‘The weirdest of all wars’

AN EXAMINATION OF DUTCH IDENTITY AND NEUTRALITY IN THE SUMMER OF 1916

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Introduction

In the summer of 1916, German and Belgian children were invited to spend some time in the Netherlands to recover from the hardships at home. At this time, the Great War was raging on throughout Europe, the Netherlands however had managed to remain neutral. The neutrality allowed the Netherlands to undertake various private and official humanitarian acts, for instance ambulances were sent to the front and internment camps were set up for German and British prisoners of war. In a conference paper on Dutch humanitarianism during the First World War, Wim Klinkert proposes a likely experience of neutrality in the Netherlands. This includes adherence to international agreements on neutrality while many are being violated by others, and the harassment of the Netherlands by the belligerents.[1] All the same, Dutch people would still initiate humanitarian actions, such as the one for German and Belgian children. Although the arrival of these children, especially the German children, evoked quite a fierce debate.

This debate, which focused on sheltering German children in the Netherlands in 1916, was dubbed 'the weirdest of all wars' by a Dutch newspaper towards the end of the debate.[2] This is a bold statement compared to the actual war raging through Europe, however the debate did cause controversy that was finally halted by a statement from the Dutch Prime Minister.[3] Newspapers that participated in this debate were both more nationally and regionally oriented and some of the major newspapers such the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *De Telegraaf*, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and *Het Nieuws van den Dag* participated in the debate. This thesis is focused on this debate and its participants, which also included people who sent letters-to-the-editor. This thesis will research how popular opinion in the Netherlands perceives Dutch identity and neutrality during the First World War. By zooming in on a case study, such as the newspaper reporting of a Dutch private humanitarian initiative to shelter German and Belgian children, the various intricacies connected to the Dutch experience of the Great War come to light. This private humanitarian initiative may also be referred to in the newspaper coverage as providing aid, relief or shelter for German children.

The Netherlands in the First World War

Historical research on the Netherlands during World War I can be divided into pre-1990s research and post-Cold War research. The former is a period of little research interest into the war-experience in the Netherlands. Firstly, because of how the role of neutrals in the War was viewed by the belligerents,

[1] Wim Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: the soft power of neutrality. The case of the Netherlands 1914-1918', paper presented at Conference: Security and Humanity in the First World War, London, January 2019, 1-2.
[2] 'Nederland als kinderkamer', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 19 August 1916, p.9.
[3] Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: soft power neutrality', 2-3.

which was perceived as insignificant.[4] However, one notable contribution was made in the Netherlands by Charlotte van Manen on *De Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij*, a Dutch company engaged in trade while remaining neutral.[5] Secondly, after World War II, Dutch historical research of the wars in the twentieth century focused mainly on the events and impact of the Second World War, which weighed heavily on Dutch collective memory.[6] The only significant Dutch contributions were made by C. Smit, first name unknown, in his three-volume history *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919)* and another book in 1975.[7] Researchers outside the Netherlands also occasionally covered the Netherlands during World War I.[8]

After the end of the Cold War, interest in the Dutch history during the First World War picked up. This reflects a more general trend in renewed interest into the history of the First World War.[9] This resulted in the publishing of more general, introductory books, such as that of Paul Moeyes *Buiten Schot* (2001), or two collaborative books *Leven naast de catastrophe* (2001) or *Wankel Evenwicht* (2007).[10] These had the purpose to prompt further research, other books, however, focused on specific overlapping topics. For example, Marc Frey wrote about the Netherlands during the First World War being situated between the United Kingdom and Germany from a political and economic perspective.[11] Maartje Abbenhuis, a historian from New Zealand and an expert on neutrality, wrote in 2006 about Dutch neutrality and the impact of militarisation on Dutch society, whereas Hubert P.

[4] Ismee Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten': Oorlog, Neutraliteit En Identiteit in Het Nederlandse Publieke Debat, 1914-1918* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 12-13.
[5] Charlotte van Manen, *De Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij: Middelpunt van het Verkeer van Onzijdig Nederland met het Buitenland tijdens de Wereldoorlog 1914-1919* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1935).
[6] Piet de Rooij, Preface to *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918*, written by Maartje Abbenhuis (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 14; Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten'*, 12.
[7] C. Smit, *Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1899-1919)*, Vol. I. 1899-1914. II. 1914-1917. III. 1917-1919 (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1971-1973); C. Smit, *Tien Studiën betreffende Nederland in de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Groningen: Tjeenk-Willink, 1975).
[8] Diane Faye Sanders, 'The Netherlands in British strategic planning, August 1914 – November 1918' (PhD dissertation, University of London, 1975); Hermann von der Dunk, *Die Niederlande im Kräftespiel zwischen Kaiserreich und Entente* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980); James John Porter, 'Dutch Neutrality in Two World Wars' (PhD dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1980).
[9] Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten'*, 11.
[10] Paul Moeyes, *Buiten Schot: Nederland Tijdens De Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 2001); Hans Binneveld, et al., eds, *Leven Naast De Catastrofe: Nederland Tijdens De Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001); Martin Kraaijestein and Paul Schulten, eds., *Wankel evenwicht: Neutraal Nederland en de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2007).
[11] Marc Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg Und Die Niederlande: Ein Neutrales Land Im Politischen Und Wirtschaftlichen Kalkül Der Kriegsgegner* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998). Other publications on economics in the Netherlands around the First World War: Hein Klemann, *Waarom bestaat Nederland eigenlijk nog? Nederland-Duitsland: Economische integratie en politieke consequenties 1860-2000* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Faculteit der Historische en Kunstwetenschappen, 2006); Hein Klemann, and Friso Wielenga, eds, *Deutschland Und Die Niederlande: Wirtschaftsbeziehungen Im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2009); Jeroen Euwe, 'Dutch-German relations after the Great War. Interwoven economies and political détente, 1918-1933' (PhD dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2012); Joep Schenk, 'Oorsprong van een wederzijdse afhankelijkheidsrelatie tussen Rotterdam en het Ruhrgebied 1870 – 1914' (PhD dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2015).

Tuyll van Serooskerken an American historian, wrote in 2001 about Dutch neutrality, militarisation and the government.[12]

These books by Abbenhuis and Tuyll van Serooskerken deal with the implementation of neutrality, which is also addressed in *Guarded Neutrality* by Susanne Wolf on the internment of belligerent troops in the Netherlands.[13] Implementing neutrality also meant humanitarian acts, for example an article by Leo van Bergen on medical aid provided by the Netherlands or *Oorlogsgasten* by Evelyn de Roodt on the treatment of refugees and prisoners of war among others.[14] Humanitarianism was also researched in relation to Dutch identity in a conference paper by Wim Klinkert. In this paper he discusses four cases of humanitarianism in the Netherlands, among which the sheltering of German children.[15] He also co-authored the book *Nederland Neutraal* with Kruizinga and Moeyes, which focuses on nine political elites with their perceptions and ideas of Dutch neutrality. It offers a varied conception of neutrality, due to the different backgrounds of the people researched.[16]

The Netherlands was also seen as a 'small state' in the time before, during and after the First World War, which effectively also had ramifications for Dutch foreign policy. Samuël Kruizinga dives into this issue in his article 'A Small State?' (2016), in which he also links the foreign policy to a sense of national identity.[17] The idea of Dutch 'national identity' during the Great War was also researched by Ismee Tames in her book *'Oorlog voor onze gedachten'*. The Dutch 'public debate', on the status of the Netherlands in the contemporary world order, is her primary research focus in her quest to find how the 'national identity' is described. She argues that three concepts dominate the public debate on a national identity during the War: 'Law and Justice, Peace, and Democracy'. As the war progressed, these concepts were used, in this order, to conceptualise a Dutch identity in relation to the dynamics of international relations.[18]

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[12] Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Hubert P. van Tuyll van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I: Espionage, Diplomacy, and Survival* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Another publication on the Dutch military during the First World War is: Wim Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality: The Netherlands Prepares for War, 1900-1925*, in History of Warfare, Vol. 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[13] Susanne Wolf, *Guarded Neutrality: Diplomacy and Internment in the Netherlands during the First World War*, History of Warfare, Vol. 86 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[14] Leo van Bergen, ''Would it not be better to just stop?' Dutch medical aid in World War I and the medical anti-war movement in the interwar years', *First World War Studies* 2, no:2 (2011): 165-194; Evelyn de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten: Vluchtelingen En Krijgsgevangenen in Nederland Tijdens De Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, 2000).

