

Chapter 7

‘Forever Connected’: State Narratives and the Dutch Memory of Srebrenica

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In January 2009, 14 years after the fall of Srebrenica, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the event. The resolution declares that Srebrenica was ‘the biggest war crime to take place in Europe since the end of Second World War’ and states that ‘this tragedy, declared an act of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), took place in a UN-proclaimed safe haven, and therefore stands as a symbol of the impotence of the international community to intervene in the conflict and protect the civilian population’ (European Parliament 2009). It also calls on the European Council and Commission ‘to commemorate appropriately the anniversary of the Srebrenica-Potočari act of genocide by supporting the European Parliament’s recognition of 11 July as the day of commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide all over the European Union (EU) and to call on all the countries of the western Balkans to do the same (ibid.).’ It is stated that this would be ‘the best means of paying tribute to the victims of the massacres and sending a clear message to future generations’ (ibid.).

This chapter explores why the Dutch government did not follow up on this resolution and why it makes sense to consider Srebrenica as a trauma within a Dutch political context. It analyses the political relevance of trauma in relation to the Dutch/United Nations (UN) Srebrenica mission and shows that talk of a ‘Srebrenica trauma’ touches upon the core values of social order. It explores why the failed peacekeeping mission in Srebrenica is not approached to reflect on the effects of peacekeeping, but has instead been reconceptualised in a narrative of national progress in order to adjust the image of the Netherlands in terms of a robust partner

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on an international stage. I also argue that the official Dutch discourse on Srebrenica has been destabilised by a recent judgement of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands. This judgement may—at least partly—open up a way of processing the past in different ways.

Srebrenica as a Dutch Trauma?

According to many commentators, Srebrenica is not only ‘Europe’s worst massacre since the Second World War’, but it also became ‘a Dutch trauma’ (Rohde 1997).¹ The *New York Times*’ journalist, Marlise Simons, reported:

‘As in previous debates on the Srebrenica episode, newspapers and television broadcasts have been filled with angry commentaries. They convey the message that the fall of Srebrenica, while not the defining event of the war, was its greatest single atrocity and that the Dutch, because of their presence in the area, bear part of the shame.’

In this context, she quoted the Dutch historian Jos Palm stating that Srebrenica is the nation’s ‘greatest post-war trauma’ (Simons 1998). Also, the British newspaper *The Guardian* has called Srebrenica ‘the most traumatic event in recent Dutch history’ (The Guardian 2002) and the Canadian radio station *CBC* reported:

‘The killing of 8,000 Bosnians after the fall of Srebrenica 10 years ago still stands as the worst massacre in Europe since World War Two. It has also become a lasting trauma for the Netherlands as Dutch peacekeepers were supposed to protect the enclave when it was overrun by Serb forces. Srebrenica has never been far from the Dutch headlines but that doesn’t mean the Netherlands is any closer to coming to terms with what happened.’²

Most of the references to Srebrenica in terms of a trauma for the Dutch come from Dutch sources, though. The term ‘Srebrenica trauma’ has come up frequently in the Dutch media ever since the fall of the enclave (Zarkov 2002). Moreover, the ‘Srebrenica trauma’ mostly referred to Dutch sentiments and not to the experiences of Bosniak survivors of Srebrenica (ibid., p. 189). Some of these Dutch accounts have differentiated the problem by addressing more specific groups and organisations as suffering from a ‘Srebrenica trauma’. Four years after the fall of the enclave, the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* published an article headed ‘“Srebrenica” Continues to be Trauma for [the Dutch Ministry of] Defence’ (Kalse 1999). In this article, it is suggested that the Ministry cannot function well because every summer, around 11 July, the Defence organisation is plagued by the media presenting mainly old facts on the Dutchbat mission (ibid.). Srebrenica is also portrayed as an ‘open war wound’ for Dutch politics and as a trauma for Prime Minister Wim Kok who led the cabinets that were responsible for the Srebrenica mission (Van Olst 2002). On 17 April 2002, 1 week after the publication of the national research report on

¹ See e.g., Rohde (1997). Since Rohde’s publication, the phrase is frequently used in publications on Srebrenica. One could say that the phrase has become Srebrenica’s second name.

² ‘Vox Humana—Long Road to Justice’, *CBC Radio Overnight*, 11 July 2005.

Srebrenica by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD), the Dutch cabinet led by Wim Kok resigned over Srebrenica. Later, Pieter Broertjes, the chief editor of the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* stated that 'the Srebrenica drama is not only a trauma for politics, but for journalism as well' (ANP 2002). In a self-accusing statement, which he addressed to an audience of Dutch newspapers editors, he claimed that 'we, and you and I have shaped a rather stereotypical image of the Bosnian conflict and the Dutch involvement in it. We, some more than others, have offered too much morality, too little facts, too many opinions, too little analysis and too much emotion (ibid., My translation).'

