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A Family Occupation



Children of the War

and the Memory of World War II

in Dutch Literature of the 1980s

Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor

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to Gregory

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JOLANDA VANDERWAL TAYLOR

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I. *Introduction*

In the summer of 1992, when the nomination by the Bush administration of an American named Donald Alexander for the post of Ambassador to the Netherlands was retracted, possible reasons that the candidacy had run into trouble in Washington and elsewhere were mentioned in Dutch newspapers. First of all, it is clear that there were objections on the basis of the fact that Alexander had made sizable political contributions, and secondly that Alexander was also Honorary Consul of the Netherlands in Kansas, a fact which was thought to create a possible conflict of interest. A third possible reason was mentioned in *NRC Handelsblad*¹: Alexander, whose last name at birth had been Buitenhuis, was the son of a man who had been indicted in the Netherlands after World War II as one who had collaborated with the Germans. However, a brief mention of the retracted nomination in the *Volkskrant* the next day² mentions the issue of his political contributions and the potential conflict of interest due to his history as Honorary Consul, and then ends the report with the curious statement that knowledge of his father's war history had had no bearing on the decision.

The apparent contradiction among these reports is interesting. It suggests that the events of World War II still played an important role in Dutch, even Dutch-American relations, nearly 50 years after the fact. As for collaboration, Donald Alexander had committed no crime, except to be his father's son. And although one might readily understand why an infamous name might be a burden – Germany, for instance, might not nominate a person named Himmler as ambassador – in this case the family name had been changed to one which nobody would associate with war crimes. Nevertheless, the issue had been raised, and it may have hurt Alexander's chances. This story points to two facts about the history of World War II as it is remembered in the Netherlands: first, what happened fifty-odd years ago is still quite relevant to many people. But second, individuals often have mixed feelings, and many Dutch citizens disagree with each other about whether the history of half a century ago still matters and what its meaning should be.

The effects and aftereffects of World War II are not limited to those actively engaged in combat, but touched civilians to an unprecedented degree as well. In the European arena, this involvement was intensified by the implementation of Hitler's "final solution". Since the regimes in various countries occupied by Nazi Germany were instructed to round up and deport not only all Jews, but all members of several other religious and ethnic groups, the Nazis' goals included not just gaining military or political control over the conquered countries, but a direct involvement in their day-to-day governance as well. Such close association among the occupiers and the occupied was particularly strong in the Netherlands, where the Nazi occupation installed a civilian, rather than a military, government and waged a hearts-and-minds campaign, in hopes of converting Dutch citizens to Nazi ideals and thus gaining their wholehearted cooperation. Because of this effort, ordinary Dutch citizens – even

- 2 those who had never before been interested in politics – were forced to devise a practical response to Nazi policies, sometimes without prior time for reflection. In the heat of the moment, and in the belief that one's life, the lives of family members, or one's livelihood might be in jeopardy if one chose not to cooperate with the regime, some made quick decisions which they would later come to question or even regret.

Regret for one's behavior under Nazi occupation took several forms. Some of those who collaborated out of principle later found that they had been deceived about the Nazis' plans; others, who collaborated – perhaps just in insignificant ways – out of fear of reprisal, later wished that they had been more valiant. Some members of both groups suffered after the war had ended; either they were punished by agents of the new regime for their political crimes, or they – often with their families – faced various degrees and kinds of social isolation because their compatriots demanded retribution for their – real or imagined – offenses against ideals of loyalty to the nation or to ethical standards. This atmosphere of retribution and punishment put great pressure on families, as uninvolved spouses and children suffered because of the choices which perhaps only one member of the family – often the father – had made, and because the suffering was not distributed fairly among offenders. Since minor infractions could lead to social isolation, it is easy to imagine that fear of exposure was widespread. Such pressured atmospheres after the end of the war even affected the families of bystanders and victims, not just those of collaborators. This book offers evidence that many civilians and in some cases their offspring were deeply affected by the occupation, whether by its direct effects or its collateral varieties.