[15] Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: soft power neutrality', 1-2.

[16] Wim Klinkert, Samuël Kruizinga, and Paul Moeyes. *Nederland Neutraal: De Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914-1918.* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2014).

[17] Samuël Kruizinga, 'A Small State? The Size of the Netherlands as a Focal Point in Foreign Policy Debates, 1900–1940' *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no.3 (2016): 420-436. Publications focused on Dutch foreign policy, including the First World War, are: Joris Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles: A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979); Duco Hellema, *Dutch Foreign Policy: The Role of the Netherlands in World Politics*, translated by Murray Pearson, in International Relations Studies Series 6 (Dordrecht: Republic of letters).

[18] Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten'*, 11, 19, 27-28.

Tames refers to the main actors in this public debate on a national identity as 'opinion makers' or 'publicists'. These people are mainly upper class and include the intelligentsia, however, this is not the reason they were selected. She firstly examines the concepts that were used, not the people who used them. And secondly, she selected only those who spoke out in relation to these concepts and thus entered the public debate on the issue of national identity. Tames does state that she is aware that these people are not representative of the whole country, however these people did believe that they were propagating the idea of the people.[19] According to these people, the Dutch nation went from being a 'moral arbiter who had the Law on his side' at the start of the war, to a 'mediator for pacification of differences between belligerents' half-way through the war, to a 'worried and docile people' at the end of the war.[20] As this is only the view of those who published in the public debate using the concepts of 'Law and Justice, Peace, and Democracy', Tames suggests further research could be done on the opinions regarding Dutch identity of the people.[21]

This thesis sets out to do so with the following research question: How does Dutch popular opinion perceive Dutch neutrality and identity during the First World War? To stay within the scope of the thesis, a case study of a stirring public debate on the humanitarian initiative for the shelter of German children in the Netherlands in the summer of 1916 was chosen. The research of the public debate will not address the three pre-determined concepts of Tames. Instead, the public debate will be shown and analysed as it developed in July-August 1916. In doing so, this thesis adds a new dynamic to the debate on the Netherlands during World War I, because of its unique topic and research focus on the Dutch people. The following secondary issues have been formulated to facilitate the research process: a) The context of neutrality and the Netherlands until the summer of 1916; b) the start and end of the public debate; and c) significant topics or key words used in the debate.

Public Debate and Newspapers

At the heart of this thesis is the public opinion of Dutch people on their identity and neutrality of their country. Public opinion, also referred to as public sentiment or popular opinion throughout this paper, is however an ambiguous topic that needs further clarification. Public opinion has been used frequently by researchers in various disciplines, however, there is no consensus on one definition of the concept of public opinion. According to Vincent Price, this concept represents the joining together of the individual and the masses.[22] Vincent Price is an authority on public opinion, social influence, and political communication, who wrote a book focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the history and usage of the concept of public opinion. His book, *Public Opinion*, served as inspiration to formulate an understanding of this concept for this paper.

[19] Tames, *'Oorlog voor onze gedachten',* 21-23.
[20] Ibid., 254.
[21] Ibid., 23.
[22] Vincent Price, *Public Opinion*, Communication Concepts, 4 (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 2.

The concept of public opinion is also closely related to the concept of public sphere.[23] The public sphere would constitute a forum where various societal issues could be debated, this idea was influenced by Christina von Hodenberg's conception on public sphere. She identifies mass media as one of the most important forums.[24] Similarly, Price relates the press to public opinion and to the public debate.[25] His definition of the public debate is the following:

> 'The term public debate seeks to describe a mass of people organizing into a public—in other words, people recognizing a problem, producing conflicting ideas about what to do, considering those alternatives, and trying to resolve the matter by building consensus for a line of action.'[26]

He distinguishes between two variations, firstly 'face-to-face' groups, and secondly 'large publics'. The focus in this thesis lays on the 'large publics', which mainly include political actors however, also individuals who are not directly involved with politics, i.e. the 'active public' and the 'attentive public' are included.[27]

Journalists and the press provide a space for the debate, however one that is not very interactive. As the 'active public', they are part of the debate and simultaneously shape and show the debate to the 'attentive public'. Price summarises their function to that of 'surveillance' and 'correlation'. The 'attentive public' is usually spectator to the debate, however, an individual can become involved in the debate when they express their opinion.[28] These individuals could do so for instance by writing letters-to-the-editor that could be published by newspapers. Letters-to-the-editor invited interaction where this was otherwise not possible, which is argued by Harm Kaal and Vincent van de Griend, authors of a chapter on how to analyse the 'voice of the people', however, in a different timeframe.[29]

Based on the above discussion on public opinion, public sphere and public debate, the following idea of public opinion will be used in this thesis. The main research focus is on the 'attentive public', for example through letters-to-the-editor, but also on the reporting of the press in their capacity to shape how events are perceived. The goal is not to find one general public opinion, but to find and observe different opinions and arguments in the public debate, which is not from the political elites but rather bottom-up. For this purpose, newspapers are good primary source material, as

[23] Price, *Public Opinion*, 9-10.
[24] Christina von Hodenberg, 'Mass media and the Generation of Conflict: West Germany's Long Sixties and the Formation of a Critical Public Sphere', *Contemporary European History* 15, no.3 (August 2006): 369, footnote 6.
[25] Price, *Public Opinion*, 12-14.
[26] Ibid., 74.
[27] Ibid., 76-78.
[28] Ibid., 18-83.
[29] Harm Kaal and Vincent van de Griend, 'Postwar Popular Politics: Integrating the Voice of the People in Postwar Political History', in *New Perspectives on Power and Political Representation from Ancient History to the Present Day*, eds. H. Kaal and D. Slootjes (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 129.

is argued by Jerry W. Knudson. The historian and professor emeritus of journalism, Knudson states that newspapers are an 'index' of public opinion, since they both conform to and are formed by 'popular attitudes'. A historian then should research and show newspaper reporting, thus making clear what was available to the general public.[30]

Knudson, Price and Stephen Vella who have worked with newspapers or wrote on how to work with newspapers, emphasise that the background of the newspaper should be taken into account when working with newspapers. For example, newspapers are businesses that strive for profit, and they are simultaneously subject to power-structures. Furthermore, newspapers decide which reality is relevant to its readership.[31] The usability of newspapers as primary sources in this thesis is further confirmed by Frank Harbers, who wrote a chapter on the newspaper landscape in the Netherlands between 1869 and 1940. He, similarly to Knudson and Vella, argued that the newspaper defined and shaped 'reality' to its readership, but stated this specifically for the timeframe leading up to and including the First World War. In this period, the newspaper, in general, would develop its journalistic techniques, expand its readership and become more widespread. As result the press would have more influence on the formulation of 'public opinion' and 'collective identity'.[32]

This new proliferation of the press was the combined result of various developments in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth century. These developments included technological advances and educational improvement, which significantly increased the number of newspapers circulating in the Netherlands, from fifty-four thousand in 1850 to one million in 1910. Some of the largest newspapers that published articles on the sheltering of German children in 1916, include the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, *De Telegraaf*, *Het Nieuws van den Dag* and the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*. With the increase of newspaper circulation, the diversity in the Dutch newspaper landscape increased and also became more apparent.[33] Their diversity can be grouped by national or regional editions, as well as by independent, political and/or religious orientation. This has been conveniently arranged in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

[30] Jerry W. Knudson, 'LATE TO THE FEAST: NEWSPAPERS AS HISTORICAL SOURCES', From *Perspectives on History: The newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, 1 October 1993, https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/october-1993/late-to-the-feast. [Accessed 15/08/2023]
[31] Stephen Vella, 'Newspapers', in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, Second edition, eds. M. Dobson and B. Ziemann (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020) 217-219, 226; Price, *Public Opinion*, 76-78, 80-83; Knudson, 'LATE TO THE FEAST'.
[32] Frank Harbers, 'Naar een massapers, 1869-1940', in *De Krant: een cultuurgeschiedenis*, eds. Huub Wijfjes and Frank Harbers (Amsterdam: Boom, 2019), 122.
[33] Harbers, 'Naar een massapers, 1869-1940', 131-137.

