Soldiers in Conflict

Moral Injury, Political Practices and Public Perceptions

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Glossary of Military Terms and Ranks

Missions

The former Yugoslavia

UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force, UN-led mission in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-1995
Dutchbat	Dutch troops deployed in and around Srebrenica, the former Yugoslavia, as part of UNPROFOR, 1994-1995. Four rotations (Dutchbat 1 to 4) were deployed in total. The third rotation, Dutchbat III, was the battalion that experienced the fall of Srebrenica

Afghanistan

ISAF	International Security Assistance Force, NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, 2003-2014
TFU	Task Force Uruzgan, Dutch troops deployed to Uruzgan, South Afghanistan, as part of ISAF, 2006-2010. Eight rotations (TFU 1 to 8) were deployed in total
OEF(-A)	Operation Enduring Freedom, US-led operation in Afghanistan, 2001-2014

Military Terms

OP	Observation Post
IED	Improvised Explosive Device, also referred to as roadside bomb
TIC	Troops In Contact, used to refer to a military engagement (combat)
OMF	Opposing Military Forces

Ranks in the Royal Netherlands Armed Forces (simplified)

Enlisted ranks

Private / Aircraftman / Seaman / Marine (depending on military branch)
Corporal

Enlisted ranks: non-commissioned officers [NCO's]

Sergeant
Sergeant Major
Warrant Officer

Officers

Lieutenant
Captain
Major
Lieutenant-Colonel
Colonel
General (Brigadier General; Major General; Lieutenant General; General)

Maps of Mission Areas

Figure 1: Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina[1]

Figure 2: Map of Srebrenica 'Safe Area' (area: ~150 km²)

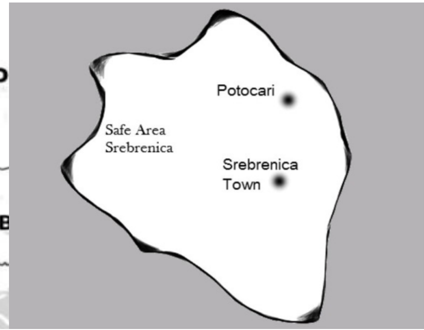


Figure 3: Map of Afghani-stan[2]

Figure 4: Map of Province of Uruzgan (area: 12.640 km²)

1 Map Data ©2017 Google

2 Map Data ©2017 Google

Part One

Setting the Stage

1

Chapter 1. Introduction

A government decides to contribute troops to an international military intervention. On the mission, the deployed soldiers confront difficult circumstances. Casualties mount: among the opponents, among the own troops, and among civilians. Meanwhile, the mission is the subject of debate in parliament and media, which heats up when something happens to draw the legitimacy of the mission into question. How did it happen? Who is responsible? What should they have done differently? Was this mission not doomed from the start? Eventually, these questions are translated into Lessons Learned, to prevent similar failures in the future.

This is one way to describe military intervention and related issues of justice, responsibility and blame. Its bird's view approach provides a structured and legible overview, allowing a clear understanding of a military mission's course of events. As such, however, it offers only little insight into the experience of those involved in the mission.

Another way to describe an intervention is as follows. The veteran – still a young man – recounts the difficult circumstances he and his colleagues confronted while on deployment. Initially he speaks about his deployment and homecoming experience in a matter-of-fact and almost casual manner, yet visibly tenses when discussing disturbing experiences. He has struggled with lingering doubts about situations in which he made choices he did not want to make. Is he responsible for those people's suffering? This question still haunts him. At the same time, he feels that he did what he did because he had no other option. He often asks himself, what were they doing there in the first place? The government sent them there with limited resources and then abandoned them to their fate. Over there, and back here.

On returning home, he started to work hard and party hard. He became aggressive, at work and at home, driven into a spiral of guilt and anger. At first, however, he did not link any of this to his deployment. Even so, he refused to talk about it because he was afraid of being condemned. Accusations about what they had done wrong over there would slice into him like a knife and infuriate him, because people had no idea of what had happened there. At the same time, the accusations hurt so much because self-reproach kept him up until early in the morning. Still, for a long time he thought he was fine, and that in fact he was the lucky one for not developing problems, up until his haunting thoughts and feelings finally made him collapse. He sought help and eventually received a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yet, even if his PTSD-focused therapy helped counter his persistent tension, it could not rid him of his feelings of guilt and anger. His family and friends insisted that nobody was to blame for what had happened, but he kept struggling with the sense that he and others should have acted differently.

In the present study, I adopt this second approach of considering moral dimensions of military practice from below, focusing on the experiences of Dutch veterans deployed to Srebrenica, the former Yugoslavia, and Uruzgan, Afghanistan, and on to what extent and how their experiences were embedded in the wider sociopolitical context of their missions. In doing so, I attempt to better understand how moral challenges at both the micro- and macro-level affect soldiers 'on the ground' and potentially generate distress among them.

Moral Injury: Linking the Moral and the Psychological

Many of the stories I have collected over the past years are about perceived personal failure, betrayal of trust, guilt and anger, and suffering. Put differently, they are about questions of right and wrong, the psychological experience of distress, and the link between them. Both scientific and media discourses of military intervention, however, tend to separate these two topics.

The topic of moral questions surrounding military intervention is usually dealt with in the domains of political ethics and law. These domains discuss when military intervention is justified, what conduct is legitimate, and where responsibility lies in the case of transgression (see e.g. Walzer 1973, 1977, Ely 1993, Ó Tuathail 1999, Ramsey 2002, Evans 2005, Parrish 2007, Cooper and Kohler 2009, Dorn 2011, Wijze 2012, Berkowitz 2013, Orend 2013). While this approach offers normative considerations for military practice, it does not necessarily yield insight into how soldiers struggle with questions of right and wrong and thus develop distress.

At the same time, the topic of soldiers' distress is predominantly taken up in the medical domain, and conceptualized as post-traumatic stress disorder (Kienzler 2008, Scandlyn and Hautzinger 2014). In most Western countries, the concept has become so well-known that it is often only referred to by its acronym, and many war movies depict typical PTSD symptoms such as jumpiness and vivid flashbacks. Most current models of the disorder define PTSD as the result of exposure to (threatened) violence or injury, and identify fear as the reaction lying at the core of post-traumatic stress (DePrince and Freyd 2002, Litz et al. 2009, Drescher et al. 2011, Difede et al. 2014). Consequently, moral dimensions of trauma generally receive little attention (Shay 1994, Bica 1999, Litz et al. 2009, Drescher et al. 2011).

However, there is considerable evidence indicating that moral challenges encountered during deployment may engender profound suffering. Mental health practitioners working with veterans report that moral conflict is a significant element of many veterans' struggles (Shay 1994, Drescher et al. 2011), and their observations resonate with academic research on this matter. In a survey conducted among US combat veterans, 10.8% reported engagement in moral transgressions, 25.5% reported transgressions by others, and 25.5% reported feelings of betrayal (Wisco et al. 2017). Another survey showed that 28% of US Iraq and Afghanistan veterans had encountered 'ethical situations', in which they 'did not know how to respond' (MHAT-V 2008, p. 58). Schut (2015), similarly, found that Dutch soldiers are often confronted by 'morally critical situations'. Moreover, many studies find that a significant proportion of soldiers faced by such situations develop feelings of shame, guilt and/or anger (see e.g. Litz et al. 2009, Ritov and Barnetz 2014, Currier et al. 2015, Bryan et al. 2016, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016, Jordan et al. 2017, Wisco et al. 2017). Though most of these studies focus on combat soldiers, and particularly on the moral impact of killing, others indicate that negative moral emotions may also arise in other deployment circumstances. A study among Dutch peacekeepers (Rietveld 2009), for instance, found that 25% felt guilty about their deployment experience, of which one third experienced distress due to their feelings of guilt.

The idea that war can be morally disrupting is ancient (see Shay 1994, 2002). However, systematic, comprehensive efforts to conceptualize moral dimensions of deployment-related

distress are relatively recent (Litz et al. 2009, Maguen and Litz 2012, Nash and Litz 2013, Shay 2014). In 2009, psychologist Brett Litz and his colleagues introduced a preliminary, now often-cited conceptual model of 'moral injury' (Litz et al. 2009, 2015, Nash and Litz 2013, Nash et al. 2013). The model is intended to capture what current PTSD models fail to sufficiently address: moral dimensions of trauma. The general idea is that moral injury results from deployment experiences that affect a soldier's moral foundations and thus cause suffering. Specifically, it is defined as the result of 'an act of transgression that creates dissonance and conflict because it violates assumptions and beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness' (Litz et al. 2009, p. 689, see also Boudreau 2011, Drescher et al. 2011, Shay 2014). Although some symptoms assigned to moral injury overlap with those of PTSD, such as intrusive distressing memories, avoidance behavior and numbing, other symptoms are believed to be specific to moral injury, including demoralization, self-sabotaging behaviors and self-injury (Litz et al. 2009, Maguen and Litz 2012, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016). Also, whereas in current PTSD models feelings of guilt, shame and anger are readily approached as misplaced emotions that need to be corrected, in the concept of moral injury they are understood as possibly appropriate (Litz et al. 2009, Nash and Litz 2013). 'Moral injury', in short, addresses the link between moral issues of military intervention and psychological distress.

The concept of moral injury has attracted fast-growing attention in both academic and public discourse. Many studies are currently working on developing workable clinical models for moral injury. These studies seek to validate the concept with empirical evidence (e.g. Drescher et al. 2011, Maguen and Litz 2012, Vargas et al. 2013), facilitate the measurement and diagnosis of moral injury (Nash et al. 2013, Currier et al. 2015, 2017, Bryan et al. 2016, Koenig et al. 2018) and develop therapies for moral injury (Gray et al. 2012, Steenkamp et al. 2013, Paul et al. 2014, Laifer et al. 2015, Litz et al. 2015, Farnsworth et al. 2017, Griffin et al. 2017, Held et al. 2018). Such research is valuable. In addition to working on the validation, diagnosis and treatment of moral injury, however, it is important to take a step back and work on the concept itself, as it is still in its developmental stages. First, the concept needs empirical and theoretical development regarding the specific mechanisms at play (Maguen and Litz 2012, Frame 2015, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016, Farnsworth et al. 2017). Moreover, as critical attitudes suggest, it may need modification. Though 'moral injury' is intended to address the moral aspects that current PTSD models fail to capture, the current concept still focuses on the 'injury' while attending too little to the 'moral' (Kinghorn 2012, Wilson 2014, Beard 2015, Molendijk et al. 2018). Also, like current PTSD models, it decontextualizes deployment-related trauma away from the people who send soldiers on a mission and welcome them back (MacLeish 2010, Scandlyn and Hautzinger 2014, Molendijk et al. 2018).

In the present study I address these gaps, aiming to advance the concept of moral injury by attending to three related issues. The first issue concerns questions about 'the moral' in 'moral injury'. The current concept describes a person's moral beliefs as a 'code' which may be violated by intruding acts (see e.g. Litz et al. 2009, Ritov and Barnetz 2014, Currier et al. 2015, Bryan et al. 2016, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016, Jordan et al. 2017, Wisco et al. 2017), a conceptualization that can be further developed and refined. As philosophical and social scientific studies teach us, moral beliefs do not constitute a harmonious system but a total of multiple, potentially competing values (e.g. Zigon 2008, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013, Tessman

2014). Soldiers internalize both civilian and military values, and as soldiers they are not merely instruments of the state who must adhere to political norms, but always remain moral agents with personal values (e.g. Baarda and Verweij 2006, Molendijk et al. 2018). In other words, soldiers have multiple moral commitments that may co-exist in tension, and it seems worthwhile to examine whether and how this complexity plays a role in the experience of 'moral injury'.

The second and third issues concern the role of political practices and public debates in 'moral injury'. Both issues relate to the fact that soldiers – as civilians, soldiers, instruments of the state and so on – do not live in a social vacuum, but with reference to the political domain and society. The current concept of moral injury 'keeps the emphasis on the individual soldier and his or her actions and away from the political and military leaders who ordered them into combat and the civilians, willingly or not, who stand behind them' (Scandlyn and Hautzinger 2014, p. 15). However, political practices and public perceptions clearly have consequences for circumstances on the micro-level. They shape the ways in which soldiers are deployed and how soldiers are perceived and treated when they get back; they shape and constrain soldiers' actions on deployment, and co-construct judgments on what soldiers have done or failed to do. Therefore, it is worth examining whether such political practices and public perceptions play a role in experiences of 'moral injury', and if so, in what ways.

Research Objectives and Questions

Before being able to translate the above considerations into specific research objectives and questions, I need to outline this study's approach to the concept of moral injury. To refine and possibly modify this concept requires critical reflection on the concept itself, the phenomena it aims to capture and the relation between both. Therefore, rather than readily accepting the current moral injury concept as established fact, I will carefully observe the distinction between the concept of moral injury and the phenomena this concept seeks to understand – just as one may distinguish, for instance, between the psychiatric concept of 'major depressive disorder' and the phenomena of feeling worthless, being unable to gain pleasure from activities, feeling restless and having trouble getting to sleep.

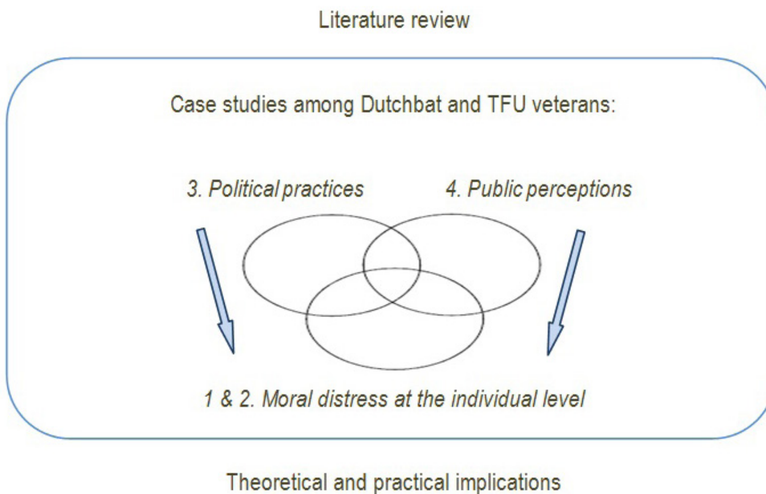
Research on psychological concepts, particularly, is often plagued by reification, that is, by misreading analytical abstractions as 'things' existing in objective reality (Hyman 2010, Dehue 2011, Nesse and Stein 2012, Korteling 2014). To avoid confusion and explicitly refrain from reification, I use different terms for concept and phenomena, respectively. I use the term moral injury to refer to the concept of moral injury developed by Litz and colleagues (Litz et al. 2009, 2015, Nash and Litz 2013, Nash et al. 2013). This concept puts forward a particular psychological definition of the moral dimension of deployment-related suffering (a mental wound yet distinct from PTSD), a particular cause (transgression of the own moral code) and particular solutions (including therapy focused on self-forgiveness). The phenomena that this concept aims to capture, I label as moral distress, intended as a nonspecific, open term.

It is not intended as yet another theoretical concept alongside the moral injury concept, but simply as shorthand for 'moral dimensions of deployment-related hurt or suffering' for the lack of a shorter term.

Having clarified this, I can formulate the overall objective of this study: **to advance the empirical and theoretical understanding of moral, political and societal dimensions of deployment-related moral distress, and in doing so, contribute to the concept of 'moral injury' and to practical interventions to address and prevent moral distress.** This objective is achieved by **examining (potential) moral dimensions of experiences of distress, and the (potential) role of political practices and public perceptions in experiences of moral distress, among Dutchbat and Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) veterans.** For this endeavor, I draw on case study-oriented empirical research I conducted involving 40 Dutchbat veterans deployed to Srebrenica, the former Yugoslavia, and 40 Dutch TFU veterans deployed to Uruzgan, Afghanistan. 'Veterans' refers to persons who have been on a mission and may or may not still be serving on active duty.

Achieving the objectives involves examining the following research questions: **what do (potential) moral dimensions of distress among veterans involve, what is the (potential) role of political practices and public perceptions in veterans' experiences of moral distress, and what does this mean for the concept of 'moral injury' and for practical interventions to address and prevent moral distress?** Examining these questions in turn involves the following steps (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Research Framework



The first step is a literature review of relevant existing studies from the fields of psychology, philosophy and social sciences regarding the topics of trauma, morality and sociopolitical aspects of mental suffering. The subsequent step involves a multiple case study among Dutchbat and TFU veterans, answering the following subquestions.

The individual level

1. How did Dutchbat and TFU soldiers in general interpret and cope with (potential) moral challenges related to their profession?
2. Did Dutchbat and TFU (ex-)soldiers report distress related to moral challenges, and if so, what did these challenges and experiences of distress entail?

Moral distress in relation to factors at the political level

3. Did political practices surrounding the Dutchbat and TFU missions, including decision-making practices related to the mission design, its framing and practices in the mission's aftermath, play a role in experiences of moral distress among deployed (ex-)soldiers, and if so, how?

Moral distress in relation to factors at the societal level

4. Did public perceptions of the Dutchbat and TFU missions and of the military in general, as expressed in for instance public debates, play a role in experiences of moral distress among (ex-)soldiers deployed on these missions, and if so, how?