COMPLEX ISSUES

The Dutch populace was affected by World War II on several levels. Two major factors which had a deep impact include, first, the relatively far-reaching physical destruction of the country, which meant a desperate need to rebuild at the end of the war. Secondly, the loss of life, particularly the lives of Jewish-Dutch citizens, sometimes with the active cooperation of Dutch compatriots, had profound implications, not least of which are various issues of guilt which presented themselves after the end of the occupation. Responding to these two results of the war set up contradictory impulses. The struggle for physical survival, the need to reconstruct the physical infrastructure of the country, and to re-establish some semblance of a social fabric was pre-eminently important. Punishing, in some cases making an example of the offenders, appeared to be an important way to reconstruct the social fabric, a step toward making life return to normal.

In addition to these legitimate goals and concerns came an undercurrent of sometimes undefined guilt, felt either on a personal or collective level. Some people definitely had reason to feel guilty: opportunists who had taken advantage of the conditions presented by the occupation to further their own political and financial ends at the expense of their compatriots. For others, those who had operated within the many gray areas which modern wars and occupations create, guilt may have present-

ed itself as a confused sense of unease: Should they have done more – or less? Had it been right for parents to protect their children, or should they have given up normal family patterns in order to save those the Nazi regime was out to destroy? Even if one had assisted the Resistance, it was still possible to ask whether one could or should have done more. In addition, some must have wondered whether offenders were being punished appropriately, or rather whether big fish were getting away while lesser fry were treated more harshly than they deserved. My intent here is not to answer such questions definitively, but rather to point to their complexity and to the difficulty of deciding on their validity.

Common knowledge holds that in the years following the war, most individuals and families were too busy with both rebuilding the nation and its infrastructure and seeing to their families' physical survival amidst chaos to spend much time mourning the past. Indulging one's regrets for a tragic past was viewed as a "luxury" which required more investment of time and energy than was affordable in light of the pressing need to restore the nation to normalcy. But clear patterns cannot be identified in the literature of the Netherlands at this time. This fact seems puzzling on the surface. After all, one would expect to find the confusion of the time reflected in the literature being published and/or also in a silence surrounding the most difficult issues. But only later did the entire picture become clearer.

It is not until later – approximately the 1980s – that a common "pattern" or interpretive convention emerges which allows readers to compare works and notice certain commonalities in these various texts. As this study will show, the issue of memory is a central theme around which the many other clusters of variables are arranged: the notions of heroism, victimhood and culpability, of family dynamics and coming of age, and issues of sexuality and national identity.

Nevertheless, however scattered the attempts, Dutch writers did begin the work of thematizing, analyzing, reworking, re-evaluating and reconsidering World War II in various kinds of texts almost as soon as the war ended – in some cases, even before it had run its course. As is the case with the work of writing which takes as its raw material the stuff of history, it is easier to locate the events of history itself – the succession of dates and events and the networks of correspondence which accompany them – than it is to locate and define the work done by these writers and their texts. Therefore, it is the intention of this study to sketch the outlines of the way that this work and reworking continues into the present time. One index of the relative importance of the experience of World War II for a Dutch reading public can be found in the comforting "historical" realities of numbers. Dick Schram estimates that some six to seven hundred literary narratives exist in Dutch which thematize the war; if plays and those texts which tend more toward documentary are included, that count approaches a thousand.³ As suggested by the sheer force of numbers, the effects of the war upon the lives of the Dutch as individuals and as a society and culture as a whole have persisted until the present and continue to be an important cultural factor into the decade of the 1990s.

Schram's count of thematic texts seems an inversion of our expectations for a study of writing as a cultural practice; we would expect to begin with "documentary"

4 texts and then proceed to include literary approaches. However, the image of a collection of events such as war, its function as a set of collected and distilled stories, the perception of memory, and the meaning of the ways in which the passage of time has altered our views of those events in the course of the intervening decades may also be understood as the quintessential domain of fiction. Thus, in some sense, the Dutch interest in the experience of the war could be said to grow gradually beyond its “literary” treatment to include more “documentary” materials and, by implication, a broader range of remembering than can be fully described by looking at explicitly fictional works. However, as is also to be expected, the image of the war, the function of this collection of events in fiction, the perception of its memory, and the meaning of the passing of time have altered in the course of the intervening decades. Although such changes are by no means uniform or programmatic, various attempts have been made to identify several broad developments.