Two years after Pieter Broertjes made the trauma diagnosis for journalism, Srebrenica was identified as a 'disease' in the academic field as well. The psychologist/historian Eelco Runia claimed in his article "'Forget about it": "Parallel Processing" in the Srebrenica Report' that the NIOD researchers who had been given the official task to write a historical construction of the events in Srebrenica had not only described the 'traumatic event', but also had displayed in their work some of the symptoms of the trauma. According to Runia, this phenomenon is known as 'parallel processing' in the discipline of psychology. He explains that the NIOD research report not only addresses the problems of Srebrenica but also evades them, like patients who suffer from traumatic experiences. As a result, the report generated feelings of 'numbness, apathy and deadlock and diffused an atmosphere of "forget about it"' (Runia 2004).

Finally—it took some years to find out—the Dutch Ministry of Defence estimated that about 10 % of the Dutchbat soldiers who served in Srebrenica suffer from the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and about 40 % have undergone, or still undergo, psychological treatment.³ Now and then, brief news items can be found in the newspapers that illustrate some of the consequences of suffering from PTSD:

The [41 year old ex-soldier T. H.] has been found guilty [by a Dutch court] for murder and attempt to murder an elderly couple in Schokkerhaven. In June last year, he shot the victims in the head with a revolver. The ex-soldier of Dutchbat actually was looking for their son who had been his commander during another UN-mission in Libanon. The confused H. wanted revenge, because Dutchbat did not recognise his 'telepathic' gifts.⁴

Ten years after the fall of the enclave, the national television network aired a news item 'The Trauma of Dutchbat' on the PTSD topic.⁵ According to Jolande Withuis, the Netherlands *has* a trauma culture in which ever more people are recognised as being traumatised (Withuis and Mooij 2010). She says that in the Netherlands, even losing a football match and vacation stress are sometimes marked as traumas

³ According to the Ministry of Defence, the number of Dutch soldiers who take part in missions all over the world is 5 % on average. Praamsma et al. 2005.

⁴ ANP, 'Ex-militair krijgt tbs na moord en moordpoging' [Former soldier sentenced after murder and attempted murder], *De Volkskrant*, 3 June 2005. (My translation.) A couple of reports about ex-Dutchbat soldiers who committed suicide after the mission have also been published by the media—'Dutchbatters pleegden zelfmoord' [Dutchbatters committed suicide], *NOS Journaal*, 6 April 2002. These reports, however, have never been verified.

⁵ 'Het trauma van Dutchbat', *NOS Netwerk*, 13 July 2005. (My translation.)

(Withuis 2006). Withuis notes that the origin of this trauma culture can be found in the way the Dutch dealt with the Second World War. After a long silence on the psychology of Holocaust survivors, the war trauma was discovered in the 1970s. Since the 1980s, however, the trauma diagnosis became a model for all kinds of victimhood. In this way, many psychological problems could be defined as being caused by ‘external stressors’ instead of being the result of having a ‘weak character’ or other personality problems (Withuis 2010). Thus, trauma has transformed from ‘a source of shame into a source of “recognition”’ (ibid., p. 213). Although Withuis notes that it is a positive development that persons who display difficulties coping with daily life situations after having experienced an horrific event are no longer seen as being ‘mad’, she also thinks, however, that the broad application of the trauma diagnoses today has led to many ‘pseudo-victims’. She speaks of a ‘trauma inflation’ that could have negative effects on real victims.⁶

Except for the survivors and the Dutchbatters who had immediate experiences with the horrors of Srebrenica, the discourse on a Dutch national ‘Srebrenica trauma’ can easily be disqualified as ‘trauma inflation’. However, I will argue that the trauma discourse and its relation to politics are more complex. Firstly, as I have illustrated, the perception of a Dutch ‘Srebrenica trauma’ is not only a Dutch phenomenon. As Madeleine Bunting reported in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, other countries too seem to suffer from ‘national traumas’ as a result of failed international peacekeeping operations. She mentions Canada, where two senior army figures resigned following the court cases of six soldiers involved in the torture and murder of a Somali boy in 1993 and notes that ‘the country struggled to reconcile the incident with its history of enlightened internationalism’. Furthermore, she says, ‘Rwanda was even worse; a Canadian general broke down and wept in a war crimes trial, still traumatised by his failure to prevent genocide’ and ‘in 2000, the Belgian prime minister gave a formal apology for the withdrawal of Belgian troops ahead of the massacre’ (Bunting 2002). One could infer that ‘trauma inflation’ as detected by Withuis is not just a Dutch phenomenon, but actually a more general problem of the Western world, in relation to the peacekeeping operations and thus to situations of war.

In fact, discussions about which events qualify as *real* traumas and which do not are in essence highly political discussions. As Georges Canguilhem has noted, ‘every conception of pathology must be based on prior knowledge of the corresponding normal state, but conversely, the scientific study of pathological cases becomes an indispensable phase in the overall search for the laws of the normal state’ (Canguilhem 1991). So what does the ‘Srebrenica trauma’ discourse say about the ‘normal’ Dutch state?