Table 1 Dutch newspapers arranged by national or regional circulation[34]

National circulation	Regional circulation
Algemeen Handelsblad (1828)	*Tilburgsche Courant* (1869)
Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (1844)	*Rotterdamsche Courant* (1869)
De Tijd (1845)	*Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad (1878)*
Het Nieuws van den Dag (1870)	*De Amsterdammer* (1883)
De Telegraaf (1873)	*Leeuwarder Courant* (1752)
De Maasbode (1868)	
Het Volk (1900)	

Table 2 Dutch newspapers arranged by affiliation[35]

Liberal orientation	Socialist orientation	Catholic orientation	Neutral orientation
Algemeen Handelsblad (1828)	*Het Volk* (1900) – Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij	*De Tijd* (1845)	*Het Nieuws van den Dag* (1870)
Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (1844)		*De Maasbode* (1868)	*De Telegraaf* (1873)
Het Vaderland (1869) – Liberale Unie			
Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad (1878)			

The newspapers with a predominant political and/or religious affiliation are generally considered 'presse d'opinion', such as the *Het Volk* and *De Tijd*. They imparted meaning to the news in line with their orientation and that of their audience, which can be understood as the 'verzuiling' of the Dutch media landscape. The exception is with the 'liberal' newspapers, *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, and 'neutral' newspapers, *De Telegraaf* and *Het Nieuws van den Dag*. The former enjoyed 'independence and autonomy' detached from their orientation and strived to improve the news coverage and reporting for a more upper-class readership. The latter introduced a more engaging type of journalism in the Netherlands, focused on sensation and entertainment, to capture a 'mass audience. In this media landscape, *Het Nieuws van den Dag* and the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* focused on a wider readership in all layers of society. *De Telegraaf* wanted to compete with the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, and to attract a larger readership, the owner of *De Telegraaf* founded *De Courant*, to compete with *Het Nieuws van den Dag* and the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*.[36]

Not all the newspapers used in this thesis have been included in the discussion above, as this would be beyond the scope of this thesis. For the research, close to five hundred articles have been read via Delpher, which is part of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek of the Netherlands.[37] These articles, also included letters-to-the-editor. were published by many different newspapers and have been identified in Delpher by using "Duitsche kinderen" as search reference for the period between 22 July 1916 and 31 August 1916. All these articles have been read to gain a deeper understanding of the

[34] Ibid., 124, 128-129.
[35] Ibid., 124, 128-129, 137-139, 141, 147.
[36] Ibid., 1869-1940', 137-139, 141, 144-148.
[37] 'Wat is Delpher?', Delpher part of the Koninklijke bibliotheek, https://www.delpher.nl/over-delpher/wat-is-delpher/maak-kennis-met-delpher. [Accessed on 15 August 2023]

variety and width of the debate on the German children. To keep track of what has been written, the articles have been collected and collated in a personal database. Around sixty articles have been selected for further analysis and a subset of the analysed articles has been used in the main storyline of the debate.

Discourse Analysis and Comparison

Since the main primary sources are newspapers and the research is focused on the public opinion, the focus of the analysis lay on the use of language in the articles. Hence, employing a form of discourse analysis would prove to be the most effective approach to understand the public sentiment on the German children. This methodology has been accurately defined in the introduction by Benjamin Ziemann and Miriam Dobson in their book *Reading Primary Sources*. They offer seven point-checklist, however focusing on all seven is unrealistic for the scope of this research. Therefore, the main focus will lay on a selection of five of these seven points, while the others will not remain unnoticed. Firstly, the key concepts and binaries form the basis for this analysis. Secondly, the narrator and its position in the article will be included. Thirdly and lastly, the reality effect and the context will be taken into account. This last selection is important for a correct understanding of the newspaper articles.[38]

At the heart of this research is comparison with a synchronic focus. This entails that the focus of the research is on Dutch identity and neutrality within a certain shorter time period, which is in contrast to a diachronic approach. The form of comparison can be further narrowed down to an 'encompassing' comparison, formulated by Stefan Berger in a chapter on comparative history. Significant of an 'encompassing' comparison is the focus on multiple cases which have an 'overarching commonality', with the goal to find differences.[39] In this research, the commonality is the German children and the cases are the newspaper articles. The aim is to analyse different opinions and perspectives with the ultimate goal of a better understanding of Dutch identity and neutrality during the First World War.

One of the pitfalls of this way of researching is selection bias, for example that the focus is solely on the contrast, which would result in a distorted version of reality.[40] However, this pitfall has been taken into account by having read and categorised all articles that came up in the search, which has resulted in a familiarisation with the discourse. A second pitfall with the specific comparison used in this research is its scale. Many primary sources, or cases, have been read as part of the research of

[38] Benjamin Ziemann and Miriam Dobson, 'Introduction', in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (version Second edition.), eds. M. Dobson and B. Ziemann (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 1-16.
[39] Stefan Berger, 'Comparative history', in *Writing History: Theory & Practice*, 2nd ed., eds. Stefan Berger, Heiko Feidner and Kevin Passmore (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 189.
[40] Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparative history: methods, aims, problems', in *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, eds. Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (New York: Routledge, 2004), 24.

this debate. This could potentially result in an overflow of information in which the comparison is lost.[41] If executed correctly, however, this comparison will reveal the various intricacies of the different perspectives. Which is the ultimate reason for conducting this comparison, to contribute to the historiographical debate on the Netherlands during the First World War with a detailed and diversified account of public opinion.

Another pitfall of comparison, especially true for the synchronic, is that the comparison breaks with continuity of a larger development.[42] This is accounted for by also paying close attention to the larger context of the discourse on Dutch identity and neutrality, which is simultaneously part of the discourse analysis. Therefore, the first chapter is dedicated for the purpose of the context. The other chapters focus on the debate on sheltering German children and its development. The focus of the analysis is on, firstly, what are their arguments for or against German children, secondly, in what format is the article written, and thirdly, what is said about Dutch identity or neutrality. The whole debate lasts about a month between 22 July and 25 August 1916, the first half of this is discussed in chapters two and three, and the second half in chapters four and five. Overall, the discussion follows the build-up and development of the debate, the discussion is mostly arranged chronologically for the discussion of the first half, whereas the discussion of the second half follows a more topical approach.

[41] Berger, 'Comparative history', 194.
[42] Haupt and Kocka, 'Comparative history', 24.

Chapter One – Neutrality

Since the mid-1840s, the Netherlands has remained neutral in most European conflicts. According to Duco Hellema, a leading scholar in international relations and Dutch foreign policy, the Netherlands had two primary objectives in foreign relations. These objectives are to defend Dutch free trade and the colonial possessions, which they tried to achieve through 'non-involvement'.[43] Another leading scholar, Joris Voorhoeve, wrote a book about Dutch foreign policy, while being a smaller country. He identified three traditions in Dutch foreign policy: 'maritime-commercial', 'neutralist-abstentionist' and 'international-idealistic' traditions.[44] Hellema, however, contested whether these can really be seen as traditions by stating that the decision to remain neutral and protect free trade was made in reaction to the prevailing conditions and interests.