VARIOUS LITERARY HISTORIES

The interest of the Dutch public in the history of the war has seen an ebb and flow in the last five decades. This variance is perhaps the result of the factors mentioned above: an interaction between the pressing need on one level – for physical and psychological reasons – to forget and on another level the intermittent and inconsistent need to remember. There is no one canonical history of “war literature” in the immediate postwar decades. Several (literary) historians have proposed different models which are at variance with each other. I will not attempt to harmonize their views, as their different proposals reflect the reality of how complex and diffuse literary treatments of the war/occupation were in the postwar era.

One analysis, in the so-called “Menten report” from 1979, asserts that the Dutch interest in remembering the war years follows a “wavelike motion”.⁴ The general pattern is presented as one of overwhelming interest in patriotic texts about recent history during the first two years after the war, followed by an attitude of satiety by the end of the 1940s.

The immediate postwar years did indeed see the publication of a number of novels which take the war or occupation as its theme. Unfortunately, almost none of this literature is available in English translation and I will therefore mention a few well-known examples. *Die van ons* by Willy Corsari, published in November 1945 and reprinted twice within a year, contrasts the story of a cynical Gentile with that of a Jewish man who dies an idealist in Bergen-Belsen; its point is that the horrible experiences of the war can be somewhat redeemed if survivors are chastened and purified by the experience. Bert Voeten’s war diary *Doortocht* (1946) optimistically proclaims the triumph of art over life: despite the fact that the spirit is put upon by physical hardship, one may find comfort in the knowledge that a perfect poem will not perish. In 1946, Simon (later Gerard) van het Reve published *De ondergang van de familie Boslowits* in the journal *Criterium*, a work which very effectively presents events from the perspective of a young boy who is initially excited at the prospect of war and

only slowly comes to realize what the Nazi occupation has in mind for his Jewish friends.

The publication of Simon Vestdijk's *Pastorale 43*, in 1947 and 1948, offers a different perspective. It represents the resistance as constituted of poorly organized, inefficient people whose motivations are often less than altruistic. Anbeek van der Meijden⁵ offers three reasons for the fact that its reception was nevertheless mostly favorable. He cites the presence of a patriotic twist at the end of the novel and the fact that, since Vestdijk was always fond of irony, the reading public did not expect him to present unambiguous heroes. Furthermore, he reads the appearance and acceptance of *Pastorale 43* as a sign that the appetite for heroic war memories had been satiated.

This work brings us to the juncture which Anbeek van der Meijden describes as the “coma” thesis: according to the Menten report, the moment in which a lively interest in the history of the war turns to collective forgetting or repression occurs in 1947. On the face of it, this thesis pertains. However, the silence after 1947 is by no means complete. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which was written during the war years and derives a part of its interest for readers from the way it foreshadows the author's death in the Holocaust, was first published in Dutch in 1947 and immediately reprinted that year, then twice in 1948 and again in 1949 and 1950. A period of silence does occur with reference to this book: after 1950, it was not reprinted until 1955, when repeated reprints became necessary – as many as seven in 1957. This second wave of interest was probably stimulated by the success of the American edition and its adaptation for Broadway.

The supposed disinterest in war topics within Dutch letters which started in 1947 then ended in 1953 with the publication of J.B. Charles' *Volg het spoor terug* (“Follow the Track Back”); the work was well-reviewed and merited two reprints that year and one in each of the two years thereafter, followed by a lacuna. This line subsequently leads to Marga Minco, the publication of whose *Het bittere kruid* (*Bitter Herbs*) in 1957, a brief and poignant novel about a Jewish woman who loses her family but herself survives the Holocaust in hiding, was followed by regular reprintings which suggest the existence of an enthusiastic readership.

