

PRACTISE 2: CRITICAL STUDIES

UNCOMFORTABLE MONUMENTS



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STUDENT NUMBER: 1047688
DATE: 14/6/2024
CHOSEN MONUMENT: De Boeg
GROUP: 6

My parts of the speech:

"I threw my blood on the statue because for me it completes the statue" was the sentence that resounded from Sabine Gruffat's movie called 'Take It Down'. A film in which students in North Carolina USA protest the Confederate statue on their campus, to have it removed. A black student smeared her blood on the statue because that for her was necessary to complete it.

Let us not forget that history is created, and therefore no statue is ever complete. Just as this student did, we must constantly re-contextualize the statues present, that commemorate the past. and each change, whether it be a removal, whether it be a reposition or an addition should have a moment of recognition, a moment of reorientation of our realities.

We are gathered here today, to inaugurate the new "de Boeg" statue. Once a statue to commemorate the people who died during the Second World War fighting in the ship ports. Now has a new meaning, a new purpose, with the addition of the words "just leave it all" carved on the front, next to the door leading into the monument. "just leave it all", the way the Dutch government ignorantly "leaves" behind its past, cutting the cord between the then and the now, just so they can figuratively enter the door back into the monument, back to then, back to a genocide.

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"Never Again" echoes from the statues, the 4th of May, the lowering of the flag. "Never again" is what we are taught the goal is of Remembrance Day, of the war statues, of the rituals around Commemorating the war. "Never again" we are told. Yet what about the people in Palestine, Sudan, the Uyghurs, and the many more genocides being committed around the world? "Never again" has blinded us, it is happening again. Genocide is happening now! War is happening now! Hate and discrimination are happening now! It happened then and it is happening now.

We stand here as people from the new generation and people from the old generation, let us use our sadness and anger to be on the right side of history. Because the Dutch identity is not just the freedom fighters, the oppressed Jewish people, and the ones who cared. It is also the ones that oppressed, the ones that helped the Genocide, the ones that profited. As the new "de Boeg" statue suggests, we should not "just leave it all". I want to call on people's humanity, to remove this distance between us and our history. let's look at these statues with a critical eye, critical mind, and our hearts open, not as a finished work, but one that we must finish with our experience, with our context with our realities, so hopefully we can actually change, the history to be made.

Personal Miro board:

https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVKL2N3TQ=?share_link_id=388685651379

Group Miro Board + Group pad:

https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVK9j5aWI=?share_link_id=727982633683

<https://pad.xpub.nl/p/r.1eb47bdc1cefd11f512ef324feed4eaa>

Reflection:

*Trigger warning - mentions of the Genocide in Gaza and description of the 27th May bombing.

At the start of the course, I wrote down the two interests that I would like to delve into for this project:

- Dutch hypocrisy
- Deconstructing the Dutch identity in the context of its colonial history and/or its involvement in the Second World War

On the 27th of May, early in the morning, I saw on my Instagram the video of a father in Gaza holding his baby's headless body. After reading about what happened and seeing more and more posts coming out by people just as disturbed, I couldn't get the image out of my head. Every time I was alone or when I was not engaging in a conversation, I would be thinking about the situation in Gaza. Then when it came down to researching monuments, I could only feel sad and disheartened. I started to look into the response of the Dutch government to the Genocide in Gaza and I learned that the Dutch government has been delivering F-35 fighter jets to Israel and only stopped when ordered by the Dutch court to do so.¹ Further looking into Dutch relations with Israel I found that the Netherlands was one of the first countries to establish its embassy in Jerusalem, whilst most other countries preferred their embassy in Tel Aviv.² On the official 'Rijksoverheid' website it is stated that the Dutch government is for a two-state solution. I found it so backward, that the Dutch government is so complicit with Israel and its actions, yet has built its identity around not wanting to repeat the Second World War. Both were and are genocides, how is seeing this connection not a widespread thought?

On the 3rd of May, I saw the Instagram reel by @tokosandbodegas and @malique_mohamud³ in which Malique criticizes the 4th of May, Remembrance Day. He talks about how this act of commemorating the 2e World War with a spotlight on the fallen soldiers, freedom fighters and victims, in turn, put the Dutch down as victims as well. By not including how the Dutch Police and major Dutch transport companies have benefited and profited from the war and the Holocaust, the Dutch can shift blame and hide behind a façade of innocence. I was told my whole life that the reason we have the 4th of May and all these war monuments is so that we would never repeat history. This is also expressed in the Instagram reel. But that is not at all the case because when it comes down to it, the Dutch government will choose the side of an apartheid state⁴ and condone genocide. The war monuments, the 4th of May, and all the other rituals are all performative.

