Concluding remarks

This book studied the politicization of private life in the Netherlands during the German occupation. In the first three chapters, I argued that many Dutch National Socialists were ideologically committed and politically active and that a small group of National Socialists was violent. In the fourth chapter, I concluded that, despite their National Socialist affiliations, NSB members continued to interact with the surrounding non-NSB community and institutions. While the interactions and activities shifted over time, these developments were gradual.

In this chapter of final remarks I will focus on different levels of the lives of NSB members: the individual member, the member in his or her local environment, the member versus the party, and the NSB member in Dutch society.

**Politicization: The individual member**

NSB members belonged to a political movement that demanded full participation and thus the politicization of their private lives. One of the results of this research is the finding that on the local level the degree of politicization was high. Politicization is related to both ideological commitment and political participation. Two thirds of the CABR sample were more or less ideologically committed to Dutch National Socialist ideology. Thus, National Socialist ideology played a role in the lives of individual NSB members. The National Socialist mindset influenced individual members; this Nazi ideology was a revolutionary form of fascism. It was not always ideology that attracted members to the party, but National Socialist propaganda influenced the majority of NSB members towards adopting a National Socialist ideology.

They also made their membership visible: half of the CABR sample expressed its NSB membership by wearing an NSB badge, 40% by wearing an NSB uniform, more than one out of three displayed an NSB flag, and half of the members had a function within the movement. Thus, NSB members were committed to both National Socialist ideology and action. The level of political participation was high. This is also related to the interconnectedness of ideology and action in National Socialism.

Apart from their high level of politicization, what are the general characteristics of
NSB members? Firstly, the socio-economic backgrounds of NSB members ranged widely: from factory workers to civil servants, from shopkeepers to intellectuals.\footnote{Similar to fascism theories: Michael Mann, 	extit{Fascists}, 18-22.}

A remarkable pattern is the high level of divorces within NSB families. Forty-four out of 322 NSB members in the sample experienced a divorce in their family. Unlike today, divorces were rare in the 1930s and 1940s in the Netherlands. The chances that an NSB member was divorced were approximately five times higher than those of an average Dutchmen, based on the research sample. This difference may have been related to the nonconformist choices of people who became NSB members. Perhaps these members were already rather nonconformist before joining the NSB. Perhaps they were already used to making choices that deviated from the common patterns in society. Thus, while in socio-economic backgrounds NSB members differed little from nonmembers, perhaps they were a bit more used to nonconformist choices than others.

\textit{The member versus the party}

The NSB party demanded full participation from its members. These demands caused frictions between (local) leaders and members. Tensions existed between the NSB leadership and local members.

The NSB organized both political and social life of its members. Political and social activities were often connected: biking around the country was aimed at propagating the party, but was also a “cozy” happening, as well as meetings at local NSB offices. The NSB broad along more than a political program; the NSB was a social network as well.

In the first years of the occupation, the NSB shifted towards becoming an increasingly inward-looking, elitist movement. NSB members were indoctrinated by a revolutionary ideology, which radicalized during the years of occupation. Failing in its attempts to reach out to the general public, the NSB decided to consider itself as a revolutionary vanguard. Thus, they distanced themselves even more strongly from the non-NSB Dutchmen. In that sense, the NSB continued to propagate a strong national Dutch community, but the non-members played a decreasingly part in the image of that community. This image was even more troubled, because the NSB increasingly incorporated
an image of a Nazi community – together with the German Nazis –, instead of a solely Dutch National Socialist society.

Dutch National Socialism was a revolutionary form of fascism and the National Socialist mindset increasingly influenced individual members. Local members recognized the movements’ revolutionary character. The revolutionary language was very visible in both national as well as local NSB newspapers. Still, there was a tension between the totalitarian claim of fascism and obstinacy of some local members. The self-directed behavior of NSB members conflicted with the fascist ideals of hierarchy and discipline. Some NSB members failed to submit to the party hierarchy. Even the paramilitary WA, which should have been the most disciplined unit of the NSB, acted autonomously. The NSB members set up local actions and had their own ideas about how the NSB organization should function.

Local NSB officials discussed the tensions between Dutch and German National Socialist ideas and goals; however, local members seemed less concerned with these debates. During the occupation the NSB increasingly adopted the positions of German National Socialism. In 1940, the NSB already was an anti-Semitic movement to begin with. The NSB embraced racial theories and in particular Anti-Semitism. The NSB supported German measures against the Jews in its propaganda. While anti-Semitism was basic to both Dutch and German Nazism, the NSB altered its views in other matters, because of its alliance with Nazi Germany. For example, the NSB minimized the importance of religion in its ideology; while the NSB in the 1930s had been pro-religion, religion became of decreasing importance in its organization in the 1940s. And while the NSB had been one of the most outspoken advocates of maintaining the Dutch empire with the Dutch Indies, it later decided to settle for colonization of Eastern Europe in line with German policy. The Dutch fascists coped with Japan thwarting their aim of a colonial empire by subscribing to the German Nazi ideal of colonization of Eastern Europe as a substitute. There were some internal disputes about the Dutch Indies and also on whether Dutch Nazis had to follow German Nazism. However, individual members seemed to be less interested in these disputes. In some cases the ideas of the party and members overlapped. In the end, both the national NSB organization and individual NSB members chose unconditionally to support Hitler and Nazi Germany.

