

# A dark shadow over the Dutch history of Srebrenica

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A research on the existence of the Srebrenica trauma among Dutch society



## **Photograph Front Page<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Photograph taken by Pellegrin, P, retrieved from <https://pro.magnumphotos.com/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&VBID=2K1HZO4KOWA6IO&SMLS=1&RW=1280&RH=587&PN=1> (8 October 2018).

# **A dark shadow over the Dutch history of Srebrenica**

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A research on the existence of the Srebrenica trauma among Dutch society

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‘Our memory repeats to us what we haven’t yet come to terms with, what still haunts us’

- Kai Erikson (1995)



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## Abstract

In 1994, Dutch soldiers of the United Nations were stationed in Srebrenica, a city located on the east side of Bosnia. Their task was to take care of the humanitarian situation and to protect the inhabitants of Srebrenica. However, on 11 July 1995, the 'safe area' Srebrenica was overrun by Bosnian Serb troops, and subsequently a genocide took place. The Dutch soldiers had failed to protect the citizens of Srebrenica. The events that took place in Srebrenica are recorded in history as a 'national trauma' of the Dutch state, however, whether or not this exists as a 'trauma' continues to be debated amongst scholars. Furthermore, there appears to be a knowledge gap within whether or not Dutch society still suffers from a trauma more than two decades since the fall of the 'safe area' Srebrenica. Trying to fill this gap, this thesis examines whether the national trauma is still present within Dutch society. By applying the definition of cultural trauma to a case-study, it was argued that there are signs indicating that Dutch society still suffers from the national trauma two decades since the fall. This can be explained by the presence of indelible representations of the memory of the Srebrenica events and by regarding this memory as a threat to Dutch identity.

## Acronyms

Dutchbat	Dutch soldiers of a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Bosnia
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
NIOD	Netherlands Institute for War Documentation
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
UN	United Nations
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force

## Introduction

The fall of the city Srebrenica and the subsequent genocide in 1995 is known as ‘Europe’s worst massacre since the Second World War’.<sup>2</sup> Srebrenica, located on the east side of Bosnia, had been central to the Yugoslav conflict in the years preceding. During this conflict, tensions between Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims increased, until in 1992 the violence escalated when Bosnian Serbs subjected the city to constant artillery fire and bombardments.<sup>3</sup> To protect the inhabitants and the refugees who were situated here, Srebrenica and its surroundings were proclaimed to be a ‘safe area’ under the protection of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) by the United Nations (UN) on 16 April 1993 (see *figure 1*).<sup>4</sup> It was not until a year later, in April 1994, that Dutch soldiers (better known as Dutchbat) were stationed in Srebrenica.<sup>5</sup> During this mission, the situation in Srebrenica only worsened, and eventually the Bosnian Serb troops overran the city.<sup>6</sup> Consequently Dutchbat was forced to surrender, and the fall of Srebrenica took place on 11 July 1995.<sup>7</sup> After the fall, Bosnian Serb troops started evacuating the inhabitants and refugees, Muslim men were separated from their women and children.<sup>8</sup> During this evacuation, the Serb troops systematically murdered more than eight thousand Muslim men.<sup>9</sup>

Fourteen years after the fall of Srebrenica, the resolution of the European Parliament states that Srebrenica was ‘the biggest war crime to take place in Europe since the end of Second World War’.<sup>10</sup> Besides being a dark page in Europe’s history, the fall and the genocide have also been seen as particularly traumatic for the Netherlands. The term ‘Srebrenica trauma’ is mentioned in several academic researches.<sup>11</sup> According to Dubravka

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of genocide is stated in General Assembly of the United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide resolution 260 (III) A* (1948), 9 December 1948: committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

<sup>3</sup> K. van der Bruggen and W. Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica: luchtsteun en voorkennis in nieuw perspectief* (Amsterdam 2016) 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Security Council resolution 819* (1993), 16 April 1993, S/RES/819.

<sup>5</sup> J.C.H. Blom and P. Romijn (eds.), *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied: reconstructie, achtergronden, gevolgen en analyses van de val van een Safe Area* (Amsterdam 2002) 1414.

<sup>6</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 16-17; N. Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment: Dutch newspapers during the Bosnian war* (Amsterdam 2005) 7.

<sup>7</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> K.N. Bookmiller, *The United Nations* (New York 2008) 81.

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament, *European Parliament Resolution* (2009), 15 January 2009, P6\_TA(2009)0028.

<sup>11</sup> For example in: R. van den Boogaard, *Zilverstad: de Haagse verduistering van het drama-Srebrenica* (Amsterdam, 2005); Y. Kleistra and C. Klep, ‘Strikt functioneel: over de militaire ervaring met het organiseren van de terugtocht’, *Bestuurskunde* 23 (2014) 3, 28-37; A. Lašas, ‘Legacies of Srebrenica: The Dutch Factor in

Zarkov, this national trauma also often appears in Dutch media after the fall of the enclave under the term ‘Srebrenica trauma’.<sup>12</sup>

It appears there is an ongoing debate concerning the question as to whether Dutch society really suffered from a Srebrenica trauma after the events in Srebrenica. Leon Wecke argues that neither the Dutch people nor the Government seem to suffer from a trauma.<sup>13</sup> More than that, other peacekeeping troops which were stationed in Kosovo, Bosnia and Cyprus did not talk of a Srebrenica trauma on behalf of the government.<sup>14</sup> According to Wecke, ‘the so-called Srebrenica-trauma seems describable as an efficient resistance against sending out Dutch soldiers within the framework of (UN) peace operations’.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Srebrenica trauma can be considered more as an imagined phenomenon due to the fantasy of diplomats, politicians and journalists.<sup>16</sup> Bob de Graaff has also questioned the phenomenon. De Graaff states that if there is any Srebrenica trauma at all, it has to be the soldiers of Dutchbat who suffer from such a trauma.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, approximately ten percent of the Dutchbat soldiers suffered (and may still suffer) from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is caused by traumatic experiences<sup>18</sup> However, this trauma cannot be marked as a Srebrenica trauma among the Dutch society as a whole, since it only concerns Dutchbat soldiers.

But, what can be considered as a Srebrenica trauma? For example, Zarkov claims that the national trauma entails the Dutch emotions that are associated with Srebrenica.<sup>19</sup> The expression ‘Srebrenica trauma’ refers to ‘the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness of the Dutch soldiers and Dutch military stationed in Srebrenica, and the sense of humiliation of the Dutch nation, in the eyes of the world’.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, according to Raymond van den Boogaard, the Srebrenica trauma is related to the feeling of shame felt by Dutch society, the Dutch Government and Dutchbat soldiers. Furthermore, Van den Boogaard argues, it can be

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EU-Serbian Relations’, *Political Psychology* 34 (2013) 6, 899-915; N. Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment: Dutch newspapers during the Bosnian war* (Amsterdam 2005) and E. Runia, *Het Srebrenicasyndroom: hoe een historisch drama nagespeeld in plaats van opgehelderd werd* (Amsterdam 2015).

<sup>12</sup> D. Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma: Masculinity, military and national self-image in Dutch daily Newspapers’, in: Cockburn, C. and D. Zarkov (eds.), *The Postwar Moment: Militarities, Masculinities, and International Peacekeeping* (Londen 2002).

<sup>13</sup> L. Wecke, ‘Het trauma-Srebrenica is louter verbeelding’, *Trouw*, 14 June 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem

<sup>17</sup> B.G.J. de Graaff, ‘Enclaves van leed en werkelijkheid; wiens trauma is “Srebrenica” eigenlijk?’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 121 (2006) 1, 45.

<sup>18</sup> H. Praamsma, J. Peekel and T. Boumans, *Herinneringen aan Srebrenica: 171 soldatengesprekken* (Amsterdam 2005) 369.

<sup>19</sup> Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma’, 188-192.

<sup>20</sup> Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma’, 188.

related to the preserved position of the Netherlands concerning the foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> Van den Boogaard wonders why the trauma continued to exist so persistently; taking a look at what the media publishes, the events of Srebrenica were still being discussed in 2005.<sup>22</sup> But does this also imply that the Dutch state has continued to suffer from a Srebrenica trauma until today?

It has been more than two decades since the fall of Srebrenica, and as the available literature about the Srebrenica trauma shows, researchers have only examined its existence during the first years following the events in Srebrenica. Moreover, there is not a single book or article which focuses on the existence of a Srebrenica trauma among Dutch society two decades after the terrible events. The Dutch press on the other hand, still discusses this topic as a national trauma.<sup>23</sup> But how can one speak of a trauma if its existence is uncertain today? This can be considered a gap in knowledge regarding the subject. Therefore, the following question will be examined in this research: ‘To what extent is Dutch society still suffering from a “Srebrenica trauma”?’ In this thesis, chapter one will start by discussing the history of Srebrenica in greater depth, followed by an analysis of how the trauma existed in the years after the horrible events. Chapter two analyses the Srebrenica trauma, and provides insights to the extent that the Srebrenica trauma is still present. In general, this research will contribute to the broader academic debate concerning the Srebrenica trauma, by filling the knowledge gap. Furthermore, it is important to gain knowledge of this subject for the following reason: if the Srebrenica trauma is present nowadays, it means that Dutch society is still suffering from the trauma and must find appropriate ways to cope with it. Ultimately, it may still influence Dutch foreign policy not only for the better, but also for the worse. Before delving into my research, the theoretical framework and methodology will be set out.

### **Cultural trauma, what’s in the name?**

The definition of cultural trauma is up for continuous debate. It is essential to review the many opinions before one can form a well-balanced vision of the concept. Trauma is not something that naturally exists.<sup>24</sup> More than that, it is a construction made by society.<sup>25</sup> It is embedded in everyday life and language:

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<sup>21</sup> R. van den Boogaard, *Zilverstad: de Haagse verduistering van het drama-Srebrenica* (Amsterdam, 2005) 23.

