sup> This website is: 'an image library making available the online collections of museums, archives and libraries. The library provides access to images from the collections of more than one hundred institutions and includes photographs, sculptures, paintings, bronzes, pottery, modern art, drawings, stamps, posters, newspaper clippings (...) and video and sound recordings.'<sup>178</sup> Eventually, 830 war diaries were posted on this website, of which about 400 came from NIOD. The most important reason for NIOD to cooperate with the KB in this project was that the subsidy allowed them to give a first impulse to digitisation. This meant that it did not cost NIOD money from its own budget and that the labour was outsourced. In the past, scans and photographs had been made of the diaries but these were stored in the archive and not available online. Jasper Faase explained that the fact that diaries are digitised does not mean they are automatically available (published) online. Privacy issues and copyright are important factors institutions have to take into account when making the decision to publish diaries online. In case of the war diaries institutions have done a lot of effort to get permission from right holders to publish the diaries.<sup>179</sup>

Most of NIOD's war diaries have been digitised but not all have been published online. Jasper Faase, Ellen van der Waerden and Edwin Klijn all made clear that this was mostly due to two restrictions: copyright and privacy. Authors are protected by the *Wet Bescherming Persoonsrecht* and the *Archiefwet* and these state that copyright ends 70 years after the author is deceased, starting the first January after the date of death.<sup>180</sup> This makes it impossible to digitise all the war diaries without looking into the author's rights. When Faase started working as head of the war diary project of *Erfgoed van de Oorlog*, he began by mapping all

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<sup>177</sup> This website was not officially part of *Erfgoed van de Oorlog*.

<sup>178</sup> Het Geheugen van Nederland, [http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/?/en/paginas/over\\_het\\_geheugen](http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/?/en/paginas/over_het_geheugen), seen on 27-07-2016.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Jasper Faase, 11-08-2016, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Ellen van der Waerden, 19 July 2016, NIOD Amsterdam.

the institutes that harboured war diaries in the Netherlands. He studied the inventories of these institutions (NIOD, several regional archives, the National Archive and city archives) and mapped a so-called 'core collection' (*kerncollectie*). His aim was to digitise as many war diaries as possible. In the end, about 4.000 diaries were scanned and about half of these came from NIOD. The next step after mapping the different collections was negotiating with the institutions, because the archives needed to cooperate and give their permission before the diaries could be scanned. Scanning was outsourced. Faase argues that this marked his first selection round: if he was unable to receive permission, certain diaries could not be included in the digitised collection. The next, most influential selection criterion was based on copyrights: these had to be retrieved for all the diaries before they could be digitised. The institutions were responsible for doing this and NIOD employees had to find out what the existing copyrights and privacy rights were for every single diary. NIOD and VWS signed an agreement that the privacy rights were NIOD's responsibility, as was the case for all the institutions. However, all the war diaries were scanned and stored at the KB for preservation and there were no selection criteria at stake there. Faase had anticipated that he would come across diaries that were in such a bad material state that they could not be digitised, but he never actually came across this problem in reality. Otherwise, this would also have been a selection criterion: the actual physical condition of the diary.<sup>181</sup>

Additionally, Faase states that he did not select diaries based on their content; the only requirement with respect to content was that the document needed to be an actual diary, kept during the war, and not a collection of newspaper clippings or memoirs. No attention was paid to whether diaries contained 'touchy' subjects. He noticed that RIOD had been stricter in composing its initial collection compared to other institutions. 'In the project we never chose to reject a diary for digitisation based on its content, but we did search for diaries with specific content in order to make sure the digitised collection was geographically and thematically varied. So, for instance, we visited local archives whenever we noticed that diaries from a certain region were missing or underrepresented.'<sup>182</sup> He explains that another factor to keep in mind was that the process of digitising diaries was manual and people make mistakes: although this does not count as a conscious selection criterion, it should be noted that diaries could be excluded from digitisation by mistake. Finally, money is an important factor in deciding how many diaries can be digitised. *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* was finished in 2010 and there is no

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with Jasper Faase, 11-08-2016.

