UCL
SCHOOL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES, CULTURE AND SOCIETY (SELCS)

The Anglo-Netherlands Society Essay Competition - 2022

COVER SHEET

Name	[redacted]
University Affiliation	University College London (UCL)
Module Name and Code	DUTC0013: Contemporary History and Culture of the Low Countries
Essay Prompt	Discuss how history is represented by a Dutch monument or other 'place of memory' of your choosing. What do we learn about the time/event/person the memorial is about and what about the time in which the monument has been built?
Essay Title	Analysing Dutch 1950s Memory Culture through its Monuments: the Case of Andriessen's *Dokwerker*.
Email address	[redacted]

Analysing Dutch 1950s Memory Culture through its Monuments: the Case of Andriessen's *Dokwerker*.

Canal Rat, The Dockworker – Sculpture by Mari Andriessen, 1952. 25 February 2017. Retrieved from Wordpress,

Overstating the influence of Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire* (1984) on Amsterdam's negotiation with its past would be a challenging endeavour. Despite weak traditions in memory site-building, the Netherlands has adopted memory sites, both in the physical and abstract sense, as an integral component of its post-war commemoration of related events. In particular, the proliferation of memory sites dedicated to the Holocaust has continuously moulded Dutch collective *imaginaires* thereof.[1] Examples abound. The present paper focuses its analysis on the City of Amsterdam's *Dokwerker*, created by sculptor Mari Andriessen in 1952 in memory of the February 1941 dock worker strikes. Specifically, it critically assesses the *Dokwerker's* controversial, partial representation of the Dutch resistance and the political, social, and discursive *Zeitgeist* in which the sculpture was erected.

Mari Andriessen's *Dokwerker* was mandated by the Council of the City of Amsterdam to commemorate the February 1941 strikes against Nazi violence towards Jews.[2] The strikes occurred as a response to the deportation of 452 Amsterdam-based Jews on February 22nd, 1941, towards the German concentration camps of Buchenwald and Mauthausen, which was allegedly warranted by the "unrestrained attack" on German officials upon their arrival in a Jewish-owned ice-cream parlour on February 19th.[3] In protest, Dutch dockworkers initiated a general strike on February 25th, which spread to the entire city within a day. While the strike was short-lived, coming to an end on February 27th at the request of Amsterdam's Jewish Council, this act of resistance *vis-à-vis* the Nazi regime remained unmatched in occupied Europe. In fact, historian Louis De Jong posits it as the only anti-pogrom protest that ever occurred during the Second World War in Europe.[4] As such, the *Dokwerker* crystallises the post-war memory of Dutchmen's bravery and solidarity towards their Jewish counterparts, acting out of concern for human rights, equality and tolerance – in sum, "fulfilling their duty as human beings".[5]

[1] Young, James. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning,* Yale University Press: London, 1993.
[2] Dwork, Deborah and Robert-Jan van Pelt. "The Netherlands", *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, (eds) Wyman, David, and Charles Rosenzveig. Johns Hopkins University, 1996, p.53
[3] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996, p.57.
[4] De Jong, Louis. *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany: The Erasmus Lectures*, Harvard University Press,London, 1988.
[5] De Jong, 1988, p.49.

However, the *Dokwerker* undeniably presents a hyperbolic, politically-motivated picture of Dutch resistance. While it duly acknowledges the resistance's approximate 50,000 members' role in protecting Jewish citizens,[6] it is also arguably the reflection of a top-down political goal to create a new, moral, dignified collective image of the *Nederlander* and, most importantly, restore national pride. To this end, the post-war government sought to nationalise the resistance movement, equating it with "the spirit of freedom [and morality] that supposedly characterised the entire Dutch nation"[7]. Exemplified by, and under the impulse of, Queen Wilhelmina's 1946 address to the nation,[8] the idea that the entire city of Amsterdam had resisted Nazi policies pervaded the realms of art and memory. In this sense, Andriessen's sculpture mirrors a self-congratulating political objective. In line with James Young's stipulation that "official agencies are in the position to shape memory explicitly as they see fit, serving national interest",[9] Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt argue that the *Dokwerker* acts above all as a tribute to *Nederlandschap,*[10] effectively transferring the resistance spirit "from particular, subversive groups to the community as a whole".[11] Conversely, failure to save 75% of the Netherlands' Jewish population, Dutch officials' involvement in violence against Jews and citizen collaboration are conveniently overlooked - again, reflecting the prevailing 1950s political narrative.[12]

Another prominent and problematic feature of the *Dokwerker* is its Calvinist aesthetic. Indeed, the dock worker's proud pose is strongly evocative of Calvinist principles, namely that of the defence of human dignity, the duty to protect a fellow man and resistance to evil. On one hand, this may be interpreted as a tribute to the Catholic and Protestant Churches' role in resisting Nazi oppression, notably that of grassroot organisations', individual priests' and local parishes' numerous, courageous initiatives to protect Jewish citizens.[13] However, here again, the *Dokwerker* presents a very partial truth of the resistance: while some Christian structures indeed did demonstrate solidarity towards their fellow citizens, "postwar reports on the

[6] De Jong, 1988, p.53
[7] De Haan, Ido. "The Postwar Jewish Community and the Memory of the Persecution in the Netherlands" *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and Others*: (eds) Brasz, Chaya and Yosef Kaplan, Brill's Series in Jewish Studies, Vol. 24, 2000, p.412
[8] Cited in De Jong, 1988.
[9] Young, 1993, p.3
[10] Dwork & van Pelt, 1996, p.57
[11] De Haan, 2000, p.413
[12] Blom, Hans. "Suffering as a Warning: the Netherlands and the Legacy of the War", in *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies,* Vol.16, 1995.
[13] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996.