Trauma as a Condition of Social Order

The discussion on trauma and its relation to communities is no novelty. The trauma discourse belongs to the field of psychoanalysis and even the father of psychoanalysis,

⁶ Withuis, ‘De ontstuitbare mars van het psychotrauma’. Withuis also elaborates on this argument in her book, Jolande Withuis, *Erkenning, van oorlogstrauma naar klaagcultuur*, 2002.

Sigmund Freud, approached it by analysing connections between human nature and forms of human organisation. Costas Douzinas has noted that Freud searched not only for the structure of the human psyche, but also for an *origo* that he imagined as “‘a time before history and memory’” at which human society was founded’ (Douzinas 2002). Later, Jacques Lacan built on Freud’s idea of the interrelatedness between human nature and society. However, where Freud tried to explain the social bond and the law by human nature, Lacan reversed this relation and emphasised how the symbolic structures like language and law contribute to the constitution of human identity.⁷

Jenny Edkins, a theorist of international relations, explored the relation between violence, trauma and forms of political community in her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Edkins 2003). Edkins adopts a Lacanian perspective on the role of trauma:

In its birth into the symbolic or social order, into language, the subject is formed around, and through a veiling of, that which cannot be symbolised—the traumatic Real. The Real is traumatic and has to be hidden or forgotten, because it is a threat to the imaginary completeness of the subject. The ‘subject’ only exists in as far as the person finds his/her place within the social or symbolic order. But no place that the person occupies—as a mother, friend, consumer, activist—can fully express what that person is (ibid., p. 11, 12).

Edkins explains how trauma manifests itself. She relates this manifestation to an ‘extreme menace’ (ibid., p. 4) which comprises a situation of utter powerlessness, betrayal by the powers we trust and shame because of this powerlessness. She says that

to be called traumatic—to produce what are seen as symptoms of trauma—an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. [...] It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well. There is an extreme menace, but what is special is where the threat of violence comes from. What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger. [...] Witnessing violence done to others and surviving can seem to be as traumatic as suffering brutality oneself. Here, a sense of shame is paramount. The survivor feels complicit in the betrayal done by others (ibid.).

Edkins adds that ‘taking part in violence oneself can evoke a similar shame [...] though this of course is *not at all to be equated with* witnessing violence done by others’ (ibid., Emphasis by Edkins). As an example, she mentions the combat veteran who ‘has not only seen his comrades killed or mutilated but [...] in some cases betrayed his own supposed code as a warrior (or as a person)’ (ibid., p. 5).

According to Edkins, traumatic events do not only expose the three elements of powerlessness, betrayal and shame, but they also expose relations of power between personhood and community. She states that who we are or who we think we may be depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence

⁷ (ibid., p. 301). Lacan does not make a clear distinction between law and language. Law is—at least not explicitly—used in the sense of ‘positive law’. See also Douzinas p. 316.

meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, beliefs. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence is changed (*ibid.*, p. 4).

So far, it is not hard to see the relevance of Edkins' theories for the experiences of the Bosnian Muslims in the UN enclave. The relevance is also clear for the UN Dutchbat soldiers. The soldiers who have been diagnosed with PTSD indicate that the reasons for their psychological problems are 'powerlessness in a horrible situation, bad publicity, [and] lack of accountability by the Defence management, politicians and the UN'. Moreover, 'they could not deal with the burden of guilt that was attributed exclusively to them' (Praamsma et al. 2005). As Edkins notes, witnessing violence done to others and surviving can be as traumatic as suffering brutality oneself (Edkins 2003, p. 4). Many Dutchbatters feel betrayed by the Dutch community and, if we go along Edkins' line of thought, it is very well possible that the Dutchbatters also feel shame and complicity in the betrayal done by others. However, establishing that the experiences of former Dutchbat soldiers meet the trauma criteria does not automatically imply the relevance for a much broader group or even a crisis of Dutchness as is suggested in many publications, exemplified by Marlise Simons' description:

The Dutch like to think of themselves as model international citizens. They are generous with foreign aid, they take in many refugees from far-off political conflicts and they play host to two world courts in The Hague. They also consider it their duty to take part in international peacekeeping operations. Yet today the Dutch find this upstanding image of themselves tainted by a fresh wave of public accusations that their peacekeepers who served in the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica were witnesses and unwitting accomplices to the worst massacre of civilians in the Bosnian war (Simons 1998).

Stefan Dudink has explored the representations of Dutchness in historical publications and his findings confirm a self-image of high morality, of moderation and contemplation and of a special moral mission connected to the lack of power and specific historical development (Dudink 2002, p. 160). According to Dudink, fantasies of moral righteousness are 'at the heart of a Dutch national sense of self', but they have often been contradicted by historical facts.⁸ Thus, in this respect, the mission in Srebrenica is one of the more recent 'historical facts' that exposes the Dutch self-image as a fantasy.

As I have discussed elsewhere, others phrase the Dutch problem in terms of having been entrapped by the 'international community'.⁹ From this perspective, the Dutch themselves became hostages of the Bosnian war, lacking support from the UN for their mission. As a result, the supposedly internationalist Dutch would feel betrayed by the UN, which they had always supported wholeheartedly. This idea of betrayal

⁸ (*ibid.*, p. 161). Another prominent instance of a (colonial) historical past that contradicts the Dutch self-image as a peace-loving country is the bloody war that was fought over Indonesian independence between 1946 and 1948, which was accompanied by atrocities committed by Dutch soldiers. See Dudink 2002, p. 160.