I connected these thoughts to my notes from the lecture from Timoteus Anggawan Kusno. In the lecture he brought up the idea that history is created through the narratives of the ones who create the archives. In his practice he plays around with different narratives of history which in turn create different realities, he uses the very act of creating a narrative as a way to make us critically assess the information we receive on the history of the Dutch colonial past in Indonesia. In this, he also talks about the performativity of museums and inaugurations. In Judith's text 'The Sending of the Crows'⁵, she writes about how the spoken stories were transcribed through the creation of a phonetic alphabet and then translated into English. From this, a series of thoughts emerged

¹ Al Jazeera. "Court Orders Netherlands to Halt Delivery of Fighter Jet Parts to Israel." Al Jazeera, 12 Feb. 2024, www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/12/court-orders-netherlands-to-halt-delivery-of-fighter-jet-parts-to-israel.

² "Israel–Netherlands Relations." Wikipedia, 12 Jun. 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel%E2%80%93Netherlands_relations.

³ @tokosandbodegas, @malique_mohamud. "2 minuten stilte..? ik doe niet mee!" Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6g3B6oIQY_/?igsh=bHdybWMyanFkNTky.

⁴ Amnesty International. "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians." Amnesty International, 1 Feb. 2022, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/.

⁵ Judith Westerveld. "NI See Studio Judith Westerveld 3." Nieuwe Instituut, https://cmsfiles.nieuweinstituut.nl/NI_See_Studio_Judith_Westerveld_3_74acb6e851.pdf.

starting from Judith's work's awareness that the act of translation becomes part of the archive itself, my thoughts followed; The act of translating, i.e. how history is retold and commemorated, becomes part of the history, so how we choose to commemorate (e.g. holidays and statues) will determine history, therefore history does not just happen like rain or a river flowing, we create it forcefully.

After explaining all this to my group, our main question became: "What do these war monuments mean in the context of today?" We decided to choose a war monument in Rotterdam to criticize the Dutch complacency with the Genocide in Gaza in the light of their war monument. Lisa showed us the monument in Amsterdam called "never again", which is a monument with the words "Never Again Auschwitz" and mirrors on the floor that are there to symbolize that "the heavens will never be defiled again". This all sounded extremely hypocritical to us. We chose "de Boeg", a war monument commemorating the people who died at sea from the Rotterdam Ports during the Second World War. We went there and took pictures and noticed at the front of the monument, a door and next to it, engraved on the wall "Just leave it all". In Raluca's film screening class, I saw the movie 'Take it Down' by Sabine Gruffat, in it, a student protest in North Carolina was shown in which they protested for the removal of the confederate statue on their campus. One of the things that stood out to me was a black student who said "I threw my blood on the statue because for me it completes the statue". This idea that a statue can be completed, that a statue can be considered incomplete, intrigued me. It challenged this unconscious authority I had previously attached to statues, this idea that if there is so much money going into it and so many 'important' people involved, it must be 'done', maybe even right, or should be there. But this act of smearing her blood on the statue was very inspiring, she actively and physically transported the statue into context by using her body. This taught me that statues are never complete and we need to re-contextualize them consistently, just like how Timoteus said that archives change depending on the time and context we look at them. I brought this thought to my group and we discussed the idea of doing an inauguration ritual for the "just leave it all" writing on the monument.

To connect this act to our research and stance on; the Dutch hypocrisy when it comes to its government response to the Genocide in Gaza, to criticize the, hiding behind a victim role, to not own up to the responsibility they have carried in the genocide during the Second World War and thereby their unwillingness to connect these two dots to do better this time around, we created a meaning for the writing that fit our critique. Anthanasia created the idea that the text had to do with the door, to "just leave it all" before entering. I added to this by saying that the "just leave it all" reflects the Dutch attitude of leaving the past in the past, constantly saying "never again" but how this attitude leads you into the door, i.e. into the monument, i.e. back to the past and their past actions. Lilou came up with the brilliant idea of combining all of our skills. She thought of us doing a speech that is a response to the speech of the Amsterdam Mayor during the 4th of May 2024 Remembrance Day⁶. We could use Anthanasia her idea of using a projector and her knowledge of fabrics to project an image of the monument on a cloth in a way so that someone can stand in front of the image without blocking the light. Lisa and Lilou could use their skills in photo making and photo editing to create an image of the monument that clearly shows the "just leave it all" writing for the projection. And I would be performing during the speech, by writing "Just leave it all" over and over again on the cloth.

⁶ "Femke Halsema Toespraak op de Dam." 4 en 5 mei, <https://www.4en5mei.nl/archieven/inspiratie/femke-halsema-toespraak-op-de-dam>.

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