Similarly to Voorhoeve, Kruizinga, researched the link between smallness and foreign policy. However, he observed the following trends in the period from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century: Dutch self-identification went from small, but worthy of remaining independent to small, but with an exemplary morality to others. The implication is that Dutch foreign policy went from detachment to a more active role 'in maintaining European security and peace'.[45] This is exemplified by the Dutch role in the peace conferences hosted in The Hague (1899 and 1907). Whereas the stance of the Netherlands during the first The Hague Conference was more passive under Foreign Minister Willem Hendrik de Beaufort, the next Foreign Minister, Reneke de Marees van Swinderen, decided on a more active role as host at the second The Hague Conference.[46]

The latter Conference resulted in multiple conventions, of which two were important for the codification of neutrality: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land (Hague Convention V) and Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War (Hague Convention XIII).[47] In the list of countries that have ratified the conventions, the United Kingdom is a notable absentee. However, they were part of the London declaration of 1909, at which the prevailing judiciary provisions of neutrality, before World War I, were defined. Abbenhuis summarises the definition of neutrality as result of the declaration, as wartime relations between nation-states in conflict and nation-states that choose not to be in conflict. It states to impose firm commitments on the

[43] Hellema, *Dutch Foreign Policy*, 34.
[44] Voorhoeve, *Peace, profits and principles*, 42-54.
[45] Kruizinga, 'A Small State?', 423-425.
[46] Kruizinga, 'A Small State?', 425; Hellema, *Dutch Foreign Policy*, 52.
[47] 'Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land (Hague V); October 18, 1907', The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague05.asp; 'Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War (Hague XIII); October 18, 1907', The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague13.asp. [Accessed 15 August 2023]

'behaviour' of all warring and non-warring parties toward each other, and in exchange afford guarantees to neutral parties for territorial, security and trade rights.[48]

The threat to Dutch neutrality was two-fold, coming from both within as well as from outside the Netherlands. The status quo, of Dutch neutrality, was maintained from the outside because the Netherlands was too valuable to either belligerent camp to let the other have control over it, so neither violated Dutch neutrality. For Germany, it meant a way to bypass the British economic blockade, as well as a protection of its northern flank. The neutrality of the Netherlands meant for the United Kingdom and Entente a place for information gathering. However, the United Kingdom also could not breach Dutch neutrality, since they entered the war with Germany to defend the neutrality of Belgium. Therefore, the United Kingdom could not breach the neutrality of the Netherlands, as it would contradict with their own principles.[49]

This idea, however, would blur as the war progressed, choosing necessities for the war over the rights of neutral countries. An important example of this is the economic blockade tactic of the United Kingdom, which was tightened in 1916 to more effectively cut-off Germany, however this did interfere with the neutral rights of the Netherlands.[50] Here the geographic position of the Netherlands between the United Kingdom and Germany becomes apparent, it was symbolically 'caught between the devil and the deep blue sea'.[51]

The other risk for Dutch neutrality came from within, since the Netherlands had to carefully adhere to its neutrality. This is clarified by Maartje Abbenhuis, she stated that to remain neutral, the Netherlands, as a small state, had to act under the legal conditions, all the while appeasing both belligerent parties. At the same time, neutrality was associated with idealism by the public, however in practice a more pragmatic approach was prevalent.[52] Similarly, Porter and Tuyll van Serooskerken observe a division between 'idealistic and pragmatic neutralists', he describes the former as adhering to a strict reading of international law, whereas the latter would allow compromise to retain Dutch neutrality.[53]

Unfortunately for the Netherlands, any act by or in the country could be used by the belligerent powers as reason to breach Dutch neutrality. Therefore, the Netherlands had to do everything possible to remain neutral, executing responsibilities of a neutral power, but also the Dutch

[48] Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, p.23. For more research on neutrality before, during and after the First World War see: Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Samuël Kruizinga, 'Neutrality', Chapter 1 in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, edited by Jay Winter, The Cambridge History of the First World War, 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 542–75.
[49] Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 24-25, 31-33; Tuyll, 128
[50] Eric Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914-1919*, Cass Series: Naval Policy and History, no.24 (London: Frank Cass, 2004) 115, 130.
[51] Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 267.
[52] Ibid., 35.
[53] Porter, 'Dutch Neutrality Two World Wars', 1-2; Tuyll van Serooskerken, *Espionage, Diplomacy, and Survival*, 3.

people had to remain 'strictly neutral'.[54] Abbenhuis noted that 'humanitarian activities' were politically used as a means of showing the importance of respecting Dutch neutrality.[55] Examples of these humanitarian acts include ambulances that were sent abroad to assist in the belligerent countries, the arrival of many Belgian refugees, or the treatment of prisoners of war.[56] Klinkert, asserts that humanitarian aid was deemed a 'traditional Dutch virtue', 'it gave reason for pride' to the 'Dutch public'.[57]

An act that directly opposed Dutch neutrality was the smuggling of contraband along the Dutch border. Abbenhuis wrote a chapter about this phenomenon in *Wankel Evenwicht*, in which she stated that most people did not realise that the smuggling was a threat to Dutch neutrality. For example, these people merely wanted to help their family and friends across the border, however, others did consciously know what they were doing.[58] However, at the same time, Hak Holdert, the owner of *De Telegraaf*, was accused of aiding and abetting the Allies by reporting on the smuggling. Although the English officials were aware of the smuggling, the English press was not, and the Dutch government did not want them to know about it.[59]

De Telegraaf was involved in various scandals, being too outspokenly 'anti-German', which posed a threat to Dutch neutrality. However, they were also the most widely distributed newspaper in the Netherlands in 1915.[60] During the First World War, most Dutch newspapers made sure to not write anything that could thwart Dutch neutrality through 'self-censorship' and remaining unbiased on the belligerents. However, *De Telegraaf* with their new sensationalist type of news reporting and coverage, chose the side of the Allied powers and being 'anti-German'.[61] According to Tames, 'polarisation in the public debate' became more prevalent in 1916. Among the opinion makers researched by Tames, the idea of repressing 'unpatriotic' influences was important, one of whom was J. A. van Hamel who almost single-handedly took out the newspaper *De Toekomst* for being a tool for German propaganda.[62]

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[54] Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 25, 262-263.
[55] Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 35-36.
[56] Leo van Bergen, ''Would it not be better to just stop?' Dutch medical aid in World War I and the medical anti-war movement in the interwar years', *First World War Studies* 2, no:2 (2011): 165-194; Evelyn de Roodt, *Oorlogsgasten: Vluchtelingen En Krijgsgevangenen in Nederland Tijdens De Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, 2000); Susanne Wolf, *Guarded Neutrality: Diplomacy and Internment in the Netherlands during the First World War,* History of Warfare, Vol. 86 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
[57] Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: soft power neutrality', 12.
[58] Maartje Abbenhuis, 'Als de oorlog aan de deur klopt: de aantrekkelijkheden, gevaren en mogelijkheden van neutraliteit aan de grenzen van Nederland, 1914-1918', translated by Paul Schulten in *Wankel Evenwicht: Neutraal Nederland En De Eerste Wereldoorlog,* eds. Martin Kraaijestein and Paul Schulten (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2007), 56-57.
[59] Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten',* 83.
[60] Ibi., 83.
[61] Harbers, 'Naar een massapers, 1869-1940', 154.
[62] Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten',* 61-65, 75; Ismee Tames, ''Waarlijk niet voor theoretisch twistgesprek.' J.A. van Hamel en de Nederlandse neutraliteit', in *Wankel Evenwicht: Neutraal Nederland En De Eerste Wereldoorlog,* eds. Martin Kraaijestein and Paul Schulten (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2007), 62-84.

This polarisation, in 1915-1916, was characterised by the positions of 'pro- and anti-German', with a focus on what is best for the 'national interest and independence. Whereas these terms are associated with being 'good or bad' after the Second World War, these terms in the First World War were used to accuse someone of being a 'bad patriot' in the public debate, and therefore 'untrustworthy'. 'Pro- and anti-German' could also have multiple implications in the debate. It could refer to someone being too positive on Germany or too negative, but it could also imply that someone would want to join the fight with the Allied forces or that someone would encourage German annexation. The topics mentioned in the debate followed the events of the war, significant events in this period included the intensifying of the economic blockade, the sinking of the *Lusitania* or the internment of Dutch civilians in Germany.[63] So how did the debate on sheltering German children develop and what were its implications on Dutch identity and neutrality in the summer of 1916?

[63] Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten'*, 58-59, 89, 93, 259-261.

Chapter Two – The Children's Invasion

On July 22, 1916, *De Telegraaf* published an article stating a 'request' was made to charitable organisations for 'hospitality' to be provided to German children during the holidays. The article mentions that this request was met with 'sympathy' by these organisations.[64] However, in the following month, this subject would turn into a polarising debate in Dutch newspaper reporting.[65] The previous chapter outlined the context of Dutch identity and neutrality, the context is a key component to rightfully understand the debate that was about to unfold. The development of this debate is the subject of this chapter and the following three chapters, starting with the beginning of the debate. The aim of this chapter is to establish how newspapers wrote about the possible arrival of German children. The core of the chapter are the newspaper reports, such as the one above, which have been analysed using discourse analysis.