The end of this period of activity is punctuated by the publication of two important texts which, as Anbeek van der Meijden stresses, are not best described as “war novels”, but are rather fictional texts which use the war as a setting in which they investigate philosophical or ethical issues: W. F. Hermans' *De donkere kamer van Damocles* (1958) and Harry Mulisch's *Het stenen bruidsbed* (1959). Anbeek van der Meijden points to the fact that these novelists develop an original, personal point of view toward the war and takes this to indicate that the war has to a certain extent receded into the past. Neither work glorifies the war, and, according to Anbeek van der Meijden, neither is specific to World War II: they could also have been set in another war. Both express a decided disenchantment with Enlightenment values and the optimistic views of human nature which are their legacy. They illustrate the negative expectations associated with a demoralized generation which survived the occupation.

6 The fact that not all literature from this period which is thematically related to the war has a negative view of human nature is illustrated by *De nacht der girondijnen* (*The Night of the Girondists*) by Jacob Presser (1957), which tells the story of a protagonist who, with the support of a rabbi, persists in making moral and humane choices, even at the cost of his own life. Anbeek van der Meijden further remarks upon the fact that the most positive books about the war were written by three Jewish authors: Etty Hillesum, herself a Holocaust victim, Willy Corsari, and Presser.

Although, as Anbeek van der Meijden states, Dutch interest in the war years is ascendant in the 1960s and 1970s, literature is not the arena in which issues related to this period in the past are primarily dealt with. The “backlog”, as he calls it, is taken on in the literature of the 1980s, the subject matter of *A Family Occupation*.

HISTORY ITSELF

In addition to the fiction being produced and read, however, the war was also being replayed in the Dutch national consciousness in a different forum. Even at times when fiction which dealt thematically with the occupation was not plentiful, an interest in the history was kept alive. One extra-literary author deserves particular mention, as his influence is nearly unmeasurable. For decades, L. de Jong was a central figure as a scholar and historian of the war in the Netherlands.

During the war, De Jong⁶ edited and read broadcasts by Radio Orange from London, the voice of the Dutch government-in-exile, which were beamed across the Channel to the occupied Netherlands. Shortly after the liberation, De Jong became the first director of the Dutch Institute for War Documentation,⁷ and – at least until his retirement in 1979 – was responsible to a large degree for its reputation in academic circles as well as among the general public. His greatest impact on the Dutch memory of World War II, however, may be attributed to two important and high-profile projects. First, he wrote and narrated a series of television programs on the Dutch history of the war, broadcast on TV between May of 1960 and May of 1965; a version in print form was also published.⁸ It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of such innovative use of technology. The programs did not rely on flashy graphics, but consisted mostly of De Jong telling the story of the war using minimal props; they nevertheless made a deep impression on the viewing public. De Jong’s style was personal and engaged, a fact which contributed to its impact on viewers.

De Jong’s second high-profile project was his popular multivolume history of the war: *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*,⁹ (“The Kingdom of the Netherlands during World War II”). De Jong received criticism from some of his scholarly colleagues for the idiosyncratic style he employed in these studies, but it is clear that his style was one factor which attracted an audience outside academic circles. In addition, in order to make the work accessible to a broad audience, the series was published not only in a scholarly edition, but in a more “popular” one as well. As De Keizer shows,¹⁰ the strategy was justified: on average, each volume was published in an edition of 75,000. The first volume, *Voorspel*, was reprinted nine times for a

total of 200,000 copies, and it is estimated that 74,000 Dutch individuals own the entire series. The very large editions indicate that, while it is true that the 1960s and 1970s are not the heyday of Dutch “war” literature, and thus of the themes of personal memory-work, the Dutch were collectively occupied with (their past during) the war. This occupation apparently contributed to the backlog to which Anbeek van der Meijden refers, an incremental build-up of a store of unresolved issues which was still to be worked out in literature and in public debate surrounding literary and non-literary texts, as will occur in the 1980s.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1980S