⁹ Rijdsijk (2012) on Both (2000) and other authors with similar perspectives on the Dutch position in Srebrenica.

by an international order that we trusted also matches Edkins' trauma description. Thus, in this respect, both the account of a shattered positive self-image as well-doer and the image of entrapment and betrayal by the international community seem to be plausible explanations fitting Edkins' description of trauma. Additionally, Edkins notes that 'witnessing and responses to trauma are not limited to survivors but extend to those to whom survivors speak' (Edkins 2003, p. 194). This can result in three levels of witnessing: 'being a witness to the experience oneself, being a witness to the testimonies of others, and being a witness to the process of witnessing itself' (ibid., p. 195).¹⁰ It is generally agreed that the events in Srebrenica were shocking, and that all three levels of witnessing are represented in the Dutch society. So, in this respect, I argue that there is more at stake than a fashionable 'trauma inflation'.

But, in order to understand the possible *political* workings of such trauma, we need to follow Edkins' arguments further. In Edkins' definitions of politics and the political, she reconciles the psychoanalytic account on the formation of personhood with the interdependent formation of statehood. In this view, she differentiates two orders of politics. The first order is the domain (sphere of activity and institutions) of 'politics' that is usually opposed to the domains of 'economics' or 'society'. The second order involves a less common definition of the political. She defines it as the events that bring the politics of the first order into being (ibid., p. 12). It is the politics that 'enjoins us not to forget the traumatic Real but rather to acknowledge the constituted and provisional nature of what we call social reality' (ibid.). This second order of politics is the process that configures politics into a common symbolic order. The way we see the democratic state rests on *not* questioning the second order of politics, which is 'the particular form of political community or the forms of individuality or personhood on which it is based' (ibid., p. 10).

Edkins sees trauma as fundamental to both the production of the self (individuality and personhood) and the state. This production takes place at what she calls the traumatic intersection between peace and war, inside and outside (ibid., p. 3). This view involves a profound critique on mainstream political science, which, according to Edkins, usually focuses on the internal (supposedly peaceable) workings of the state, international politics and external conflict and ignores the processes that lead to the production of the self and the state (ibid., p. 10). She sees political science as dominated by a liberal view of statehood, in which statehood is imagined as 'individual citizens banding together to form democratic institutions which (more or less) represent the views of those citizens and which (more or less) have their interests at heart. The state possesses power (and can use violence), in this narrative, because the people legitimise its authority' (ibid.). The form of personhood as a separate, autonomous and sovereign individual, on which this liberal view relies, is supposed to exist independently of, or prior to, the social order.

Edkins argues instead that personhood can only come into existence through its interaction with a social order like the state. In this view, the individual and the state are constitutive of each other. Moreover, social orders and persons are inherently incomplete and insecure. This fundamental instability is not acknowledged in

¹⁰ Edkins bases the levels of witnessing on Dori Laub's chapter (1995).

mainstream political theory. ‘In the west both state and subject pretend to a security, wholeness and a closure that is not possible’ (ibid., p. 11). Recognising this fundamental instability and the mutual interdependence of social orders and subjectivity enables us to see the role of trauma. According to Edkins, an event can be described as traumatic if it reveals the pretence of security, wholeness and closure as impossibility. After this disclosure, the pretence will be experienced as a betrayal (ibid.).

The memorialisation of trauma can constitute a questioning of the second order of politics, and Edkins comes to the radical conclusion that memory and trauma are central to the production of political space (ibid., p. 216). She states that sovereign power produces and is itself produced by trauma; it provokes wars, genocides and famines. But it works by concealing its involvement and claiming to be a provider not a destroyer of security. It does this, of course, directly, through discourses of international security that centre around the state as well as through claiming to provide security internally for its citizens. In addition, however, the state does this in no small part through the way in which it commemorates wars, genocides and famines. By rewriting these traumas into a linear narrative of national heroism, the state conceals the trauma that it has, necessarily, produced (ibid., p. XV).

In this perspective, I will consider three cases related to the memory of Srebrenica in the Netherlands in order to see how they relate to the disturbed self-image of the Dutch. The first is the speech by the Dutch minister of defence Henk Kamp at a special meeting for Dutchbat III soldiers in 2006. The second case is the formulation of the official Dutch history canon, a guideline for primary and secondary education—in which the events in Srebrenica are remembered—and the third case is the Dutch response to the call of the European Parliament to organise a national Srebrenica commemoration on the 11th of July in all EU member states.