The first reports on the potential arrival of German children were made by *De Telegraaf* and the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* on July 22, 1916. The contents of both articles are quite similar, however the article in *De Telegraaf* goes into more detail and appeals to the goodwill of the people.[66] The article can be interpreted to have two goals, firstly to inform the people and secondly to provide an opinion on the information. The informative part of the article informs readers that the request for German children to be sheltered was made due to a foodstuff shortage in Germany, to which the Dutch institutions responded positively. By highlighting the binaries in the debate, 'pro-of anti-gevoelens', which have had a polarising effect on the Dutch public debate, the newspaper provides their own opinion on the matter.[67] According to the article, children should be seen as 'innocent victims' and should be given help regardless of one's opinion of either warring side.[68]

All through the debate on the arrival of German children, newspapers would copy articles or information from other newspapers that provided an update on the situation. As was also done with the next major update on 27 July. The update stated that seventy German children had passed through Zevenaar, a border-town in Gelderland, and was first published by *De Telegraaf* and the *Algemeen Handelsblad*.[69] While the overall textual message of the articles in all newspapers would be similar, the titles, however, differed significantly between newspapers. Some newspapers, such as *De*

[64] 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland', *De Telegraaf,* Avondblad 22 July 1916, p.5.
[65] Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: soft power neutrality', 2.
[66] 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland', *De Telegraaf,* Avondblad 22 July 1916, p.5; 'Duitsche kinderen', *Rotterdamsch nieuwsblad,* Derde blad 22 July 1916, p.9.
[67] Tames, *'Oorlog Voor Onze Gedachten'*, 58-59.
[68] 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland', *De Telegraaf,* Avondblad 22 July 1916, p.5. This specific article was later copied or edited and reprinted in several local newspapers: 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland', *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser courant,* 24 July 1916, p.2; [68] 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland', *Provinciale Noordbrabantsche en 's Hertogenbossche courant,* 24 July 1916, p.6.
[69] 'Duitsche kinderen naar ons land', *De Telegraaf*, Avondblad 27 July 1916, p.6; 'Arme kinderen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Avondblad 27 July 1916, p.6.

Telegraaf or *De Tijd*, named the article 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland'.[70] Others used a more emotionally charged title, such as the *Algemeen Handelsblad* with 'Arme kinderen', the *Zuthphense Courant* with 'Hongerige kinderen' or the *Arnhemsche Courant* with 'Slachtoffers van den oorlog'.[71] The latter newspapers chose to write a descriptive title with a judgement value, instead of a more neutral and factual title.

Another valuable aspect of this public debate are letters-to-the-editor, which are insightful to gauge the engagement and opinion of readers. These letters provided a platform to the 'attentive public' to express their opinions, concerns and emotions about the events. On 28 July, *De Telegraaf* published a letter-to-the-editor on this topic, which resonated with the broader themes of compassion observed in the changing titles of newspaper articles. However, the letter also places a caveat with this compassion, which, according to *De Telegraaf*, was shared among other letters-to-the-editor that they received. According to the published letter, sheltering German children will ease the 'encumbrances' experienced by Germany. In turn, this would aid Germany to 'durchzuhalten', which would mean prolonging the suffering in the occupied regions as well as the suffering of 'prisoners of war' and 'civilian internees'. The letter ended with a passive warning to those who are 'compassionate' to realise the consequences of aiding the German children.[72]

Whereas the previous letter-to-the-editor was unsupportive to aiding German children, the following letter, published and edited by *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, has an opposing message. To begin with, this letter has been published in a way where the actual writer has become the third person in the article. Therefore, the role and position of the newspaper, which is now more prominent, must be taken into account. The letter, as published by *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, echoes some of the aforementioned themes. The writer emphasises on the sadness of the case of the German children regardless of partiality and sentiment toward England or Germany. Firstly, the writer explicitly appeals to those who have children. Secondly, he calls for contributions to be collected to help the German children. Lastly, the writer augmented the imagined level of suffering of the German children by saying that they may have lost a 'father or brother'.[73]

On 2 August, a new theme would be introduced in the debate. Previously, newspapers would publish on the existence of the initiative and general updates around this. However, *De Telegraaf* revealed that on this day that the plan was to host three hundred thousand 'Belgian and German children'.[74] On 5 August a reader, Jeremias, sent in a letter explaining that he believed the majority of

[70] 'Duitsche kinderen naar ons land', *De Telegraaf*, Avondblad 27 July 1916, p.6; 'Duitsche kinderen naar ons land', *De Tijd*, Avondblad 28 July 1916, p.7.
[71] 'Arme kinderen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Avondblad 27 July 1916, p.6; 'Hongerige kinderen', *Zutphense courant*, 28 July 1916, p.1; 'Slachtoffers van den oorlog', *Arnhemsche courant*, middaguitgave 28 July 1916, p.2.
[72] 'Ingezonden stukken. Duitsche kinderen in Nederland', *De Telegraaf*, Ochtendblad 28 July 1916, p.3.
[73] 'Ingezonden stukken. Duitsche kinderen in Holland', *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, Ochtendblad 01 August 1916, p.5.
[74] 'Exodus van Duitsche en Belgische kinderen'. *De Telegraaf*. Ochtendblad 2 August 1916, p.2.

arriving children to be German. Regarding the aforementioned three hundred thousand children, he estimated that this amount would comprise of two hundred ninety-five thousand German children. He explained that he has no problem with the smaller group of five thousand Belgian children. His reasoning resonated with the letter of 28 July, believing that aiding German children would ultimately help Germany. However, Jeremias also added a new dynamic, postulating that this treatment of German children would be unfair to Dutch children.[75]

The reporting on the supposed number of German children, published by *De Telegraaf*, was often repeated in various newspapers. In the end, *De Telegraaf*, even went so far as to call the arrival of German children a ‘Duitsche kinder-invasie’, in an article on ‘De Duitsche kinderen’ of 9 August.[76] This shows how newspaper coverage evolved from mere updates to a stirring debate. *De Telegraaf*, the most-mentioned newspaper in this chapter, started out neutral and became increasingly opposed to the arrival of German children. They also published letters-to-the-editor with vehement arguments on this issue. Although the newspaper is not responsible for the content of these letters, they do choose to publish them. Other newspapers, however, chose a more neutral or positive approach to the German children. This can be seen in the various article titles given to an update on 27 and 28 July. As well as the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, who published a letter-to-the-editor asking to raise money to help and accommodate German children in the Netherlands in the summer of 1916.[77]

[75] 'Ingezonden stukken. 300.000 kinderen'. *De Telegraaf*. Ochtendblad 5 August 1916, p.3.
[76] 'De Duitsche kinderen'. De Telegraaf. Avondblad 9 August 1916, p.7.
[77] ‘Arme kinderen’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Avondblad 27 July 1916, p.6; ‘Hongerige kinderen’, *Zutphense courant*, 28 July 1916, p.1; ‘Slachtoffers van den oorlog’, *Arnhemsche courant*, middaguitgave 28 July 1916, p.2; 'Ingezonden stukken. Duitsche kinderen in Holland', *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, Ochtendblad 01 August 1916, p.5.

Chapter Three – Anti-Homeland?

As can be read in the previous chapter, the beginning of the debate became increasingly polarised and intense. This chapter focuses on a brief period in which many newspapers printed an article on the German children and what this meant for the Netherlands. This intensified the debate further. Whereas in the previous chapter the focus was on the German children, in this stage of the debate Dutch neutrality would increasingly come to the forefront. One of the first articles that discussed German children and neutrality is the article from 9 August 1916. This article of *De Telegraaf* referring to a children's invasion first expressed the compassion for the situation of the German children and reiterates Jeremias' argument on the needs of Dutch children. This was followed by a question whether England will not simply intensify their blockade politics to further corner the Netherlands.[78]

De Telegraaf argued that this is a real possibility when the Dutch people continue to aid German people and in effect the German war effort. The newspaper then continued to state that this act will dissatisfy the allied countries when the Netherlands cannot reciprocate the act for them. According to *De Telegraaf* the hospitality offered to the Belgian children cannot be compared to this case, since the Belgian children were under duress by a criminal party. On the question whether aid to German children would do 'more harm than good', the second of four letters-to-the-editor published on the same page in *De Telegraaf* stated that people have a duty to do a good deed, however this would be a crime if the act supports a criminal cause. In all these letters the fear of the loss of Dutch neutrality and freedom was echoed when it comes to retaliatory measures by the Allied countries.[79]

Throughout the debate thus far, newspapers have either published articles expressing their own opinions or copied articles from each other. However, at this stage of the debate, newspapers are starting to react and comment on opinions in articles and letters published by other newspapers. The news coverage of *De Telegraaf*, who were outspokenly opposed to the arrival of the German children, was heavily commented on and criticized in the following days.