In the meanwhile, the German authorities tried to use NSB members to carry out German policies. The paramilitary WA members were an attractive “nursery” for different
German organizations. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, the WA men were recruited to fight on the Eastern Front. The German occupation regime needed reliable manpower in the Netherlands as well; thus they recruited “trustworthy” people for the police. As such, the paramilitary part of the NSB was an intermediating organization for a collaborationist career.

In the final phase of the German occupation the situation became more extreme: half of the NSB members fled the country because the impending defeat in September 1944, thus they excluded themselves physically from Dutch society. Besides, the Dutch and German National Socialist institutions recruited Dutch NSB members for the Landwacht, who roamed through the streets. The Landwacht members performed police tasks, assisting the Dutch and German police. They were ordered to control identification cards, enforce the night-time curfew, destroy the black market and track down hiding people. Thus, they executed the most unpopular and visible tasks of the Nazi occupation regime. The Landwacht made the NSB an even more unpopular organization.

The NSB member in Dutch society

The high politicization of private life affected relationships in an NSB member’s local environment. One of the reasons was the claim of the National Socialist movement on individual members. The high level of politicization becomes even more relevant if we compare it to the low level of politicization of the non-NSB members in Dutch society.

In general, the NSB was detested. The perception of treason is the main reason for the antipathy towards the Dutch National Socialists. NSB membership was perceived as a continuous process of treason: every political act in support of the NSB was seen as an act in favor of the occupation and against the Dutch population. However, on an individual level the degree of antipathy depended on actual behavior. This finding reveals the tensions between institutional exclusion and individual interaction.

In the first year of the occupation, the delay in acquiring political power led to impudent behavior by some frustrated NSB members. The position of the NSB improved in the fall of 1941, and NSB members could enhance their power in local politics. Meanwhile, the interactions developed over time more in a centrifugal than centripetal direction. The
discrepancy between duties of NSB members and nonmembers increased. The paramilitary part of the NSB contributed to the negative image, which got even worse as in 1944, the generally detested *Landwacht* was founded. All these political decisions and social developments created a framework in which the NSB group and non-NSB group became further estranged on a group level, though, not necessarily on an individual level. NSB members, in the Netherlands as well as in Germany, were confronted with feelings of disillusion or radicalization as well as with the disintegration of the NSB and of Dutch governance.

The first social circle is the household. In half of the sample the spouses of NSB members were also aligned with the NSB; in half of the sample this was not the case. These different political ideas affected family life. In the case of the Hoebee family, the NSB membership of the wife and her children broke their family apart. After May 1940, when the meaning of the political choices of the different family members became so much more important in the politicized period of the German occupation, evidence of estrangement became greater.

NSB membership also affected relations at the workplace, in two ways. It changed relationships in “older” work environments, especially if NSB members had enhanced opportunities for jobs and promotions because of their party membership. However, the reaction depended on the specific environment: jobs in the NSB office or related organizations placed the member in an NSB environment, while jobs in, for example, the local government, where NSB membership was the reason for hiring or promotion, were more problematic.

These “fractured” relationships depended on whether the individual expressed himself as a member. The more a member tried to profit from his membership or was openly rude, the higher the chances of fractures in the relationships.

The neighborhood was one of the key focuses of this study. The case study of three streets in Amsterdam has broad different insights. Inhabitants of the streets revealed different patterns of interaction. Through this microstudy the politicization of NSB members on a local level becomes visible. It also shows that while “nice” neighbors were judged positively, “unpleasant” neighbors were judged very negatively. The broader sample of NSB members, in different cities and villages, show basically the same interaction patterns as the three Amsterdam streets.
The case studies and the broader sample of NSB members reveal that NSB members often continued their relations with neighbors, family members and coworkers. Because NSB members were not always recognizable as such in all contexts, they could behave as a non-NSB member. They had possibilities to work in non-NSB environments and to have identities outside their NSB membership, leading to a “mixed” identity of some NSB members.

Another factor is the status of the prewar relationships of NSB members. Former “misfits” maintained their outsider status. However, this outsider status may not have been fully caused by their party membership.