During the 1980s, narratives which deal with experiences of World War II not only continued to appear in Dutch literature but even increased in number. Although it may be tempting to ascribe the renewal of interest in World War II novels during the decade of the 1980s as a mere function of some important anniversary (i.e., the 40th anniversary of the occupation or the liberation of the country), a look at the scope of these novels might suggest that some broader set of social constructs were being engaged – for these narratives were not only about World War II as a kind of moral “stage” on which the novelists of the decade moved their characters about. A list of the works which were published and read by the Dutch public includes novels about citizens who suffered during the occupation, such as Harry Mulisch’s *The Assault*. Several works by Marga Minco published in the 1980s such as *The Fall* and *The Glass Bridge*,¹¹ Rudi van Dantzig’s *For a Lost Soldier*, texts by Jona Oberski such as *Kindertjaren* (“Childhood Years”),¹² Frans Pointl’s *De kip die over de soep vloog* (“The Chicken which Flew Over the Soup”), Sera Anstadt’s *Een eigen plek* (“A Place of One’s Own”),¹³ and Kati David’s *Een klein leven* (“A Small Life”),¹⁴ while set during the time period of World War II, are further notable as texts which place children centrally among the war’s victims. Various texts by Armando (a pseudonym for Herman Dirk van Dodeweerd) such as *De straat en het struikgewas* (“Street and Foliage”) engage the question of enmity and aggression among people(s), the central role prejudice plays, and the ways in which language contributes to our memory of past offenses.¹⁵

The decade of the 1980s also saw the publication of a number of narratives from a new group of persons – the children of collaborators. These include such texts as Hanna Visser’s *Het verleden voorbij* (“Beyond the Past”),¹⁶ Rinnes Rijke’s two memoirs¹⁷ *Niet de schuld, wel de straf. Herinneringen van een NSB-kind* (“Punished, Though Innocent: Memories of the Child of a Member of the N.S.B.”)¹⁸ and *Op zoek naar erkenning* (“In Search of Recognition”),¹⁹ and *Niemandland* (“No Man’s Land”) by Duke Blaauwendraad-Doorduyn, as well as texts about collaboration clearly marked as novels such as Louis Ferron’s *Hoor mijn lied, Violetta* (“Hear My Song, Violetta”), D.A. Kooiman’s *Montyn* (“Montyn”), and Ten Hooven’s (pseud.) *De lemmingen* (“The Lemmings”).

A final sub-genre within this group is comprised of narratives dealing with the experience of World War II in Indonesia, then the Dutch East Indies, the occupation

8 by the Japanese, and the consequences of the fact that the colonials were forced to repatriate when Indonesia gained independence after the war. Works about this period and the memory of it include Jeroen Brouwers' novel *Sunken Red*, numerous memoirs such as Beb Vuyk's *Kampdagboeken*,²⁰ ("Camp Diaries") the voluminous writings of Rudi Kousbroek, and novels about the desire to return to one's parents' homeland, such as Ernst Jansz's *De overkant* ("The Other Side").²¹ The publication of these works was supplemented by a flood of books, booklets, articles and studies in various fields which signaled the fact that the Dutch were still very much interested in the history of the war and its aftermath.

What is of particular interest in the Dutch literature of the 1980s which deals with the memory of the occupation is not just the fact (which may surprise some) that such narratives are still being published and that the memory of the war is still a matter for public discussion, but also that there has been a clear shift in the locus and meaning of such arguments. Those traditionally assumed to have been affected by the war include victims such as survivors of the Holocaust, their children (for whom "survivor's guilt" is a central concept), and members of the Resistance (whose position as Dutch heroes has long been firmly established). In the 1980s the exclusivity of these two groups was challenged to include a much broader spectrum of the population. Members of more and more constituencies, all of whom we may identify as "children of the war", begin to identify themselves as having been affected by the events of World War II, as having their lives and identities changed by the memories – the history – of what happened in the first half of the fifth decade of this century, even events which happened to their families when they were very young or not even born yet. What emerges is a "continuum of survivors" which begins with the groups acknowledged as victims from the start, such as survivors of the Holocaust and members of the Resistance, and now includes other groups as well.

Another striking feature of these texts concerned with the memory of World War II and its aftermath is not merely their number, but also the fact that so many of these fictional and nonfictional works which portray the experience and memory of the occupation of the Netherlands during World War II consist of representations of children, of their experience of childhood, and of the ways in which the rest of their lives are influenced by their early experiences. The World War II period is represented as having a profound effect, whether protagonists experienced it as young people, as children, or only indirectly, mediated by their parents; all these categories of not-yet-adult persons affected by World War II are included in the term "children of the war".²²

These texts presenting childhood memories of World War II confront the critical reader with problems of the relationship between childhood memory and historical accuracy. Are such texts an objective statement concerning the period of World War II, or are they portrayals of troubled childhood years? On a more specific level, they also raise questions concerning the development of the self-image of the Dutch.