On 10 August, *De Nieuwe Courant* was the first to do so. In the article, they explained the context of the situation of the German children, which is that the Allied forces were attempting to starve enemy population. However, they stated that this tactic infringed on the legitimate rights of neutral countries. *De Nieuwe Courant* suggested that *De Telegraaf* and those people in the Netherlands who have chosen to side with the Allied forces supported this tactic and perceived a threat to Dutch neutrality with the sheltering of German children. The article discusses why German children would come to the Netherlands and explains that well-to-do German parents have already sent their children to the Netherlands. *De Nieuwe Courant* points out that this is not feasible for children of

[78] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *De Telegraaf*, Avondblad 9 August 1916, p.7.
[79] 'Ingezonden stukken. De Duitsche kinderkruistocht', *De Telegraaf*, Avondblad 9 August 1916, p.7.

lower-income parents, hence Dutch people with German ties have tried to accommodate those less fortunate children.[80]

Refuting the statements in *De Telegraaf* on the number of German children and the veil of secrecy, *De Nieuwe Courant* portrayed *De Telegraaf* as a newspaper which wanted to be the 'saviour of the homeland' to conceal their 'anti-homeland practices'. Furthermore, the latter proclaimed that this initiative to invite German children to the Netherlands was made officially by the German embassy, which would conflict with Dutch neutrality. *De Nieuwe Courant* stated that this proclamation is false, which prompted a correction by *De Telegraaf* changing 'official' into 'unofficial'. *De Nieuwe Courant*, again, contradicted this statement. In conclusion, *De Nieuwe Courant* stated that citizens of belligerent countries have a 'freedom' to come to the Netherlands and thus that the German children do not pose a threat to Dutch neutrality.[81] When taken all into account, this suggests that *De Nieuwe Courant* believed that *De Telegraaf* and its activities are a threat to Dutch neutrality.

Het Nieuws van den Dag argued that *De Telegraaf* was deemed to hold 'dangerous' and 'partisan' views, as well as always trying to exaggerate differences. They also argued that the reasoning of *De Telegraaf* leads the Netherlands to side with the Allies in the war, if not with weapons than economically.[82] In the *Nieuwe Venlosche Courant* a similar article, accredited to 'huisgesin', was published. The article repeated the reasoning used in *De Telegraaf*, however states that this 'goes against the grain of humanity and of human sentiment'. According to the article, the statements made by *De Telegraaf* would damage the reputation of the Dutch people. As result the Netherlands would undeservedly become known as 'barbarians and inhumans'.[83] The *Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant* also used the word 'inhumane' to describe the Dutch people if the Netherlands would not help the German children. Furthermore, they label the articles of *De Telegraaf* as 'irresponsible provocations and hate-mongering'.[84]

De Telegraaf responded to some of the critical notes made by newspapers in the past days through a letter-to-the-editor on 12 August. This writer specifically referred to *Het Nieuws van den Dag* with their article 'Bange tijd' and why *Het Nieuws van den Dag* was ignorant of the 'grave danger' of helping German children. The writer asserted a legal basis, that a country had the right to expel aliens without means of livelihood. The postulation that followed was that in time of peace this was a right of a country, however, in time of war this was a duty. Failing to act on this duty would be a 'grave violation of neutrality'. How would the Entente, in retrospect, view our failings and our pretended neutrality? Why help Germany when they sank the Tubantia or 'incarcerate' Dutch

[80] 'Gastvrijheid voor kinderen', *De Nieuwe Courant,* avondblad 10 August 1916, p.8.
[81] Ibid., p.8.
[82] 'Bange tijd', *Het Nieuws van den Dag,* ochtendblad 11 August 1916, p.1.
[83] 'Onuitsprekelijk klein', *Nieuwe Venlosche Courant,* 12 August 1916, p.8-9.
[84] 'Hoever de haat gaat', *Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant,* 11 August 1916, p.1.

civilians?[85] This last question was also addressed by *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, stating that helping German children gave the Dutch government another opportunity to urge Germany to cease illegally imprisoning Dutch citizens.[86]

[85] 'Ingezonden stukken. De Duitsche kinder-kruistocht', *De Telegraaf*, avondblad 12 August 1916, p.5.
[86] 'Bange tijd', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, ochtendblad 11 August 1916, p.1.

Chapter Four – Strict Neutrality

The second half of the debate is analysed in the following two chapters, with a focus on Dutch identity and neutrality. The analysis of Dutch identity and neutrality will be addressed by examining what is written about it in newspaper articles and more importantly letters-to-the-editor. Whereas the analysis of the newspaper debate in the previous chapters was structured chronologically, the analysis in these chapters will be structured topically. Because of the large volume of newspaper articles and letters-to-the-editor in the reporting on the German children, the arguments in the reporting are better understood when broken down into separate topics. The previous chapter focused, in particular, on the position of *De Telegraaf* in the debate. Among other things, they stated that the initiative was shrouded in secrecy. However, Kellenaers, director of a Roman Catholic housing committee in Leiden tried to clear up this issue in *De Tijd*.[87]

Kellenaers clarified the Dutch idealism of helping all children affected by war. Since this was a success with Belgian children, the idea arose to help German children as well. In 1914-1915, this initiative was rejected by Germany, however, in the summer of 1916 German charitable organisations appealed to the Dutch institutions to help revive the plan. Kellenaers contended that this is done at a 'semi-official' level and that the support for the German children was similar to that for the Belgian children. Kellenaers agreed with *De Telegraaf* that first Dutch children should be aided, however, he referred to those residing in Germany. In conclusion, Kellenaers called the Netherlands 'the small country of grand hospitality'.[88] This phrasing was similar to a statement in a letter-to-the-editor published in *Het Nieuws van den Dag* on 14 August. The writer of this letter, Ds. F. W. Drijver, stated that the Netherlands should show 'wherein a small nation can be great'.[89]

The statements made by Drijver conflicted with some arguments made by Dr. David van Embden in a letter-to-the-editor to the *Algemeen Handelsblad* on 14 August. Van Embden began by regretting that he will argue against this charity for German children. However, he considered this his duty, because sheltering German children would set a 'precedent'. Van Embden wrote a three-pronged plea why helping German children was a bad cause. This cause would firstly clash with 'neutrality', secondly with 'morality', and thirdly with 'nationality'.[90] Drijver, on the other hand, stated that Dutch people needed to teach their children 'love' and 'hate to all that is war'. This conviction was evidenced

[87] 'Duitsche kinderen naar Nederland', *De Tijd*, 11 August 1916, p.6.
[88] Ibid., p.6.
[89] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, avondblad 14 August 1916, p.7. 'Ds' stands for pastor.
[90] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, avondblad 14 August 1916, p.5. Dr. David van Embden was a professor of economics at the *Gemeente Universiteit Amsterdam*, now University of Amsterdam. He also sat in the *Provinciale Staten* between 1910 and 1916, as representative of the *Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond*.

by Drijver's argument that Belgian and German children, and the situation of those children, should not be compared and that 'heartfelt compassion' should be shown to all victims of war.[91]

In his three-pronged plea against relief for German children, Van Embden's argument on neutrality was that Germany is a 'stronghold' that is under siege. He saw the relief offered to the German children as Dutch interference in this siege. Furthermore, he viewed the comparison between Belgian and German children as flawed, because care for German children had 'military-political' value while care for Belgian children did not. On morality, Van Embden stated that the result of the German children's initiative would be to strengthen the defiance of the German people and government against an ultimate defeat. He feared prolongation of the war, a nurturing of 'lust for annexing territory' of the Germans, which would lead to 'human massacre upon human massacre'. Neither German children nor the Dutch people could be held accountable for this suffering, but that should not justify a charitable initiative to help German children. Lastly, on nationality, according to Van Embden, the Netherlands would eventually lose its independence if Germany would win the war.[92]