Under certain conditions NSB membership provoked negative reactions. For example, criminal NSB members were viewed unfavorably by those around them. In their case, NSB membership was a catalyst for previously held negative opinions. Witnesses testified unfavorably if an NSB member hassled or denounced people. In these cases, the testimonies corresponded with the general negative image of the NSB. Besides criminal behavior, the main determinants of individual rejection were: aggressive behavior, fanaticism, denunciations (unreliability), financial prosperity gained through unfair advantage and provocation. Thus, negative reactions followed when an NSB member terrorized his neighborhood, denounced his colleagues, profited from his membership financially or provoked the people surrounding him. However, if an NSB member refrained from these behaviors, the testimonies were mostly neutral or positive. NSB membership was not a sufficient reason to detest someone.

The negative image of the NSB member is widespread and visible in every statement of neighbors, colleagues and family members. Nevertheless more positive judgements were attached to specific individuals in terms of “despite his NSB membership, he was still a decent person.”

There are many attenuating variables and reasons for neighbors and coworkers to testify favorably about NSB members. In general, extenuating circumstances included helpfulness, being young and having grown up in a National Socialist family, quiet behavior, being “normal” and not causing any trouble. Whether someone was viewed favorably or not was largely related to the extent to which NSB membership affected the person’s actions and thus the non-NSB member personally. The ideological differences seem less important than provocative behavior. Thus, if NSB members did not create any problems, witnesses
distanced these members from the party’s general negative image. As long as the personal sphere was respected and people were not personally offended, neighbors were willing to speak favorably about those being tried.

Studying interaction patterns involves not only the NSB as a group but also the society in which the NSB members lived. Was the Netherlands a depoliticized society? Did the politicization of NSB members make it more difficult for nonmembers to relate, to understand, or to be attracted to them?

One of the key terms in describing the Dutch society is “verzuiling,” pillarization. The NSB copied in the end the system of the pillarized system it strongly opposed. One of the key issues in the NSB program was the abolition of the pillarized society, and to create a ‘volksgemeenschap’ (one of the key parts of fascism). In many aspects the NSB resembled prewar pillarized organizations: the NSB was over-organized with a sub-organization for every group. Plus, these organizations also tried to include civil society. However, in one aspect the NSB did not resemble the prewar pillarized system. While religion was one of the key dividing elements within Dutch society, the NSB tried to separate religion from politics.

While in the system of pillarization most groups had to mobilize their own supporters, the NSB had to reach out to other groups. Therefore they had to be more active, fanatic and above all more politicized than prewar pillarized groups. This leads to the question of whether the degree of politicization of NSB members was extraordinary in the Dutch political landscape. NSB members broke out, or had to break out, of the pillarization.

A small minority of the Dutch belonged to the National Socialist movement. While politically losing touch with the non-NSB majority they became a “fringe” culture within Dutch society. The NSB members developed a subculture on the border of society with political power based on illegitimate grounds. Whereas the political mobilization of NSB members was a success, the communication with outsiders was a failure. The NSB had become political insiders as a result of their political orientation and their leaning towards the occupier. At the same time, they remained cultural and social outsiders.

What does these findings add to international debates on fascism and collaboration? First, the NSB fits well into the authoritative definitions of fascism: as provided by Paxton and Mann: the NSB was indeed an revolutionary movement, aimed at building a completely new national community and economy, with a struggle of a hierarchy of race, with a focus on
empire and with paramilitary groups using violence means. In that sense, the NSB as such was a Dutch movement, and moreover most definitely a fascist movement.

Thus, the NSB was part of a larger international fascist movement. For this reason, we can compare the Dutch case with other countries. However, research on grass roots level collaborators is limited. The best case to compare with is Aline Sax’ research on Flemish collaborators. Comparing with the case of Flemish collaborators the outcomes differ. While we both argued the importance of ideology on the lives of individual collaborators, the Flemish collaborators (her research focuses on a broader group of collaborators) were more isolated than the Dutch. The reasons for this can be broad: perhaps the Flemish collaborators were even more hated; or the influence of politics on individual levels ( politicization) was higher in Flanders. A probable answer might also be the content of the sample: whereas Sax studied Flemish collaborators who were sentenced for more than only the membership of a collaborative movement, my sample is based on this membership, many were sentenced only because of this reason. Perhaps the offense of my sample of NSB members was ‘lighter’, and therefore the opinion of their surroundings less harsh.

To sum up: Dutch Nazis were in majority politically active, ideological motivated; thus they were politicized, and their identity was influenced by their membership (although it was not their sole identity); however; this identity did leave room for interactions with non members. In other words: Dutch Nazis were politicized, but as collaborating Nazis not excluded in Dutch society. During the war, the tension between Dutch National Socialism and collaboration increased. Ideologically the NSB moved toward German Nazism, and in the fall of 1944 half of the NSB members fled to Germany. The May 1945 liberation of the Netherlands meant the imprisonment of many Dutch National Socialists. Their identity during the Second World War had impact on their lives after 1945. But that is a different story.