The Rehabilitation Speech for Dutchbat III

In 2006, in a speech named ‘Forever Connected’, the Dutch minister of defence Henk Kamp stated before a group of former Dutchbat soldiers:

Dutch society, politics and the Defence organisation have struggled with Srebrenica for a long time: the role of politicians, the role of the international community and the role of Dutchbat. Many debates in Parliament and many investigations were necessary before the Netherlands cleared its own mind and got a clear view on what really happened during those terrible days in July. The reports by the United Nations, the Dutch Institute for War Documentation [NIOD] and the parliamentary inquiry proved that the responsibility for the mass murder cannot be attributed to the soldiers of Dutchbat.¹¹

After this statement, Kamp emphasised how much Dutchbat soldiers have suffered from the lack of recognition for their difficult position and work in Srebrenica by

¹¹ H. G. J. Kamp, ‘*Voor altijd verbonden*’, [‘Forever Connected’], 4 December 2006, speech by the Minister of Defence at a special meeting for Dutchbat III. (My translation.)

Dutch society and by the international community and the injustice of it all. He presented to every Dutchbat soldier a decoration as the symbolic 'completion of rehabilitation'.¹² Two Dutchbat soldiers were mentioned by name to indicate their special status in this process of rehabilitation: Dutchbat commander Thom Karremans and the commander of the Dutchbat Bravo Company, Jelte Groen. Both have received a large share of negative public attention because of their role in Srebrenica. Karremans' leadership qualities have been questioned and the photo of Karremans drinking with the Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladić has become the symbol of the fall of Srebrenica and the humiliation of Dutchbat and the UN.¹³ Jelte Groen has been accused of not having responded adequately to the misconduct of the soldiers in his company. This misconduct included racism, sexism, right-wing extremism, rudeness and lack of empathy towards others (Blom and Romijn 2002). Furthermore, Groen has been accused of a lack of commitment to the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica since he decided not to aim fire directly at the Serbs even when Dutch soldiers were attacked by them in the so-called blocking positions, although he was ordered to do so to fulfil the conditions for UN air support.¹⁴

The performances of Karremans and Groen have been explained and defended in the NIOD report and in the report of the Dutch parliamentary inquiry. On the leadership of the Dutchbat, the Dutch Parliamentary Committee concludes that 'Dutchbat could hardly influence their situation', (ibid., p. 440, My translation) and that it is 'understandable' that the leadership of Dutchbat underestimated 'the number of men and the risks that they confronted' because of 'the chaos of the moment' (ibid., p. 447). The Committee also concludes that Dutchbat could not have stopped the 'evacuation' of the men (ibid., p. 448). On the performance of Groen, the NIOD report finds that the misconduct of Groen's soldiers was an 'internal' matter that did not affect the operational capacity of Dutchbat. Moreover, they justify Groen's 'macho-behaviour' and lack of interest in the misconduct of subordinates as a result of his fighting mentality that may have served him well in other difficult situations (Blom and Romijn 2002, p. 1638). The Parliamentary Committee did not find a 'single indication that the accusation that members of Dutchbat were guilty of crimes was justified' either.¹⁵ On Groen's interpretation of Dutchbat shooting tasks, the Committee states that it was up to this commander to judge how to fulfil his orders, and that the local situation could never have been fully overseen by his superiors. According to the Committee, Groen filled in his space for decision making 'in his own way' and, after all, it did contribute to the conditions for air support that were set by the French UN Force commander, Janvier (ibid., p. 442).

Minister Kamp referred to those reports and explicitly expressed his trust in Karremans and Groen and all other former Dutchbat soldiers. Moreover, he situated the difficult position of Dutchbat and the lack of public recognition for their actions in

¹² Not every member of Dutchbat III attended the meeting. Some of them did not want to be decorated for this mission, as one member of Dutchbat explained to me.

¹³ See, for an elaborate analysis of this photograph and its symbolisations De Leeuw (2002).

¹⁴ Parlementaire Enquêtecommissie Srebrenica, *Missie zonder vrede: Eindrapport*, [Mission Without Peace: Final report of the Dutch Parliamentary Inquiry], 27 January 2003, pp. 177–183.

¹⁵ Parlementaire Enquêtecommissie, *Missie zonder vrede*, p. 445. (My translation)

a perspective of a better future. Kamp addressed the hardship of Dutchbat soldiers and turned their suffering into a narrative of progress. He claims that the hardship the Dutchbat soldiers had undergone has led to significant improvements in Dutch crisis management operations:

After 1995, Dutch soldiers have never been deployed again under conditions comparable to those of Dutchbat. The Hague has learnt the lessons that were necessary, albeit at a high price *for Dutchbat*.¹⁶ Many things changed after 1995: no more ‘double keys’ in the line of command, stricter conditions for the feasibility of peacekeeping missions, strongly improved intelligence capacity, better armament and better aftercare. [...] All these changes [now] contribute to a good and well prepared participation of the Netherlands in crisis management operations.¹⁷

In Kamp’s ritual of rehabilitation, he not only reduced the Srebrenica genocide to a practical lesson for the Netherlands, but he also re-established the Netherlands as a provider of security instead of a potential destroyer of security. Kamp’s rehabilitation speech for the Dutchbat soldiers is thus no exception to the phenomenon identified by Edkins that states tend to rewrite traumas into linear narratives of national heroism and so conceal the traumas they have (co-)produced—although ‘national heroism’ in this occasion has been moderated into ‘national progress’.