Furthermore, Van Embden accused the Netherlands of lack of self-respect, given all the German misdeeds toward the nation in this war, if one then also provides charity to children from Germany.[93] The arguments made by Van Embden were immediately rebutted by the *Algemeen Handelsblad* and two days later *Het Nieuws van den Dag* followed suit. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* stated that it published Van Embden's letter, because they believed that more people shared his views, while at the same time they felt compelled to dispute his views. Generally, the arguments of the *Algemeen Handelsblad* were paraphrased by *Het Nieuws van den Dag*. Both newspapers agreed that Germany is a stronghold, however they argued that this stronghold is not under full siege because of its border with the Netherlands, over which the Netherlands had a sovereign right. Furthermore, *Het Nieuws van den Dag* argued that sending ambulances would break neutrality as much as it would be broken by relieving some of Germany's burden.[94]

Similar statements were made in *De Telegraaf* by Mr. H. Louis Israëls, who holds a Master of Laws, however he stated that the sheltering of German children does not contravene the Dutch Penal Code. At the same time, he believed that the sheltering of German children should be agreed upon by both belligerent parties, as not to breach neutrality. He emphasised that people draw resilience from the moral strength of a country, which might be more important than military or economic might. So, providing aid or relief to one of the belligerents, which would increase its moral strength, would only be allowed when both belligerent sides had officially agreed on this. He also addressed Germany being

[91] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, avondblad 14 August 1916, p.7.
[92] Ibid., p.5.
[93] Ibid., p.5.
[94] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, avondblad 14 August 1916, p.5; 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, ochtendblad 16 August 1916, p.1.

a stronghold under siege, arguing that non-combatants may only leave the stronghold with the consent of the Allied powers. Furthermore, would this be allowed, the return of non-combatants would no longer be possible because it would increase moral strength in Germany.[95]

The implicit message in the letter by Israëls was that the Netherlands must maintain a strict neutrality. Which is also the belief of F.W.H. Emons in a letter-to-the-editor to *Het Nieuws van den Dag*. He argued that the Allied powers would view the hospitality to German children as an act of kindness to Germany, with the result that the Allied powers would turn against the Netherlands. Hence, Emons reasoned that the Netherlands should continue to stand for its assumed role of neutrality, no matter what. Just like Israëls, Emons also argued that German children were only allowed to be aided when both belligerent parties agreed on this, as well as that the aid thwarted one of the war tactics of the Allied powers. The editors of *Het Nieuws van den Dag* immediately replied to Emons, stating that what the belligerents thought of the Netherlands was not of her concern, and the Netherlands had a 'duty' to help others.[96]

Israëls did propose an alternative way to aid the German children, which would not conflict with Dutch strict neutrality as advocated by him. This would be made possible through the fifth Convention of the second Peace Conference at The Hague in 1907, which is regarding neutral parties. His proposal would make it possible to intern German children in Dutch care for the duration of the war in a camp, if the funding is provided by the German government.[97] In an article on 19 August, the *Tilburgsche Courant*, supporting aid to war children, found his proposal interesting and deserved food for thought, as it signals he was not against helping German children. However, the *Tilburgsche Courant* questioned the opinion of Israël that the way aid was now organized was 'unpatriotic' and 'perilous'.[98]

[95] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *De Telegraaf*, avondblad 17 August 1916, p.5.
[96] 'Neutraliteit', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, ochtendblad 22 August 1916, p.3.
[97] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *De Telegraaf*, avondblad 17 August 1916, p.5.
[98] 'De Duitsche-Kinderen', *Tilburgsche Courant*, 19 August 1916, p.1.

Chapter Five – Compassion

Interestingly, the article in the *Tilburgsche Courant* and the letter of Emons in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, have quite different views of the role of the Netherlands in this war. The *Tilburgsche Courant* stated that the allied forces would view the Netherlands nothing other than a 'fair, neutral and compassionate' party, regardless of the initiative for the German children.[99] Emons, on the other hand, described the role the Netherlands should have in the war as a 'fair, down-to-earth and unemotional' invisible observer.[100] The topic that will be discussed in this chapter, focuses on compassion, whereas the topic in the previous chapter focused on neutrality. The discussion below includes words, such as 'Menschlievend' and 'menschelijk'. These words share the common connotation of having or showing compassion with humans as persons and in deeds, e.g. human-loving, humane, humanitarian. They have often been used by Dutch newspapers and writers of the letters-to-the-editor and have both been used to argue for and against the initiative for German children. For example, the *Tilburgsche Courant* stated that the initiative started from a 'spontaan menschelijk medegevoel'.[101]

These two words have also been used in an earlier article published by the *Tilburgsche Courant* on 18 August. 'Menschelijk' was the word that they used to describe the 'Dutch nation' in an article reacting to a report published by the *Maasbode*. In this publication of the *Tilburgsche Courant*, they claimed to have copied and republished the whole article of the *Maasbode*, which includes several interesting statements. The *Maasbode* stated that the initiative for German children showed 'magnanimity' as well as 'menschenliefde'. This was also part of their core message in this article, hate versus love. They argue that hate fuelled this war, whereas love would bring peace. Through clever wording, the *Maasbode* has put a message across that boiled down to hate being attributed to the belligerent parties, whereas love is being attributed to neutrality. In their phrasing, they use 'food' to postulate that hate feeds warmongering, whereas neutrality feeds peace.[102]

The article ended with a statement about being 'truly neutral', which the *Maasbode* postulated to be the case when a neutral country encouraged rapprochement between the two belligerent parties to end the war.[103] The *Zutphense Courant*, however, believed that the Netherlands has already shown its neutrality. The newspaper argued that the Netherlands or Dutch people have started other humanitarian initiatives during the war, for example taking in Belgian refugees or providing ambulances to the front. According to the *Zutphense Courant*, a 'charitable spirit' was what the

[99] 'De Duitsche-Kinderen', *Tilburgsche Courant,* 19 August 1916, p.1.
[100] 'Neutraliteit', *Het Nieuws van den Dag,* ochtendblad 22 August 1916, p.3.
[101] 'De Duitsche-Kinderen', *Tilburgsche Courant,* 19 August 1916, p.1.
[102] 'Van kinderen en haat', *Tilburgsche Courant,* 18 August 1916, p.1. The article of the *Maasbode* is not available online.
[103] 'Van kinderen en haat', *Tilburgsche Courant,* 18 August 1916, p.1.

Netherlands was known for and one of its finest traits.[104] The *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant* even went as far as to state that those Dutchmen who opposed the initiative for German children are unlike the Dutch, or 'onnederlandsche Nederlanders'.[105] Something even more striking is that the outspoken professor J.A. van Hamel, advocated the initiative for German children in *De Amsterdammer*, which article was reprinted and commented on in *Het Vaderland.*[106]

The main premise of Van Hamel was that the Dutch people 'kept the fire of humanity burning', during a time of revulsion, hardship and cruelty. This follows closely the earlier mentioned articles and letters-to-the-editor, praising the Dutch people and identity. Although the publicist did feel the need to clarify that supporting this initiative did not make one pro-German. Van Hamel also gave arguments against claims that helping German children prolonged the war. In his opinion the pure existence of a neutral country such as the Netherlands prolonged the war.[107] All these arguments being in favour or against the arrival of German children for whatever reasons have led the *Leeuwarder Courant* to liken the Netherlands to a 'children's room'. Highlighting what they perceived to be 'childish' behaviour of adults on international, but insignificant affairs. The *Leeuwarder Courant* contended that this debate and its participants were threatening the status of the Dutch as down-to-earth. In the superlative, the newspaper referred to the debate as 'the weirdest of all wars', one which was being fought with 'letters-to-the-editor'.[108]

In line with the above statement of the *Leeuwarder* Courant, the editors in chief of the *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche Courant* wrote that in this period of 'peculiar circumstances', the pro- or anti-sentiments of people are enlarged. Which in turn means that proponents and opponents will not be able to convince the other and these letters-to-the-editor will only cause further friction.[109] Which is probably why some newspapers in this last part of the debate were calling to help the children regardless of one's disposition. The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* even suggested to form one all-encompassing shelter committee. [110] The debate on whether sheltering the German children in the Netherlands was a breach of neutrality would however be ended on 25 August 1916. On this day, *De Telegraaf* published a circular letter stating that the German government facilitates the initiative and that the initiative has been approved by Prime Minister Cort van der Linden.[111]