The final step concerns determining the implications of the findings of this multiple case study. In terms of the theoretical implications, this involves answering the question of how the findings correspond with, add to or diverge from the current concept of moral injury, and how they contribute to the development and potential refinement of the concept. Reflecting on the findings involves translating them into practical implications for the question of how to address and decrease moral distress among (ex-)soldiers.

Relevance

This study takes up several critiques and appeals from different disciplines with regard to understanding deployment-related distress. First, it answers recent calls for research on *moral aspects* of mental health problems among veterans, termed moral injury (e.g. Boudreau 2011, Brock and Lettini 2012, Kinghorn 2012, Nash and Litz 2013, Farnsworth 2014, Meagher 2014, Shay 2014, Frame 2015). Second, it takes up persistent calls to address *societal factors* involved in war-related suffering, which overspill the boundaries of prevalent trauma models (Kleinman et al. 1997, Summerfield 2001, Withuis 2002, Kienzler 2008, Efraime and Errante 2012, Suarez 2013, Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2017) as well as those of current conceptualizations of moral injury (MacLeish 2010, 2018, Scandlyn and Hautzinger 2014). Third, it responds to appeals to go beyond an understanding of psychological distress in terms of disease, and also appreciate such distress as *more or other than pathological* (e.g. Kleinman et al. 1997,

Summerfield 2000, Withuis 2002, Das 2007, Kinghorn 2012, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013, Daphna-Tekoah and Harel-Shalev 2017).

In responding to these calls, this study makes several contributions to knowledge. Overall, it goes beyond general assertions that military action has a moral impact on soldiers, toward a comprehensive understanding of specific factors at play in deployment-related moral distress, including in military operations other than war. Specifically, this study provides insight into the moral beliefs with which soldiers are deployed and return home, the characteristics of the situations they may encounter on and after deployment, and how they are affected by political practices and public perceptions surrounding their mission. Theoretically, this study's main contribution lies in advancing the concept of 'moral injury', which originated in psychological circles, by contributing to the development and refinement of the concept regarding moral, political and societal dimensions of moral distress. In helping develop this interdisciplinary conceptualization of 'moral injury', this study furthers understanding of how the macro-level sociopolitical context of military missions may affect soldiers' individual experience of military practice, not only in war and combat, as is the focus of current research on 'moral injury', but also in peace support missions. In practical terms, this study provides therapists, counselors, military trainers and policy makers with suggestions for how to address moral distress at the individual, military, political and societal level.

Structure of the Dissertation

This Introduction and the next two chapters form Part I, which lays the groundwork for this study. Chapter 2 locates this research in relation to perspectives from various disciplines on the topics of trauma, morality and sociopolitical aspects of mental suffering. It provides both a review of relevant literature and a preliminary theoretical framework for the multiple case study. Chapter 3 specifies the methods and techniques this study used. Besides explaining the overall research strategy and elaborating on choices made for sampling, data collection and analysis, this chapter discusses epistemology, credibility, generalizability and research ethics.

Part II presents and analyzes the findings of the multiple case study. Chapter 4 sketches an overview of the Dutchbat and TFU missions, in anticipation of the subsequent four chapters, which discuss and analyze in detail various aspects of these missions. In these chapters, the focus moves from moral dimensions of deployment-related distress at the individual level (Chapters 5 and 6), to the role of political factors (Chapter 7) and societal factors (Chapter 8) in moral distress.

Chapter 5 explores how Dutchbat and TFU veterans in general – including those who do not develop distress – made sense of their deployment and (potential) moral challenges related to their profession. The purpose is to gain insight into the ways in which soldiers generally attempt to prevent moral distress, to better understand when and why moral distress does arise. The veterans' stories indicate that soldiers generally do not experience as much moral tension as one might expect considering their operational circumstances. Yet, the veterans' accounts also show that it does not mean that soldiers never experience tension,

and when they do, they tend to employ justifying simplifications to resolve it, relying on the belief that all situations are ultimately uncomplicated and soluble. Foreshadowing the subsequent chapters, Chapter 5 concludes that while such a belief may work in many cases as a self-fulfilling prophecy, it may exacerbate confusion and distress when conflicts turn out to be truly irresolvable.

Chapter 6 zooms in on veterans who reported distress related to moral challenges, examining the morally distressing experiences that emerged in their stories. It turns out that these were often not clear-cut experiences of wrongdoing (the focus of current studies on moral injury), and accordingly did not allow straightforward interpretations (which soldiers tend to employ). While veterans felt guilt and anger, they often also experienced uncertainty and conflict with respect to these feelings. That is, many developed a profound sense of moral disorientation, meaning that they lost their trust not only in the goodness of themselves and the world, but also in the very notions of good and bad. This painful loss forced them to engage in an ethical struggle, in order to find moral re-orientation again.

Chapter 7 relates the experiences of moral distress among Dutchbat and TFU veterans to the political practices that surrounded their mission. Specifically, this chapter examines how political decision-making and narratives played a role in the emergence of particular quandaries for soldiers 'on the ground', both on and after deployment, and how this in turn resulted in morally distressing experiences. This investigation reveals that the Dutchbat and TFU missions had far more in common than not. Both missions shared several fundamental problems at the political level, and as these problems remained unresolved, they affected soldiers at the micro-level. Moreover, political compromises did not always mean that problems were solved, but instead often implied that conflicts were left to the lower levels to deal with. As a result, many soldiers developed profound feelings of political betrayal and, in turn, sought reparations from the political leadership.

Chapter 8 turns to the role of public perceptions in moral distress. Specifically, it examines the public condemnation that Dutchbat veterans faced and the mixed reactions that the TFU mission evoked. This chapter finds that not only public criticism but also admiration may be experienced as misrecognition, and that perceived societal misrecognition may directly and indirectly contribute to moral distress. At the same time, it becomes clear that not just veterans struggle with the moral significance of military intervention, but society does as well. Yet, in neither mission did this lead to a rapprochement between soldiers and society. On the contrary, how public debates tried to resolve societal discomfort with the missions only alienated veterans further from society. To complicate matters, the societal misrecognition that many veterans experienced engendered not only a sense of estrangement from society, but also from themselves.

Part III reflects on the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings. Chapter 9 answers this study's research questions, summarizing the major findings and turning them into a refined concept of moral injury. Also, it reflects on the broader theoretical contributions of this study and proposes possible directions for future research. Chapter 10 is devoted to translating the research findings into practical implications and considerations for the individual, military, political and societal level.

2

Chapter 2. Toward a Broader Theoretical Approach to Moral Distress

Introduction: 'Trauma and far more'

Peter[1] sits in the corner of the bar, where he has a clear view of the place, including entrance and exit. In the hours that follow, we speak about his deployment as a Dutchbat III soldier stationed just outside of the 'safe area' of Srebrenica, and about the aftermath of his deployment. He tells me about witnessing his buddy's death, about being unable to do anything when Srebrenica fell – his company was not allowed to go there when it happened – and about how these experiences affected him.

'I wanted to help people. And then you find out the world is rotten', Peter says. 'I have a trauma, because of what happened with [my buddy]. But it's far more than that'. When I ask him what that 'far more' is, he summarizes: feeling helpless, feeling guilty about his own inaction, being abandoned by the UN and the Dutch government, and being accused in the Dutch media. He goes on to say that he is 'lucky' that he witnessed the terrible death of his buddy, because this event entitled him to a PTSD diagnosis and thus to 'recognition and compensation'. Had he not experienced that, he says, he perhaps 'would have felt almost just as shitty as I do now', but he would not have received recognition and compensation. He knows many colleagues who have missed out on this because they were never diagnosed with a deployment-related illness. Then again, Peter tells me, although the therapy he received for his PTSD helped him, he has always held 'a feeling of dissatisfaction'. He kept feeling 'it wasn't finished', that his therapy mainly focused on his buddy's death and insufficiently addressed the 'far more'.

To understand deployment-related suffering as PTSD is to regard it as a medical condition characterized by specific symptoms. According to the most recent official definition, PTSD diagnosis requires 'exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence', either directly or indirectly (DSM-V 2013, p. 271). Also, it requires the following symptoms: (1) recurrent intrusive memories of the trauma (for instance re-experiencing in nightmares) (2) avoidance of trauma-related stimuli (for instance by evading certain situations), (3) negative changes in thoughts and mood, and (4) heightened arousal and reactivity (for instance jumpiness) (DSM-V 2013, pp. 271–272).

It is impossible to determine whether Peter would have been diagnosed with PTSD had he not been exposed to the death of a close colleague. Yet, it is conceivable that a psychologist or psychiatrist would hesitate to judge his indirect exposure to the fall of Srebrenica as fulfilling the required criteria. On the basis of symptoms, a PTSD diagnosis is not easy to make either. Many of the symptoms associated with PTSD (sleep disturbance; avoidance behavior; negative changes in thoughts and mood; heightened arousal) overlap with those of other conditions, such as depressive and anxiety disorders (Richardson *et al*. 2010, DSM-V 2013, p. 265).

1 As will be explained in chapter 3, all names are pseudonyms to help ensure the veterans' anonymity.

In addition to the difficulty of diagnostic practice, Peter's story highlights issues of addressing and treating deployment-related distress. Many prevalent PTSD treatment models are based on the notion that post-traumatic stress is rooted in exposure to life-threat and in resultant fear-responses (see e.g. DePrince and Freyd 2002, Litz *et al*. 2009, Drescher *et al*. 2011, Difede *et al*. 2014). Yet, Peter's story is not only about life-threat and fear, but also about perceived injustice, feelings of guilt, abandonment and condemnation. Like Peter, several veterans told me that their therapist kept focusing on a particularly violent incident – such as an IED attack and/or a colleague's death – while they also wanted to talk about other events, which did not always involve direct exposure to violence but nevertheless caused great distress because they violated deeply held values.

The violation of values lies at the core of the concept of moral injury. Distinct from the fear-based traumas associated with PTSD, moral injury is about transgressions of beliefs of right and wrong, and accordingly, about feelings of shame, guilt and anger (Litz *et al*. 2009, Drescher *et al*. 2011). As such, this concept has the potential to fill the space left by the concept of PTSD. However, it requires development with respect to dimensions that go beyond the conventional focus of psychological approaches. Not only does the current concept employ an understanding of morality that can be further developed and refined, it also tends to leave the broader political and societal context of moral distress out of the frame.

In philosophy and social sciences, there are many studies of trauma, morality and the sociopolitical aspects of mental suffering. The insights these studies yield can contribute to a more substantial understanding of the factors possibly involved in moral distress. In this chapter, I discuss these insights, producing a state-of-the-art overview of relevant literature and, simultaneously, an initial theoretical framework from which to approach stories such as Peter's. Throughout the remainder of this study, empirical findings will prompt the adding of further theoretical insights, which will be discussed in the chapters of Parts II and III, together with the case study results from which they emerged.

In the following sections, I first elaborate on the origin and rise of the concept of PTSD. Subsequently, I discuss the increasing tendency to understand deployment-related suffering in medical terms and the implications thereof. Next, I discuss the value and potential of the concept of moral injury, as well as its current shortcomings. In order to address these shortcomings, I discuss various insights on the complex nature of morality and on what has been dubbed 'social suffering'. In doing so, I set the stage for examining, in the subsequent chapters, whether and how moral complexities at both the individual and sociopolitical level relate to experiences of moral distress among veterans.

PTSD and Moral Injury

The Origin and Rise of PTSD

In 1980, 'post-traumatic stress disorder' was introduced in the third edition of the official classification guide of psychiatrists, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III 1980). Currently, PTSD constitutes the dominant explanatory model for the

suffering of veterans (Summerfield 2001, Withuis and Mooij 2010, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013). However, it is not the first concept to acknowledge the psychological impacts of war. However, it is not the first concept to acknowledge the psychological impact of war. Before 1980, it was already well established that the stress of combat could cause suffering – known over time as 'combat fatigue', 'shell shock' and 'war neurosis'. Toward the end of World War One, there were psychiatrists and doctors who stated that 'everyone had a breaking point' (Jones and Wessely 2007, p. 173). At the same time, the history of war neuroses did not follow a linear course, but entailed a back-and-forth movement between different views on war-related suffering (Shephard 2001). The twentieth century, for instance, witnessed a repeated pendulum swing between the notion that trauma was due to individual predisposition, on the one hand, and an emphasis on external causes of trauma, on the other (Shephard 2001).

In the Vietnam era, individual predisposition 'became the fault-line across which American psychiatry split' (Shephard 2004, p. 50). While it was acknowledged in the 1960s and '70s that war can cause people to break down, the dominant belief was that when soldiers failed to recover within a certain period of time, this was predominantly due to other factors. Especially the then-older psychiatrists thought that in most cases, soldiers' problems were the result of childhood trauma or innate predisposition to mental illness, which war had merely 'triggered' (Scott 1990, Shephard 2004, Jones and Wessely 2007). The Vietnam war, however, fueled an important change in this view, largely due to the efforts of anti-war psychiatrists and veterans, who advocated the introduction of 'post-traumatic stress disorder' in the DSM-III (Scott 1990, Shephard 2004, Jones and Wessely 2007). PTSD officially shifted the cause of persistent war-related psychological problems from the internal, namely the person's personality and background, to the external, namely a traumatic event (ibid). It was now officially acknowledged that serious mental problems could also be caused by trauma in one's adult life. An external event, not the distressed person, was to 'blame' for persistent distress. In fact, claiming that personal characteristics are also involved in an individual's response to stressors became a controversial statement to make (Shephard 2004, p. 54).

Since its introduction, the PTSD concept has changed in several ways. In the DSM-III of 1980, the traumatic event was defined as 'a recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone' and the stressor was described as 'generally outside the range of usual human experience' (DSM-III 1980, pp. 238; 236). In the latest edition, DSM-V, it is defined more specifically as exposure to 'actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence' (DSM-V 2013, pp. 271–272). Relatedly, studies on PTSD initially included d a wide range of symptoms. Currently, most studies are centered on fear, meaning that they are founded on the assumption that fear lies at the core of post-traumatic stress (Lee *et al.* 2001, DePrince and Freyd 2002, Drescher *et al.* 2011, Nash and Litz 2013). Another important change concerns the perceived role of individual predispositions in the development of PTSD symptoms. As mentioned, DSM-III turned previous views on war-related suffering on their head by emphasizing external rather than internal causes. More recently however, studies have started to point out again that severe stressors do not always produce long-term distress, thus swinging the historic pendulum somewhat back toward pre-individual predispositions (Nash *et al.* 2009). For instance, research found soldiers who

had suffered childhood abuse to be at increased risk of developing PTSD symptoms (Zaidi and Foy 1994).

Currently, behavioral and cognitive psychology constitute the dominant approach in research on PTSD, as opposed to for instance psychodynamic approaches (Finley 2011). For example, PTSD is often approached in terms of maladaptive conditioned fear responses and distorted cognitions (Finley 2011). The dominance of behavioral and cognitive psychology is in line with general trends favoring such approaches in the field of psychology (Robins *et al*. 1999, Pilgrim 2011). Furthermore, potential genetic and neurobiological aspects of PTSD are increasingly studied, again in correspondence with broader developments in the field of mental health research. Extensive research is being conducted on biological markers that could indicate the presence of PTSD in an individual, thereby validating the objective existence of the PTSD classification (Lehrner and Yehuda 2014, Schmidt *et al*. 2015). As yet no unequivocal biomarker has been identified for PTSD (Lehrner and Yehuda 2014) – or for any other mental disorder (Nesse and Stein 2012, Sokolowska *et al*. 2015) – but progress has been made in other respects. For instance, it has been found that specific psychobiological changes may occur in people with PTSD diagnoses (Stein *et al*. 2007, Fragkaki *et al*l. 2016).[2] Generally, research indicates that the acute reactions of animals (such as mice) to life-threat are comparable to those of humans (Yehuda and LeDoux 2007, Daskalakis *et al*. 2016). Apart from all these developments, the essence of the concept of PTSD has remained the same, namely that of a traumatic event causing symptoms in an individual.

Limitations of PTSD Understandings

While much valuable research has been and is still being conducted on PTSD, it has also evoked much debate and criticism. In particular, the *concept* of PTSD is surrounded by discussion.

A main issue – mentioned in the Introduction – concerns the general reification of mental disorders, which is worthy of discussion in order to better comprehend criticisms specifically directed at the PTSD concept. Many scholars, as well as DSM itself, warn that mental disorders cannot be understood as tangible 'things' with a certain content and clear boundaries, explicating that a 'disorder' is a standardized collection of clinical descriptions of people's behavior, not an objectively identifiable entity in the mind of a person (Faust and Miner 1986, Radden 1994). In a similar vein, some scholars take the fact that extensive research has failed to result in the identification of a specific biomarker for any disorder to argue that the psychiatric classification system is not 'tidy' but 'blurry'. Mental disorders may overlap, they argue, and it is impossible to distinguish one from the other completely objectively (Nesse and Stein 2012). Some scholars go so far as to reject the idea that biomarkers could ever validate a disorder all together, calling this a fallacy (Morse 2008, Dehue 2011).