<sup>182</sup> Ibidem.

budget left to add new material to the existing digital collection. The content on the *Geheugen van Nederland* website is static and there is no money available right now to actively engage with the scans that have been made of all the diaries that weren't made available online, which now lie at KB. There used to be more government subsidy available for digitisation projects, but nowadays responsibility has moved largely to the institutions themselves.<sup>183</sup> Concerning the influence of digitisation on historiography, Faase states that historians seem to be less critical when it comes to online sources than analogue source material. They seem to be less aware of the fact that these sources have also been selected; sometimes by people with certain goals in mind but also due to practical limitations like copyrights, lack of funding, etc. 'Source-criticism is also important for digital sources, but many scholars seem to be unaware of this.'<sup>184</sup> Although this is the responsibility of scholars, archives can also do better at accounting for their online collections and stating the metadata more clearly. This observation led Faase to believe that historians need to learn how to get acquainted with digital collections, just like they have to get acquainted with archives when they visit these.<sup>185</sup>

Edwin Klijn argues that there are three layers of selection criteria that can be discovered behind the total process of acquiring diaries and eventually digitising them. The first selection round took place immediately after RIOD's foundation, in the first post-war decade, and concerns the decision whether diaries should be included in the archival collection or not. 'In line with historiographical trends, at first the diaries that were selected by RIOD were mostly rather elitist diaries and gradually interest in the lives of ordinary people increased.'<sup>186</sup> The second selection round concerns the decision whether diaries are suitable for digitisation. Klijn confirmed that selection criteria for *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* were mostly pragmatic and he also mentioned the material condition, copyrights and privacy rights as most important. A third, and currently future selection round is deciding whether diaries can be subjected to OCR (online searchable for headwords). *Delpher* a Dutch website with digital scans of historical newspapers is an example where this technique has been implemented: a search bar allows people to scan through thousands of newspapers and find relevant articles by typing in search words. In the future, this can also be done for the war diaries and that would allow scholars to search through diaries for certain names, events or terms. This will enable

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<sup>183</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>184</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>186</sup> Interview Edwin Klijn, 17-05-2016, NIOD.

new research questions to be answered based on these diaries and a new research corpus will be created. However, it is important to note that mistakes in transcription and scanning influence the results that come up with this search method. Digitisation-on-demand is also an option, where people can request documents to be digitised if they pay for it. This way, the most popular documents are digitised first. At NIOD, digitisation occurs project-wise whenever external funding is available and this means that another selection round is deciding which diaries fit within subsidy programmes that make digitisation possible.<sup>187</sup> Klijn is now in charge of Netwerk Oorlogsbronnen (Network War Sources), a network which aims to make the collections of more than 400 war institutions available online.

Ellen van der Waerden argues that copyrights and privacy rights are the two biggest restrictions for digitising NIOD's war diaries. However, she believes that author rights are formal and legal issues that can be cautiously 'ignored' in digitisation projects because people did not intend to receive these rights when they sent their diaries to RIOD.<sup>188</sup> A bigger issue is privacy. The diaries sometimes contained names of people who were 'wrong' during the war or consisted of very personal information that authors did not wish to share with a broad audience. The diaries written by former members of the NSB sometimes contain names of their children and relatives, who most likely do not want to be associated with the NSB. Moreover, based on correspondence between writers of diaries and RIOD in the years 1945 – 1950, it becomes clear that many authors hesitated in sending their private documents to the institute because they did not want those to be shared with other people. 'Surely those authors could not have known or suspected that it would be possible in this day and age to spread information to such broad, varied audiences. Moreover, they could not have foreseen that people would still be so involved and interested in World War II over 70 years after liberation of the Netherlands.'<sup>189</sup> RIOD's policy of not publishing anything from the diaries without permission shows that this wish was respected and digitising the diaries after these people have passed away might be legal but can be tricky on a moral level. However, many people eventually sent their diaries to RIOD because they wanted to inform later generations on life during the German occupation and digitisation can support this goal on a large scale. Van der Waerden believes that privacy limitations are only legitimate if the authors in question are still alive or when the diaries contain information that can harm others who are

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<sup>187</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>188</sup> 'Het punt van de auteursrechten: dan zeg ik dat je dat moet 'negeren'. Auteursrechten zijn er formeel-juridisch wel, maar burgers die hun dagboek hebben geschreven en ingezonden naar het NIOD hebben geenszins de bedoeling gehad om daar auteursrechten voor te 'innen'.' Interview Ellen van der Waerden.