<sup>22</sup> Van den Boogaard, *Zilverstad*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> For example: J. Eijssvoogel, ‘De waarheid komt niet boven’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 28 February 2009; J. Eijssvoogel, ‘Slag bij Choraroep trauma Srebrenica in herinnering’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 June 2007; M. Haenen, ‘Ik houd niet van advocaten die de hele tijd ruzie zoeken’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 31 August 2013; B. Monster and J. Visscher, ‘Val Srebrenica blijft trauma voor Nederland’, *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 9 July 2011 and C. van Zwol, ‘Nu hoorden we bij de bad guys’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 May 2011.

<sup>24</sup> J.C. Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, in Alexander, J.C., R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser and P. Stompka (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (California 2004) 2.

People have spoken continually about being traumatized by an experience, by an event, by an act of violence or harassment, or even, simply, by an abrupt and unexpected, and sometimes not even particularly malevolent, experience of social transformation and change.<sup>26</sup>

According to Kai Erikson, the term trauma is used ‘in so many different ways and has found a place in so many different vocabularies’ that it is difficult to make a ‘useful concept’ out of it.<sup>27</sup> In that manner, it is important to define the concept of trauma before applying it. The word ‘trauma’ is derived from Greek, meaning ‘wound’; thereby it was associated with physical injury caused by an external force.<sup>28</sup> Traditionally, the concept of trauma has been applied to individuals and their personal lives that can be explained as a physical injury by exposure to a distressing event, and an overwhelming amount of stress, beyond the individual's control, for example PTSD.<sup>29</sup> However, it is important to emphasise that this research is regarding cultural trauma, and not individual trauma.<sup>30</sup> A cultural trauma goes beyond the individual and physical dimensions of trauma as it extends the concept to the cultural, collective level of society.<sup>31</sup> People who are affected by traumatic experiences may not suffer from an individual trauma, but can still experience a cultural trauma.<sup>32</sup> But what exactly is a cultural trauma?

The embeddedness of trauma in everyday life and language is important ‘for providing an initial intuitive understanding’ of the concept. Therefore, there is made use of a lay theory of trauma in this thesis:

The theories people use in their everyday life have been termed lay, implicit, naive, intuitive, common sense, and background beliefs because people are not necessarily aware of their theories or the impact of those theories on their social understanding.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem

<sup>27</sup> K. Erikson, ‘Notes on Trauma and Community’, in: Caruth, C. (ed.), *Trauma: explorations in memory* (Baltimore & London 1995), 184.

<sup>28</sup> S. Talley, S., *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War: Trauma and Collective Memory in the American Literary Tradition Since 1861* (Knoxville 2014) IX.

<sup>29</sup> Talley, *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War*, IX; Praamsma, Peekel and Boumans, *Herinneringen aan Srebrenica*, 369.

<sup>30</sup> The difference between a national or cultural trauma is minimal at the theoretical level, see R. Eyerman, ‘Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity’, in Alexander, J.C., R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser and P. Stompka (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (California 2004) 60-111.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Y. Hong, S.R. Levy and C. Chiu, ‘The Contribution of the Lay Theories Approach to the Study of Groups’, *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5 (2001) 2, 98.

In general, it is possible to determine two versions of the lay theory of trauma. The lay theory perspective explains that traumas are created by events themselves: ‘traumas are naturally occurring events that shatter an individual or collective actor’s sense of well-being’.<sup>34</sup> According to this theory, when something threatens the needs of human beings such as security, order, love, and connection, people will be traumatized.<sup>35</sup> The first version of lay theory is about enlightenment thinking. This suggests that ‘trauma is a kind of rational response to abrupt change, whether at the individual or social level’.<sup>36</sup> For instance, Arthur Neal defines a national trauma according to its enduring effects.<sup>37</sup> These effects are related to events ‘which cannot be easily dismissed, which will be played over again and again in individual consciousness’, becoming “ingrained in collective memory”.<sup>38</sup> Another example is, Alexander’s definition, which states that,

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.<sup>39</sup>

Reviewing this definition, it is noticed that the horrendous event forms a trigger from which a trauma emerges. Both Neal and Alexander emphasise the quality of the event itself. However, this thesis uses a psychoanalytical version of lay theory focused on the memory of the event. It is the remembrance of the event and the meaning which is given to the event that creates a traumatic effect.<sup>40</sup> So, how can one define a memory of an event as traumatic?

This is related to the identity of a collective. For a cultural trauma it is necessary that ‘social crises must become cultural crises’. Therefore, representations of these events are significant. These representations must enter ‘into the core of the collective’s sense of its own identity’ and cause ‘acute discomfort’.<sup>41</sup> In this manner, ‘collective actors “decide” to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>37</sup> R. Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (New York 2001) 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, 1.

<sup>40</sup> R. Eyerman, ‘Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity’, in Alexander, J.C., R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser and P. Stompka (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (California 2004) 62.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*

from, and where they want to go'.<sup>42</sup> But, for a group to have a notion of itself, collective memory is necessary. In succession, the collective memory refers to historical events and the meaning of these historical events.<sup>43</sup> These can be 'interpreted from the perspective of the group's needs and interests'.<sup>44</sup> So, to determine if a memory of an event generates a traumatic memory, one could look at the collective memory. Hereby mass-mediated representations play an important role.<sup>45</sup> For instance, 'it was the traumatic memory of slavery and its representation through speech and art works that grounded African American identity'.<sup>46</sup>

Neil Smelser provides a psychoanalytical definition of cultural trauma:

A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.<sup>47</sup>

Roy Eyerman sharply criticises Smelser's definition, as a cultural trauma can also be linked to the group's identity. Eyerman adds the phrase 'or group's identity' to the last component (c) of Smelser's definition.<sup>48</sup> A side note must be placed by the component of 'negative affect' in Smelser's definition. Smelser addresses the relation between negative effects and collective identity. According to Smelser, a cultural trauma is a threat to a culture and its identity.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, as this threat is experienced, negative effects arise.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the claim that a cultural trauma exists or is threatening, is strengthened. In this manner, effects can be considered part of the identity. While Smelser describes the concepts as two different components, this thesis will subject 'negative affect' to the component of 'regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group's identity'. The new definition is as follows:

A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) represented as indelible, and (b) regarded as threatening a

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<sup>42</sup> Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', 10.

<sup>43</sup> Eyerman, 'Cultural Trauma', 67.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem

<sup>45</sup> Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem

<sup>47</sup> N.J. Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma', in Alexander, J.C., R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser and P. Stompka (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (California 2004) 44.

<sup>48</sup> Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma', 39.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem

society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group's identity whereby negative effects arise.

## Methodology

To answer the main question, a lawsuit regarding Rizo Mustafić, who operated for the city council of Srebrenica, will be used as a case study. The local authority assigned him to Dutchbat where he worked as an electrician situated in the Dutchbat base in Srebrenica. After the fall of Srebrenica, Mustafić's family found refuge at the Dutchbat base in Potočari. The family was told they had to leave the base on July 13, 1995. Shortly after they had left, Rizo was killed by the Bosnian-Serb army.<sup>51</sup> This case was chosen as it received a lot of interest, from the public to academic researchers; from Dutch society, to the international community. Moreover, the case pays specific attention to the state's responsibility for the performance of UN soldiers during peacekeeping missions. It was the first time a state, the Netherlands, was found responsible for the consequences of activities to which it had contributed troops to a UN peacekeeping mission. This stirred up a discussion which broadened the scope of the responsibility of states that contribute troops to UN peacekeeping missions. The case was studied with the help of primary resources, particularly newspaper articles. The reason to use these resources is connected to the relation between the collective memory and journalism because newspapers form a reflection of the collective memory.<sup>52</sup>

For my research a selection was made of three newspapers which cover a large part of Dutch society. The following three newspapers had been consulted to represent the collective memory: *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf*. For content analysis, different forms of news coverage were chosen: factual news coverage, the news coverage in which journalists put forward their own opinions, and the news in which stakeholders have been given the chance to speak.<sup>53</sup> For the selection of newspaper articles, there was made use of 'LexisNexis krantenbank' and the archives of *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf*. The period of this research is from 13 May 2005, which marked the time that the newspapers started discussing the case study, until 30 June 2017, the last date of a newspaper article regarding the case. The articles were systematically chosen through the use of Dutch

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<sup>51</sup> Rechtbank 's-Gravenhage, 10 September 2008, ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BZ9228, <https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BZ9228> (16 October 2018).

<sup>52</sup> C. Kitch, 'Placing journalism inside memory – and memory studies', *Memory Studies* 1 (2008) 3; J.K. Olick, 'Reflections on the Underdeveloped Relations between Journalism and Memory Studies', in: Zelizer B. and K. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (eds.), *Journalism and Memory* (London 2014).

<sup>53</sup> For more information about different forms of news coverage: N. Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment: Dutch newspapers during the Bosnian war* (Amsterdam 2005).

keywords. Each query contained the keyword ‘Srebrenica’ and another Dutch keyword which was related to the case or to the Srebrenica events. The following keywords were used:

Aangeklaagd	Verantwoordelijk	Cassatie
Zaak	Verantwoordelijkheid	Excuses
Rechtszaak	Aansprakelijk	Excuus
Moslim	Aansprakelijkheid	Sorry
Mustafić	Rechter	Hennis
Wegsturen	Vervanger	Schadevergoeding
Weggestuurd	Vervanging	Schadeclaim

To examine this case, qualitative analysis - which examines interpretations, experiences, and meaning in a structural manner - was performed. Using qualitative analysis, the trauma can be discovered by applying the definition of cultural trauma.<sup>54</sup> The presence of the two elements in the definition of the case-study will be analysed. Making use of this methodology allows for the examination of how the events of Srebrenica are remembered by the Dutch society, and to explore what the collective memory of that time period indicates. The articles were analysed by looking into implicit and explicit opinions. Implicit opinions are when ‘journalists select different events or different sources depending on the goal they want to achieve, without giving their explicit opinion about the events at hand’.<sup>55</sup> For example, articles in which stakeholders were quoted.<sup>56</sup> Explicit opinions occur when journalists are allowed to discuss their own opinions about the issues in the news.<sup>57</sup>

### Limitations of the methodology

The methodology of this research is not infallible. Firstly, the examined newspaper articles are only partly representative of the memory constructed by the mass media. Other media such as the radio, the television and the internet were not considered. Besides, since only a selection of newspapers with keywords was analysed, it is possible that some information was missed.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the keywords are related to the most significant moments concerning the Srebrenica case. Therefore, a significant amount of information was included in my

<sup>54</sup> The definition of cultural trauma applied in this thesis: a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) represented as indelible, and (b) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group’s identity whereby negative effects arise.