2 The amygdala and hippocampus areas of the brain seem to play a critical role in fear-related change (Difede et al. 2014). Activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis leads to arousal and sleeplessness (Daskalakis *et al*. 2016, Fragkaki *et al*. 2016). Findings suggest a possible biological susceptibility to developing symptoms considered typical for 'PTSD'. For instance, a small hippocampus volume and an inability to produce enough cortisol may increase the probability of developing typical 'PTSD' symptoms (Yehuda and LeDoux 2007, Daskalakis *et al*. 2016).

Even if a biomarker were found, they argue, it would not prove the independent existence of a disorder. One can identify the marker of a disorder only after defining the disorder, that is, after having first developed a concept of what that disorder is. A biomarker would only tell us something about the differences between people with and without the diagnosis of a disorder, not anything about the disorder itself. In short, these scholars argue, a disorder necessarily remains a *concept*, an *analytical abstraction*.

Starting from this notion, several scholars have examined the genealogy of the scientific conceptualization of PTSD. They argue that introducing the PTSD concept is not merely the result of scientific progress, but also of particular political processes (as they maintain is always the case) (see e.g. Scott 1990, Young 1997, Shephard 2001). The previous section has touched upon these processes, namely the efforts of anti-war psychiatrists and veterans to have veterans' suffering recognized were intimately linked to their political criticism of the Vietnam War. Yet, paradoxically, while this politically informed struggle led to the introduction of a psychiatric concept that recognizes military suffering, the medicalization of suffering immediately implied its depoliticization (cf. Summerfield 2004, Fassin and Rechtman 2009). The current concept frames PTSD simply as a psychiatric response to a traumatic event, much like how animals respond to extreme danger.

At first glance, it may seem that the medicalization process has freed the concept of PTSD from all bias. But ignoring political dimensions is just as biased as highlighting them. Like all concepts, PTSD is an explanation, an interpretation, and, inevitably, a judgment. It is a story in a nutshell about someone's suffering (cf. Withuis 2010, Dehue 2011, Molendijk et al. 2016). It says something about the nature of the suffering, including about whether it is normal or abnormal. It specifies where the disorder, the disruption, lies: in the individual, in external events, or in the system. And, as such, it suggests who and what is responsible for the suffering, and who and what is not.

Through the story of 'PTSD', deployment-related suffering has become both 'normalized' and 'medicalized'. On the one hand, it is now often described as 'a normal reaction to an abnormal event' (Nash *et al*. 2009, p. 791, Meichenbaum 2011, p. 325). This normalization of deployment-related suffering helps to destigmatize the troubled veteran, releasing him as it were from blame for his suffering. Growing evidence that traumatic events affect the brain (Pitman *et al*. 2012) contributes to the idea that a breakdown is not the result of a lack of moral fiber, but of an external event affecting a person's biology. Considered as such, the veteran is neither weak nor crazy, nor did he do anything wrong in war; he 'simply' suffers a mental combat wound, and his nightmares, doubts and anger stem from that wound (Jones and Wessely 2007).

On the other hand, through the story of 'PTSD' deployment-related suffering has become medicalized. It has become a psychiatric disorder, a medical condition characterized by 'not so normal' thoughts and behavior on the part of the suffering individual. As such, it is understood as a problem in the head of the soldier, and thus as a problem that should be addressed by means of training and treatment of soldiers, not by changing the context in which they operate.[3] Accordingly, the story of 'PTSD' absolves those actors who place

3 This development is in line with a broader shift in how western societies appreciate suffering and deviant behavior; from religious understandings of moral deficiency, to medical understandings of mental illness (Foucault 2006).

the soldier in potentially traumatizing circumstances from responsibility. That is, it does demand governments (and by extension, militaries) to take responsibility for the suffering of their veterans, but by establishing medical treatment programs, governments can free themselves from having to review the circumstances in which they put soldiers in the first place (cf. Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

The two sides of 'PTSD' (normalization and medicalization) have moral and sociopolitical consequences. Framing deployment-related suffering as PTSD entitles a suffering veteran to symbolic and material recognition. But simultaneously it removes his distress from the moral and sociopolitical domain by treating it as a purely medical issue characterized by his individual dysfunctional thoughts and feelings. This is especially the case when PTSD is understood in terms of fear-related changes in brain areas. Although this understanding has value in its own right, it inevitably fails to address moral and sociopolitical questions. It does not attend to moral aspects of a soldier's own actions in deployment-related suffering, or to the political assignments on which the soldier is sent to war, or to the ways in which the soldier is perceived by society at home.

Moral Injury: Promises and Limitations

The concept of moral injury emerged from discontent with the marginal attention that current PTSD models pay to potential moral dimensions of veterans' struggles (Shay 1994, Bica 1999, Litz *et al.* 2009, Drescher *et al.* 2011). The psychiatrist Shay (1994) and veteran/philosopher Bica (1999) are both cited as coining the term 'moral injury' (Dokoupil 2012, Kirsch 2014). Psychologist Litz and his colleagues played an important role in systematically conceptualizing the notion (Litz *et al.* 2009, 2015, Drescher *et al.* 2011, Maguen and Litz 2012, Nash and Litz 2013). They developed a much-cited preliminary model of moral injury, which served as the foundation of an increasing number of psychological studies (Steenkamp *et al.* 2013, Vargas*et al.* 2013, Currier *et al.* 2015, Frame 2015, Laifer *et al.* 2015, Bryan *et al.* 2016, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016, Farnsworth *et al.* 2017). With 'moral injury', they do not aim to replace the concept of PTSD, neither do they propose it as a new diagnosis. Rather, they aim to capture particular experiences in ways that deviate from dominant understandings of PTSD (see also Table 1).

Litz and colleagues argue that whereas some characteristics of PTSD may overlap with what they call moral injury (e.g. intrusions, avoidance behavior and numbing), in other ways moral injury is unique (Litz *et al.* 2009, 2015, Nash and Litz 2013). As opposed to the fear-related responses that are central to PTSD models, they place moral emotions such as shame and guilt at the core of their model. Their definition of 'potentially morally injurious experiences' also deviates from the traumatic experiences defined in the PTSD concept. While these experiences may or may not involve (threatened) death, violence or injury – requirements for a PTSD diagnosis – Litz and colleagues' definition centers on moral transgression, namely '[p]erpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations' (Litz *et al.* 2009, p. 700).

To be sure, the idea that war can be morally compromising is not new. As Shay (1994, 2002) emphasizes, descriptions of moral suffering are found in ancient texts on war, such as the Iliad and the Odyssey. Considering recent texts, the theme is reflected in Grossman's well-known study on killing (1995), which puts forwards the moral aspect of killing rather than the threat of being the object of violence as an important source of post-traumatic stress. Killing-induced guilt is also an important theme in the work of psychiatrist Lifton (1973), who played a key role in introducing PTSD to the DSM (see e.g. Scott 1990, Shephard 2001), making it remarkable that current PTSD models pay so little attention to moral dimensions of trauma. However, this does not mean that moral struggles have gone completely unnoticed. DSM-III, for instance, mentions 'survivor guilt', referring to guilt about surviving a situation when others have not as a possible symptom of PTSD. Though this symptom ceased to be listed in later editions of DSM, it still appeared as a potential coexisting feature (Marshall *et al*. 1999). Moreover, in the most recent DSM classification of PTSD, blame and self-blame re-occur as possible symptoms. The DSM-V classification includes, as part of the criterion 'negative alterations in cognitions and mood', the potential symptom of 'persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others' (DSM-V 2013, p. 272). Generally, DSM-V has moved 'PTSD' from the category of 'anxiety disorders' to the newly introduced category of 'trauma and stressor-related disorders', allowing a wider range of traumatic responses (see DSM-V 2013).

Nevertheless, systematic efforts to conceptualize moral dimensions of deployment-related suffering, namely through the concept of moral injury, are relatively new. Also, though current PTSD models do acknowledge potential feelings of guilt and shame, they approach these emotions in a particular way. First, they treat blame of self or others as one of many symptoms of trauma-related distress, not as a potential source. Second, they tend to approach blame as misguided and misplaced. The DSM classification of PTSD explicitly defines blame of self or others as the result of 'distorted cognitions' and 'exaggerated negative beliefs' (DSM-V 2013, p. 272), resonating with existing psychological approaches to trauma-related guilt. Edward Kubany, for instance, conceptualizes 'combat-related guilt' as 'irrational guilt', based on 'false assumptions and faulty logic' (1994, p. 5).

In contrast to these PTSD-based approaches, Litz and colleagues stress that negative judgments about events may be 'quite appropriate and accurate' (Litz *et al*. 2009, p. 702). Although blame may be 'unfair and destructive', they state, 'it is equally unhelpful to suggest to morally injured persons that no one is at fault'. Instead, 'each person's culpability is usually somewhere between none and all, and many people share responsibility for any outcome' (Nash and Litz 2013, p. 372). Furthermore, they emphasize, for a person to be able to hold onto the idea of a moral self, it is important to judge a bad act as such (Litz *et al*. 2009, p. 703). For this reason, instead of recommending efforts to alleviate feelings of guilt or anger, Litz and colleagues propose other procedures. They recommend 'imaginal dialogues' with a moral authority figure, discussing and apportioning blame in a fair way, and making amends. As part of these procedures, they propose 'Socratic questioning' and suggest that engaging in discussions 'within religious and spiritual frameworks is potentially instrumental' in the treatment of moral injury (Litz *et al*. 2009, pp. 702; 704). The goal of these procedures is that

the veteran will eventually be able to forgive himself or others (Litz *et al*. 2009, Nash and Litz 2013).

Thus, in contrast to the current PTSD concept, the concept of moral injury explicitly attends to moral dimensions of deployment-related suffering, and it does so in promising ways. However, the concept is still very much in its developmental stages. While praised for its cross-disciplinary potential, the concept has drawn criticism for being predominantly a psychological construct (Kinghorn 2012, Scandlyn and Hautzinger 2014). Some have pointed out that the concept only focuses on moral injury as a dysfunction that must be treated while failing to actually venture into the ethics of war (Kinghorn 2012, Wilson 2014, Beard 2015). Others, in addition, have signaled that it decontextualizes deployment-related trauma from the political leaders who send soldiers into war and the civilians who 'welcome' them back (MacLeish 2010, Scandlyn and Hautzinger 2014). As I argued in an exploratory article that prompted the present study (Molendijk *et al*. 2018), the concept of moral injury needs to go beyond a strictly psychological approach in at least two ways. First, it would benefit from moral philosophical perspectives that can help to develop a better appreciation of the complexity of morality. Second, because military intervention is not an individual endeavor but a sociopolitical enterprise, and because morality is generally a socially shaped phenomenon, the concept would benefit from social scientific perspectives, which would help to capture the role of contextual factors in moral distress. In the following sections, I take up these issues. In doing so, I attempt to construct a broader theoretical framework to examine moral distress.

Table 1: Dominant Understandings of Distressing Deployment Experiences

	Current conceptualization of PTSD	**Current conceptualization of Moral injury**
Event	(Life-)threat	Moral transgression
Significance	One's sense of safety is violated	One's sense of 'what's right' is violated
(Perceived) role in event	Victim; witness	Victim; witness; responsible agent
Characteristic responses	Fear-related responses	Moral emotions
How to understand guilt, shame, anger	Exaggerated negative beliefs about the self and the world; resulting from distorted cognitions	Guilt, shame and anger may be considered appropriate and accurate

Toward a Broader Theoretical Approach to Moral Distress

Issue 1: The Complex Nature of Moral Beliefs

Adequately theorizing the role of morality in moral distress is crucial for understanding what 'moral injury' entails. When questions about the complex nature of morality go unaddressed, unsubstantiated assumptions about trauma's moral dimensions and its implications are easily incorporated, leading to the risk of complex issues being approached reductively. In the current concept, the general idea is that moral injury is the result of an act that violates a soldier's beliefs about right and wrong (e.g. Litz *et al.* 2009, Drescher *et al.* 2011, Nash *et al.* 2013, Vargas *et al.* 2013, Currier *et al.* 2015). The concept speaks of violations of one's 'deeply held moral belief and expectations' (Litz *et al.* 2009), and a resultant 'loss of trust in previously deeply held beliefs about one's own or others' ability to keep our shared moral covenant' (Nash and Litz 2013, p. 368, see also Farnsworth *et al.* 2014, Litz *et al.* 2015, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016). A person's moral beliefs are thus understood as a coherent system of values that may be violated by intruding acts. Yet, no consideration is given to the possibility of values being in conflict with one another (see also Molendijk *et al.* 2018). This implicit approach to moral beliefs as a harmonious unity gives rise to questions when considered from the perspectives of philosophical and social scientific studies. An important insight drawn from these disciplines is that an individual embodies multiple and potentially competing moral beliefs and assumptions (e.g. Williams 1973, Baarda and Verweij 2006, Zigon 2008, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013, McConnell 2014, Tessman 2014). In this section, I will discuss this issue and its implications in more detail.

A person's moral beliefs and expectations are essentially both personal and social (Bandura 1991, Haidt and Joseph 2004). While specific moral beliefs and expectations may differ in people, they do not develop in a social vacuum. Individuals develop them through the socialization process of becoming members of a community. The community provides assumptions and meanings through which they understand their experience and make moral judgments about what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct, creating a moral compass that guides their actions (cf. Bandura 1991, Haidt and Joseph 2004, Zigon 2008, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). Childhood constitutes an important period of moral socialization, yet the process of internalizing moral beliefs and expectations never stops. Interacting with others – including parents, friends, communities and social institutions – an individual continuously elaborates and alters acquired values and norms, and adopts new ones (cf. Van Gennep 1909, Bandura 1991, Eriksen 2001, Zigon 2008).

So, whereas some moral concerns may be found world-wide (Haidt and Joseph 2004, Cassaniti and Hickman 2014), morality is 'thick', meaning that values and norms are shaped by their specific sociohistorical context (Walzer 1994). An individual's moral beliefs are developed with reference to the different groups of which he is a member, such as religious groups, generational distinctions and organizations. Accordingly, morality can both serve as a glue binding groups together and be a source of conflict between groups (Zigon 2007, 2008, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). Moreover, conflict may arise within the individual. A person lives and acts on a daily basis, within a range of social levels (e.g. group, organization, nation) and a

range of social contexts (e.g. different ethnic cultures, professional cultures) (see e.g. Eriksen 2001, Hanna 2004, Baarda and Verweij 2006). As a result, rather than owning an orderly and harmonious system of values, a person embodies multiple moral commitments, which at times make conflicting demands, creating tensions that need to be managed (Hanna 2004, Baarda and Verweij 2006, Laidlaw 2014, McConnell 2014, Tessman 2014).

Managing moral tensions is not a rational endeavor, like solving brainteasers. Only in laboratory experiments with hypothetical situations could one come close to a situation where people approach moral issues as abstract puzzles. In practice, people's judgments are not merely governed by formal reasoning, which rationally weighs all relevant values one against one the other, but also by deeply felt emotions. Anger, disgust, shame and compassion, to name but a few, inform moral perceptions and decisions (see e.g. Haidt 2001, Skoe *et al*. 2002, Harris 2003, De Graaff *et al*. 2014). Furthermore, the specific social context plays an important role. Experiments by Milgram (1974) and Zimbardo (2008) provide perhaps the most notorious reminders of this. Their experiments showed that when people are placed in situations with particular group dynamics, social pressures and power relations, they may more readily engage in behavior they would otherwise consider immoral.[4] Of course, these experiments were radical and extreme, and in some respects their direct applicability to real-life situations may be questionable (e.g. Banuazizi and Movahedi 1975). Nevertheless, by creating these extreme circumstances, the experiments made apparent what is often not so obvious: people's moral standards and behaviors are to an important extent shaped by context and the social roles people assume in this context (e.g. Bandura 1991, Hanna 2004). This means that the same people may adopt different moral standards in different contexts. In the case of soldiers, the values and norms they follow on deployment may not be the same as those they abide by in civilian settings.

Morality, in short, comprises rational and emotional dimensions of social life, and as such is multilayered and fragmented. At the same time, people are generally unaware of this. Moral beliefs can be best understood as embodied dispositions which people usually enact without thinking out beforehand (Zigon 2008). This is not to suggest that moral decisions are based on nothing, but rather that they are not primarily the result of reflection. Accordingly, people are generally unaware of having multiple, potentially competing moral beliefs. They live their lives without constantly experiencing conflict by which they maintain, as Ewing (1990) called it, an 'illusion of wholeness'. They tend to think of themselves in terms of completeness, coherence and consistency, not in terms of fragmented, shifting selves (Ewing 1990, Zigon 2008).

In line with this, people's explanations of their behavior are often judgments made in hindsight. These are often, at least partially, post-hoc rationalizations rather than completely accurate reflections of what occurred at the moment (Haidt 2001, Tessman 2014). Usually, people only come up with reasoned arguments when they become aware of an inconsistency in their moral judgment, either because the inconsistency generates discomfort (Haidt

4 In the Milgram experiment, participants were ordered to administer what seemed to be agonizing dangerous electric shocks to whom they thought were other voluntary participants; many did (Milgram 1974). In Zimbardo's Stanford experiment, participants were placed in a situation with strongly asymmetric power relations; some participants were made prisoners, others were made guards. Many 'guards' resorted to disrespectful and even sadistic behavior toward the 'prisoners' (Zimbardo 2008).