Srebrenica in the Canon of The Netherlands

The events in Srebrenica are also remembered in the official Canon of the Netherlands. The Canon was initiated by the Dutch government in 2005 as a result of a perceived identity crisis of the Netherlands.¹⁸ The minister of education, culture and science, Maria van der Hoeven, states in the task description for the canon committee that ‘social developments in the Netherlands have led to rethink the identity of the Netherlands and the way it is expressed in education’ (ibid., p. 1, My translation). She notes a need for a new ‘story of the Netherlands’ and says that the Canon should aim to provide a common (cultural) historical knowledge of the Netherlands in an international—but foremost European—context. She adds that ‘valuable parts of our history’ could include both positive and negative aspects (ibid., pp. 1, 2).

A committee—chaired by Professor Frits van Oostrom—has developed the Canon and presented its work to the Dutch government in 2007.¹⁹ Since 2010, the culture and history of the Netherlands are represented in a web-based chronological framework of 50 ‘windows’ that serve as a guideline for primary and secondary education. The

¹⁶ My emphasis.

¹⁷ Kamp, ‘*Voor altijd verbonden*’. (My translation.)

¹⁸ Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap Maria J. A. van der Hoeven [Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science], ‘Taakopdracht voor de commissie Ontwikkeling Nederlandse Canon voor Prof. dr. F.P. van Oostrom [Task description for Committee Development Canon of the Netherlands, to Professor F.P. van Oostrom]’, 26 May 2005. <http://www.entoen.nu/doc/opdrachtbrief.pdf>, accessed on 5 October 2013.

¹⁹ About the Canon, see <http://entoen.nu/over>, accessed on 5 October 2013.

Canon is translated into six languages.²⁰ Srebrenica is represented in one of the 50 windows and contains a footnote that frames the events as a 'black page' in the history of the Netherlands. The window is also accompanied by the following warning:

The canon committee hesitated before including this window. Not so much because the underlying story is so complex, or unflattering, to put it mildly, to the Netherlands. [...] It is, however, the case that thanks to the internet, the most horrific images of the drama in Srebrenica are only a mouse-click away. Although the truth is undoubtedly served by this, the committee would like to warn teachers and other staff about the attendant risks.²¹

These risks are not specified.

The Canon of the Netherlands memorialises Srebrenica primarily as a practical lesson for Dutch peacekeeping. As such, it runs parallel to Kamp's rehabilitation speech for Dutchbat. The Srebrenica window of the text of the Canon consists of four paragraphs and the aforementioned warning of the committee. The first paragraph describes the violence that took place in Srebrenica, without naming it genocide, and reducing the event to a very narrow time frame:

On 6 July 1995, the Bosnian-Serbian troops of General Mladic moved towards the Dutchbat III protected enclave of Srebrenica. Without too much resistance the attacking troops on July 11th took control of this safe-haven for Muslims. The Serbs had the Muslims removed in buses, after first separating the men from the women and children with assistance from the Dutch forces. A short time later, the Serbs executed most of the men (at least 7000). The Dutch soldiers, some of whom suspected what was to come but none of whom witnessed the executions, were given safe passage to Zagreb, where they were welcomed by Prime Minister Kok and Crown Prince Willem-Alexander (ibid.).

In the second paragraph, the events are reconstructed as a political problem for and responsibility of the Dutch government that was 'accepted' by the resignation of the Dutch cabinet in 2002:

When news of the slaughter that had taken place 'under the very eyes of Dutchbat' reached the Netherlands, the question was raised as to whether the Dutch soldiers should have protected the enclave against the Bosnian-Serbian troops and so avoided the genocide. Initially, attention was largely focused on the troops, but it soon became clear that responsibility could not be laid at their feet. Their mandate prohibited them from participating in the war. In September 1996, the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) was commissioned by the government to investigate the exact circumstances of the incident. When the NIOD report was published in 2002, Prime Minister Kok accepted political responsibility for the massacre in Srebrenica and resigned (ibid.).

In the third paragraph, this 'political' problem is placed in the broader history of Dutch peacekeeping since 1948 in which the Dutch Lower House has not had sufficient control over the formulation of the missions led by UN and especially over the troops' use of force. 'Events in Srebrenica' are taken up as a call for the Lower House to be better informed:

²⁰ The full text of the canon—*De Canon van Nederland*—can be found at <http://entoen.nu>, accessed at 2 October 2013. The Canon is also published as a book in English: Oostrom (2007). Furthermore, the website can be accessed in English, German, Polish, Turkish, Indonesian and Arabic.

²¹ <http://entoen.nu/srebrenica/en>, accessed on 5 October 2013.