It is instructive to note a central feature of common speech in Dutch when thinking of the course of Dutch history in the 20th century. In common parlance, World War II is known to speakers of Dutch as "de oorlog" (the war). What is curious about

this widespread usage is not merely the inclusion of the definite article – “the” war – but the choice of noun itself: “war” rather than the more historically accurate “occupation” (*de bezetting*). Admittedly, the famous televised history of the years 1940-1945 featuring Dr. L. de Jong mentioned above bears the title *De bezetting*.²³ However, the more commonly used term reflects the historically less accurate expression of the experience of the Dutch populace. The Netherlands was forced to surrender a mere four days after the surprise attack by the Germans in May of 1940. Although Dutch individuals joined in the war effort, for instance as members of the SS, their behavior was considered treasonous by the bulk of the population, in a move that per definition made such a person “un-Dutch”.²⁴ The northern part of the Netherlands, the last to be liberated, was under German occupation from May of 1940 until May of 1945, but the population nevertheless often refers to this period as “the war”. In the course of this study, I investigate the implications of this definitional relocation as it is practiced in contemporary literary culture.

THE OCCUPATIONS OF FAMILIES

The community’s practice of writing/producing and reading/consuming narratives about this occupation renamed “war” invites interesting questions about the functions these cultural practices fulfill. For example, the shift in terminology creates and sustains the image of an occupied populace as combatants rather than citizens, and of communal behavior during the occupation as a protracted (either overt or inner) conflict. In addition, these narratives, in presenting history and memory on the same stage, contribute to a discourse on the nature and function of memory. The experience of the war fades into history, and its literary treatment also changes; the minds of those who lived through the war display a shift in focus from the experience of that period to memory, on the one hand, and to its implications for the survivor, on the other. Alongside this shift, one also finds an interesting and useful dynamic posed by representing “remembered” time, which coincides with the childhood of the texts’ central characters. Their memory of “the war”, seen through the lens of a depicted childhood and its traditional thematic connections within the circle of family and peers, becomes a story of a kind of “family occupation” in three senses. In the first place, there is an occupation (one could call it a pre-occupation) of the dynamics within the family by (and with) issues in the forgotten or repressed past. Secondly, the much-maligned occupying forces were paradoxically viewed, by some at least, as ethnic “brothers”, and were sometimes aided by local collaborators. This fact of family resemblance between the Dutch and German peoples and between loyal Dutch citizens and Dutch Nazis fundamentally complicates attempts to equate foreignness with the enemy and to view one’s own nation as purely the victim. This phenomenon begins and ends within the realm of the childhood subject and the larger circle of family as I consider various seminal Dutch-language novels and investigate the interactive construction of notions of childhood and occupation by exploring broad-

10 er concerns about the maintenance of binary oppositions such as victimization/collaboration and fiction/nonfiction in these contexts.

The third meaning suggested by “A Family Occupation”, has to do with the long-standing discord among Dutch victims of the occupation. They are permanently related to each other, but they nevertheless insist on comparing their differences, much as sibling rivals do.²⁵ Some non-Dutch readers will be surprised at the notion that survivors of the occupation would sort themselves into individual constituencies – the groups along the “continuum” I name in my study – rather than immediately recognize their essential solidarity. It is easier to understand when one keeps in mind the 20th-century tradition in the Netherlands of “pillarization”, the principle of dividing society into groups of people who share similar epistemic commitments (“pillars”) rather than just along class lines (“strata”). Although pillarization has withered in the course of the century, the predisposition toward joining groups of like-minded people has persisted in the Dutch character.²⁶

In the following pages, I will briefly describe the most important points along this continuum, i.e. the various “kinds” of survivors. I present a number of works of fiction and non-fiction from the 1980s which have the memory of World War II as their central theme. The titles which I have chosen from the many available in order to attend to them in this study are representative of certain approaches and themes which were prominent in the 1980s.

