“The Dutch and the Germans have not yet spoken sufficiently about the Second World War.” the Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant titled in 1995. In the same year, remembrance of the occupation had become such a central element of Dutch history and identity, that it was impossible for the Dutch government, to hold a commemoration (Dodenherdenking/Bevrijdingsdag) with official German attendance.

When and how did Germans and Dutch speak about the national socialist crimes, the occupation of the Netherlands and the deportation of their Jewish community?

In my paper I will examine the German-Dutch communication about the Second World War based on the example of the city of Rotterdam and two of her German contacts. These are the partnership with Cologne and the “Aktion Sühnezeichen e.V.” and her building of the “Visser’t Hooft Centrum” in Rotterdam in 1968.

In each of these contacts the Second World War was manifold mentioned. Both – the German and the Dutch – presented to each other various interpretations of national socialist crimes. The German war-stories however –so my thesis – have something in common: The Germans recognized the suffering of the Dutch people but only while asserting their own suffering. At the same time they avoided to mention the cause of these sufferings; the Germans portrayed themselves as victims rather than perpetrators. This fragmented war-narrative can be understood as a “suffering without perpetrators”. After the Second World War this narrative made first contact with Dutch people possible, but those connections were not stable and finally became one of the origins of the problematic bilateral relationship of the two countries.