Right from the outset, Dutch soldiers have participated in UN peacekeeping missions whereby, on behalf of the United Nations, troops supervise compliance with peace treaties and ceasefires in various troubled areas around the globe. The first mission was in 1948, in Israel. A recurring problem during these missions is the instruction on the use of force. What are the peacekeepers allowed to do, and what is prohibited in these trouble spots? The Dutch Lower House has the ultimate say in instructing Dutch troops. The House has to endorse the agreements made between the government and the UN regarding the degree to which the troops are armed and the type of force they are permitted to use. This means that the balance between the duties of Dutch troops and the dangers they consequently run is ultimately struck in the Dutch Lower House. After the massacre at Srebrenica, it was once again set down that the House must be kept as well informed as possible in this regard (*ibid.*).

In the last section, the role of Dutch peacekeeping after Srebrenica is described as accepting international requests for military support more cautiously and as aiming to ‘play a role’ on an international stage. The role of Dutch peacekeeping is thus no longer defined in terms of a contribution to international justice or humanitarianism:

The aftershocks of Srebrenica were felt deeply in the Netherlands. It led to increased hesitation and more caution when deploying Dutch troops abroad. However, the incident did not result in the Netherlands sitting on the fence and rejecting international requests for military support, because the Netherlands desires to continue to play a role in international politics and peacekeeping (*ibid.*).

Both Kamp’s speech and the Srebrenica window in the Canon of the Netherlands confirm what Dubravka Zarkov earlier found on the Srebrenica discourse in Dutch newspapers: The official way that Srebrenica is remembered in the Netherlands is more concerned with national recovery and the position of the Netherlands in world politics (Zarkov 2002, pp. 198–120) than with the ‘horrific images’ that are only ‘a mouse-click’ away. The main aim is to make sure that the Netherlands can still ‘play a role’ on the international stage. This role is related to (future) international ‘requests’, but also to the need for the Dutch Lower House to be in control of future peacekeeping operations. The text, however, displays a refusal to engage with the ‘horrific images’ and as such excludes a politics that would be more sensitive towards the victims as well as the larger context of some of the unforeseen effects of peacekeeping. These two issues will be the focus of my investigation of the question why the Netherlands did not follow up on the Srebrenica commemoration resolution of the European Parliament.

The Question of an Official Srebrenica Commemoration Day in The Netherlands

Since 1997, a yearly Srebrenica commemoration is organised in The Hague by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the 11th of July.²² After the adoption of the EU resolution on Srebrenica in January 2009, member of Parliament, Mariko Peters posed an official question to the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, Maxime Verhagen, whether he was prepared to follow up on the EU resolution by organising a

²² See srebrenica-herdenking.nl. The NGO’s are Politiek Comité Stari Most, BiH Platform, IKV Pax Christi, IZB Selam and Mladi BiH.

Srebrenica commemoration on the 11th of July in the Netherlands and if he was willing to get in touch with NGOs in order to discuss such a memorial day.²³ Verhagen, however, speaking for the Dutch government, did not see a special reason to do so. He answered:

The European Parliament aims to proclaim 11 July a day on which the entire EU remembers the genocide in Srebrenica. To that end the [European] Parliament called on the European Commission and the Council. Until now, those institutions have not given effect to this call. The genocide in Srebrenica is included in the Canon of the Netherlands and has an important place in Dutch history. The commemoration of Srebrenica is thus not only limited to one day a year (ibid., My translation).

Verhagen's first argument against a commemoration in the Netherlands is that the European Commission and the Council did not give effect to this call. In fact, the European Parliament instructed 'its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its entities, and the governments and parliaments of the countries of the western Balkans' (European Parliament 2009). This instruction does not include any hierarchy in the organisation of Srebrenica remembrance days, so it is unclear why Verhagen sees a problem for a commemoration day in the Netherlands in this. Verhagen's second argument is that the Canon of the Netherlands already provides a more extended attention to Srebrenica than 'one day a year', by having 'an important place in Dutch history'. Verhagen's third argument against a Dutch national Srebrenica commemoration is as follows:

The Dutch government is of the opinion that the yearly meeting in Potočari on 11 July is the most important and single authentic commemoration, which should be honoured. The Dutch ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents the government at this yearly commemoration. Apart from this commemoration there is no rationale for a specific Dutch commemoration day. There are organisations in the Netherlands that do give attention to 11 July. My colleague of VWS [Department of Health, Well-being and Sport] talks to relevant organisations about the way this subject can get broader attention, for example in education (ibid., My translation).

Thus, in Verhagen's and Dutch government's view, attention to Srebrenica in education is better than a commemoration day. The fact that the Canon of the Netherlands does not remember the 'underlying story' of the genocide is apparently not an issue. Moreover, a combined approach—education *and* a national Srebrenica commemoration day—is not considered because there is already a more 'authentic' Srebrenica commemoration in Bosnia. As such, the Canon of the Netherlands not only upholds a particular self-image of the Netherlands, but it is also situated as a replacement for commemoration.