2001, Tsang 2002) or because anticipated criticism by others raises the need for justification (Billig 1996, Haidt 2001). In any case, both ad-hoc and post-hoc interpretations are ways in which people eventually come to understand the situation in which they were involved and the role they played in this situation. Organizing and structuring memories into meaningful narratives enables people to make sense of their experiences. As such, the stories that people construct of their experiences become personal truths of what they have seen and done (cf. Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Haidt 2001, Molendijk *et al*. 2016).

To turn back to the issue of competing moral commitments, these are most obvious in moral dilemmas. To begin with, let me give an example that soldiers joked about in an ethics course I observed. They sketched a scenario in which a soldier's girlfriend asks for his opinion of her trendy flower-printed jeans. As her boyfriend, the soldier does not want to hurt her, but as his mother's son, he does not want to lie. Hence, he is confronted by a dilemma. While this example was meant as a joke, it well illustrates that everyone embodies multiple moral commitments and that everyone encounters numerous moral dilemmas every day, often without being aware of it. Moreover, it demonstrates that a moral conflict does not necessarily engender disturbance or distress.

That said, a soldier's world constitutes pre-eminent conditions for moral conflicts that do engender serious distress. Soldiers may have to use and witness violence in dangerous circumstances. While they are instruments of the state who must adhere to political norms and legal rules, they also remain moral agents with personal values (Baarda and Verweij 2006). Even when they agree with all they are ordered to do, they remain members of a society which makes violence taboo (cf. Grossman 1995). Given that soldiers hold multiple moral commitments in the context of war and violence, it is not hard to imagine that they may experience distressing moral conflicts. In extreme cases, they may face tragic dilemmas which force them to choose between two evils, leaving them inevitably with 'dirty hands', no matter their choice (e.g. Walzer 1973, Baarda and Verweij 2006, Parrish 2007, Blattberg 2015).

What is the psychological impact of tragic dilemmas and other morally critical situations? The literature on this topic provides no clear answers. Philosophers have predominantly discussed the topic in normative debates on ethics, and the specific psychological impact of these acts has therefore not been their main concern (Walzer 1973, Williams 1973, Marcus 1980, Wijze 2005, 2012, Tessman 2014). However, when desiring to understand moral distress, it seems that precisely this is necessary: to examine in depth how people experience and are affected by tragic dilemmas and other moral quandaries. The concept of moral injury does attend to the psychological experience of moral quandaries, but the problem is that this concept tends to approach a person's moral beliefs as a harmonious unity. Instead, drawing on the abovementioned insights, this study considers that a person's moral beliefs constitute a complex total of multiple, potentially competing values. As the following chapters will make clear, morally distressing experiences are often more complicated than clear-cut transgressions, and, accordingly, moral distress is more complicated than unequivocal feelings of guilt and shame.

Issue 2: Political and Societal Dimensions

The insight that soldiers embody multiple moral commitments brings me to a second insufficiently addressed issue in the current concept of moral injury: the (potential) role of political and societal factors in moral distress. In recent decades, it has become increasingly clear that besides the nature of war and individual susceptibilities contextual factors play a crucial role in the onset of war-related suffering, (e.g. Breslau and Davis 1987, Summerfield 2000, Perilla *et al*. 2002, De Jong 2005, Stein *et al*. 2007, Finley 2011, Suarez 2013). At the same time, most research on war-related suffering, both in terms of PTSD and moral injury, decouples the suffering from its wider context (ibid).

The concept of PTSD is persistently criticized for failing to attend to context. As various studies have argued, it frames war-related suffering as a condition contained within the individual, thus failing to account for its societal and political context (e.g. Summerfield 2000, Das 2007, Withuis and Mooij 2010, Finley 2011, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013, MacLeish 2013). As a medical concept it tends to give war victims the status of patients (Kleinman *et al*. 1997, Summerfield 2001, Withuis 2002). In response, studies on what is dubbed 'social suffering' (Kleinman *et al*. 1997) have examined how violence is generated and shaped by political, economic and cultural structures, mostly in non-Western settings, attesting to the many ways in which social forces can produce human suffering (e.g. Kleinman et al. 1997, Summerfield 2000, Das 2007, Kienzler 2008). These studies challenge the biomedical notions that characterize suffering as an intra-individual disease.

Although most research on 'social suffering' focuses on challenging biomedical notions as Western conceptions (Bracken *et al*. 1995, Summerfield 2000, Kienzler 2008), it follows that in Western settings, too, war-related suffering may be considered more than an intra-individual disease. A 'social suffering-lens' seems particularly important when trying to understand moral dimensions of deployment-related distress. As discussed above, individuals develop their moral beliefs and form their moral judgments not in a social vacuum but in interaction with family, friends, and formal and informal institutions (Bandura 1991). Specifically with respect to a soldier's conduct, questions of right and wrong are not 'owned' by the soldier but explicitly debated by the soldier's social environment. It is at the societal and political level that debates take place about, for instance, the legitimacy of military missions.

Generally, the military does not operate in isolation from politics and society, but consists of 'people with arms' who act in the name of 'people without arms' (Rukavishnikov and Pugh 2006, p. 131). This means that in case of military operations, the military is granted exemptions from certain standards that society holds for its citizens. While war and violence are generally considered immoral and criminal, it is also maintained that 'killing may be necessary to save lives' and that 'the devastation of war may be required to prevent the destruction of deeply held values' (Williams and Caldwell 2006, p. 309). And so, military action is considered 'justified harm' (Shue 2005, p. 743). Yet, this is only the case because its justification is not unconditional. On the contrary, the justification of an intervention rests on the condition that it is subject to rules and constraints (MacFarlane 2002, Kennedy 2006, Berkowitz 2013).

The political and public domain thus play an important role in shaping soldiers' deployment. These domains determine the conditions under which soldiers have to operate,

and where their actions are monitored and judged. Today's military interventions tend to occur in a multilateral context, often on the basis of commitments to international organizations such as the United Nations. Accordingly, decision-making with regard to an intervention is shaped by political alliances, as well as international law and other normative principles and criteria that are considered important (see e.g. MacFarlane 2002, Narine 2016). Abiding to international principles and criteria narrows the possibilities of intervention and shapes the nature of a mission, but as such they also enhance the mission's legitimacy. Governments may follow such principles and criteria for sincere reasons – to reach a reasonable consensus and abide by moral standards – or, conversely, to mask self-centered motives and bypass moral questions (cf. Berkowitz 2013).

At the national level, decision-making regarding military intervention is often directly influenced by parliamentary demands and indirectly by public sensitivities and attitudes (Everts and Isernia 2003, Klep 2011, Grandia 2015, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016).[5] Parliamentarian demands and public opinion usually influence the decision to contribute national troops to a military mission, as well as the ways in which this contribution takes shape, by making the government add so-called national caveats (limitations) for its own troops to the mandate of the mission. For instance, public sensitivities and resultant parliamentarian demands can lead a government to focus the mission on humanitarian activities and restrict the use of force allowed (cf. Born *et al*. 2010, p. 21). However, the government may also attempt to gain public support by trying to sway parliamentary and public opinion and mobilize support. It may for instance create persuasive narratives of a mission's 'why-what-and-how' – which, notably, may or may not turn out to be an accurate description of the actual mission (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001).

Political concessions and persuasive narratives are thus supposed to legitimize a military intervention on several levels. When this is achieved, deployed soldiers are assured that their mission accords with political demands, legal rules and societal wishes. However, in practice, it is not always clear what military conduct is desired, and tensions between sociopolitical justifications and personal experience are not always resolved. In fact, the opposite may be the result. Consider for instance a mission justified by images of the opponents as a violent, terrorist 'them' (Bhatia 2005, Chambers 2012), and by rhetoric on national security (Goldstein 2010) and/or liberation and civilization (Abu-Lughod 2002, Kellner 2004). Such framing may initially protect soldiers from worrying about their mission, but this very protection may also lead them to do things they might later regret, and for which they might be condemned in their home country (Lifton 1973, Shay 1994, Bica 1999, Gutmann and Lutz 2009, Boudreau 2011, Sherman 2011). For instance, Bourke (1999), Lifton (1973), Shay (1994) and Ticke (2005), describe the profound shock US soldiers experienced when the Vietnamese 'gooks' they were supposed to hate turned out to be human, just like them. Bica (1999) similarly notes that

5 The influence of parliament is especially strong in countries with multi-party systems like the Netherlands, which more often than not have coalition governments and a powerful parliament. Although much like other governments, the Dutch government officially holds the exclusive power to deploy troops, parliament exerts considerable influence over the government's decision-making (cf. Wagner 2006, p. 49). With respect to recent missions, the Dutch government has always tried to gain a majority of parliamentary support for a mission. With respect to public opinion, it is true that political leaders often do not completely follow public demands, since they also wish to fulfill commitments concerning international cooperation. Yet, they are also unlikely to completely ignore the impact of public pressure or the threat of decreasing electoral support (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001).

these soldiers felt deeply confused when they saw the ‘myth’ of the warrior as noble and heroic crumble in war. Moreover, Sherman (2011) describes the deception US soldiers felt on returning from Iraq and discovering that their government’s claims about Iraq stockpiling weapons of mass destruction were untrue. Ex-Marine Boudreau (2008, 2011) stresses that political and legal justifications may encourage soldiers to do things they later came to regret, pointing to his own remorse for the heavy handed actions he ordered in Iraq.

The studies cited above all focus on war and combat operations. But what about other types of missions? Recent years have mostly seen peace missions for which the national and international leadership imposed tight restrictions on the use of force (Rietveld 2009). The UN missions in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the 1990s are well-known examples of such missions, or rather of the possible downsides of such missions (Van der Meulen 1998, Klep and Winslow 1999). They show that while restrictions on the use of force may protect soldiers from doing things they might regret later, they may also render soldiers powerless when confronted by situations that do require force. The trauma literature describes the profound psychological impact that powerlessness may have (Herman 1967, 2011).

In short, political practice and public debate shape the ways in which soldiers are deployed and how they are perceived at home. While the current concept of moral injury keeps moral distress encapsulated at the level of the individual soldier, there is much reason to expect that political practice and public debate may play an equally important role in moral distress. It is therefore worth examining exactly how political and societal influences affect soldiers’ experience, and particularly whether and how these influences relate to moral distress.

I began this chapter by discussing the potential of the concept of moral injury for capturing moral dimensions of deployment-related distress, yet subsequently noted the current concept’s failure to address and incorporate the complexity of morality and the role of wider sociopolitical contexts in moral distress. Therefore, I complicated the concept by adding philosophical and social scientific perspectives on morality and the impact of sociopolitical factors on soldiers’ experience. First, I established that a soldier’s moral beliefs constitute a complex constellation rather than one coherent system. Second, I contended that this complexity is related to the fact that soldiers are not entirely autonomous, but embedded in a sociopolitical context. Soldiers are, of course, individuals. Yet, they are also institutional instruments, and civilians as well. These contentions led me, first, to propose further examination of moral dimensions of deployment-related suffering, and second, to propose broadening the research scope to examine the role of political practices (including decision-making and mission framing) and public perceptions (including public demands and criticism regarding military interventions) in moral distress. I do so in the present study with the perspectives and insights discussed here serving as a theoretical framework, ultimately to advance the concept of moral injury.

3

Chapter 3. Methodological Choices and Considerations

In this chapter, I explain the methodological considerations and choices of this study. I discuss, first, the epistemological underpinnings of the methods; second, the overall research strategy; third, the missions chosen as case studies; fourth, choices made regarding sampling and data collection; fifth, the process of data analysis; sixth, issues of credibility and generalizability; seventh, reflections on researcher role and objectivity, and finally, ethical considerations.

Epistemological Underpinnings

As explained, this study aims to contribute to the concept of moral injury by seeking holistic, in-depth insight into mechanisms of moral distress, examining veterans' personal experiences of distress in relation to complexities of moral beliefs and socio-political processes. To achieve this objective, it deviates from the positivist traditions in which most current research on 'moral injury' can be situated. Current 'moral injury' research predominantly focuses on identifying correlations between different variables, attempting to explain moral distress in terms of isolable and one-directional causal relations between events and symptoms (see e.g. Maguen *et al*. 2009, Nash *et al*. 2013, Currier *et al*. 2015, Bryan *et al*. 2016). While such an approach helps to systematically identify empirical regularities, it inevitably overlooks and even distorts the multidimensional and multidirectional nature of the human world (cf. Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Bryman 2012). Also, it tends to reify the concept of moral injury as a clearly demarcated entity. Consequently, current research on 'moral injury' has been unable to adequately capture and conceptualize complexities of both moral and contextual dimensions of moral distress.

This study approaches social reality not as a closed system of isolable facts, but as an open world shaped by countless factors and always embedded in a wider social context (cf. Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Bryman 2012). Accordingly, it examines moral beliefs and socio-political processes, not as independent variables of which moral distress may be a function, but as complex webs of meanings and practices in which veterans' experiences of moral distress can take the shape they do (cf. Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Bryman 2012). It does not examine questions such as 'how often can moral distress be identified among a given population?' and 'can a correlation be found between moral distress and a particular political act?', but such questions as 'if veterans experience distress due to moral challenges, what does their distress entail?' and 'if political practices surrounding veterans' missions play a role in experiences of moral distress, what does this entail?'. In other words, this study does not cut up moral distress into variables in order to find correlations between these variables, but attempts to better understand under what structural and contextual conditions, and in what shapes, moral distress may come into being.

The overarching objective of this approach is to contribute to the concept of moral injury. To be able to do so, this study consistently extends its critical epistemological approach to this concept. As noted in the previous chapter, a scientific concept is always an explanation, an interpretation, and, inevitably, a judgment (Lock and Nguyen 2010, Withuis 2010, Dehue 2011). 'Moral injury', likewise, is not a tangible and objectively identifiable entity, but rather a useful analytical lens to understand moral dimensions of deployment-related distress. It is from this line of thought that this study distinguishes 'moral distress' (an open range of experiences) from 'moral injury' (a particular demarcation and conceptualization of these experiences). This approach echoes an established anthropological approach, which distinguishes people's experience of illness, on the one hand, and on the other, biomedical concepts of disease and disorder (Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Lock and Nguyen 2010). Starting from an unspecified, open notion of moral distress, this study explores experiences that overspill the boundaries of the current 'lens' of moral injury, ultimately to advance this lens.

Research Strategy

The aims of this study require a research strategy that has a strong inductive component (to gain novel insight into moral, political and societal dimensions of moral distress) while also making theory development (of the concept of moral injury) possible. This led me to adopt grounded theory, both a rigorous and flexible methodology to construct or advance theory, as my overarching research strategy. Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, this method involves theory development through a relatively open analysis of relevant data, in which data and theory continuously inform one another (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Charmaz 2006). In accordance with revised versions of grounded theory (Evers and Wu 2006, Richardson and Kramer 2006), I did start from relevant existing theories and concepts, as is also the case in more traditional research, but I let the subsequent research process be guided by a continuous interplay between data and theory.

Specifically, this study involved three alternating activities. In anticipation of the next, detailed sections on these activities, let me briefly explain what they entailed. First, I developed a preliminary theoretical framework of relevant knowledge by gathering and integrating existing insights from the fields of psychology, philosophy and social sciences, which I presented in the previous chapter. Developing this framework allowed me to move from the predominantly psychological approach of the current concept of moral injury to a more comprehensive perspective.

Second, since existing knowledge appeared insufficient to gain insight into moral, political and societal dimensions of deployment-related moral distress, I conducted a qualitative empirical study, namely a multiple case study focused on two Dutch missions. The qualitative character of the study made it possible to gain in-depth insight into the particular mechanisms of moral distress. For reasons to be discussed in the next section, as my cases I chose the Dutchbat mission to Srebrenica, the former Yugoslavia, and the TFU mission to

Uruzgan, Afghanistan. The main part of the case study data consisted of interviews with Dutchbat and TFU veterans.

Third, I analyzed these interviews as narratives, which allowed me to inductively and holistically explore veterans' accounts. In contrast to, for instance, the investigation of pre-defined symptoms through structured questionnaires, this approach made openness to new observations possible while allowing these observations to be appreciated in their wider context (cf. Mishler 1986, Kleinman 1988, Finley 2011). Ultimately, the narrative approach meant that I gained insight into the personal experience of veterans while understanding their experience in the context of political practices and public perceptions. To do so adequately, I drew on existing information on the political practices, public perceptions and operational realities that characterized veterans' missions, thus combining and triangulating the stories of veterans with other perspectives (cf. Morey and Luthans 1984, Eriksen 2001).

The inductive aspect of the grounded theory approach allowed me to draw novel insights from the empirical material. At the same time, the continuous use of theory assured that I linked and integrated empirically grounded insights with existing theoretical insights. Together, these two aspects made it possible to achieve the research objective of advancing the understanding of moral, political and societal dimensions of moral distress, and to further develop the concept of moral injury.

Case Selection: Dutchbat and TFU

The empirical part of this research consisted of a multiple case study focused on two missions. The focus on just two missions, instead of a wider range, made it possible to conduct detailed analysis of the specific political practices and public debates that characterized those missions, and of the ways in which veterans' experiences are embedded in these practices and debates. At the same time, although comparison between cases was not the main aim of the empirical research, the choice of two missions as opposed to only one mission made it possible to distinguish mission-specific observations from general patterns and mechanisms.