<sup>55</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, during my research, two articles of *De Telegraaf* could not be retrieved because *De Telegraaf*, as a publisher, did not own the right of publication for these articles. As a result, these two articles were not included in my research. It concerns the following articles: Editorial Staff of *De Telegraaf*, ‘Srebrenica’, 13 May 2005, *De Telegraaf* and Editorial Staff of *De Telegraaf*, ‘Begin process Srebrenica’, *De Telegraaf*, 22 August 2006.

research. Furthermore, my research only examines three Dutch newspapers. They have been selected to give a representative view of what Dutch society thinks, however, it has to be noted that other Dutch newspapers were left out. Nonetheless, this framework and methodology will provide important insights regarding the Srebrenica trauma in Dutch society.

# Chapter One – The Traumatic Memory of Srebrenica

## The war in Bosnia

After the death of Josip Broz Tito, leader of Yugoslavia, the unity of the Federation of Yugoslav Republics (see *figure 1*) slowly began to unravel in 1980.<sup>59</sup> This set the stage for ethnic nationalism and the desire for autonomy, due to ‘economic instability, years of suppression of political opinion, past injustice and mistrust, and struggle for power among the various ethnic groups’.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, tensions between several communities emerged, mainly the Serb, Croat, Slovenian and the Bosnian Muslim.<sup>61</sup> In *figure 2*, the ethnic diversity of the former Yugoslavia is shown. On 25 June 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence which marked the beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.<sup>62</sup> This led to increased tensions and eventually war between Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. Ultimately, the situation escalated to such an extent that the UN Security Council decided action was needed. On 21 February 1992 Resolution 743 was accepted, whereby UN troops (UNPROFOR I) were sent out to Croatia ‘to ensure a peaceful political settlement’.<sup>63</sup>

The situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina was complicated because three communities lived there: Muslims, Croats and Serbs.<sup>64</sup> In January 1992, Slovenia and Croatia were recognised as independent countries by the European Community and the UN.<sup>65</sup> After these secessions, the Bosnian Croats and Muslims claimed to be sovereign on 15 October 1991 in Bosnia as they feared a Serbian domination. Subsequently, on 3 March 1992 they declared independence from Yugoslavia. In April 1992, the European Community and the United States recognised Bosnia and Herzegovina as independent countries. The UN followed by granting membership.<sup>66</sup> However, the Serbian minority of Bosnia refused to acknowledge the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, the Serbs struck back with armed resistance, in an effort to create a schism between ethnic groups in the republic, as well as to unite Serbian controlled areas hoping to form a ‘Greater Serbia’.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Bosnian Serbs declared the ‘Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina’ independent. The Bosnian Croats

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<sup>59</sup> A. Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London 2017) 433-434.

<sup>60</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> A. Jones, *Genocide*, 433-434.

<sup>62</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> United Nations Security Council of the United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 743* (1992), 21 February 1992, S/RES/743.

<sup>64</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Macedonia had also declared independence. However, this country was not recognised by the European Community or the United Nations because Greece opposed the name; N. Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 4.

on the other hand, who also feared a Muslim domination, declared the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna.<sup>68</sup>

The declaration of the Serbian Republic was seen as a threat to the Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović. Consequently, Izetbegović requested that the UN send peacekeeping troops to Bosnia, however, the UN did not respond. For Radovan Karadžić, leader of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this indicated that the UN would provide little to no resistance if he wanted to create a 'Great Serbia' through the use of violence. As a result, several fights, mostly being the Bosnian Croats and Muslims against the Bosnian Serbs, broke out in some parts of Bosnia in March 1992. Between March and June, the Bosnian Serb troops managed to take over a large part of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>69</sup> The fights escalated quickly, mainly in Sarajevo. In other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bosnian Serbs began with ethnical cleansing.

### **The situation in Srebrenica**

In Srebrenica, the citizens also had to endure rising tensions. While located in a Serb dominated area, Srebrenica was home to a Muslim majority. In the spring of 1992, Srebrenica was first occupied by the Bosnian Serbs and later the Muslims took back the city. In the fall of 1992, the Bosnian Serbs demanded they take over the city again. They conquered the surrounding villages and subsequently the Muslim inhabitants sought refuge in Srebrenica.<sup>70</sup> In this period hereafter, the humanitarian situation got worse.<sup>71</sup> When Philippe Morillon, the commander of UNPROFOR I, came to Srebrenica on 11 March 1993, he said that not enough help was being offered by the UN Refugee Agency. Eventually, further help was provided in the form of air drops, which resolved a large part of the emergency situation. But when Morillon wanted to leave the city, the Muslim inhabitants insisted for him not to leave. For this reason, Morillon proclaimed it a 'safe area'.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the situation in Srebrenica did not improve and the enclave threatened to fall to the Serbian troops.<sup>73</sup> Noticing this threat, the Security Council of the UN took on the Resolution 819, which would mark Srebrenica and its surrounding areas officially as a 'safe area', known as 'Srebrenica safe area' (see *figure 3*).<sup>74</sup> The area was placed under the protection of the UN peacekeeping units of UNPROFOR

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<sup>68</sup> Ibidem

<sup>69</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem

<sup>72</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem

<sup>74</sup> United Nations Security Council of the United Nations, S/RES/819.

II.<sup>75</sup> At the time, the term had no clear definition.<sup>76</sup> As the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) report ‘Srebrenica: een “veilig” gebied’ stated, the status of a safe area of international law was not described anywhere and this would lead to a lot of uncertainty.<sup>77</sup> In practice, the presence of UNPROFOR soldiers had to deter Bosnian Serbs: ‘deterrence through presence’.<sup>78</sup>

To enforce the resolution, a Canadian battalion was stationed in Srebrenica in 18 April 1993. Since the Canadians would demobilise in early 1994, the UN searched for a country to take over control. This was a difficult task as most countries did not want to send their own military troops to the dangerous UNPROFOR location.<sup>79</sup> For the Dutch state, ‘having consistently occupied the moral high ground internationally’, it could not withdraw its commitment.<sup>80</sup> This would have meant an end to the Dutch role as ‘guardian of morality’.<sup>81</sup> Eventually the Dutch government decided to contribute to the UNPROFOR II mission in order to implement the safe area policy in Srebrenica and to take the place of the Canadians at the start of 1994.<sup>82</sup>

During the stay of Dutchbat, the situation in the ‘safe area’ deteriorated. The approaching Bosnian Serb troops surrounded and threatened the area.<sup>83</sup> Eventually, the Serbian troops attacked the ‘safe area’ on 11 July 1995. Since Dutchbat was only lightly armed and their numbers too small to defend against the troops, the Dutch soldiers demanded air support.<sup>84</sup> It was stated in resolution 836 that in case of an attack against the ‘safe area’ the use of air power was ensured to protect the ‘safe area’.<sup>85</sup> However, this request was never answered by the UN headquarters.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, the Serbian troops took control of the city and evacuated the Muslim women and children from the area with the help of Dutchbat.<sup>87</sup> In these days, the Serbian troops took the lives of more than eight thousand Muslim men. The fall of the ‘safe area’ Srebrenica and the massacre were one of the contributing factors for the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibidem

<sup>76</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> Blom and Romijn, *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, 942.

<sup>78</sup> C. Klep, *Somalië, Rwanda, Srebrenica: De nasleep van drie ontspoorde vredesmissies* (Amsterdam: 2008) 80.

<sup>79</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 17.

<sup>80</sup> N. Both, *From indifference to entrapment: the Netherlands and the Yugoslav crisis, 1990-1995* (Amsterdam 2000) 241.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem

<sup>82</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 17.

<sup>83</sup> J. van de Bildt, ‘Srebrenica: A Dutch national trauma’, *Journal of Peace, Conflict & Development* (2015) 21, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> United Nations Security Council of the United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 836* (1993), 4 June 1993, S/RES/836.

<sup>86</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Klep, *Somalië, Rwanda, Srebrenica*, 81.

international community to intervene so fiercely. Bombardments and a successful Bosnian-Croatian offensive forced the Bosnian Serb troops to go on the defence.<sup>88</sup> In the end, The Dayton Agreement, which was signed on 14 December 1995, brought peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and between Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia.<sup>89</sup>

### The Srebrenica trauma

With the fall of Srebrenica and the subsequent genocide the UNPROFOR II had failed. Dutchbat was not able to take care of the humanitarian situation and could not protect the Srebrenica civilians. According to Madeleine Bunting, these Srebrenica events resulted in a national trauma in the Netherlands. It was not the first country to suffer a trauma after failed peacekeeping missions.<sup>90</sup> Both Canada and Belgium have been traumatised by the memory of their performance with international peacekeeping, for example.<sup>91</sup>

However, as was discussed in the introduction, both Wecke and De Graaff called the existence of the Srebrenica trauma into question.<sup>92</sup> In line with this argument, Jolande Withuis argues that ‘the broad application of the trauma diagnoses today has led to many “pseudo-victims”’.<sup>93</sup> The trauma culture of the Netherlands has resulted in more people being recognised as having been traumatised. According to Withuis, even ‘a lost football match’ and ‘vacation stress’ are flagged as traumas.<sup>94</sup> This ‘trauma inflation’ could have negative effects for real victims.<sup>95</sup> However, Eelco Runia discusses that NIOD researchers, who examined the events in Srebrenica, showed in their report some of the symptoms of trauma.<sup>96</sup> In the psychological academic field this phenomenon is named ‘parallel processing’.<sup>97</sup> Runia clarifies that the NIOD report not only addressed the problems of Srebrenica but also evaded it. Similar to a patient who suffers from traumatic experiences who wants both ‘to get rid of his symptoms and to retain them’.<sup>98</sup> Following the argument of Runia, there is more at stake here than ‘trauma inflation’.