²³ Response to questions by Member of Parliament Mariko Peters on European Remembrance of Srebrenica, Tweede Kamer, 'Aanhangsel van de Handelingen No. 2224, Vergaderjaar 2008–2009, retrieved from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/ah-tk-20082009-2224.html>

Towards a Conclusion: The Law and the Cracks in the Official Srebrenica Discourse

As mentioned earlier, according to Edkins, sovereign power works by concealing its involvement and claiming to be a provider, not a destroyer of security. This is in part done through the ways in which states commemorate wars and genocides (Edkins 2003, p. XV). In the case of the Netherlands, it works by *not* officially commemorating Srebrenica and situating the Srebrenica experiences as an issue of education, (governmental) control and international representation. However, Edkins has also pointed at the inherent instability of such discourses (ibid., p. 11). A recent judgement of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands in a case related to Srebrenica, which has attracted the attention of both national and international media, could destabilize the official Dutch Srebrenica discourse. I will first give a brief outline of the legal case and this final decision by the Supreme Court on the appeal in cassation by the State of the Netherlands (see also Zarkov and De Vlaming in this volume, discussing different aspects of the judgment). For the four Srebrenica survivors and their lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld, this court decision represents the final stage of many years of a juridical fight against the State. Finally, I will relate the decision to the official Dutch Srebrenica discourse as discussed above.

The case concerns the events that occurred shortly after the fall of Srebrenica. At the time, a young Bosniak, Hasan Nuhanović, was a UN interpreter who worked for Dutchbat, stationed in Potocari. He had a UN pass and was on the list of local personnel who could be evacuated with Dutchbat. After the fall of the enclave, his father and brother had sought refuge in the compound, but they were sent away by Dutchbat and shortly afterwards, they were murdered by the Bosnian-Serb forces (or related paramilitary groups) (Supreme Court of the Netherlands 2013a). Another case—which was part of the same proceedings—concerns the death of Rizo Mustafić. He worked for Dutchbat as an electrician. After the fall of the enclave, he had sought refuge at the compound together with his wife and children. Dutchbat sent this family away from the compound too, and Rizo Mustafić was killed shortly afterwards (Supreme Court of the Netherlands 2013b). Nuhanović, Mustafić's wife Mehida, daughter Alma and son Damir together initiated the case because they claimed that the State of the Netherlands was responsible for the death of their family members.

On 6 September 2013, the Supreme Court of the Netherlands decided on two central issues. The first question was whether Dutchbat's conduct could be attributed to the State and the second question was whether Dutchbat's conduct was wrongful (Supreme Court of the Netherlands 2013a, p. 4). The Court indeed found that 'the State did have effective control over Dutchbat's conduct in the compound' and that 'Dutchbat's disputed conduct can be attributed to the State' (ibid., pp. 26, 27). Moreover, answering the question whether Dutchbat's conduct was wrongful, the Court ruled that this was the case. It based this decision on the Law of Obligations Act of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including the right to life

and the prohibition on inhuman treatment.²⁴ The Court has decided that the State is responsible for the damage that Hasan Nuhanović and the relatives of Mustafić have suffered and are still suffering (Supreme Court of the Netherlands 2013b, p. 28). Furthermore, it countered a claim by the lawyers of the State that the exercise of judicial restraint was necessary in cases like this, because it could have an adverse effect on the implementation of peace operations by the UN and the willingness of member states to provide troops for such missions. The Court judged, instead, that then 'there would be virtually no scope for the courts to assess the consequences of the conduct of troop contingents in the context of a peace mission [. . .]. Such far-reaching restraint is unacceptable' (Supreme Court of the Netherlands 2013b, p. 34, 35).

The central issues at stake are relevant to the three examples of the official Dutch Srebrenica discourse, because the final judgement of the Supreme Court contradicts the idea that no responsibility for the course of events could be attributed to Dutchbat soldiers or the State and that there was no effective government control in the UN mission (as implicated in Kamp's rehabilitation speech and the Canon). At least, the judgement exposes a form of Dutch government control that has been denied for a long time and was instead attributed to the UN organisation which enjoys 'immunity'. It also opens a discussion on the suffering of the victims and survivors by providing space for the voicing of their individual experiences with Dutchbat and the suffering that was caused by the mission—albeit in the language of law. This is only a small window of opportunity, because it concerns just two specific events that took place after the fall of the enclave and a limited number of victims. Nevertheless, the judgement has exposed the official Srebrenica discourse as unsustainable and so causes a crack in the way that the memory of Srebrenica can be scripted by the government. Moreover, it can be expected that other claims by survivors will follow, based on this judgement. In this respect, the legal judgement has opened up a new political space for discussion on the effects of peacekeeping in relation to victimhood that will perhaps be enhanced by other cases to follow. Nevertheless, there is probably still a long road ahead before the government is ready to answer the call by the European Parliament for national Srebrenica commemorations.

Until then, 'paying tribute to the victims of the massacres and sending a clear message to future generations', as desired by the European Parliament, will depend on the work of NGOs in collaboration with Bosniaks living in the Netherlands, the alternative annual National Srebrenica Commemoration in The Hague and the courts.

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²⁴ European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), articles 2 and 3 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), articles 6 and 7. The Court added in its decision that 'these principles should be regarded as rules of customary international law which have universal operation and are binding on the State'. Mustafić 12/033329, pp. 27, 28 and Nuhanović 12/033324, p. 29.

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