Hervormde Kerk show that in many parishes there was total silence over the attempts to deport Jews and that many pastors refused to take risks out of fear of German punishment" - a fear that, ironically, the valiant *Dokwerker* conceals, contradicts and even refutes.[14] In short, Andriessen's *Dokwerker* provides a partial picture only of Calvinist values' role in the resistance.

Standing in stark contrast with this Calvinist aesthetic, the absence of Jewish imagery in the proud *Dokwerker* reflects the general disregard towards Jews' role in the Dutch resistance at the time of its erection. Again, this is politically and historically problematic. Certainly, as rightfully highlighted by Dwork and Van Pelt, the first three years of the war were marked by widespread passivity and accommodation, notably among Jews, as a result of expectations of protection from the Dutch Administration and the Jewish Council.[15] However, while the February 1941 strikes were indeed mostly led by Dutch gentiles, the *Dokwerker*'s lacking Jewish imagery fails to acknowledge Jews' role in the resistance. It conceals the fact that the proportion of Jews who participated in the broader Dutch resistance movement was "significantly higher" than that of the Christian population, and that "there is not a single form of general Dutch resistance in which the Jews did not play a prominent part".[16] Rather, the *Dokwerker* mirrors the narrow 1950s definition of the resistance as that of a predominantly male, Christian endeavour. Lastly, it embodies gentiles' and officials' post-war demands that Jews display gratitude towards their predominantly Christian "saviours."[17]

Worse still, for a memory site commemorating Jewish suffering, the *Dokwerker* shares strikingly little of the victim's perspective on Jewish discrimination. This is revealing of 1950s' memorialisation processes: indeed, until the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961, Jewish suffering and voices were largely ignored by the vast majority of the Dutch population and received minimal official acknowledgment.[18] Because the entire Dutch population had arguably been made a victim of the Nazi Occupation, Jewish persecution was seldom perceived as unique. Instead, Jewish issues were simply treated as part of a broader discourse on Nazi

[14] Moore, Bob. "The Dutch Churches, Christians, and Rescue of the Jews in the Netherlands", *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and Others,* (eds) Brasz, Chaya and Yosef Kaplan, Brill's Series in Jewish Studies, Vol.24, 2000, p.285.
[15] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996.
[16] De Jong, 1988, p.28
[17] Blom, 1995.
[18] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996, p.55.

violence, or used as an example thereof.[19] As stipulated by Dwork and Van Pelt, "the history of the war was [primarily] seen as a battle between German suppression and Dutch resistance" all throughout the 1950s.[20] The *Dokwerker* is thus merely an official expression of this dichotomy, which was only called into question at the start of the 1970s. National detachment from the Holocaust was such that the latter was even occasionally depicted as separate from Dutch history altogether. This idea is notably reflected in Abel Herzberg's "Kroniek der Jodenvervolging, 1940-1945":

> "The persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, although it happened on Dutch soil, is not properly Dutch history. It did not arise from Dutch circumstances. One can even say with certainty that it could not have arisen from it."[21]

This detachment is best explained by the government's post-war desire to equalise all members of Dutch society, and thus, break away from Nazi traditions of differentiation between Jews and gentiles[22]. However, this detachment attempt from Jewish discrimination also sheds light on a substantial paradox in national policy: while Dutch resistance to Nazi violence was eagerly assimilated to national memory, the very events against which protests occurred were largely dismissed, and even minimalized.[23] As a result, the *Dokwerker* has become an emblem of the Netherlands' "post-war passion to create parity" and consequential overlooking of Jewish suffering, as well as that of post-war antisemitism.[24]

To conclude, the *Dokwerker* presents a partial, politically-motivated and somewhat problematic picture of the resistance. The *Dokwerker*'s predominantly Calvinist aesthetic, failure to credit Jewish participation in general resistance movements, its role in nationalising the resistance, and its lacking representation of the victim's perspective are highly revealing of the political, social and discursive *Zeitgeist* in which it was built; they shed light on the minimal public attention given to violence against Jews throughout the 1950s.

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[19] Blom, 1995.
[20] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996,p.60.
[21] Herzberg, Abel, "Kroniek der Jodenvervolging, 1940-1945", *Onderdrukking in Verzet* (1949 to 1954): Amsterdam, 1950.
[22] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996.
[23] Blom, 1995.
[24] Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996,p.55

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