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<sup>88</sup> Bookmiller, *The United Nations*, 81.

<sup>89</sup> General Assembly and Security Council of the United Nations, *General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Agreement)* (1995), 30 November 1995, A/50/79C and S/1995/999.

<sup>90</sup> M. Bunting, ‘Something had to be done. But no one knew what it was’, *The Guardian*, 18 April 2002.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem

<sup>92</sup> Wecke, ‘Het trauma-Srebrenica’; de Graaff, ‘Enclaves van leed en werkelijkheid’, 45.

<sup>93</sup> E. Rijdsdijk, ‘“Forever Connected”: State Narratives and the Dutch memory of Srebrenica’, in: Glasius, M. and D. Zarkov (eds.), *Narratives of Justice In and Out of the Courtroom: Former Yugoslavia and Beyond*. Springer Series in Transitional Justice 8 (New York 2004), 135.

<sup>94</sup> Ibidem

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem

<sup>96</sup> E. Runia, ‘“Forget about it’: ‘Parallel processing’ in the Srebrenica Report”, *History and Theory* 43 (2004) 3, 295-320.

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem

<sup>98</sup> Runia, ‘Forget about it’, 300.

Besides, when specifically studying the history of the Netherlands, the Dutch state had already suffered a national trauma ‘in the way the persecution of Jews during World War Two acquired meaning in Dutch society’, states Zarkov.<sup>99</sup> This formed a stain on Dutch’s reputation.<sup>100</sup> Looking further in Dutch history another example emerged. According to Arend Lijphart, the Netherlands suffered from a colonial trauma following the loss of Indonesia.<sup>101</sup> This was also marked as something traumatic. Could it be that the Dutch society suffered another national trauma in its history?

### Indelible

Determining if Dutch society suffered from a national trauma one can apply the definition of cultural trauma. At first, the memory of the event or situation must be represented as indelible; ‘the cultural traumas can never be solved and never go away’.<sup>102</sup> An indelible representation has to be described as a national tragedy, a national shame, a national catastrophe and/or a permanent scar.<sup>103</sup> As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, a huge amount of newspapers and academic researches discuss the events of Srebrenica as a ‘Srebrenica trauma’, ‘Dutch trauma’ or a ‘national trauma’.<sup>104</sup> Such an example is also indicated by the Dutch newsmagazine *HP/De Tijd* in which it was written that ‘Srebrenica became a national disgrace’.<sup>105</sup> Not only in the Dutch media, but in the foreign media were similar acknowledgements on behalf of the collective made.<sup>106</sup> So, it seemed the Srebrenica events were depicted as unforgettable.

### Ambivalence: the assignment of responsibility

There is another way in which one can speak of fixed representations of trauma. One could look at the ambivalence of the remembrance of an event. This means that over time the remembrance of the trauma is repeatedly brought to the surface. The ambivalence leads to a tendency whereby generation after generation are engaged in ‘compulsive examining and re-

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<sup>99</sup> Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma’, 196.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem

<sup>101</sup> A. Lijphart, *The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea* (New Haven 1966).

<sup>102</sup> Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma’, 54.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem

<sup>104</sup> D. Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma: Masculinity, military and national self-image in Dutch daily Newspapers’, in: Cockburn, C. and D. Zarkov (eds.), *The Postwar Moment: Militaries, Masculinities, and International Peacekeeping* (Londen 2002); R. van den Boogaard, *Zilverstad: de Haagse verduistering van het drama-Srebrenica* (Amsterdam, 2005); Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment: Dutch newspapers during the Bosnian war* (Amsterdam 2005) and E. Runia, *Het Srebrenicasyndroom: hoe een historisch drama nagespeeld in plaats van opgehelderd werd* (Amsterdam 2015).

<sup>105</sup> A. Lašas, ‘Legacies of Srebrenica: The Dutch Factor in EU-Serbian Relations’, *Political Psychology* 34 (2013) 6, 907.

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem

examining, bringing up new aspects of the trauma, reinterpreting, re-evaluating, and battling over symbolic significance'.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, ambivalence ensures that indelibility retains its status.<sup>108</sup> So, the aspect of ambivalence is part of the component of indelibility.

The memory of the Srebrenica events was repeatedly brought to the surface several times throughout the years. Centre of attention forms 'the assignment of responsibility' which is also salient by a cultural trauma. This leads to finger-pointing, mutual blame and demonization that can result in launching investigations 'to settle question of responsibility in a cooler and more neutral way' on the part of the political authorities.<sup>109</sup> Following the return of Dutchbat from Srebrenica, a debate was triggered regarding what had happened, the responsibility of the troops and the politicians who played a role in the events.<sup>110</sup> In these years, according to Norbert Both, there was 'a lot of unfair scapegoating directed at the Dutch battalion in Srebrenica and Defence Minister Voorhoeve'.<sup>111</sup> To clarify the questions concerning Srebrenica, the government gave NIOD an assignment to research the events before, during, and after the fall of Srebrenica in 1996. Insights had to be gained regarding the causes and the events, which led to the fall of Srebrenica and subsequent genocide, from a historical perspective in national and international context.<sup>112</sup> A week after the publication of the NIOD report, the Dutch cabinet (led by Wim Kok) resigned due to the Srebrenica events on 17 April 2002.<sup>113</sup> According to Nel Ruigrok, 'with the fall of Srebrenica, the Bosnian war became a national trauma that culminated in the government's resignation in April 2002, ten years after war in Bosnia-Herzegovina broke out'.<sup>114</sup> The minister-president and his ministers acknowledged the political consequences of the Srebrenica events, but they did not take responsibility for the genocide.<sup>115</sup> The resignation of the cabinet meant a discussion between the government and parliament about the NIOD-report could not be conducted.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, the Dutch parliament did take initiative to set up a parliamentary inquiry in 2002. This led to research being carried out on the performances of the Dutch parliament, the Dutch government and those responsible concerning the military area before, during and after

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<sup>107</sup> Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma', 54.

<sup>108</sup> Ibidem

<sup>109</sup> Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma', 52-53.

<sup>110</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Both, *From indifference to entrapment*, 241.

<sup>112</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 18.

<sup>113</sup> NIOD Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies, 'Onderzoeksopdracht', <https://www.niod.nl/nl/srebrenica-rapport/onderzoeksopdracht> (20 October 2018); Rijdsdijk, "'Forever Connected": State Narratives and the Dutch memory of Srebrenica', 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment*, 7-8.

<sup>115</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem

the events of Srebrenica.<sup>117</sup> It is clear that the assignment of responsibility was brought up repeatedly which indicates the ambivalence of the memory of the Srebrenica events, and the indelibility of this memory.

### A threat to the Dutch identity

The other component is that the memory is 'regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group's identity whereby negative effects arise'.<sup>118</sup> A cultural trauma effects a group with definable membership, therefore there will be an association with that group's collective identity.<sup>119</sup> To determine this component, one must gain knowledge of the collective identity before the traumatic memory occurred.

The national identity of the Dutch society has been constructed as ethically superior, described Stefan Dudink.<sup>120</sup> According to Dudink, 'it is the Dutch, in Dutch national self-imagination, who can teach the rest of the world the moral principles of humanity.'<sup>121</sup> Indeed, Marlise Simons notes that 'the Dutch like to think of themselves as model international citizens', for example, 'they consider it their duty to take part in international peacekeeping operations'.<sup>122</sup> But the events of Srebrenica changed the Dutch image. More than that, Dutch identity was damaged due to public accusation that Dutch soldiers in Srebrenica 'were witnesses and unwitting accomplices to the worst massacre of civilians in the Bosnian war'.<sup>123</sup> Erna Rijdsdijk even claims that the mission in Srebrenica is one of the more recent 'historical facts' that exposes the Dutch self-image as a fantasy.<sup>124</sup> This led to a stain on the reputation of the Dutch armed forces.<sup>125</sup> The feeling on national moral superiority was based on nothing else, but 'the luck of our smallness'.<sup>126</sup> The Netherlands were a mirror in which countries could see their reflections no more.<sup>127</sup> So, the Dutch identity found itself in a crisis after the Srebrenica events occurred. In this way, the memory of Srebrenica can be regarded as threatening Dutch identity.

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<sup>117</sup> Van der Bruggen and Ten Have, *De Val van Srebrenica*, 22-23.

<sup>118</sup> Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma', 43; Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 3.

<sup>119</sup> Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma', 43.

<sup>120</sup> S. Dudink, 'The Unheroic Men of a Moral Nation: Masculinity and Nation in Modern Dutch History', in: Cockburn, C. and D. Zarkov (eds.), *The Postwar Moment: Militaries, Masculinities, and International Peacekeeping* (Londen 2002), 146-161.

<sup>121</sup> Zarkov, 'Srebrenica trauma', 193.

<sup>122</sup> M. Simons, 'Bosnia Massacre Mars Do-Right Self-Image the Dutch Hold Dear', *The New York Times*, 13 September 2018.

<sup>123</sup> Simons, 'Bosnia Massacre Mars Do-Right Self-Image the Dutch Hold Dear'.

<sup>124</sup> Rijdsdijk, "'Forever Connected": State Narratives and the Dutch memory of Srebrenica', 9.

<sup>125</sup> Zarkov, 'Srebrenica trauma', 194.

<sup>126</sup> Ibidem

<sup>127</sup> Van Zwol, 'Nu hoorden we bij de bad guys'.