I do not claim to be offering complete or final interpretations of the texts I discuss, or the final word on any of the texts I mention, nor do I claim that these texts are the only ones which qualify for inclusion in a study of the discussion of the memory of World War II. This study is intended as a necessarily limited, unabashedly engaged, but certainly good-faith contribution to a centrally important discussion.

I expect that some readers will disagree with some of my interpretations. Perhaps others will offer examples from texts or writers other than those I discuss. Both the facts worthy of remembrance and the meanings accorded to such facts are negotiable. I am persuaded that memory is a community project as well as a personal reality, and that it is in the interplay – be it push-and-pull or give-and-take – between those poles that we human beings can work out our “family arguments”.

VARIOUS VICTIMS : THE CIRCLE WIDENS

Harry Mulisch’s *The Assault*, Marga Minco’s *The Glass Bridge*, and Rudi van Dantzig’s *For a Lost Soldier* look at children as victims of the occupation, and introduce some paradigms of what it means to be a victim. This problem, I argue, became important in the 1980s. From several texts of Armando’s published in the 1980s, I have chosen *De straat en het struikgewas*. All his literary works up until that point, to be sure, would be thematically relevant; I chose this text because it can in some sense be said to be a novel (most of his literary work is much more fragmentary) and because its protagonist is a child. For my discussion of narratives by the children of collaborators, I pay closest attention to Rinnes Rijke’s *Niet de schuld, wel de straf. Herinnerin-*

gen van een NSB-kind (“Punished, Though Innocent; Memories of the Child of a Member of the N.S.B.”)²⁷ and Hanna Visser’s *Het verleden voorbij* (“Beyond the Past”). Rijke’s book more clearly illustrates some of the ways in which the Dutch have fashioned their memories of the darker sides of their history in the middle of the Twentieth Century in such a way that collaboration becomes a useful foil for other social problems. Visser’s work is illustrative of an honest search for reconciliation and is particularly interesting because of the author’s close connection with “Herkenning”, the Dutch “self-help” group for children of collaborators.

The main characters of all these works are too young to have experienced the war as adults, too young to have participated in the wrenching political and moral choices which adults were forced to make during the occupation. Nevertheless, their lives were fundamentally influenced by the legacy of the war, and particularly by the effect the war had on them and their families. This “trans-generational traumatization” bears some resemblance to an effect which has been well known for a long time and has been treated as a syndrome among the families of Holocaust survivors.

Individuals who survived the Holocaust are commonly said not only to be deeply traumatized by their experiences, which frequently cause flashbacks and nightmares and a general habit of distrust toward other human beings, but also often to suffer “survivor’s guilt”, a deeply troubling response to the arbitrary factors which determined who died in the camps, and who survived. Their children are traumatized because they sense their parents’ pain, and because they are aware that their parents have had experiences too terrible and painful to discuss. They suffer from communication difficulties within the family, difficulties attributable to their own reluctance to ask questions or discuss painful issues.

In the 1980s, a surprising number of Dutch novels and nonfiction works, such as memoirs and diaries, presented the children of different groups, that is, children whose parents had experienced a wide variety of war histories, as suffering from similar symptoms. The syndromes presented in these novels can be traced back to the wartime experiences of the character’s family. A pattern develops; I will show that these “children of the war”, be they the children of victims, of bystanders, of collaborators, or of survivors of the Japanese concentration camps in Indonesia, are all shown to have suffered in similar ways.

“Children of the war” (“Kinderen van de oorlog”) was the topic of a convention of lay people and therapists interested in these war-related problems, which was held in Amsterdam in 1989. G. Bögels states that there were two reasons for choosing that title: first, because then-standard references to “second generation” had been under fire in the political arena, and secondly, based on an argument I find fully convincing, because “counting” generations appears to involve making distinctions which are more rigid than is necessary or useful. It is in all probability less relevant to a person’s development whether he or she was born after, during or even just before the war. More important is the fact that such a person grew up as offspring of parents seriously affected by the war, and in the midst of a culture still seriously focused on the war, its aftermath, and its meaning for the present and the future.