Mission selection was motivated by two considerations. First, the two had to be partially dissimilar, both in order to approximate the diversity of present-day missions and to enable comparison (cf. Gerring 2007). Specifically, the missions had to be dissimilar with regard to the focal points of this study, namely moral dimensions of deployment-related distress at the individual level, the role of political practices in moral distress, and the role of public perceptions in moral distress. Yet both missions had to be sufficiently representative of the variety of present-day missions. While current research on 'moral injury' focuses on traditional situations of war and combat (see e.g. Litz *et al*. 2009, Vargas et al. 2013, Shay 2014), most recent missions are actually a variation of what has been called peace support missions (Pugh 2018). The second, practical consideration was to ensure that sufficient literature on the missions, and the decision-making processes and public debates was available. Eventually, I decided to focus on (a) Dutchbat veterans deployed to the former Yugoslavia (in what is now

called Bosnia and Herzegovina), as part of the 'blue helmet' UNPROFOR mission, and (b) TFU veterans deployed to Uruzgan, Afghanistan, as part of the 'green helmet' ISAF mission.

In anticipation of detailed discussions of both missions throughout this dissertation, let me sketch three relevant characteristics. The first has to do with moral distress at the individual level. In both missions many soldiers were exposed to violence and human suffering. However, Dutchbat troops were mainly bystanders of violence, though unwillingly, whereas TFU soldiers were often used force themselves. It seemed worthwhile to examine whether and how these different positions had different psychological effects, in particular for the investigation of moral dimensions of deployment-related stress.

Second, both missions had different political characteristics which seemed related to the abovementioned differences. While neither mission was a regular war operation, both differed significantly in their approach. The Dutchbat mission was a 'blue helmet' peacekeeping mission, while TFU's mission was a 'green helmet' counterinsurgency mission involving combat. That is, Dutchbat soldiers were deployed as UN peacekeepers with light weaponry and few troops. At least partially due to their limited possibilities and resources, they were unable to perform their tasks. This incapacity became most clear in July 1995, when the third rotation of Dutchbat could not prevent the now infamous fall of Srebrenica and subsequent mass slaughter of thousands of boys and men (NIOD 2002, Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005, Van de Bildt 2015). In contrast to Dutchbat's mission, TFU's mission was part of a NATO-led mission which both anticipated and authorized combat. Although the Dutch government attempted to downplay the mission's 'green' element, Dutch soldiers were mandated to engage in combat when deemed necessary, which turned out to regularly be the case (Grandia 2015, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). The selection of these two missions thus made it possible to identify and compare potential moral quandaries 'on the ground' related to the political practices surrounding each mission.

Third, with respect to societal dimensions, extensive public debates surrounded and shaped both missions, yet in different ways. The Dutchbat mission soon became overshadowed by allegations of cowardice in the soldiers, who would have lacked the courage to fight (Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005, Van de Bildt 2015). In the TFU mission, Dutch troops did fight, which evoked mixed reactions, however. Although it bolstered the damaged reputation of Dutch soldiers (Klep 2011), it fueled criticism in the Dutch public and in parliament that the mission was simply combat in the guise of 'reconstruction' (Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). Whereas Dutchbat soldiers thus were accused of having been unwilling to fight, TFU soldiers received both admiration and criticism for the fact that they did fight, and it seemed insightful to examine the potentially different ways in which these divergent public responses affected the soldiers in question.

In short, both missions are characterized by individual, political and societal challenges, in interestingly different ways, which made them suitable cases for this study. This does not mean, however, that their characteristics became predetermined themes. In line with this study's grounded theory approach, I took the accounts of the veterans interviewed as the starting point from which to examine relevant contextual factors, not the other way around. As will become clear, this approach resulted in the finding that Dutchbat's and TFU's missions had far more in common than anticipated.

Sampling and Data Collection

Sample Selection

Soldiers constitute a heterogeneous population, with different ranks, tasks and experiences. Therefore, in addition to choosing the military missions, I had to choose a sample selection. To do so, I employed the theoretical sampling method, which is typical in grounded theory research (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Charmaz 2006, Bryman 2012). While, for instance, random sampling is driven by the aim to collect data representative of a given population, theoretical sampling serves the aim of collecting theoretically valuable data. It involves the collection of material that makes it possible to fill determined gaps in extant theory and to refine theoretical ideas that develop during research (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Charmaz 2006, Bryman 2012). Put differently, theoretical sampling implies that the search for data is led by the study's research objectives and questions.

My sample criteria were the result of several considerations. Importantly, the first concerned the goal of gaining a better understanding of moral distress; that is, not to collect statistical data about the prevalence of moral distress, but data that helped gain an in-depth understanding in order to advance theory about the phenomenon. While this goal did not require all research participants to experience deployment-related distress, it did seem valuable that it was the case for a substantial number of the participants, either at the time or in the past. However, since only a minority of veterans appears to develop mental health problems (Engelhard *et al*. 2007, Richardson *et al*. 2010), random sampling would likely have resulted in a handful of participants with deployment-related distress. Therefore, I chose to ensure that I would reach a substantial number of participants with deployment-related distress, while also including participants without deployment-related distress for the purpose of comparison. In later sections I explain how the data collection methods I used made this possible.

A second important issue concerned the comparability of the Dutchbat and TFU missions. To be able to juxtapose the two missions with respect to their political and societal characteristics, it seemed desirable that the selected veterans were as similar as possible with respect to other characteristics. Hence, for purposes of comparison, I chose to confine the research to veterans from similar types of units. In both Dutchbat and TFU, the infantry units of the Airmobile Brigade played a major role. Moreover, in both cases these units frequently encountered local civilians as well as combatants, and were exposed to violence and human suffering. Therefore, I selected the infantry units of the Airmobile Brigade, including attached troops such as medical units. With respect to rank, I chose not to further limit my focus, because it seemed insightful to explore similarities and differences across ranks.

Data Collection

The empirical research was carried out between July 2016 and March 2017. The research was divided into one short orientation phase and two additional phases. This division was made

so that data collection could alternate with data analysis, which made it possible to examine insights gained in one phase through additional questions in the next phase. Several sources and methods were used in the empirical research phase, including the literature, interviews, participant observation and other sources such as media documents. Below, I discuss these sources and methods.

Existing Information in Literature

I drew on three kinds of empirical material in existing literature. First, I made use of studies on the political practices, public debates and operational realities that characterized the Dutchbat and TFU mission, respectively, which provided important context for the primary data (e.g. Honig and Both 1996, NIOD 2002, Klep 2008, 2011, Beeres *et al*. 2012, Grandia 2015). Second, I drew on large-scale qualitative and quantitative studies on deployment-related guilt and 'moral injury', which provided useful 'facts and figures' to substantiate observations that would otherwise be more impressionistic (e.g. Rietveld 2009, Nash *et al*. 2013, Vargas *et al*. 2013, Bryan *et al*. 2016). Third, I made use of existing personal accounts of Dutchbat and TFU veterans, dating from shortly before these veterans' deployment to long after their deployment, which aided in triangulating my own empirical material. These accounts were found in academic studies, reports, (auto)biographies, interviews, internet blogs and documentaries (e.g. Vogelaar *et al*. 1996, Kroon *et al*. 1997, KMAR 1999, Jongbloed 2002, NIOD 2002, Vogelaar and Kramer 2004, Praamsma *et al*. 2005, Hetebrij 2006, 2006, 2007, Eijsvoogel 2007, Kramer 2007, NRC TV 2009, Van Bemmel 2009, Ter Velde 2010, Van Hemert 2014, Veldhuizen 2014, Freebird69 2016, Veteraneninstituut.nl 2017).

Interviews

The main part of the empirical research comprised interviews. In total, I collected and analyzed 80 interviews, of which 40 were semi-structured interviews I conducted myself. The other 40 interviews were audio-recorded 'life story' interviews selected from the collection of the Netherlands Veterans Institute *(Veteraneninstituut).*

Self-Conducted Interviews

No contact details are readily available for veterans who have left service. Therefore, to recruit veterans, I used the following routes.

- Announcements on formal and informal websites for Dutch (ex-)soldiers
- Networks of service members of different ranks, established in prior research
- In several cases, chance encounters at events such as military training and Veterans Day

In addition, I employed snowball sampling, identifying research participants who could then refer me to colleagues, acquaintances or friends. Snowball sampling has been identified as a method that considerably facilitates research into sensitive topics which involve hard-to-reach populations (cf. Faugier and Sargeant 1997, Atkinson and Flint 2001, Penrod *et al*. 2003). It makes it possible to gain access to otherwise distrustful respondents who would

not have participated had they not been referred by someone they knew, and it increases the likelihood that respondents are willing to speak openly about sensitive topics (cf. Atkinson and Flint 2001, Schulman-Green *et al*. 2009). This advantage seems to have been especially valuable in the case of Dutchbat veterans, whose negative experiences with media had made many distrustful of interviewers. Aware of the limitations of conventional snowball sampling regarding representativeness, I drew on the above-outlined variety of starting points. Doing so resulted in 'multiple snowballs', which extended the sample scope beyond a single social network, thus decreasing bias (Penrod *et al*. 2003).

Before interviewing a veteran, I always explained my study in general terms, by which I abided with the obligation of informed consent. In the announcements posted on websites, for instance, I stated that my study focuses 'on how soldiers and veterans deal with challenges during deployment and after homecoming'. Having noted that the words 'moral' and 'ethical' often evoke specific associations in which most veterans do not recognize themselves, I decided to avoid these terms. Instead I gave the following examples, formulated such that they were open to interpretation. 'Seeing, doing or experiencing difficult things. Having to make hard choices. Seeing injustice. Doing something that seems not right (or simply wrong). Being treated unjustly. Or, any other challenge soldiers and veterans may face'. I made explicit in my announcement that 'it is not necessary that you recognize yourself in this description, because it is also an interesting fact if soldiers and veterans don't. First and foremost, I am interested in the experiences of deployed soldiers'. Also, I clarified that all participants would remain anonymous.

I refrained from stating in my initial announcement that my research focuses on experiences of (moral) distress. Only after veterans responded to the announcement I explained clearly that my study was concerned with better understanding deployment-related distress and that it would also look at political decision-making and public opinion. Despite the fact that I did not select veterans beforehand on experiences of distress, a substantial number of participants reported deployment-related distress (as I will discuss later in the section headed 'The Research Participants'). Presumably, veterans who had deployment-related distress were particularly inclined to respond to my request. Also, when a veteran referred me to a colleague or acquaintance, relatively often this person also had deployment-related distress.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, which enabled me to hone in on the research questions while at the same time allowed the interviewees to bring up what they felt was important. I organized the interviews around three phases of military life: pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment. Specifically, I inquired about the interviewees' reasons for joining the military, their motivation for joining a particular mission, the expectations they had of their deployment, their overall deployment experiences, impressive or difficult experiences during deployment, the experience of homecoming, possible challenges in terms of returning to the world at home, and the ways in which their experiences did or did not affect and change them, both positively and negatively. When veterans spoke about experiences that seemed particularly relevant to this research, I probed deeper. Interview length ranged between two and five hours, with most lasting between three and five hours. Appendix A presents the interview topic list.

One challenge worth mentioning concerned the retrospective nature of many veterans' accounts. As is well-known, time colors and changes memory, and influences which memories are retained and which are not (cf. Kleinman 1988, Mattingly 1994, Sturken 1998). While this is insightful in itself, this study's purpose also required insight into the beliefs and expectations that veterans 'actually' held at various moments in their lives. Therefore, I always sought concrete examples to support or contradict their statements. Also, as mentioned, I triangulated veterans' memories with studies and media documents containing accounts of Dutchbat and TFU soldiers dating from earlier periods. Interestingly, at the time of the interviews by far the majority of interviewees (all except two) had never heard of the term 'moral injury', which means that though the notions of trauma and PTSD might have shaped their memories and accounts, this could not have been the case for moral injury.

Interviews Conducted by the Netherlands Veterans Institute

In addition to 40 self-conducted interviews, I drew on 40 'life story' interviews from the Dutch Veterans Interview Collection *(Interviewcollectie Nederlandse Veteranen)* of the Netherlands Veterans Institute *(Veteraneninstituut)*, which expanded this study's data to 80 interviews.

The Netherlands Veterans Institute owns a collection of more than 1000 interviews with veterans from several missions that the Institute has conducted to offer Dutch civilians the possibility to listen to veterans' life stories. The interview length is between two and six hours. Half of the interviews are publicly accessible on the website (www.veteraneninstituut.nl). The other half of the interviews are – responding to the wishes of the interviewees in question – only available with explicit permission. For this study I was given access to both public and restricted parts of the collection, having agreed that the interviews would only be used for research purposes and that interviewee anonymity s would be maintained.

The Netherlands Veterans Institute accessed the majority of interviewees through an announcement in the veteran magazine 'Checkpoint', which is free for veterans both in and out of service. An initial exploration indicated that the interviewees were of different ages, ranks, rotations and military branches. Some interviewees had left the military; others were still in active service at the time of the interview. With respect to the issue of distress, the interviews ranged from interviewees reporting no psychological difficulties at all to interviewees reporting significant suffering. Because this distribution was in line with the sample criteria I had determined, I chose to select a random sample. The interviews included in the selection were conducted between 2008 and 2014, but by far the majority in 2010 and 2011.

The interviews of the Netherlands Veterans Institute had no particular objective to examine moral distress. Consequently, they are limited in that the interviewer did not ask (supplementary) questions when I would have, which means that these interviews provided less in-depth information than self-conducted interviews. However, this very limitation also served the purpose of triangulation (see Denzin 2006). Although the interviews were not specifically intended to produce material on moral, political and societal dimensions of distress, nonetheless the veterans often shared stories that concerned these dimensions, and when this was the case, the accounts were comparable to the accounts of the veterans I had interviewed.

Participant Observation and Other Sources

In addition to interviews, I conducted several participant observations. The main purpose was triangulation of the data gathered in my interviews. I documented my observations in extensive field notes (Bryman 2012, p. 440). The observed occasions include military classroom courses on ethics and stress at military bases, Veterans Day, information days on PTSD organized by and for veterans, and a political demonstration of Dutchbat soldiers regarding the delay in responding to legal claims they had filed against the Dutch state. When attending an event, I would look its content as well as the responses of the participants. In the case of military training courses, I would observe how soldiers responded to the content of the training. On Veterans Day, I attended speeches and asked veterans for their opinions of the speeches. In the case of political demonstrations, I read the printed flyers and reflected on their content with participants. On all occasions, I asked participants why they participated in the event in question and joined in group conversations.

The Research Participants

This section discusses the characteristics of the 80 interviewed veterans. In line with the sample criteria, half of the veterans were sent to the former Yugoslavia, in or around Srebrenica, as part of Dutchbat or attached to Dutchbat, such as in a medical unit. Between 1994 and 1995 they were deployed for several months, in one or other of the four rotations of Dutchbat.[1] The other half of the interviewees were deployed to South Afghanistan as part of Task Force Uruzgan's Battle Groups, or as part of a unit attached to the Battle Groups. Between 2006 and 2010 they were deployed for several months, as part of one of the eight rotations of TFU. Three interviewees served in both Dutchbat and in TFU. Of the Dutchbat veterans, the majority had left service, while of the TFU veterans, about half had left service. A likely reason for this difference is that the mission of Dutchbat lies further in the past than the TFU mission.

Two interviewees are female, both Dutchbat veterans. The age of the interviewees at the start of their deployment varies from 19 to 46 years, but the majority was between 20 and 30 years old. Their rank at the time of deployment ranges from private to colonel. Most, however, were a private, corporal or non-commissioned officer at the time of deployment. While this distribution is in line with the distribution of ranks in the military population at large – the lower the rank, the higher the number of (ex-)soldiers – it does mean that some ranks are better represented than others.

With respect to the issue of moral distress, the characteristics of the interviewees are more difficult to express in figures. If placed on a continuum based on this criterion – ranging from veterans who reported no psychological problems at all to veterans who spoke of years of debilitating suffering – it could be said that about half are on the left side, and the other half are on the right of the continuum. To repeat, this distribution is probably not

1 It is not well-known that after Dutchbat III, one company of the planned fourth rotation of soldiers was still deployed to the former Yugoslavia.

representative of the Dutch military population at large. Rather, it is the outcome of this study's aim to reach a substantial number of participants with deployment-related distress (see 'Sample Selection').

Finally, it is worth noting that the study sample is not limited to a specific social or institutional network. Most interviewees, including those interviewed by the Netherlands Veterans Institute, were not actively involved in either the Netherlands Veterans Institute or other associations. Also, because I drew on multiple sources, the interviewees were acquainted with only a couple other interviewees at most.

Data Analysis

In accordance with grounded theory methods, a crucial part of the analytical process entailed coding the collected material. The coding technique served to label and organize the data, so that analysis and the data's translation into theoretical concepts occurred systematically (Bryman 2012, p. 402). I coded the data with the help of the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti. For the coding process, I followed grounded theory guidelines usually employed for narrative analysis (Charmaz 2006, Lal et al. 2012). In the initial coding phase, I coded recurring phrases and other regularities at a low level of abstraction. During this phase, I constantly compared the emerging codes with the data and with one another, in order to identify additional relevant regularities and to ensure I had not left out relevant context with respect to the regularities already identified. When necessary, I renamed and modified codes, or merged them into new ones. In the focused coding phase, I grouped the codes into more abstract and theoretical categories and explored the relationships between them. Again, I re-explored the data in comparison with the constructed categories. Eventually, I established 'core categories'. Appendix B presents a schematized report of the codes that emerged from this analytical process.