### *Humiliation, shame and guilt*

When the memory is ‘regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group’s identity’, negative effects will emerge, for example: shame, guilt, humiliation, disgust, anger or fear.<sup>128</sup> When effects are experienced it ‘can generalise and endow meaning to events and situations’.<sup>129</sup> In this manner they strengthen the claim that a cultural trauma exists or is threatening.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, it has a central position in our understanding of cultural trauma,

A cultural trauma is, above all, a threat to a culture with which individuals in that society presumably have an identification. To put it differently, a cultural trauma is a threat to some part of their personal identities. As such, this threat, if experienced, arouses negative affects.<sup>131</sup>

As such, the crisis of the Dutch identity and negative effects are connected to each other. There were several negative effects noticeable in the time after the fall of Srebrenica and the genocide. For example, according to Zarkov, humiliation dominated the Dutch identity.<sup>132</sup> Also, Van den Boogaard discussed the relation of the ‘Srebrenica trauma’ to the feeling of shame which was felt by the Dutch society, Dutch Government and Dutchbat soldiers after the Srebrenica events occurred.<sup>133</sup> Ainius Lašas takes this argument even further by stating that the Dutch society and political elites were ‘on the overlapping shame-guilt continuum’.<sup>134</sup> According to Lašas, there was the side of people who felt the shame who believed ‘that the situation in Srebrenica was largely outside of the Dutch military and political control’.<sup>135</sup> The other side who believed ‘that the Dutch could have prevented or at least minimised the massacre’ experienced guilt.<sup>136</sup> So, Dutch identity was not only broken, Dutch society felt humiliated, and feelings of shame and guilt also emerged. These effects give strength to the assertion that a cultural trauma exists or is threatening. Bringing components of indelibility and threatening Dutch identity together, it is made clear that the ‘Srebrenica trauma’ among the Dutch society is not a fantasy or myth. The trauma did exist in the years after the Srebrenica events.

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<sup>128</sup> Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma’, 39.

<sup>129</sup> Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma’, 40.

<sup>130</sup> Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma’, 41.

<sup>131</sup> Ibidem

<sup>132</sup> Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma’, 188.

<sup>133</sup> Van den Boogaard, *Zilverstad*, 23.

<sup>134</sup> Lašas, ‘Legacies of Srebrenica’, 901.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem

<sup>136</sup> Ibidem

## Chapter Two – The Presence of the Srebrenica Trauma

In chapter one, it was examined that Dutch society had suffered a trauma from the Srebrenica events, even years after they occurred. That leaves still the question, what is the status of this trauma two decades later? To determine if Dutch society still suffers from a trauma, this chapter will apply the definition of cultural trauma to the Mustafić lawsuit.<sup>137</sup> It is important to consider that through time and generations, trauma takes on different forms. The trauma is ‘contingent on forever changing’ due to social and political conditions or negotiation and contestation among groups.<sup>138</sup> After the Holocaust, for instance, the cultural trauma was first embodied in personal memories of the Holocaust. This resulted in public silence and the social expulsion of the perpetrators until the 1960s. But all of this changed when a new generation, without personal memories, set foot on the political stage. The trauma was now characterized by political conflicts, public discussions and public confessions of guilt.<sup>139</sup> During the eighties, it found its way through another domain: scholarly debate and historical research.<sup>140</sup> This example shows clearly the changing process of a cultural trauma. Looking at the Srebrenica trauma in the Netherlands two decades later, it is possible the trauma has also altered. But before analysing this, it is important to develop knowledge about the Mustafić lawsuit.

### The Mustafić lawsuit

Rizo Mustafić (husband/father) worked as an electrician situated in the Dutchbat base in Srebrenica. When Srebrenica had fallen, Mustafić’s family fled to the Dutchbat base in Potočari. But on 13 of July in 1995, they were told they had to leave this base. After the family had left, Rizo Mustafić was killed by the Bosnian-Serb army.

In 2002, Mustafić’s family-members sued the Dutch state for the liability of the ‘wrongful acts by offering insufficient protection to the victims and exposing them to the enemy’.<sup>141</sup> On 10 September 2008, the court denied this claim and judged the Dutch state was

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<sup>137</sup> The definition of cultural trauma: a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) represented as indelible, and (b) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group’s identity whereby negative effects arise.

<sup>138</sup> Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural trauma’, 51.

<sup>139</sup> B. Giesen, ‘The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity’, in Alexander, J.C., R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser and P. Stompka (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (California 2004) 127, 134-135.

<sup>140</sup> Ibidem

<sup>141</sup> Rechtbank 's-Gravenhage, 10 September 2008, ECLI:NL:RBSGR:2008:BF0182,

not responsible for the performance of Dutchbat in Srebrenica in 1995. Instead, the responsibility of the consequences of Dutchbat's actions fell to the UN as it held original authority over the peacekeeping mission.<sup>142</sup> However, because of the immunity of the UN it could not be prosecuted.<sup>143</sup> This verdict did not satisfy the claimants. Consequently, they appealed to a higher court. Contrary to the verdict of 2008, on 5 July 2011, the Court of Appeal held the Dutch state responsible for the acts of Dutchbat regarding the sending away of Rizo Mustafić from the base in Srebrenica in 1995 because it had effective control concerning the actions of Dutchbat.<sup>144</sup> This means that the acts of Dutchbat were attributed to the Netherlands, because the Netherlands had control over their troops in that time, even while the operational command was with the UN.<sup>145</sup> However, the 2011 verdict would prove not to be final due to claims made by defendants that the replacement of Bart Punt, the judge overseeing the trial, by another judge during the case, was a violation of due process in that it might influence the trial's outcome. The examination of this claim postponed the final verdict, which was delivered on 26 June 2012. Denying any violation of fair process, the court ultimately found the Dutch state responsible for the exile and death of Rizo Mustafić.<sup>146</sup>

However, the Mustafić lawsuit was not yet resolved. The Supreme Court agreed to review the case following a motion to appeal filed by the State attorney. On 6 September 2013, the Supreme Court judged that the Dutch state can be blamed for the performance of Dutchbat concerning Mustafić because it held effective control regarding the performance of Dutchbat.<sup>147</sup> After the judgement, the relatives made a claim for financial compensation

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<https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:RBSGR:2008:BF0182&showbutton=true&keyw ord=mustafic> (16 October 2018).

<sup>142</sup> Rechtbank 's-Gravenhage, 10 September 2008, ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BZ9228,

<https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BZ9228> (16 October 2018).

<sup>143</sup> Immunity of the United Nations recorded in article 105 section 1 of the Charter of the United Nations and elaborated in the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Article two, section 2 states: 'The United Nations, its property and assets wherever located and by whomsoever held, shall enjoy immunity from every form of legal process except insofar as in any particular case it has expressly waived its immunity. It is, however, understood that no waiver of immunity shall extend to any measure of execution.', in: General Assembly of the United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide resolution 260 (III) A* (1948), 9 December 1948.

<sup>144</sup> Gerechtshof 's-Gravenhage, 5 July 2011, ECLI:NL:GHSGR:2011:BR0132,

<https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:GHSGR:2011:BR0132> (16 October 2018).

<sup>145</sup> B. Boutin, 'Responsibility of the Netherlands for the acts of Dutchbat in Nuhanovic and Mustafic: the continuous quest for a tangible meaning for "effective control" in the context of peacekeeping', *Leiden Journal of International Law* 25 (2012) 2, 521-535.

<sup>146</sup> Gerechtshof 's-Gravenhage, 26 June 2012, ECLI:NL:GHSGR:2012:BW9015.

<https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:GHSGR:2012:BW9015>.

<sup>147</sup> Hoge Raad, 6 September 2013, ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BZ9228,

<https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/inziendocument?id=ECLI:NL:HR:2013:BZ9228> (16 October 2018).

against the Dutch state; who proposed rewarding each relative with 20.000 euros.<sup>148</sup> However, since the state did not talk to the relatives first, they did not accept it.<sup>149</sup> Eventually, after several conversations with the State, the relatives accepted the financial compensation, although the amount was undisclosed.<sup>150</sup> This lawsuit provided an example of how the Dutch government dealt with the Srebrenica events. But in which way did Dutch society deal with the case? And what does this mean for the Srebrenica trauma?

## Indelible

A component of the definition of cultural trauma is ‘a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is represented as indelible’. In chapter one, research showed that the memory of Srebrenica events was represented as indelible in many of the newspapers and academic studies in the years after the events, for example ‘national trauma’.<sup>151</sup> But, in times of the Mustafić lawsuit, there were only a few articles which depicted the Srebrenica events as indelible, using descriptions such as ‘(humanitarian) tragedy’, ‘national trauma’, ‘black day of Dutchbat’ and ‘black page’.<sup>152</sup> However, these few examples do not signify that the memory of the Srebrenica events in the whole period of the lawsuit was described as unforgettable. This does not directly suggest that Dutch society has entirely overcome the Srebrenica trauma. Because of the changing aspect of trauma, the trauma which was once so vividly present, can be less visible than before.<sup>153</sup> So, this can result in fixed presentations which are less present. As was discussed in chapter one, there is another possibility by which to uncover a trauma: the

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<sup>148</sup> J. van Egmond, ‘Vergoeding en excuses voor nabestaanden weggestuurde Srebrenica-slachtoffers’ (25 June 2015), Nederlandse Omroep Stichting, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2043421-vergoeding-en-excuses-voor-nabestaanden-weggestuurde-srebrenica-slachtoffers.html> (3 December 2018).

<sup>149</sup> Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘20.000 euro schadevergoeding voor nabestaanden Srebrenica’, *De Volkskrant*, 10 April 2014.

<sup>150</sup> Van Egmond, ‘Vergoeding en excuses voor nabestaanden weggestuurde Srebrenica-slachtoffers’.