<sup>189</sup> Ibidem.



still alive. She aims to make all NIOD's war diaries available online as soon as possible and only leave the diaries out that were written by very young people (and who might still be alive) and diaries of people who were 'wrong' during the war. 'Diaries in this last category can be published online if the author has deceased and no names or personal information on children is mentioned.'<sup>190</sup>

The objective of *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* was to make sources on World War II available to a large audience by collecting material from different archives, museums, institutions and libraries and offering them on one platform to people who could then access these from their homes. Van der Waerden mentions that this sense of urgency for making material accessible from people's homes was not present at all NIOD's levels, as some people seemed to not really feel the need to make the collection available outside the institute and preferred it if visitors came to the study room and requested the material there.<sup>191</sup> She suggests that the subsidy project was important in the war sector and functioned as an impulse in this field to make collections and knowledge available in digital format. 'The difficult aspect of *Geheugen van Nederland* is that it is an image database, where pictures are offered without much context. People get to see scans of, for example, a war diary, but they don't get to see the context in which this diary was written, stored and later digitised. Of course, when you request a war diary in NIOD's study room, you also get to see a diary without much context but then there could be an archivist or employee of the institute around who could tell you something about the context.'<sup>192</sup> However, she argues that providing this context is also possible on digital platforms and sometimes the context of a document might not be known in the study room as well, so the difference is nuanced. Still, it is something people need to be aware of.

Van der Waerden states that it is remarkable that NIOD's war diaries are available in digitised format on the *Geheugen van Nederland* website but not on NIOD's own website or catalogue. This reveals that NIOD's attitude towards digitisation is divided but also that the diary collection is not prioritised in offering it digitally to a broad audience at home. 'I believe that NIOD's war diary collection is unique and that it deserves a larger audience. It should be

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<sup>190</sup> 'Ik vind privacy-bepkeringen alleen legitiem (en zo werkt de WBP ook) als het gaat om auteurs die nog in leven kunnen zijn, en bij dagboeken waarvan mogelijk een 'derden-belang' kan worden geschaad, zoals kinderen van 'foute ouders'. Daarom mijn beleidslijn: alle dagboeken moeten online zo snel mogelijk, behalve dagboeken van mensen die nog jong waren toen ze het schreven (want die kunnen mogelijk nog in leven zijn) en dagboeken van 'foute Nederlanders'. In die laatste categorie wel weer de dagboeken online zetten als daar geen persoonsgegevens van kinderen in voorkomen en de auteur met zekerheid is overleden.' Interview Ellen van der Waerden.

<sup>191</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>192</sup> Ibidem.

promoted more to people outside the institute.<sup>193</sup> When I ask her why the *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* subsidy was not used to include the digital scans of the war diaries on NIOD's own website, she suggests that the overall aim of this project was to gather World War II sources from different institutes and offer them to an audience on one overarching website. So the goal of this subsidy was to move beyond the websites of institutes and create an overview of different sources available at different institutes.<sup>194</sup> In the future, she aims to promote the war diary collection and connect it to NIOD's own website and archive inventory. She suggested that perhaps volunteers could transcribe the diaries and attach Word-files to the digitised scans of the diaries to make sure that people can read them when the handwriting is difficult to decipher. Once these diaries have been transcribed to Word-files, they can also be subjected to OCR software.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

NIOD decided to digitise its war diary collection in 2007 because a government subsidy programme made this possible. As digitisation is an expensive and labour-intensive activity, *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* was meant as an impulse to get this started at different institutes in the Netherlands. A war diary subproject was led by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek and managed by Jasper Faase. NIOD's entire war diary collection was scanned and prepared for digitisation but only a selection was made available online on the website *Het Geheugen van Nederland*. Faase negotiated with NIOD employees which diaries were suitable to be published online and the most important selection criteria were copyrights and privacy rights. Diaries were not chosen for their content and the aim was to digitise as many diaries as possible.