Coding and analysis occurred iteratively, with the research questions and theoretical framework in mind, which allowed for constant revision. I constantly compared the data with the preliminary theoretical framework, searched for new theoretical literature based on empirical findings, and questioned emerging understandings by exposing them to deeper data analysis. Further, I regularly presented my emerging findings at symposia and to several of the interviewed veterans, who served as a sounding board. The findings of this study are thus the result of an iterative process in which data and theory continuously informed one another. As such, they are the result of 'abductive inference' (Richardson and Kramer 2006): they are regularities and associations detected in the empirical material for which theoretically sensible explanations could be given.

To illustrate the coding process, the following example describes how I coded accounts of potentially morally challenging situations. Initially, I coded on the basis of the factors evoked by the interviewed veterans (e.g. 'adrenaline', 'orders', 'it was him or me') and the ways in which veterans interpreted the situation (e.g. right, wrong, non-moral). I thus analyzed veterans' accounts by focusing simultaneously on content (e.g. the situation and the factors involved in the situation) and meaning (e.g. evoking orders to justify a decision,

or, conversely, to condemn a situation). This process resulted in codes such as 'rules and instructions' and 'moral distancing and numbing'. In the focused coding phase, I grouped codes that had emerged in the initial coding phase into more abstract categories. Initially I tried to distinguish between different values or value sets, but found that disentangling veterans' accounts in this way was virtually impossible. For instance, I found that professional values such as obedience to 'rules and instructions' were often also deeply personal values, while personal tendencies such as 'moral distancing and numbing' were not always seen as contradictory to professionalism. Moreover, I found that disentangling veterans' accounts like this would eliminate the multiplicity and complexity of some experiences, while a noticeable feature of many distressing experiences was this very multiplicity and complexity. Therefore, I decided to group the emerging concepts from initial coding into categories such as 'justifications and rationalizations' and 'inconsistency in interpretations'. Finally, I identified these categories as coping mechanisms, specifically as ways of 'making soldiering less complex', and thus grouped these categories into a core category with this label. Figure 6 and Table 2 show the emerging and final results of this process.

The ultimate aim of the coding and analysis was to gain insight into moral, political and societal dimensions of veterans' experiences of moral distress. The iterative procedure made it possible to generate theory (rather than merely test existing theory) while ensuring that the emergent theory was empirically grounded. In other words, the procedure made it possible to contribute to the concept of moral injury.

Figure 6: Example of the Coding Process in ATLAS.ti

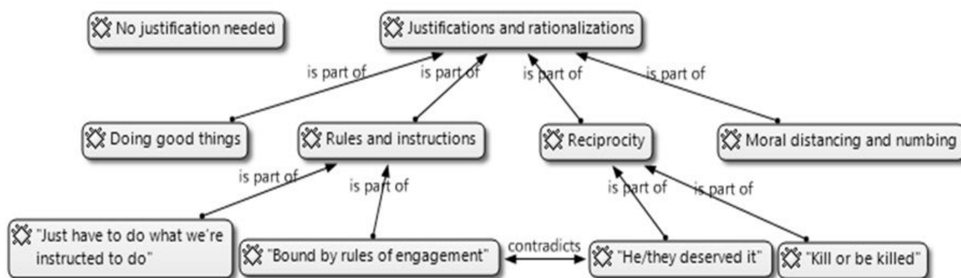


Table 2: Example of the Coding Results

Initial codes	Focused codes		Core categories
Doing good things	Justifications and rationalizations	Inconsistency in interpretations	Making soldiering less complex
Rules and instruction			
Reciprocity			
Distancing and numbing			
No justification needed	No justification needed		

Credibility and Generalizability

This section discusses the issues of credibility and generalizability. Credibility is the qualitative equivalent to what in quantitative research is referred to as internal validity (Bryman 2012, pp. 274–5). It refers to a high level of correspondence between what one wants to study and what is actually studied (cf. Golafshani 2003, Bryman 2012, p. 273). This study gathered detailed qualitative material, drew upon various data sources using several methods, applied a largely inductive approach, and constantly compared data and theory, seeking both confirmation and disconfirmation. All these methods have been identified as enhancing credibility because they ensure triangulation of data and methods, and firmly ground theory in empirical material (Denzin 2006, Bryman 2012). In particular, these methods ensure high 'ecological credibility', meaning that my research findings do not apply just to hypothetical or experimental situations, but to natural social settings as well (Denzin 2006, Bryman 2012).

Regarding the issues of generalizability, the chosen sampling method is relevant to consider. I consciously choose to use theoretical sampling (selection of theoretically relevant data) rather than random sampling (selection of statistically representative data). My aim was not to provide quantitative information about the prevalence of symptoms associated with 'moral injury'. Several other studies have already done this (Maguen *et al*. 2009, Rietveld 2009, Drescher *et al*. 2011, Nash *et al*. 2013, Vargas *et al*. 2013, Currier *et al*. 2015, Schut 2015, Bryan *et al*. 2016). Rather, my aim was to gain theoretical insight into moral distress. As mentioned, this study does not examine questions such as 'can a correlation be found between moral distress and a particular other factor?', but such questions as 'if veterans experience distress due to moral challenges, what does it entail?'. While random sampling is useful when examining the first kind of question, theoretical sampling is most appropriate for the second kind. It increases the potential for theoretical generalization, that is, for the transferability of the study findings to other settings characterized by similar processes and circumstances, because it makes it possible to thoroughly examine particular mechanisms at work in phenomena (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967, Charmaz 2006). So, while this study is substantially limited with respect to statistical generalization, it relies on relatively strong methods for theoretical generalization.

Researcher Role and Issues of Interpretation

In this section, I consider my own role in this study and issues of interpretation more generally. Let me start by stating that no research is simply an objective presentation of the world. The way the researcher enters a research setting inevitably shapes the result. Research questions and theoretical approaches, as they guide the analysis, always color the research. For instance, the fact that I focused on sociopolitical dimensions of moral distress resulted in findings on these dimensions, which may give the false impression that sociopolitical factors are entirely responsible for the prevalence of moral distress. Yet, the fact that I identified a relation between moral distress and sociopolitical factors (rather than other factors) is a

direct result of this focus, which inevitably causes bias. Also, rather than rendering these factors blameworthy, their identification reveals no more than that they formed a context that shaped the ways in which veterans experienced their deployment and homecoming.

A second issue is my role in the empirical research process. It would be naïve for any social researcher to think it is possible to simply be a 'fly on the wall'. Although I could triangulate my own interviews with those conducted by the Netherlands Veterans Institute, it still seems relevant to reflect on how the veterans' perceptions of me may have shaped my material. As a female civilian academic, I was generally seen as a partial outsider. While a completely insider position is undesirable as it presents the risk of 'home blindness' (Eriksen 2001, p. 30), being perceived as a complete outsider may hinder the establishment of rapport. Interviewers always face issues of building trust, and as noted, these issues are exacerbated in research on sensitive subject matters (Schulman-Green *et al.* 2009). Indeed, veterans would sometimes comment that 'people who have not been through the same thing cannot understand it'. At least partially, I could compensate for this limitation by my familiarity with the military organization, the Dutchbat and TFU mission, and military jargon. Speaking 'the same language' to this extent helped me to build rapport, which was indicated, for instance, by the fact that many veterans expressed views to me which they knew were different from what 'civilians would like to hear'. At the same time, my partial outsider position also turned out to be an advantage, because it facilitated the discussion of emotional topics that soldiers usually do not talk about to each other. Furthermore, it gave me a technique for obtaining relevant information. By making my perceived position an explicit theme of the interview, I was able to probe deeper into veterans' perceptions and attitudes.

Third, the focus on accounts of distress led to specific challenges. As Sayer has noted, 'analyses of things that bear on well-being and what people care about cannot avoid taking on a certain evaluative load' (Sayer 2009, p. 782). As mentioned, some veterans I interviewed commented that people without similar experience cannot truly understand what they have seen and done. At the same time, some veterans told me they hoped my study would generate recognition of the veterans' problems, to which others added that they felt 'sort of proud' that they were 'doing something useful' by helping me with my research. All these statements were more than mere descriptions of feelings. By saying these things, veterans inevitably made implicit appeals to write my research in their name, while their overwhelming stories already made critical analysis a challenge. How to maintain critical detachment to barely imaginable stories of suffering? Then again, how to write compassionately without the study becoming an idealized fiction of victim-heroes instead of real human beings?

I came to understand veterans' statements through the notions of transference and countertransference. Initially developed in the field of psychoanalysis, these notions are increasingly applied in scientific research (e.g. Paul 1989, Withuis 2002). In research contexts, transference is used to indicate the totality of feelings and reactions of the respondent toward the researcher. Countertransference, in turn, is meant to describe the feelings and reactions of the researcher toward the respondent and his transference (ibid). As Robben (1996) noticed in his own research on political violence in Argentina, a major risk of examining impressionable stories of suffering is that they may overwhelm researchers. Consequently, researchers may uncritically reproduce the world-views of their respondents while believing that they have gained a true understanding of their pain. Conversely, as Withuis (2002)

signaled, researchers may also declare themselves speechless and refrain from analysis out of respect for the stories of overwhelming suffering they examine. However, as Robben and Withuis also emphasize, critical analysis is exactly what makes a scientific research valuable. Just as a critical attitude is not the same as criticizing others, empathy is not the same as absorbing others' perceptions. While it remains true that an empathetic attitude is indispensable for understanding people's experiences, its pitfall is being led astray from one's scientific objectives toward a superficial analysis. Such a study is to no one's benefit.

Yet, Withuis (2002), Robben (1996) and others (e.g. Paul 1989) also contend that transference and countertransference, when recognized, can actually benefit one's research. In line with psychoanalytic understandings, they state that the mechanisms can be used as an analytical tool. That is, the interactions between researcher and respondents can also be seen as insightful data. Indeed, veterans' responses to my requests and my own responses to their stories were part of what my research was about: the impact of experiences of powerlessness, feelings of isolation and mistrust toward others, appeals for recognition, discomfort in others when hearing stories of violence and pain, and so on. Understanding my interactions with veterans as such helped me to refrain both from uncritically absorbing veterans' perspectives and from forcing indifference out of a fear of not being objective. Moreover, it allowed me to use these interactions as a source of information.

Ethical Considerations

The previous section discussed the ethical issue of doing critical research without doing injustice to the research participants. In this final section, I briefly explain how I dealt with other ethical issues. Overall, I followed the ethical guidelines for good research practice defined by the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) (2011), which are the result of broad qualitative research experience among marginalized or otherwise vulnerable populations.

To be more specific, I first made sure that all my research participants were aware of my identity as a researcher. I always emphasized that I am not a therapist or a professional able to offer information or advice. I only interviewed individuals who gave informed consent to the research. In the preparatory, orientation phase I only interviewed veterans who had already spoken publicly about their deployment experience. I asked two military chaplains for advice on the ethical dimensions. On this basis, I decided to interview veterans who had already confided their experiences to at least one other person, which I made sure was the case before making an interview appointment. At the start of every interview, I always mentioned the website of the Veteranenloket ('Veteran Office') that can guide veterans in finding health care. Also, I explicitly said that participants did not have to answer any question if they did not want to. I closely observed how the interview affected the veteran, and if it seemed necessary I would briefly steer us to a less emotional topic. To ensure veterans' anonymity, I use pseudonyms in this study. Also, where it does not compromise the significance of the stories, I have omitted other details, such as specific dates and locations.

Part Two

Soldiers in Conflict

Part II. Soldiers in Conflict

In the following chapters, which make up Part II, I present the findings of my research. The structure of each chapter reflects the grounded theory approach taken in this study. The presentation of empirical findings alternates with the discussion of theoretical insights, mirroring the continuous process of the coding and analysis of data having been informed by extant theoretical literature while additional theoretical inquiries were guided by the data coding and analysis. A report of the coding results can be found in Appendix B. Following this iterative path, each chapter ends with a theoretical contribution to the understanding of moral distress.

Regarding the ways in which Dutchbat and TFU veterans in general tended to make sense of their deployment experiences (Chapter 5), and the kinds of moral challenges that engendered moral distress among a number of them (Chapter 6), I found many more remarkable similarities than differences. For this reason, I take the two groups together when discussing these topics. However, with respect to the role of political practices and public perceptions in moral distress (Chapters 7 and 8), respectively, it did prove valuable to separately discuss the experiences of these two groups, although, again, it will turn out that what was most striking were not the differences but the similarities between their experiences. Before proceeding to Chapters 5 to 8, it is useful to give a short overview of the Dutchbat mission and the TFU mission, which I will do in Chapter 4.

4

Chapter 4. The Missions

This chapter sketches an overview of the Dutchbat and TFU missions to offer some context in advance of detailed discussions in the subsequent chapters. In light of these chapters' focus on soldiers' experiences of conflict and disorientation, however, it seems that a word of caution is in order. Outlines like this one inevitably turn the complexity, uncertainty and unintelligibility of the missions into simplified, structured and readable overviews. Hence, they should always be understood as the post-facto interpretations that they are.

Dutchbat, UNPROFOR

The UNPROFOR mission in the former Yugoslavia, which lasted from 1992 to 1995, was a UN-led peacekeeping operation. It was thus a 'blue helmet' mission, based on three principles: voluntary consent of the parties in conflict, impartiality in relation to all parties, and a minimum use of force allowed only as a last resort (UN 2008). The Netherlands was one of the countries that contributed troops to the UN mission, driven by the wish to help address humanitarian necessity coupled with the desire to improve Dutch prestige in the world (NIOD 2002, Van der Meulen 2004). In the Netherlands, and in many European countries for that matter, there was broad public support for the peacekeeping mission and even for more forceful intervention (Ten Cate 1998, Klep and Winslow 1999, Van der Meulen 2004). However, both the UN and the Dutch government feared that forceful military intervention would lead to intensification of the conflict and too many casualties in UN troops, and so the mission remained a peacekeeping operation (Van der Meulen 2004). In practical terms, this meant that troops were armed with light weaponry, had to maintain a neutral position, and were only allowed to use force in self-defense or in defense of the mandate (Klep and Winslow 1999, Vogelaar and Kramer 2000, NIOD 2002).

As from 1992, the Dutch government contributed transport units, whose main tasks were transportation of food and other aids for humanitarian purposes. In 1994, it began contributing additional troops, who were sent to the 'Safe Area' of Srebrenica, declared as such in 1993 together with five other areas in what is now called Bosnia and Herzegovina. The military leadership, though not unanimous, had voiced serious doubts about the feasibility of this mission given the quantitative and qualitative constraints with which the troops would be deployed (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005). Nevertheless, in early 1994, the first battalion of what was called Dutchbat was dispatched. Two Dutchbat companies were active in Srebrenica, while the third company was stationed just outside the enclave. The core of Dutchbat was the Air Maneuver Brigade. While the Air Maneuver Brigade is an infantry unit trained for combat, Dutchbat's main tasks entailed operating observation posts and carrying out social and information-gathering patrols.

The two companies deployed within the enclave of Srebrenica had the additional task of disarming Bosnian Muslim belligerents (Vogelaar and Kramer 2000, NIOD 2002).

However, these tasks proved difficult to perform. Dutch peacekeepers were greatly constrained in their ability to use force, while each local warring party far outnumbered them (Klep and Winslow 1999, Vogelaar and Kramer 2000, NIOD 2002). In addition, both parties took advantage of the Dutch. Bosnian Serb forces frequently shot over the heads of the Dutch troops to intimidate them, and Bosnian Muslim fighters regularly provoked fire by Bosnian Serb forces, after which they sought cover with the Dutch (Vogelaar and Kramer 2000, NIOD 2002). Also, Bosnian Muslim belligerents often left the Srebrenican enclave at night to carry out raids in Bosnian Serb territory, returning for protection by Dutchbat, which was supposed to stay impartial (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002).

As a consequence of these problems, Dutchbat was unable to perform the tasks of their original mission. After several unsuccessful attempts to disarm Bosnian Muslim belligerents, who generally outnumbered the peacekeepers and seemed unimpressed by their presence, Dutchbat soldiers often stopped trying (NIOD 2002, Kramer 2007). Furthermore, as Dutchbat II soldiers reported, in order to avoid great risk they tended to avoid dangerous patrol routes (Kramer 2007). The battalion found itself 'in a schizophrenic situation, performing a mission in such a way that the mission was actually denied' (Kramer 2007, p. 192).

Many soldiers became discouraged and frustrated by their powerlessness and by the behavior of the belligerent parties. For some, the only remaining motive was to 'get back in one piece' (see also Vogelaar *et al.* 1996, Praamsma *et al.* 2005). Among Dutchbat soldiers, and later in the media, rumors started to circulate that Dutchbat II soldiers had given jam-covered fuel tablets to local children, behaved aggressively to the local population, used drugs and received sexual services from local girls and women in exchange for money, food or cigarettes (NRC 1995, NIOD 2002, pp. 1245–6). In fact, when Canadian troops were stationed in Srebrenica, even before Dutchbat, reports had already come in of local girls offering themselves to soldiers or being offered to them by family members (NIOD 2002, p. 1126). Although several internal inquiries were set up, none led to convincing evidence for the allegations (NIOD 2002, p. 1250).