<sup>151</sup> D. Zarkov, ‘Srebrenica trauma: Masculinity, military and national self-image in Dutch daily Newspapers’, in: Cockburn, C. and D. Zarkov (eds.), *The Postwar Moment: Militaries, Masculinities, and International Peacekeeping* (Londen 2002); R. van den Boogaard, *Zilverstad: de Haagse verduistering van het drama-Srebrenica* (Amsterdam, 2005); N. Ruigrok, *Journalism of attachment: Dutch newspapers during the Bosnian war* (Amsterdam 2005) and E. Runia, *Het Srebrenicasyndroom: hoe een historisch drama nagespeeld in plaats van opgehelderd werd* (Amsterdam 2015); A. Lašas, ‘Legacies of Srebrenica: The Dutch Factor in EU-Serbian Relations’, 907.

<sup>152</sup> All the Dutch phrases were translated in English; B. van der Bol, ‘Deze moslims waren te redden’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 19 January 2013; O. Tempelman, ‘Srebrenica, wat kunnen we anders doen dan herdenken’, *De Volkskrant*, 11 July 2005; L. Vervaeke, ‘Oranje-finale wringt met zwarte dag van Dutchbat’, *De Volkskrant*, 9 July 2010; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Srebrenica’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 July 2011; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Omgang nabestaanden Srebrenica respectloos’, *De Telegraaf*, 10 April 2014; M. Klerks, “‘VN zijn verantwoordelijk’: Lezers vinden Srebrenica-vonnissen een aanval in de rug”, *De Telegraaf*, 18 July 2014.

<sup>153</sup> Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’.

ambivalence of the remembrance of an event. Was the traumatic memory of the Srebrenica events brought to the surface again in times of the Mustafić lawsuit?

### Ambivalence: the blame-game

As in chapter one, this section will observe the ambivalence of the memory of the events in Srebrenica. Hereby, an example of assignment of responsibility was discussed. When Dutchbat had returned from Srebrenica, several times a discussion rose about the responsibility of Dutchbat and the government regarding Srebrenica. As a result, inquiries were set up on behalf of the Dutch government. But these inquiries did not calm the waters because the memory of the Srebrenica trauma was activated in times of the Mustafić lawsuit. Indeed, Joyce van de Bildt states that the question of responsibility remains a ‘sensitive issue’ in Dutch politics and society after two decades of the Srebrenica events.<sup>154</sup> However, it was not until after a hearing of a witness, personnel officer B.J. Oosterveen, in July 2005 the public was interested in the case; he was the first one of the witnesses hearing.<sup>155</sup> Oosterveen told Rizo Mustafić that he could not count on the protection of Dutchbat and that he had to leave the UN-base in Srebrenica. Consequently, the lawsuit received a lot of attention; nationwide and from the international press.<sup>156</sup> It catalysed a debate about the terms under which UN member states could be responsible for the performance of UN peacekeepers; Srebrenica formed the focus of interest. This debate was illustrated in the Mustafić lawsuit, particularly the statement of the verdict in 2011 stated that the Dutch state could be held responsible for the behaviour of Dutchbat during the UNPROFOR mission for sending Mustafić away. After this judgment, the Dutch public was fixated on whether or not the Dutch state could really be held accountable.

The question of responsibility was first brought up by *NRC Handelsblad* in 2005 and 2007.<sup>157</sup> These articles covered news about the progression of the lawsuit. Moreover, both

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<sup>154</sup> Van de Bildt, ‘Srebrenica: A Dutch national trauma’, 143.

<sup>155</sup> Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Dutchbat zond lokale monteur weg van basis’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 May 2005.

<sup>156</sup> As I have mentioned in the introduction *De Telegraaf* did publish two articles in 2005 and 2006. This concerns the following articles: Editorial Staff of *De Telegraaf*, ‘Srebrenica’, 13 May 2005, *De Telegraaf* and Editorial Staff of *De Telegraaf*, ‘Begin process Srebrenica’, *De Telegraaf*, 22 August 2006. Reading the titles of the articles, I can only assume this is about the lawsuit of Mustafić.

For example see: Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Dutchbat zond lokale monteur weg van basis’; Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Rechtszaak Srebrenica tegen staat’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 11 July 2005; Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Dutchbatters hadden meer kunnen doen’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 12 July 2005; C. Huisman, ‘Dutchbatters hebben niemand gered, maar hadden wel die mogelijkheid’, *De Volkskrant*, 30 June 2005; Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘Nabestaanden Srebrenica beginnen rechtszaak tegen Staat’, *De Volkskrant*, 10 July 2005; O. Tempelman, ‘Srebrenica, wat kunnen we anders doen dan herdenken’.

<sup>157</sup> Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Rechtszaak Srebrenica tegen staat’; S. Derix, ‘Twaalf jaar na de val’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 April 2007.

sides of the lawsuit, claimants and the state attorney, were given a voice to clarify their position in the lawsuit. Besides *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Volkskrant* was also showing interest in the lawsuit after the verdict of 2011. In both newspapers responses to the verdict of several people were discussed. There were some preserved reactions, for example. A member of the parliament Frans Timmermans (PvdA), who was quoted in an article: ‘I do not know the judgement yet. I would like to study it. I cannot oversee the consequences at the moment. In a case like this, caution and accuracy are required’.<sup>158</sup> But the comments concerning the verdict were mostly positive; one could even say enthusiastic. Damir Mustafić (son of Rizo Mustafić) responded: ‘This statement is unbelievable. We have been proceeding for ten years. We did not expect such a statement anymore’.<sup>159</sup> Also, other responses were quoted from the relatives, the advocate of the relatives Liesbeth Zegveld, the foundation Mothers of Srebrenica, and the mayor Camil Durakovic of Srebrenica.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, member of the parliament, Harry van Bommel (SP) was pleased with the verdict. In *De Volkskrant* in the article ‘Defensie verrast door uitspraak Srebrenica’, van Bommel said that the verdict must satisfy the relatives since they received recognition for the liability of the Netherlands and the suffering that has been done to them.<sup>161</sup> Journalist Peter Giesen also made it clear that the Netherlands cannot hide behind the United Nations.<sup>162</sup> *NRC Handelsblad* goes a little further by blaming the Dutch state for the way it dealt with the Srebrenica events. For instance, the Dutch government had to take moral and political responsibility long before the verdict.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, both newspapers did not consider the state’s point of view. The quotes given by the State attorney are mainly short phrases, containing only factual information and no response to the verdict.

The fixation of the newspapers on discussing the positive reactions to the verdict indicate that readers of the *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* tended to support the side of the relatives. Especially *NRC Handelsblad* strongly points the finger to the Dutch state. Looking at the question of responsibility, it suggests that these newspapers opposed the side of the Dutch state.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibidem

See also the reaction of the President of *Veteranen Platform* Leen Noordzij who reacted preserved about the verdict in: Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘Defensie verrast door uitspraak Srebrenica’, *De Volkskrant*, 5 July 2011.

<sup>159</sup> B. Hinke, ‘Staat beraadt zich na ‘onverwachte’ uitspraak Srebrenica-zaak’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 July 2011.

<sup>160</sup> Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘Defensie verrast door uitspraak Srebrenica’.

<sup>161</sup> Ibidem

<sup>162</sup> P. Giesen, ‘Schuld en boete’ 7 July 2011, *De Volkskrant*, 7 July 2011.

<sup>163</sup> Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Pijnlijk oordeel voor de staat’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 July 2011; C. Banning, ‘Commandant Karremans en collega’s nu ook onder vuur’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 July 2011.

### *Readers of De Telegraaf: in conflict*

In contrast to *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant*, the readers of *De Telegraaf* did not express which side they supported, by publishing reactions to the verdict. In fact, it remains unclear which side *De Telegraaf* supported as fingers are pointed in several directions regarding who to blame. For example, in the article ‘Srebrenica’ in 2011, it states, ‘the verdict is especially painful for the former military and political summit. They have withdrawn themselves from any responsibility and have repeatedly passed on the question of guilt to the UN for sixteen years’.<sup>164</sup> This example shows that the Dutch state could be held accountable for sending away Mustafić. But, in another article it was made clear that Karadžić and leader of the Serbian troops Ratko Mladić were the ones to blame.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, *De Telegraaf* circulated a poll in Dutch society whereby they could vote on who is to blame for the death of Mustafić. Most of the people voted for the UN because the Netherlands operated under the UN flag. In that manner, the UN was liable for the actions of Dutchbat concerning Mustafić. So, the readers of *De Telegraaf* constantly switch from side about who is at fault: the Dutch state, Karadžić and Mladić or the UN.

Just like the years following the Srebrenica events, the question of responsibility was still present two decades later. Putting emphasis on the positive reactions to the verdict of 2011, it seemed the readers of *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* were choosing the side of the relatives, who held the Dutch government responsible. In contrast, the readers of *De Telegraaf* were at conflict with themselves about which side they wanted to support. The verdict of 2011 stimulated the traumatic memory of the Srebrenica events because it reintroduced the question of responsibility. Apparently, the assignment of responsibility was a topic which repeatedly grabbed the attention of Dutch society. Here the ambivalence of the memory of the Srebrenica events is clearly expressed. In its turn, this had strengthened the indelibility of the traumatic memory.

### **A threat to the Dutch identity**

Beyond the ambivalence, another component of the definition of cultural trauma is,

A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or

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<sup>164</sup> Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Srebrenica’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 July 2011.

<sup>165</sup> Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Schuld’, *De Telegraaf*, 7 July 2011.

more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or group's identity whereby negative effects arise.

