

Rense Havinga, *De Zwarte Driehoek: De geschiedenis van als ‘asociaal’ vervolgd 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Van Genneep, 2021, 144 pp., ISBN 9789461645531).

Rense Havinga, the author of this short book, also works as the curator of the Freedom Museum (Vrijheidsmuseum) in the Dutch town of Groesbeek. In fact, the book's publication coincided with an exhibition, which ran in 2022, exploring the persecution by the Nazi regime of those deemed asocial. And yet, it is much more than a mere exhibition catalogue. Granted, the structure of *De Zwarte Driehoek* (*The Black Triangle*) reflects a museological logic insofar as the book features an extensive series of personal journeys and life stories set off from the main text. However, the author also provides a comprehensive overview of the repression endured by individuals labelled ‘asocial’ in Germany and the Netherlands. The term ‘asocial’ describes individuals who were marginalized by society and perceived as a potential threat, whether it be to social and political stability or to public health. As a result, so-called asocials were subject to special surveillance and control measures or to physical and symbolic isolation. As a social and political construct, the notion summons a loosely defined amalgam of groups – the homeless, sex workers, petty thieves, the long-term unemployed, addicts – that gradually converge to embody a perceived source of harm. They were forced to wear the black triangle in camps under the Third Reich.

Structured with both chronology and geography in mind, Havinga produces a nuanced and complex portrait of the persecution faced by a group of marginalized individuals. Across its 144 pages, the book deals with political, human, and institutional issues, as well as matters of remembrance. Looking first at Germany and then at the Netherlands, the various chapters lay out how so-called asocials progressively faced administrative surveillance (through personal files), isolated arrests, mass raids, forced work, detention, and deportation. The author details the locations and characteristics of the different transfer and concentration camps involved (specifying the categories, sexes, and ages of detainees), including several facilities located in the Netherlands: Vught, Amersfoort, and the so-called Erika Camp (near Ommen). He describes living conditions in the camps and the movement of prisoners between them. He furthermore discusses the role played by German and Dutch institutions, especially the extent of their willingness to implement or support repressive measures. Finally, Havinga deals with the aftermath of the Nazi period in the context of not only the immediate circumstances of liberation, but also the broader postwar period.

Havinga's book adopts a broad chronological perspective that encompasses the decades both before and after the war. As the author is careful to point out, the concept of asocial behaviour began gradually emerging in the late nineteenth century as the product of scientific, eugenic, and ideological discourses and theories. Accordingly, Havinga views the war as an exceptional, but by no means solitary, context for the rise of discourses targeting individuals deemed asocial, alongside associated practices of surveillance, discrimination, and repression. Havinga also reflects on the postwar 'return to normal', demonstrating how certain forms of stigmatisation were allowed to persist in both the law and social practices. This made it difficult – and sometimes impossible – to acknowledge the persecution suffered by victims, to recognize victims as such, or to construct a memory of the conflict that bears witness to their suffering. For instance, the author carefully assesses the challenge of finding a place for the experiences of individuals labelled asocial, so rare compared to other categories of victims, in the national narratives that emerged after the war in the Netherlands and the two Germanies. Likewise, he scrutinizes how the memory of the camps and other places of internment has so often been obscured.

Alongside this broad chronological approach, Havinga pursues a fascinating comparative analysis that considers the Dutch and German contexts in parallel. Having followed separate, yet by no means incongruous, paths for the first third of the twentieth century, the two countries faced a shared future, dominated by Nazi ideology, after May 1940. The author addresses the impact of changing political regimes on the treatment of the several thousand individuals at the heart of his study, including by exploring how prewar Dutch policies and attitudes shaped both Nazi demands and the mindset of collaborators.

This social and political analysis is a fresh contribution to the history of societies at war. For instance, by calling attention to the diverse circumstances under which the Nazi regime committed acts of repression and persecution, the text invites consideration of how the experiences of targeted groups diverged. And in addition to a review of the existing literature, Havinga offers perspectives on unexplored aspects of the topic, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the wartime fate of several European social groups. In doing so, he draws on various sources (including documents from institutional, administrative, and personal archives) to explain the wartime situation in the Netherlands and Germany, as well as the context faced by international institutions subsequently charged with documenting German misdeeds and upholding the rights of those who had suffered persecution, such as the Arolsen Archives.

To conclude, I want to stress the overall quality of the book. Its convincing portrayal of the ordeals faced by those forced to wear the black triangle will engage readers through a focus on not only historical facts but also postwar memory, not to mention the fascinating chronological and

transnational approaches buttressing the text. Considering both the overall approach to the topic and the heuristic work carried out to identify relevant sources, this work serves as a historian call for undertaking a monographic study focused on a specific camp or category of victims, with a view to providing a deeper appreciation of the complex rationales behind the repression unleashed by Nazi Germany in local contexts and across Europe.

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