In retrospect, Dutchbat's mission had all the makings of a 'mission impossible', to draw on the words used by both journalists and the former commander-in-chief of the Dutch army (Klep and Winslow 1999, p. 99, Van de Bildt 2015, p. 119). In the summer of 1995, this impossibility materialized in the fall of Srebrenica, which led to the murder of thousands of Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serb forces, of which the estimated number varies between over 7000 and over 8000 (see e.g. NIOD 2002, Karčić 2015). In the beginning of July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces laid siege to the Srebrenican enclave, where the third battalion, Dutchbat III, was present. On 9 July, Lieutenant-colonel Karremans, commander of Dutchbat III, received the following order. 'You are to use all means at your disposal to establish blocking positions to prevent further advances of VRS [Bosnian Serb army] units in the direction of the town of Srebrenica. You are to do everything in your power to reinforce those positions, including the use of weapons'. The order stated that Karremans could count on all 'promised supplementary resources', that is, the previously promised Close Air Support (NIOD 2002, pp. 1664–5).

The Dutch troops were now ordered to execute a ‘green order’ (NIOD 2002, p. 1665). However, they were still armed with only the light weaponry of peacekeepers, which was inadequate for combat situations. In addition, Bosnian Serb blockades had made them run dangerously low on fuel, ammunition, food and other supplies. Meanwhile, Bosnian Serb forces had stopped many soldiers who had gone on leave from returning to Srebrenica, and they took a number of others hostage. As a result, of some 600 soldiers in the third battalion, only about 400 were left, including about 200 infantry soldiers (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, p. 1669, Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005).

The Dutch troops took up blocking positions, occupying strategic positions with armored tracked vehicles from which they could fire upon the advancing Bosnian Serb forces. They were ordered to return fire over the heads of the advancing Bosnian Serb forces except when direct fire was necessary for self-defense, and this is what they did. However, against the aggression of an overwhelming majority of Bosnian Serb forces equipped with weaponry that included tanks and heavy mortars, Dutchbat commanders felt unable to put up more forceful resistance (NIOD 2002, p. 1656 ff., Praamsma *et al*. 2005). They saw air strikes as their only salvation, which they believed would come early in the morning of July 11.[1] However, the air strikes never came (NIOD 2002, Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005).

In the meantime, a terrified crowd of several thousand Muslim refugees assembled in Srebrenica town stormed the small Bravo company compound, which was occupied by 30 Dutch soldiers. The rest of the company was occupying the blocking positions (NIOD 2002, p. 1692). After Srebrenica fell, thousands of refugees fled the compound. In this flight, thousands of Bosnian Muslim men were either killed at once by mortar fire or captured for execution later (NIOD 2002, pp. 1953–4). A number of refugees fled to the second UN compound that was inside the enclave of Srebrenica, in Potočari, five kilometers from the compound in Srebrenica town. Here, the Charlie Company of Dutchbat was stationed.

The Potočari compound was soon flooded with thousands of refugees, including several hundred men (NIOD 2002, p. 2024). There was hardly any food, water or medication, and people were in great panic. Women spontaneously gave birth to dead babies; some men hanged themselves (NIOD 2002, p. 2125, Praamsma et al. 2005). On July 12, Bosnian Serb forces came to deport the refugees by buses. The refugees rushed to get a seat on the buses, as many wanted to leave the dire circumstances they were in as soon as possible (NIOD 2002, p. 2045, Praamsma *et al*. 2005). The Bosnian Serb forces stated that their aim was to interrogate alleged belligerents, and therefore wanted to separate the women and children from the men. Dutchbat assisted in the separation and evacuation/deportation of the refugees. By assisting, soldiers said later, they were trying to regulate the panic among the refugees, mitigate the aggressive way in which the Bosnian Serb forces deported the refugees, and help

1 Air strikes are not the same as Close Air Support. Commander Karremans requested Close Air Support, which is small-scale support aimed at threatened positions. However, based on what Karremans announced to the company commanders and the Bosnian Muslim army, it seems he expected air strikes, which entails large-scale deployment of air power (NIOD 2002, pp. 1699–1705). In any case, UNPROFOR leadership had already decided and announced that ‘there was not really any question of the possibility of air strikes in July’ (NIOD 2002, p. 1787 see also 1662). It is unclear why Karremans believed he had been promised air strikes (NIOD 2002, p. 1789). Notably, according to documents uncovered in 2015, it seems that France, Britain and the US had already agreed to suspend NATO air support. The Dutch institute NIOD conducted additional exploratory research into this question. However, partially because NIOD was not granted access by these countries to classified information, it was unable to draw new conclusions (NIOD 2016).

as many women and children as they could (NIOD 2002, pp. 2045–6, Praamsma *et al*. 2005). The Bosnian Serb forces later executed the deported men (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, Praamsma *et al*. 2005).

In the Netherlands, when it became clear that Dutchbat had not put up robust resistance against the Bosnian Serb aggression, heated debates began on who was to blame for this tragedy (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, Van de Bildt 2015). While there was sympathy for the fact that the Dutch peacekeepers had not been equal to the sheer power of the Bosnian Serbs, they were also accused of having been passive cowards and indeed collaborators as they had helped to separate the women and children from men. Thousands of local civilians had been killed, including the hundreds of boys and men deported from the UN compound in Potočari. At the same time, 'only' two soldiers died on the Dutch side and Dutchbat soldiers stated they had not seen the murders coming. A large part of the domestic public found these coupled facts incomprehensible (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, Van de Bildt 2015).

Task Force Uruzgan, ISAF

The Srebrenica tragedy damaged the reputation of the Dutch armed forces. The NATO-led ISAF mission in Uruzgan, Afghanistan, provided an opportunity to gain redemption (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015). This mission was a 'green helmet' counterinsurgency operation, meaning that soldiers did not have to assume an impartial peacekeeping position but were supposed to marginalize insurgents politically, socially, and economically with a mix of humanitarian and combat activities (Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010, Klep 2011, Zaalberg 2013). Compared to the UNPROFOR troops, ISAF troops were armed with far heavier weaponry and allowed to use it.

The Dutch government's decision to contribute troops to the ISAF mission was inspired by the desire to present the Netherlands as a trustworthy ally of the United States and the 'international community' (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015). While Dutch troops had already been present in Afghanistan since 2002, large-scale Dutch engagement in the region of Uruzgan started in 2006, under the header of Task Force Uruzgan. The officially formulated goal of TFU was to make a substantial contribution to safety and security, socio-economic development and governance. The goals of the mission were thus ambitious but also rather vague (Klep 2011, pp. 191–2, Grandia 2015, pp. 125; 139).

The decision to contribute troops to the NATO mission met strong domestic criticism (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Klep 2011, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). A large part of both the Dutch public and parliament were wary of turning the mission into an offensive operation, and some were opposed to participating at all. They warned that the Netherlands should not let themselves get hitched to a US war wagon, and insisted that if the Netherlands did join, the mission had to revolve around humanitarian activities and reconstruction (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Klep 2011, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016).

From the start, parliamentary and public debate centered on the question of whether it was a 'combat mission' or a 'reconstruction mission' (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). The Dutch government insisted that it could not be categorized

as either one or the other, but at the same time stressed that the emphasis would lie on reconstruction of the country (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Klep 2011). The TFU troops would engage in combat only if insurgents directly interfered with reconstruction, and the Dutch use of force would be less 'blunt' than that of the US military (Klep 2011, p. 33). Also, Dutch operations would be strictly separate from activities belonging to the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), which opposition parties had branded a 'terrorist hunt' (TK 2006, p. 18, see also Klep 2011, Grandia 2015).[2] Generally, the Netherlands would employ a 'Dutch approach' of subtlety and cultural awareness, and be 'as civilian as possible, and as military as necessary' (Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012, p. 82). So, while the government did not deny that the mission could involve combat, it did frame it in non-martial terms and underlined its non-involvement with US-led activities. This created the expectation that the mission would revolve around reconstruction and little combat would take place (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016).

In practice, the mission could aptly be called a counterinsurgency operation, combining humanitarian and combat elements (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010). Though the Dutch government avoided this term because of its martial connotations (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, p. 520, Grandia 2015, p. 147), the Dutch military did indeed use the label (Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012). The composition of the Task Force Uruzgan was tailored to such a combined approach. Its core components were the Provincial Reconstruction Team, consisting of units tasked with reconstruction, and Battle Group units responsible for security. Besides protecting the Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Battle Group carried out patrols (reconnaissance, social and combat patrols) and tactical operations from forward-operating bases (Klep 2011, Beeres *et al*. 2012). Also, frequently under insurgent attack, they regularly engaged in combat (Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010, Klep 2011, Beeres *et al*. 2012).

The image of a reconstruction mission was thus not wholly incorrect. The Dutch troops did focus on reconstruction, and although their approach was far less uniquely Dutch than the term 'Dutch approach' implies, they tried to avoid combat more than their British and Canadian counterparts did, for instance (Klep 2011, pp. 40; 151). Especially compared to the US-led troops of Operation Enduring Freedom, they had many more constraints (Nagl and Weitz 2010). In fact, this applied to ISAF troops in general and resulted in US troops mockingly explaining the acronym ISAF as 'I Saw Americans Fighting' (Bowman and Dale 2009, p. 16). This mockery notwithstanding, the Dutch mission was certainly more than merely a reconstruction operation. During its course, soldiers had to be 'as military as necessary' quite frequently. In total, 25 Dutch soldiers died, more than 140 Dutch soldiers were (severely) wounded, and many more locals were killed, both insurgents and civilians (Klep 2011, Rietjens 2012). In other words, although the reconstruction image was more than a myth, it was not an accurate representation of reality either. The combat/reconstructing dichotomy existed more generally only in the Dutch political and public imagination, not in Uruzgan (Klep 2011, Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). As a Dutch major general put

2 Perhaps interesting to note is that in 2005, the government contributed 250 soldiers to Operation Enduring Freedom (Dimitriu et al. 2016, p. 152). While several parties in parliament criticized this decision (ibid), the media did not debate it extensively (see e.g. De Volkskrant 2005, Trouw 2005).

it at the time: 'Evidently, the operational reality in Uruzgan and the political reality in the Netherlands do not always coincide' (cited in Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, p. 22).

Besides this discrepancy between framing of the mission and its operational reality, there was a gap between objective and resources. The Dutch troop size was too small and their mandate too restricted to provide safety and security outside several relatively small areas in Uruzgan. In turn, this hampered their undertaking of activities targeting socio-economic development and governance, and vice versa (Klep 2011, Ruijter *et al*. 2011). Given the resources available, the objective to make a substantial contribution to safety and security, development and governance turned out to be overambitious (Klep 2011, Ruijter *et al*. 2011).

Over the course of the mission, political and public opposition grew. Opposition seemed less to do with whether or not the mission's objectives could be achieved (the situation started looking much better toward the end of the mission), and more with increasing awareness that the mission progressed differently from what was outlined in advance (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Klep 2011, Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). Public support dwindled because the gap between the expected reconstruction mission and the reality on the ground became increasingly clear (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, pp. 520–1, Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010, p. 435). Within political circles, agreed deadlines for the withdrawal of Dutch troops and related electoral considerations played an important role (Klep 2011, p. 134, Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, p. 28). In 2010, the Dutch coalition government collapsed after a conflict over extension of the mission, which resulted in the mission's termination (Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012). The Dutch soldiers' performance in Uruzgan had been perceived as too soft by their US colleagues, and as too aggressive in the Netherlands.

5

Chapter 5. ‘That’s just the way it is’: Uncomplicated Soldiering

Introduction

When a man on a motorbike keeps riding toward the base, ignoring warning shots, when should you fire a shot aimed at him? When local men intimidate a local woman, should you intervene, even against orders? When local combatants do not abide by any of the laws of war, why should you? Given that you will soon leave again anyway, why should you care at all about the mission?

The accounts of the interviewed veterans, both Dutchbat and TFU veterans, are full of questions like these, revealing the circumstances under which soldiers have to operate and the challenges that may come with it. How do soldiers cope with such challenges? For many veterans interviewed for this study, reading the above anecdote would bring back disturbing memories of similar situations that wounded their minds. However, this would not be the case for many other veterans interviewed for this study. They would raise their eyebrows at the stressful complexity implied by the anecdote, thinking to themselves that soldiers simply have to be able to cope.

In preparation for this study, I attended several military ethics classes. Once, the instructor began the lesson by jokingly saying what he knew many soldiers were thinking: ‘oh God, are we going to talk about ethics?’ When I spoke with the soldiers in the coffee breaks, about half said they found ethics education valuable, but the other half were not that keen on it, not only because sitting in a classroom was not their favorite activity but also because they did not see the use of it. Although most of the skeptical soldiers had been deployed at least once, and agreed that one can experience moral dilemmas on deployment, they said they did not see them as ‘real’ dilemmas. ‘You already know what’s wrong and right’, they would say with a shrug. ‘You just use your common sense’.

Some of my military acquaintances made similar remarks when I told them about my research. Although they agreed that situations with major consequences might cause distress, they insisted that they themselves found their job just as uncomplicated as other people found theirs. For instance, when I told an acquaintance that I was interested in how soldiers deal with the moral side of war, he grinned. He had served six tours and had often engaged in combat. ‘Do they never tell you they just like fighting?’ he asked rhetorically, reminding me of his excitement when he told me about his deployments.

Interestingly, all interviewed veterans, including those who developed moral distress, recounted perceptions of uncomplicatedness. Yet, while most veterans who never developed distress still saw their profession as uncomplicated, for those who had found it uncomplicated, this view belonged to the past. Their morally distressing experiences had irrevocably changed their perception of military practice. To gain comprehensive insight into moral distress, it seems important to understand not only veterans’ current perceptions, but also the perceptions they held before developing moral distress. Therefore, before zooming in on stories of moral distress, as I do in subsequent chapters, here I focus on accounts of

moral uncomplicatedness. That is, I focus on the 'pre-distress' memories of veterans who eventually developed distress, and on the stories of veterans who never did, which turned out to be remarkably similar. These accounts will help to gain insight into how soldiers perceive their profession in the first place and into the coping strategies they initially use in the face of moral challenges. This, in turn, will shed light on how soldiers usually (try to) prevent moral distress, which will help to understand why and when moral distress does arise.

This chapter results from an examination of the subquestion: How did Dutchbat and TFU soldiers in general interpret and cope with (potential) moral challenges related to their profession? First, I discuss how veterans understood their profession in general; second, how they interpreted and coped with specific experiences on deployment, and, third, how they made sense of their military experience in relation to civil life. Next, on the basis of this discussion, I analyze their accounts as ways to maneuver through moral tension, and as attempts to cope with potential challenges by relying on the belief that all situations are ultimately soluble.

The Military Profession

Conscription to the Dutch armed forces was suspended in 1997.[1] Thus, TFU units contained volunteers (professionals) only. In the case of Dutchbat, soldiers of the Airmobile Brigade were all volunteers as well. Of the other Dutchbat soldiers, such as those responsible for logistics or communications, some were conscripted at the time they served in the former Yugoslavia, but they went on this mission as volunteers. They had been able to choose whether they wanted to serve their time in the Netherlands or Germany, or as part of a UN mission (see also NIOD 2002, pp. 386; 1010).

All interviewed veterans said they had been eager to serve in their designated mission. Why was this? Although their motives and expectations obviously differed, many similarities could be found. Contrary to common belief, virtually no veterans expressed any abstract ideals. Although all were proud to be deployed, few believed they would serve their country. Generally, few had been particularly concerned by any political reason behind their mission. Rather, they had been attracted by the idea of adventure, action and comradeship. In the words of one veteran, they liked the idea of 'sports, comradeship, doing things as a team – you know, just the military'. Incidentally, expressions like these can be found among soldiers worldwide. It has been well-documented that despite buzzwords like 'serving the country', most soldiers living in countries at peace do not see military service as heroic sacrifice. Their primary motives to serve are their affinity with sports, the attraction of comradeship, the benefits of a relatively good salary and free education opportunities (see e.g. Bourke 1999, Gibson and Abell 2004, Bar and Ben-Ari 2005, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013).

1 Suspended means that citizens are no longer forced to undertake military service as long as it is not required for national safety. In the Netherlands, the transition from conscripted to all-volunteer armed forces began in 1991. The Dutch military now consists fully of volunteers.

Yet, it would be incorrect to conclude that soldiers perceive military service as a job with no moral dimensions whatsoever. For about half of the interviewed veterans, it had always been quite obvious that their profession had a significant moral aspect. These veterans said that even if not their primary reason for joining the military, they expected and hoped they would be able 'to help people' or at least 'to do something useful' on their mission. Veterans deployed in a medical function voiced this motivation most strongly. At the same time, just as many veterans, particularly in the infantry did not mention any altruistic motives and insisted they lacked any such motive even when I probed deeper into the issue. For instance, if I inquired whether it mattered if the mission had 'some kind of point', these veterans would shrug in denial, clarifying that although they would have found it 'a big plus' if the lives of the locals improved, it had not been a motive. They had joined the military because they liked sports and adventure, they said, not because they wanted to help people.