In chapter one, it was discussed that the Srebrenica events had damaged the image of Dutch society as model international citizens. When such traumas are experienced among a collective, their identity will become decisively altered.<sup>166</sup> In the case of the Netherlands, Dutch society had to rethink Dutch involvement in peacekeeping missions in general, a discussion which began in 1998.<sup>167</sup> During the Mustafić lawsuit, there were signs which indicated Dutch society had not yet taken a stance in this discussion. The consideration of future involvement in peacekeeping missions was demonstrated by a debate concerning whether the lawsuit would result in any consequences for future UN peacekeeping missions. A discussion which also found a place in the international realm.<sup>168</sup>

The verdict of 2011 marked the first time a state had been held accountable for acts committed by its troops deployed on an UN mission. As a result, from 2008 to 2012, it was decided that this verdict might have huge consequences for other UN peacekeeping missions in the future.<sup>169</sup> For instance, the willingness to send out national troops to future UN

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<sup>166</sup> Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', 22.

<sup>167</sup> Zarkov, 'Srebrenica trauma: Masculinity, military and national self-image in Dutch daily Newspapers', 197.

<sup>168</sup> See: C. Klep, *Somalië, Rwanda, Srebrenica: De nasleep van drie ontspoorde vredesmissies* (Amsterdam: 2008) and C. Klep, *Van Korea tot Kosovo: de Nederlandse militaire deelname aan vredesoperaties sinds 1945* (Den Haag 2000). For example: J. van de Bildt, 'Srebrenica: A Dutch national trauma', *Journal of Peace, Conflict & Development* (2015) 21, 115-145; B. Boutin, "Responsibility of the Netherlands for the acts of Dutchbat in Nuhanovic and Mustafic: the continuous quest for a tangible meaning for 'effective control' in the context of peacekeeping", *Leiden Journal of International Law* 25 (2012) 2, 521-535; O.M. Direk, 'Responsibility in peace support operations: revisiting the proper test for attribution conduct and the meaning of the "effective control" standard', *Netherlands International Law Review* 61 (2014) 1, 1-22; N. Mileva, 'State Responsibility in Peacekeeping: The effect of responsibility on future contributions', *Utrecht Law Review* 12 (2016) 1, 122-138; O. Spijkers, 'Responsibility of the Netherlands for the Genocide in Srebrenica: The Nuhanović and Mothers of Srebrenica Cases Compared', *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 18 (2014) 3-4, 281-189; A. Nollkaemper, 'Dual Attribution: Liability of the Netherlands for Conduct of Dutchbat in Srebrenica', *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 9 (2011) 5, 1143-1157; C. Ryngaert, 'Apportioning Responsibility between the UN and Member States in UN Peace-Support Operations: An Inquiry into the Application of the "Effective Control" Standard after Behrami', *Israel Law Review* 45 (2012) 1, 151-178 and S. Williams and D. McGoldrick, 'Killings at Srebrenica, effective control, and the power to prevent unlawful conduct', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 61 (2012), 713-728.

<sup>169</sup> C. Banning, 'Familie Dutchbat-staf wil dat de staat schuld erkent', *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 June 2008; C. Banning, 'Nederland verliest proces Srebrenica', *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 July 2011; B. Hinke, 'Nederland aansprakelijk voor dood drie Bosnische moslims – "oordeel spectaculair"', *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 July 2011; Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, 'Pijnlijk oordeel voor de staat'; J. Eijssvoogel, 'Hof stapt makkelijk heen over rol VN', *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 July 2011; S. de Jong, 'VN-vredesmissie wordt een verzekeringskwestie. Commentaren op het Srebrenica-vonnis', *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 July 2011; J. Eijssvoogel, 'Wie wil er nog blauwhelmen op uit sturen?' *NRC Handelsblad*, 7 July 2011; L. Vervaeke, 'Hartverscheurend, en niet te volgen', *De Volkskrant*, 17 June 2008; L. Vervaeke, 'Actie Dutchbat viel buiten mandaat VN', *De Volkskrant*, 22 April 2011; L. Vervaeke, 'Nederland verantwoordelijk voor dood Moslim Srebrenica', *De Volkskrant*, 6 July 2011; H.W. von der Dunk, 'Aanvaard Haags vonnis Srebrenica', *De Volkskrant*, 12 July 2011; Redactie *De Volkskrant*, 'Staat niet aansprakelijk in Srebrenica-zaak', *De Volkskrant*, 18 January 2013; C. Sanders, 'Staat schuldig aan

interventions would decrease because states could be responsible for the acts of their soldiers.<sup>170</sup> In this manner, Dutch society was becoming more reserved about peacekeeping operations. Consequently, the system itself - of countries delivering troops to the UN for peacekeeping missions - was called into question.<sup>171</sup> According to Richard Gowan, the verdict could serve as a warning to European countries. However, Gowan argues, European countries were already reserved about becoming involved in long-term peacekeeping missions, and therefore the verdict would not set a precedent for the preparedness of states to deliver troops to UN missions.<sup>172</sup>

This side of the opposition grew stronger from 2013, the public opinion shifted clearly to the statement that the verdict would not lead to consequences for future peacekeeping missions.<sup>173</sup> Besides, it is even argued that the consequences of the verdict may be positive. It could lead to more or better attention to the effects of a mission for the soldiers or the local population.<sup>174</sup> This is something which happened after the verdict of 2013, several measures were introduced so as to prevent a repetition of the Srebrenica events.<sup>175</sup> In that manner, the Dutch soldiers could still take part in UN peacekeeping operations. It seemed that Dutch society, after all, was holding onto their duty to take part in international peacekeeping operations as ‘model international citizens’.<sup>176</sup>

Throughout the years, the memory of the Srebrenica events continued to pose a threat to Dutch identity. Dutch society conflicted with itself about which stance it would take in future peacekeeping missions. Eventually, by seeing the verdict as something which had no consequences on peacekeeping missions, this suggests that Dutch society had chosen its side; acting as model international citizens, only with a stricter policy.

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Srebrenica-doden; Dutchbat-drama krijgt staartje voor militaire top’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 July 2011; R. van Zwieten, ‘VN verantwoordelijk; Stemmers: Staat niet aansprakelijk voor dood drie moslims in Srebrenica’, *De Telegraaf*, 8 July 2011.

<sup>170</sup> Banning, ‘Nederland verliest proces Srebrenica’; Hinke, ‘Nederland aansprakelijk voor dood drie Bosnische moslims – “oordeel spectaculair”’; Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Pijnlijk oordeel voor de staat’; Eijsvogel, ‘Hof stapt makkelijk heen over rol VN’; Vervaeke, ‘Hartverscheurend, en niet te volgen’; Vervaeke, ‘Actie Dutchbat viel buiten mandaat VN’; Vervaeke, ‘Nederland verantwoordelijk voor dood Moslim Srebrenica’; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Staat niet aansprakelijk in Srebrenica-zaak’.

<sup>171</sup> Eijsvogel, ‘Hof stapt makkelijk heen over rol VN’; Eijsvogel, ‘Wie wil er nog blauwhelmen op uit sturen?’.

<sup>172</sup> Ibidem

<sup>173</sup> Eijsvogel, ‘Hof stapt makkelijk heen over rol VN’; Eijsvogel, ‘Wie wil er nog blauwhelmen op uit sturen?’; G. van Dijck, ‘Uitspraak Srebrenica kan ook juist goed uitpakken’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 July 2014; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Nederland houdt vast aan missies; Aansprakelijkheid voor dood moslimmannen heeft geen gevolgen’, *De Telegraaf*, 7 September 2013; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Oppositie: excuses maken over Srebrenica’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 September 2013; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Staat niet aansprakelijk in Srebrenica-zaak’.

<sup>174</sup> Van Dijck, ‘Uitspraak Srebrenica kan ook juist goed uitpakken’.

<sup>175</sup> Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Nederland houdt vast aan missies; Aansprakelijkheid voor dood moslimmannen heeft geen gevolgen’; Van Dijck, ‘Uitspraak Srebrenica kan ook juist goed uitpakken’.

<sup>176</sup> M. Simons, ‘Bosnia Massacre Mars Do-Right Self-Image the Dutch Hold Dear’.

## Compassion through guilt

It was discovered, in chapter one, that Dutch society was feeling humiliated and ashamed, and that they felt guilt after the Srebrenica events. Being Dutch was characterized by these effects, and, as part of their identity, it strengthened the assertion that a cultural trauma existed or was threatening. Analysing the Dutch identity two decades later, guilt was still part of being Dutch. This was expressed by being compassionate to the Mustafić family. It is important to note that effects as humiliation and shame were not detected in this period. However, this does not suggest they are not entirely present anymore. Due to the changing aspect of trauma it could be that humiliation and shames were less visible.

Feeling collective guilt was not a unique phenomenon. When the new German generation got a voice in the political arena in the 1960s, a narrative of collective guilt dominated the society.<sup>177</sup> This, eventually, led to ‘public rituals of confessing the guilt for the Holocaust’ by representatives who were innocent as individual persons.<sup>178</sup> In case of the Mustafić lawsuit, guilt was expressed as a feeling of compassion. Compassion is fixated on ‘the relief of suffering’.<sup>179</sup> The term indicates ‘a social relation between spectators and sufferers, with the emphasis on the spectator’s experience of feeling compassion’.<sup>180</sup> The feeling of compassion was demonstrated in two ways: by telling of stories from the Mustafić family and by stressing the responsibility of the Dutch government to make an official apology to the family.

## *Personal stories of the Mustafić family*

By publishing a plethora of personal phrases and stories from the relatives, *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* showed one way by which to express signs of compassion; *De Telegraaf* did not publish any personal stories of the relatives. These stories show that the Srebrenica events and the subsequent loss of their father/husband were terrible for the relatives; they were still suffering from this traumatic memory. Alma Mustafić told several stories about her father Rizo Mustafić, for example about how her father was sent away from the gate before she could give him a hug or say goodbye.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, it was demonstrated that the lawsuit

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<sup>177</sup> Giesen, ‘The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity’.

<sup>178</sup> Giesen, ‘The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity’ 130.

<sup>179</sup> T.G. Plante, *The Psychology of Compassion and Cruelty: Understanding the Emotional, Spiritual, and Religious Influences* (California 2015) 17.

<sup>180</sup> L. Berlant, *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York & London 2004) 1.