The 'digital turn' is currently changing the role that archives and archivists play in the production of historical knowledge. Historical sources are offered online and new technologies allow people to search with headwords through sources and view material from their homes. In terms of acquisition, a lot has changed since the first post-war decade. Whereas NIOD employees actively searched for diaries and used promotion techniques to obtain them, NIOD practices a passive acquisition method. Once a year they do cooperate with a national campaign entitled *Niet Weggooien!* (Don't Throw Away!) in which people are reminded that

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<sup>193</sup> 'NIOD-medewerkers zijn nog wat terughoudend waar het gaat om het online toegankelijk maken ervan. Men vreest privacy-issues die er in mijn optiek niet of nauwelijks zijn.' Interview Ellen van der Waerden.

<sup>194</sup> Ibidem.

they should never throw away war sources but bring them to a research institute or archive instead. However, this campaign is not specifically about war diaries or NIOD.

## Conclusion

When the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (RIOD) opened its doors on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, employees aimed to collect material and write the official history of the Dutch kingdom during World War II. RIOD was the first institute of its kind in Europe and acquired a prominent reputation due to its connection to the Dutch state (which funded it) and because the head of the institute, Loe de Jong, had become well known during his weekly radio talks. A special diary section was founded in 1946, which was led by historian Dolf Cohen and later by Jitty Sjenitzer-van Leening. Between 1945 and 1955, the Dutch people were repeatedly asked to send diaries that they had written during the war to the institute because RIOD's employees believed that these were important sources in writing the history of 'ordinary people' in World War II. Additionally, they viewed diaries as crucial sources for making generations experience a past that they had not witnessed. However, the selection criteria applied to deciding which diaries were included in the archival collection reveal that Cohen and Sjenitzer-van Leening still focused mostly on extraordinary events and people. Consequently, diaries that might be interesting for historians who aim to write a history of 'ordinary people' nowadays could have been declined and sent back. Nonetheless, RIOD was quick in advocating history from below and the importance of diaries as historical sources and they paved the way for historians in the Netherlands to study war experiences from people of varied backgrounds.

Selection criteria grew stricter as the diaries kept coming in and based on correspondence between authors and RIOD, the quarterly and annual reports, and diary analyses drafted by Sjenitzer-van Leening, I argue that RIOD predominantly selected diaries that contained either important factual information, detailed descriptions of daily life, a description of regional or local developments, rare topics or authors with special qualities or a psychological reaction to the occupation and war. Diaries had to be personal and not dry summaries of news accounts or scrapbooks with newspaper clippings. Pragmatic selection criteria were also at stake: paper scarcity and expensive photographers formed a restriction. The selection process of these diaries for RIOD's archive demonstrates that the institute selected in part based on the institute's research agenda. The employees aimed to write historical publications, so their archive was not constructed with the goal to provide the rest of the world with as detailed information as possible on the war and they did not aim to make their war diary archive as complete as possible. It is important to acknowledge that the

material was collected as a working archive for researchers and employees worked very pragmatically by mostly selecting what was interesting for their research.

However, the diaries were also selected for another goal besides writing scholarly publications: to transfer the experiences, emotions and memories of people who lived through the German occupation to later generations. I argue that this transmission is part of a process of creating collective memory of World War II in the Netherlands. People always remember in social frames and personal memory is the result of a complex interaction between the brain, material objects, and these cultural frames. As mediated memories, diaries are capable of transferring emotions and experiences to later generations. The relationship that generations after World War II bear to the personal, collective, and cultural memories of the event is therefore partially influenced by the war diaries that have been included in public history and commemorative narratives. By reading first-hand accounts, experiences and thoughts of people from varied backgrounds during World War II, people are able to acquire memories that are not their own biological inheritance. Remembering the past and writing about it are influenced by conscious and unconscious selection and interpretation and archivists are key players in deciding which historical information reaches historical studies, and which is forgotten. It is important to nuance this statement though, as there are strict rules and laws for archivists and not all historical research is dependent on archives. Moreover, history is not the only force behind the creation of collective memory.