[104] 'Duitsche kinderen', *Zutphense Courant,* 19 August 1916, p.1.
[105] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant,* 21 August 1916, p.1.
[106] 'Een verstandig woord', *Het Vaderland,* avondblad 21 August 1916, p.5-6. The article of *De Amsterdammer* is not available online.
[107] Ibid., p.5-6.
[108] 'Nederland als kinderkamer', *Leeuwarder Courant,* 19 August 1916, p.9.
[109] 'Correspondentie', *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche Courant,* 22 August 1916, p.3.
[110] 'Duitsche, Fransche en Belgische kinderen in Nederland', *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant,* avondblad 22 August 1916, p.1; 'De hongerende kinderen', *Dragtster Courant*, 23 August 1916, p.2; 'Over Duitsche en andere kinderen', *Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche Courant*, 23 August 1916, p.1; 'De Vreemde Kinderen', *Leeuwarder Courant,* 23 August 1916, p.5.
[111] 'De Duitsche kinderkruistocht', *De Telegraaf,* ochtendblad 25 August 1916, p.2. Cort van der Linden was Interior Minister and Chairman of the Council of ministers, nowadays the Prime Minister.

Later that day, Prime Minister Van der Linden clarified that this initiative did not have his permission. However, those responsible for the circular letter did ask him whether the idea conflicted with Dutch neutrality, to which he responded that the initiative would not conflict with Dutch neutrality.[112] With this statement the debate would practically be discontinued.[113] However, symbolic for the end of the debate is an exchange between Charivarius in a letter-to-the-editor of *De Telegraaf* and a writer of a letter-to-the-editor of *Het Nieuws van den Dag* in response to Charivarius.[114] On 29 August, *Het Nieuws van den Dag* published a message after they had received a reply from Charivarius, this message stated that his reaction would not be published as they wished to stop the debate after everything that had been said.[115]

[112] 'De verzorging van Duitsche kinderen', *De Nieuwe Courant*, avondblad 25 August 1916, p.1.
[113] Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: soft power neutrality',3.
[114] 'Ingezonden stukken. Charivarius aan de Duitsche kinderen', *De Telgraaf*, avondblad 25 August 1916, p.5; 'Van de Duitsche kinderen', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, avondblad 28 August 1916, p.3.
[115] 'De Duitsche kinderen', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, avondblad 29 August 1916, p.5.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the primary issue researched is how popular opinion in the Netherlands perceived Dutch identity and neutrality, by zooming in on a case study in the summer of 1916. From late July to late August 1916, a public debate developed on the sheltering of German children in the Netherlands for a short period of time. Although this humanitarian initiative was set up at the same time that similar initiatives were helping Belgian children, the debate focused almost exclusively on the German children. Notions, ideas and perceptions of Dutch identity and neutrality emerged in the debate, as newspapers and writers of letters-to-the-editor voiced their opinions on the initiative for the German children. In one key sentence, the overall idea of Dutch identity that emerged on the basis of the debate is the following: The Dutch people are patriotic and take pride in showing compassion for those around them. However, as indicated in the introduction, that is not exactly what this paper seeks to explore.

Instead, the emphasis has been on the differences of ideas on Dutch identity and neutrality as expressed by the 'active public' and 'attentive public'. Through examining newspaper articles and letters-to-the-editor on the use of language several nuances became apparent. Firstly, the idea of 'national interest' was a common thread in this debate in 1916, as was also observed by Ismee Tames. Regardless of whether the public argued for or against the sheltering of the German children, many articles or letters used arguments that included the 'national interest'. Some, for example, argued that Dutch children should be aided first and then German children. According to Tames, 'pro- and anti-German' terms were often used by opinion makers and were also associated with 'national interest'. She stated that these terms were used to denounce someone as being 'unpatriotic', however in the public debate on the German children 'pro- or anti-German' was rarely used.[116] Instead, the phrases used in the articles and letters were focused on the homeland and being patriotic.

Secondly, many articles and letters touched on the topic of compassion in the debate. Early on in the debate, the plight of the German children was associated with emotionally charged words such as 'poor' or 'hungry', but also towards the end, the main message was that children should be aided regardless of feelings for the belligerents. Throughout the arguments in favour of helping German children, the term compassion was used to describe the sentiments of the Dutch people. Even Van Hamel agreed that this act was positive for the image of the Dutch people. Thus, people also believed that by showing compassion and humanitarianism, an essence of being Dutch was put into practice. Even people arguing against the German children, showed compassion, but not for the German children. They voiced their concern about the situation of those in occupied areas, those who were interned, and the allied soldiers.

[116] Tames, *'Oorlog voor onze gedachten'*, 259-261.

Thirdly and finally, neutrality was an important topic in the debate, which is also related to the 'national interest'. What becomes apparent throughout the articles and letters was the common belief that the Netherlands should maintain a strict neutrality. For this purpose, some letter-writers in the debate, emphasised international agreements to be strictly followed, others emphasised that both belligerent parties needed to agree on the method of the initiative before action was taken. Still others, however, argued that the vehement arguments against the aid for German children, mainly by *De Telegraaf*, endangered Dutch neutrality. When Prime Minister Cort van der Linden stated that the initiative did not contravene neutrality, the debate ended.

The findings of this research corroborate some of the earlier research carried out on Dutch identity and neutrality during the First World War. Firstly, the statement of Wim Klinkert that performing humanitarian acts was seen as 'traditional Dutch virtues' is also proven by the more detailed analysis of articles and letters-to-the-editor.[117] Which is, secondly, also the case for the contention of Samuël Kruizinga that morality was a central aspect of Dutch self-image in the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the First World War.[118] Thirdly, the conclusion of Tames stated that the perception of the Netherlands by the opinion makers, which went from a 'moral arbiter' to a 'mediator for pacification', was not shared in the articles and letters published in the newspapers. However, both the debate of the opinion makers and the debate on the German children showed that 'national interest' was an important theme in the discourses.[119]

This paper offers a unique angle into the research on Dutch identity during the First World War, one which has sparsely been researched. Even when identity was studied, the focus was on the political elite, foreign policy or people who are part of the intelligentsia. The interpretation of the Dutch identity provided in this thesis has an added value to existing research, as it employed a language-focused model of analysis on a carefully constructed comparison with a clear theoretical framework on public opinion and debate. Furthermore, the newspapers, as well as this case study on the debate of sheltering German children, have proven to be an interesting resource to find popular notions and beliefs of Dutch identity and neutrality. However, some critical reflection on the relevance of the findings of this thesis is also necessary.

Firstly, the content published in the newspapers in the form of articles and letters-to-the-editor are by no means representative of the ideas and beliefs of the whole population of the Netherlands. However, the chosen sources represent the best possible approach to research popular opinions, which was argued in the introduction. Secondly, the examined period and case study only concerns a small extract in the larger framework of the First World War. These findings are based on research covering one month halfway through the war, so whereas the overall findings can prove to be informative and insightful, they are not representative for the whole duration of the war. Thirdly, the case study that

[117] Klinkert, 'Humanitarianism: soft power neutrality', 11-12.
[118] Kruizinga, 'A Small State?', 423-425.
[119] Tames, *'Oorlog voor onze gedachten'*, 254, 259.

has been examined, is very specific and relevant for Dutch identity and neutrality, however it is ultimately intimately interwoven with perceptions on the initiative for German children.

Therefore, further research could be focused on Dutch identity in a case study on the sheltering provided to Belgian children, or another case study altogether as long as it focuses on popular opinion. Another interesting approach could be to go outside of the Netherlands and research Dutch identity from the perspective of public opinion in a foreign country. It would be interesting to see how outsiders would view this debate on the sheltering of German children in the summer of 1916, as the *Leeuwarder Courant* called it ‘the weirdest of all wars’. Even so, this debate proved insightful into the prominent beliefs and opinions of Dutch people regarding Dutch identity and neutrality. Which ultimately proved to be grounded in patriotism and compassion.

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