<sup>181</sup> J. Tromp, ‘Gedreven buiger van recht dat krom is’, *De Volkskrant*, 19 March 2013.

itself was experienced being as difficult for the relatives. For instance, an article quoted, ‘The lawsuit is “long-lasting and exhausting”, sighs Alma. “Emotionally, we are broken. We are losing my father again and again”’.<sup>182</sup> These examples show that the traumatic memory of Srebrenica was still felt by the relatives in such a way they could not reconcile with their trauma. Putting emphasis on these stories, stirred feelings of compassion within Dutch society. In this manner, the society was shown to be compassionate to the sufferings of the relatives.

### *Demanding an apology of the Dutch government*

Being compassionate involved alleviating the suffering of the victims and having empathy for what they will need to flourish and prevent future suffering.<sup>183</sup> Dutch society demonstrated this by demanding an official apology to the Mustafić family from the Dutch government. By being issued an official apology, the relatives of Rizo Mustafic might begin to come to terms with the trauma created by the events in Srebrenica. Even though *De Telegraaf* did not discuss any personal stories, it did underline that the relatives deserved an official apology from the Dutch state. This was also brought to attention by *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant*. For instance, Dion van den Berg of IKV Pax Christi (an organisation which supported the relatives for years) wanted the Dutch government to apologise.<sup>184</sup> Van den Berg argues,

It would suit the government ... to offer an apology. Why? Because the time has come for a new political-ethical consideration. For ten years, the politicians kept silence, because the case was not closed yet. Now, it is the turn of the politics.<sup>185</sup>

Additionally, members of the parliament, such as Harry van Bommel (SP), Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66), and Joel Voordewind (ChristenUnie) supported the view of the public.<sup>186</sup> According to

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<sup>182</sup> Banning, ‘Familie Dutchbat-staf wil dat de staat schuld erkent’.

<sup>183</sup> P. Gilbert, ‘The Evolution and Social Dynamics of Compassion’, 242.

<sup>184</sup> Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Nu moet de regering nog excuses aanbieden’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 7 September 2013; Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘Nederland aansprakelijk voor doden Srebrenica’, *De Volkskrant*, 6 September 2013; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Nederland aansprakelijk voor dood moslims’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 September 2013; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘IKV Pax Christi: tijd voor excuses Nederland’, *De Telegraaf*, 6 September 2013.

<sup>185</sup> Redactie *NRC Handelsblad*, ‘Nu moet de regering nog excuses aanbieden’.

<sup>186</sup> M. Haenen and E. van Outeren, ‘Nu is het tijd om excuses aan te bieden’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 7 September 2013; F. Huiskamp, ‘Kabinet zal handelen naar uitspraak Hoge Raad over Srebrenica’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 6 September 2013; Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘Oppositie: excuses maken over Srebrenica’, *De Volkskrant*, 6 September 2013; Redactie *De Volkskrant*, ‘Nederland aansprakelijk gesteld voor dood mannen in Srebrenica’, *De Volkskrant*, 7 September 2013; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, ‘Oppositie: excuses maken over Srebrenica’;

van Bommel, the responsibility of the Netherlands for the death of Mustafić is rightfully acknowledged, and that must lead to an apology from the government.<sup>187</sup> So, Dutch society clearly wanted the government to apologise.

Why would the Dutch society be so compassionate to the Mustafić family? This was connected to the feeling of collective guilt, which was expressed by compassion, that the Dutch society experienced after the Srebrenica events. This was shown by the story-telling of the Mustafić family-members, and by emphasising the responsibility of the Dutch government to make an official apology to the relatives. Thus, two decades after the Srebrenica events, apart from the debate revolving around what stance Dutch society had to take to the future peacekeeping missions, the feeling of guilt was part of their identity throughout the years. In turn, this strengthened the claim that the Srebrenica trauma still existed. These two aspects show that the memory of the Srebrenica events was still posing a threat for Dutch identity.

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Redactie *De Telegraaf*, 'Nederland houdt vast aan missies; Aansprakelijkheid voor dood moslimmannen heeft geen gevolgen'.

<sup>187</sup> Huis Kamp, 'Kabinet zal handelen naar uitspraak Hoge Raad over Srebrenica'; Redactie *De Volkskrant*, 'Oppositie: excuses maken over Srebrenica'; Redactie *De Telegraaf*, 'Oppositie: excuses maken over Srebrenica'.

## Concluding Remarks and Discussion

### Conclusion

This research examines the extent to which Dutch society is still suffering from a 'Srebrenica trauma'. The fall of Srebrenica and the subsequent genocide were marked as a Srebrenica trauma for the Netherlands. The traumatic memory of these events expressed itself in several ways. Firstly, by the means of fixed representations. The Srebrenica events were described as a 'Srebrenica trauma', 'Dutch trauma' or a 'national trauma' in the first few years following the events. Moreover, the indelibility was showed by the ambivalence of the traumatic memory. Hereby the assignment of responsibility formed the focus point. Over the years, it appeared that the responsibility question resurfaced multiple times. Two decades after the Srebrenica events, in the period of the Mustafić lawsuit, the attention of the public was fixated on the assignment of responsibility again. Besides, a few examples of indelibility in the news articles were noticed, such as '(humanitarian) tragedy', 'national trauma', 'black day of Dutchbat' and 'black page'. This clearly indicated that events were represented as being unforgettable.

The traumatic memory can also be explained by regarding the Srebrenica events as posing a threat to the Dutch identity. After the return of Dutchbat, it became clear what had happened in Srebrenica. The memory of the events resulted in a broken Dutch identity. They felt humiliated, and feelings of shame and guilt arouse. Their self-image as model international citizens became a fantasy. To restore this broken identity, Dutch society had to rethink Dutch involvement in peacekeeping missions. This was illustrated by the Mustafić lawsuit. In these years, there was an ongoing debate focussing on the stance that the Netherlands should take concerning future peacekeeping missions. At first, Dutch society indicated that the lawsuit would lead to far-reaching consequences for future peacekeeping missions. But the side of the opposition strengthened after the verdict of 2013. Eventually, it seemed Dutch society would keep on contributing to international peacekeeping operations as 'model international citizens', only with a stricter policy. During these years, Dutch society felt guilt which was expressed by acting compassionately towards the relatives. The rethinking of Dutch involvement in peacekeeping missions and the feeling of guilt illustrated the memory of the Srebrenica events was posing a threat for Dutch identity. In conclusion, the Srebrenica trauma among Dutch society was still present in the years of the Mustafić lawsuit. By applying the definition of cultural, this thesis argues Dutch society still suffers from the national trauma. This can be explained by two components: the presence of indelible

representations of the Srebrenica events and by regarding this memory as a threat to Dutch identity. By demonstrating these components of the issue, this thesis provides a sufficient picture of the unpredictable, complex and long pathway that the trauma has taken.

## Discussion

Examining the Srebrenica trauma by means of a case-study, showed only a fragment of this complex issue. As a result, there are countless questions still unanswered. To provide a whole picture of the Srebrenica in this period, other newspapers and media resources should also have been included in the research. Further research regarding the Srebrenica trauma among Dutch society during the Mustafić lawsuit should be focused on this aspect. Also, the lawsuit of Hasan Nuhanović could be added. This lawsuit took place at the same time as the Mustafić lawsuit. Hasan Nuhanović also sued the Dutch state for liability of the ‘wrongful acts by offering insufficient protection to the victims and exposing them to the enemy’. Although the public showed less interest in this case, it would be meaningful to involve this lawsuit in further research.

The insights provided by this research proved to be valuable in this case, and definitely have more to offer during follow-up research. This thesis is focused on a specific case in a period of time. Further research is necessary to provide more information about the discourse of Srebrenica trauma today. Therefore, it is possible to look at several significant moments related to the Srebrenica events. For example, one could look at the lawsuit of the Mothers of Srebrenica after the final judgement was given. The foundation ‘Mothers of Srebrenica’ together with ten women, all the relatives of men who were murdered in July 1995, had sued the UN and the Dutch state. They wanted a compensation claim for all the pain they have been through concerning the death of their beloved ones. Since the Dutch state can appeal to a higher court, the case is not yet closed. As a result, the case cannot be examined at present, but it will be valuable for further research when the case has been closed.

As my thesis discussed, the Srebrenica trauma existed in the years after the Srebrenica events. Moreover, it showed that there are signs which indicate the Srebrenica trauma was present during the Mustafić lawsuit. Taking the discourse of the Srebrenica trauma nowadays into consideration, it is also significant to examine ways that the Dutch society can use to overcome the Srebrenica trauma. For example, it was not until 2015 that the Minister of

Defence Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert apologized for the death of Mustafić.<sup>188</sup> Apologies can ‘reconcile and reunite oppositions and ruptures and provide ways to overcome traumas’.<sup>189</sup> This might have indicated that in 2015, Dutch society was finally coming to terms with the Srebrenica trauma. This is important, not only for the reconciliation of Dutch society, but as the trauma may still influence Dutch foreign policy today. If Dutch society fails to deal with the traumatic memory of the Srebrenica events, the book of Srebrenica will never be closed.

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<sup>188</sup> T. Niemantsverdriet and A. Kas, ‘Eerst woorden, maar dan ook daden’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 June 2015.

<sup>189</sup> Giesen, ‘The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity’ 130.

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## Figures

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Figure 2: Wikimedia Commons, ‘Yugoslavia ethnic map’, 23 December 2006, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yugoslavia\\_ethnic\\_map.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yugoslavia_ethnic_map.jpg) (18 November 2018).

Figure 3: Spiegel Online, ‘Srebrenica Survivors Sue Netherlands, United Nations’, 5 June 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/grossbild-486755-885921.html> (18 November 2018).

## Appendices

*Figure 1:* Map of countries which belonged to the Federation of Yugoslav Republics before the Federation began to unravel in 1980.



Figure 2: Map of the ethnic diversity in former Yugoslavia in 1991



Figure 3: Srebrenica 'safe area'