Nonetheless, I argue that RIOD's war diary archive does contribute to the shaping of a collective memory of World War II in the Netherlands. When people write diaries, experiences are turned into mediated memories and when these are shared online, they become information files that can be viewed as disembodied and dematerialised memory. Important players in this process are archivists. By selecting the sources that become readily available to historians for their scholarly work, archivists help determine what is publicly known about a certain historical period. They have to deal with limited budgets, finite amounts of both physical and computer storage space and limited staff resources. Additionally, they can also have a specific research agenda that restricts which material they include in their collection – as demonstrated in RIOD's case.

Between 1945 and 2007, the acquisition criteria for war diaries proved to have changed drastically at NIOD, along with the internal organisation of the archive. RIOD employees actively asked people to send diaries to the institute and they analysed and selected these when they came in and sent others back. They photocopied their selection and returned the originals

to the authors, keeping copies in the archive. By contrast, Gertjan Dikken, who is in charge of the acquisition of war diaries nowadays, does not actively search for diaries, does not accept copies of diaries but only includes originals and does not select diaries based on their content. In 2007, NIOD started digitising a selection of its archive as part of the state-funded programme *Erfgoed van de Oorlog* and they applied the same selection criteria for deciding which diaries were digitised. In terms of publishing diaries online, copyrights and privacy rights are most important. I believe the change in these acquisition methods can be explained by the changing context in which the institute is operating: in the first post-war decade, sharing private information was less common than it is today and correspondence between authors and NIOD reveals that the institute often had to convince people to send in their diaries. Nowadays, this is different with social media and a memorial culture where reading ego-documents and witness testimonies is more common.

I aimed to demonstrate that archives are social constructs and there are constant decisions to be made by people that eventually influence the availability of sources for historians. Archives are not just places where documents of the past are preserved; they are also places where the past is constructed and produced.<sup>195</sup> Archival professionals and users of archives need to recognize the nature of archives as socially constructed institutions and they need to be aware of the role of archives in the production of knowledge about the past.<sup>196</sup> This role is changing due to modern technical innovations and new media. The ever-increasing scale of new media information makes it difficult for archivists to decide which information should be stored, deleted or ignored and archivists therefore need new skills and different sets of experience.<sup>197</sup> The same applies to historians: they need different skills to work with digital sources. Jasper Faase's statement that people seem to be less inclined to critically examine the context of digital sources suggests that historians are focussing on the personal information in individual cases when they are studying digital diaries, without taking the context of how the story was composed, acquired by an archive and made available online into account.

Precisely how digitisation and technological advances will transform the position of archivists and historians within the memory ecology of the Netherlands is hard to tell. Do digital networks connect individual memories to others and blur established borders between the personal and the collective? Do they redefine the relationship between the private and the

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<sup>195</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 328.

<sup>196</sup> Schwartz and Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power', 8.

<sup>197</sup> Louise Craven (ed.), *What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader* (Aldershot, Hampshire 2008) 8.

public?<sup>198</sup> When war diaries are digitised and published online they become ‘networked objects’ that are in constant interaction with other people through the World Wide Web. I believe that new digital technologies are not completely replacing old ways of remembering but are gradually transforming them in ontological and epistemological terms. Digitisation is a cultural process that is not completely changing the way people remember the past, but is unsettling and renegotiating the sociocultural practices that help shape our memories.<sup>199</sup> The limitations in terms of time and scope of this dissertation have restricted my ability to answer how NIOD’s war diary collection influences memory on World War II. This thesis was meant to map the creation of the collection and act as a pioneer study on the influence of the war diaries on historiography and memory. Having focused on the selection criteria at RIOD/NIOD, more research on the way in which these war diaries have been incorporated in historical studies over the years (which diaries were used most, and why?) is needed to understand the influence of the diaries on Dutch memory of World War II more clearly.

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<sup>198</sup> Jens Brockmeier, ‘After the Archive: Remapping Memory’, *Culture Psychology* Vol. 16, No. 5 (2010) 5 – 35, 15.

<sup>199</sup> Van Dijck, ‘Memory matters in the digital age’, 372.

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