Lieutenant Henk's statements are exemplary of this second attitude. After he denied caring about some kind of mission purpose, I asked him whether he at least 'stood behind his missions', to which he responded 'not always' but added that 'it has nothing to do with my job as a soldier'. Like Henk, many veterans said, 'I just wanted to do what I am trained to do', by which they meant planning, organizing and leading troop activities (in the case of officers), or executing their drills and skills in real-life situations (in the case of enlisted personnel). Some veterans mockingly called my inquiries about goals or purposes 'typically civilian questions' and joked that I mistook the military for an NGO. They maintained that their job was simply not that complicated, and I was the one making it difficult. More seriously, many veterans emphasized that overly idealistic expectations could be dangerous. Former NCO Mushin, for instance, said, 'When a new guy comes in and says "I want to help the local population" we immediately say, "Fucker, you'd better not think like that, you'll come back broken"'. As Mushin and others suggested, at the start of their career many veterans had already learned that they should rid themselves of the ideal of helping others, as these were considered dangerous illusions.

However, when I asked veterans whether they considered themselves comparable to mercenaries, they all denied this to be the case. Yes, some said, they were like mercenaries in the sense that to them 'being a soldier is just a job', and that they did what they did 'for myself' and 'for my buddies' rather than anyone else. But none viewed themselves as people who would 'do just anything for money'. As NCO Boris stated, 'I just like what I do, but I wouldn't intervene in a country if it didn't make sense. I've got my principles'. Specifically, many veterans emphasized that 'I am not a *murderer*'. Such a distinction between killing and murder was often brought up, just as the distinction between robots and human beings. Even amid danger and chaos 'you're always there', veterans stressed, and 'you always stay human'.

The veterans' pre-deployment motivations and expectations thus varied from 'helping people' to 'putting my training into practice'. However, even the veterans who denied having any altruistic motives distinguished themselves from murderers and mercenaries, and stressed that soldiers are human rather than robots. The need to do so indicates that these veterans also saw their profession as morally significant. They were certainly not opposed to the use of force, but they did need it to occur within a framework that gave them justification, and they needed to see themselves as moral agents acting out of their own will and values. As long as this was the case, they did not find their job morally problematic.

Challenges during Deployment

How did these perceptions work in practice? Specifically, how did the interviewed veterans interpret and cope with events of tangible violence and suffering on deployment without developing distress? Below, I disentangle and explicate the interpretations that featured most frequently in their accounts. First, I discuss situations for which veterans did not seem to require justifications to cope. Subsequently, I discuss the interpretations veterans employed for situations that did need to be justified or at least rationalized.

The Joys of Military Practice: No Justification Needed?

Military talk stands out in its technical terms for manifestations of violence. 'Troops in contact' and 'kinetic action' refer to combat situations. 'Use of force' is infliction of harm, and 'to neutralize' or 'take out', specifically, is to wound or kill a person in the opposing party. 'Friendly fire' or 'blue on blue' is the accidental killing of a person in the own troop, and 'collateral damage' means that people are unintentionally wounded and killed. As these examples show, technical jargon not just describes and distinguishes particular phenomena, it also euphemizes them into non-emotional and non-moral issues (Bandura 1999). Consequently, no justification is ever needed for these phenomena.

Interviewed veterans often used military jargon. Generally, they were often matter-of-fact about deployment events. Consider the following anecdotes.

> A car comes at us fast. It's about 600 meters away, I give a stop sign. He doesn't listen, keeps on driving. I give him another stop sign, he keeps on driving. At one point, I fire into the air, and then at the car. Full on brakes. I hadn't hit him. He opens the door and it turns out it was just two guys who wanted to test how far they could go.

> There were days in the Baluchi valley when shit went fucking mad, and at one point a message came in over the radio, like 'anything that moves is the enemy'. From any house where they fire at us. (...) That engagement lasted nine hours or so. We fought all day. And it was like, the spiral of violence grew tighter and tighter, and when the helicopters have to leave at one point to refill their tanks, there's no air support anymore, things get risky, and everyone is then – when you've been fighting nine hours, nobody who's not a combatant has any reason to be there. And so the guy running there, he might have just put down his weapon, or is just running to a weapon, so he goes down too. Yeah, that's the way it is.

> Maybe I did hit a civilian. They were firing at us from between the qalas [housing compounds], and from the fields, and you didn't see anything. I'd find it fucked up if it had happened, if I knew it. That's just shitty. A life is a life. But even if I'd killed a friendly old man by accident, it wouldn't have given me big problems. These things can just happen.

The veterans who recounted these stories are three of many who spoke about deployment events without offering extensive explanations. It's just 'the way it is', and things like this 'can just happen', they would say.

While veterans often employed a factual narrative style, at the same time their accounts were usually more 'raw' and less 'clean' than the texts of military reports. Many TFU veterans, for instance, said that they got 'a kick' out of engaging in combat.

> I found it good, a very special feeling. Combat is just something that... you soar above yourself. You become like, if you're past the fear, at one point, it's something very unique. And something very... primal. Just, warrior, destruction. (...) You feel like some kind of god.

> Women and children left the village en masse. And suddenly you heard the first bullets. Everybody was actually very excited and we were all laughing, like: 'awesome-awesome-awesome!' And then, you heard mortars slamming. We were like 'fuuuck!' [laughs]. You're going to get yourself amped up, like 'we're going to fuck them up!' (...) You can't go and think, like 'oh they have families too', you know. (...) You just know what to do. You're not scared of anything.

> Look, you've got to psych yourself up a bit. The last thing you want is for it to go wrong, that you hesitate, that you think: that's a human being too. At that moment it's him or me. You know, in the past we fought each other with swords. Man is just an animal, you know. You have to see yourself as an animal too.

Though not about combat, many Dutchbat veterans also recounted joyful memories. While all Dutchbat III veterans (who experienced the fall of Srebrenica), without exception, reported deployment-related problems, even many of these veterans said that 'until mid-May' – when things started to get grim – 'I had an awesome time'. One veteran said:

> For the most part, I had a great time, just what I'd hoped for. (...) Patrolling four, five days a week. I was always in front. (...) And having little and bad food. I enjoyed it. Having to endure things. I felt on top of the world.

Many Dutchbat veterans talked about how they had enjoyed manning observation posts and patrolling. Some, moreover, described instances of bullets being fired over their heads as exciting 'adrenaline rushes'. Even for Dutchbat III veterans, such occurrences were not worrying in the beginning. They were, after all, in a war zone.

I am not the first to note that military accounts are often filled with statements of joy rather than expressions of moral concern. Ferguson, for instance, signals that many of the soldiers of World War One 'simply took pleasure in killing' (1998, p. 358), and Gray (1959, p. 28) similarly notes that many soldiers are attracted by 'the delight in seeing, the delight in comradeship, the delight in destruction'. Bourke (1999) and Bar and Ben-Ari (2005), too, argue that once soldiers overcome their resistance to fighting and killing, they often enjoy it. These statements resonate with the accounts of the interviewed veterans. This does not mean, however, that the feelings they described

can be put down to 'fun'. No interviewed veteran called it 'fun', but rather used words such as 'good' and 'unique'. They often described a confluence of antagonistic feelings, including fear, adrenaline and excitement, reminiscent of how Vietnam veteran and novelist O'Brien describes war stories. As he writes, 'war is mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead' (O'Brien 1990, pp. 86–87). In a similar vein, Gray states that if 'we think of beauty and ugliness without their usual moral overtones, there is often a weird but genuine beauty in the sight of massed men and weapons in combat' (1959, p. 31).

What does this mean in moral terms? Again, Gray's and O'Brien's writings are illustrative. Gray argues that to look at war in esthetic terms 'involves a neglect of moral ideals' (1959, p. 39). O'Brien adds, a 'true war story does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior. (…) There is no rectitude whatsoever. (…) Send guys to war, they come home talking dirty' (1990, p. 76). Indeed, the accounts of the interviewed veterans are not just ridden with 'sanitizing' technical terminology and factual descriptions of drills, they are full of raw emotional and dirty language. At the same time, the two languages have something in common. Both technical talk and talk of the bizarre beauty of destruction make moral questions look irrelevant, thus rendering justifications and rationalizations unnecessary. Such talk makes it possible to think and speak of military practice without justification or rationalization.

Justifications and Rationalizations

The previous section quoted Dutchbat and TFU veterans speaking of deployment events as 'the way it is', and as things that 'can just happen'. In doing so, they did more than merely describe their experience. They also made a statement, namely that one cannot and should not judge. However, as their distinction between murderers and killers has revealed, this does not mean that they believed there is no morality in war whatsoever, that 'all is fair in love and war'. If they did, they would not have found moral explanations for their conduct. But just as often as they refrained from explanations, they did explain their conduct as right or excusable. Below, I discuss four kinds of justifications and rationalizations that veterans offered: doing good, rules and instructions, reciprocity, and numbness.

Doing Good

A first justification veterans offered came in the form of referring to the 'good things' they had done on deployment. Particularly veterans who hoped they would be able to help other people tended to give examples of how they had been able to do good. These examples, however, were always rather modest. Both Dutchbat and TFU veterans, from privates to senior officers, generally did not point to achievements of their overall mission. In line with

expectations, many veterans were unsure if their mission had actually contributed to large-scale improvements. Accordingly, when they invoked achievements, these would always be very specific examples of how they had been able to do something good during their deployment.

Dutchbat II veteran Gert, for instance, said that as soon as it was clear that demilitarizing the enclave of Srebrenica was impossible, his unit started carrying out social patrols to see if there was at least something they could do for the local population. On two patrols, Gert helped a woman giving birth. And 'even though it was against the rules', he regularly gave away 'food and other stuff'. It gave him a good feeling to be able to help like this, he recalled. It was 'all I could do, and I'm happy that I could do it'.

When veterans related anecdotes like these, they often added statements such as 'I've been able to give at least one person a smile on his face'. Such statements suggest that 'doing good' is not only satisfying in itself, but serves as compensation when bigger accomplishments are hard to identify. Yet, even small achievements were relatively scarce in the stories of most veterans. The majority of the interviewed veterans did not recall any event in which their presence had directly and noticeably helped the local population. So, justifications in terms of the righteousness and usefulness of an event were often not at hand. Instead, veterans often recounted situations in which harm was inflicted upon people. Still, as became clear when listening to their accounts, they had many other ways to make sense of and cope with such situations.

Rules and Instructions

Besides doing good, another kind of moral explanation that many veterans put forward involved rules and instructions. In line with other studies (e.g. Bourke 1999, Grassiani 2009), rules and instructions were in the most frequently offered explanation. For example, let me consider the ethics class discussed previously. At one point during this class, the instructor showed a PowerPoint slide of two pyramids. One stood for a soldier's 'personal morality', the other signified a soldier's 'professional morality'. Dissatisfied, one sergeant raised his hand and asked where the pyramid with 'instruction' was, clarifying, 'We don't have the luxury to act from our personal moralities, we just have to do what we're told'. This kind of reasoning was abundant in veterans' accounts of their deployment experiences. Veterans from all ranks frequently stated that 'those were simply your drills', they 'just had to follow orders', they were 'bound by the Rules of Engagement', and that their decisions were 'dictated by the mandate'.

Besides describing institutional constraint, statements like these often also served as a coping strategy. Take the following anecdote recounted by Thijs, an NCO in Afghanistan.

> We were on patrol, and then we heard colleagues had engaged in fire contact, and that we had to go there. And on our way there, we saw a woman with a small child, dead in her arms. She asked us for help, but we couldn't help, because our prio was to go to that fire contact. So, yeah, you let a person stand there at the side of the road with a dead child. (…) I was the one who said (…) 'Shouldn't we do something?' [but my commander said,] 'Our

prio is to go there, so no, we can't now'. Well, then there is nothing I can do, you know. At least, for myself, I said it.

Thijs had not found the situation easy, but he had been able to come to terms with it because he believed he had done all he could; he did not have the power and did not consider it his responsibility to do more than what he did.

Many veterans suggested that as long as they followed the rules and instructions, they could not be held responsible for their conduct, since they were not the ones who made the rules or issued the orders. Moreover, many expressed a belief in the rightness of adhering to rules and instructions, stating that even if one does not agree with a decision personally, obedience and conformity are still the right thing to do. Former private Jim, for instance, said the following.

> I was a soldier in the Air Maneuver [Brigade], and there it was like, everyone had their say, like, 'We could also do it like this'. (…) But, it's not our job to be hesitating all the time, like 'Um… shouldn't we…' It doesn't work. The strength of the military is that you… you build a shield together, you strive for the same goal together. (…) I can name eight soldiers right now who think differently about things than I do. And exactly because of that, it's so important that everyone sticks to that single task, because we're all so different. If we all chose to go our own way, we'd get nowhere.

Like Jim, many veterans not only claimed that adherence to rules and instructions was all they could do in some cases, it was also that they should do. In these cases, the rationale of rules and instructions did not mean a rejection of responsibility, but rather the opposite. Adhering to rules and instructions, 'putting aside' one's personal beliefs was regarded the soldier's responsibility. Some veterans put forward 'uniformity' as an explanation for this, others reasoned that they trusted the judgments of their superiors. In both cases, they believed it was morally right to withhold one's own personal verdicts when necessary, and instead obey the will of superiors and the military organization. Put differently, they believed that an instrumental position was the soldiers' moral responsibility.

Reciprocity

Soldiering cannot always be as straightforward as following rules and instructions. For commanding officers, this is definitely not the case: it is their very job to issue orders. Yet, the issue is more complicated for soldiers in the lower ranks as well. Even when the rules and instructions are clear, they are always indefinite. Consider, for instance, the situation of being approached by the driver of a vehicle who could be just as well an innocent person as a suicide bomber. In Afghanistan, there were clear instructions for what to do in such situations: verbal warnings, then warning shots, then aimed shots. Yet, the instructions did not specify when exactly the soldier should take a second warning shot, or even an aimed shot, and this decision could make the difference between being called 'trigger happy'

and accused of endangering the own unit. Rules and instructions are never exhaustive and knowing that one has adhered to them is not always enough to ease one's conscience.

Hence, besides adherence, veterans often invoked other rationales. One I frequently heard was 'it was him or me'. Unsurprisingly, veterans said this when talking about direct fire contact. Yet, some used it for other scenarios, extending 'him or me' to 'them versus us' (opponents versus colleagues), and beyond direct situations of 'kill or be killed'. A field artillery veteran, for instance, used the phrase when speaking about operating a long-distance howitzer. 'It's him dead or me dead', he said. 'Well, that's an easy choice for me. My colleagues asked for my support for a reason'. Although the veteran had been in no direct danger when operating the howitzer, he still used 'him dead or me dead' to refer to the opponent versus the infantry colleagues he supported.

As Bourke also suggests (1999, p. 214), it seems that soldiers may not only use him-versus-me as a rule of survival, but also as a formula of reciprocity, that is, of 'doing unto the other as he would do to you". Consider the following anecdote. One day in Afghanistan, a Dutch platoon hit an IED [roadside bomb], and although everyone was lucky enough to survive, the explosion made a great impact. A few days later, the platoon caught a man suspected of being responsible for placing IEDs. One soldier lost his calm and punched the man in the face. His colleague, who told me about this incident, completely understood the soldier's reaction. 'Of course you can give someone a good punch when he wants to blow you up', he told me. 'War is nasty. Super nice that we've got international laws, but war has never been anything pretty'. This veteran felt that his colleague had had the right to punch someone who had wanted to kill him, even if what he did was strictly against both legal rules and military norms. It was a matter of reciprocity, and reciprocity is 'fair'. Incidentally, the rationale of reciprocity could work the other way around, for instance in the case of Dutchbat veterans giving food and clothes to local people who they believed deserved support for being so friendly, even though it was against the rules.

When the logic of reciprocity could not be applied, it appeared harder to justify conduct, as the following example shows. In a digital television program (NRC TV 2009), a Dutch veteran recounted having killed an insurgent and a dromedary in Afghanistan. Killing the armed opponent never bothered him. 'He fired at me, I fired at him. I hit him, I won', he said about this. However, the dromedary's death often gave him nightmares. It had been gravely wounded during the firefight, and he had been ordered to shoot the animal to free it from its suffering. All the veteran could say was that it was 'harsh'.

Distancing and Numbing

The final explanation that veterans offered for deployment events was emotional distance and 'numbness'. They mentioned numbness, for instance, to rationalize negative or indifferent behavior to the local population. Let me take some space to discuss this in the context of the Dutchbat mission. Most Dutchbat veterans recounted being initially affected by the poverty and suffering they saw in Srebrenica, especially seeing children walking around barefoot and in dirty clothes. In the course of the mission, many veterans developed a kind of friendship with the children who hung around the observation posts. At the same time, many found

themselves becoming indifferent – 'numb' – to the local people's suffering. Several veterans disclosed, for instance, that they had pushed away children begging for sweets, and openly ridiculed adults.

Both Dutchbat and TFU veterans mentioned this numbing process. In line with study findings on US and Israeli soldiers (Lifton 1973, Grassiani 2009), the Dutch veterans said that their negative behavior to the population was because they had become desensitized to the pain of others. Interestingly, however, many interviewed veterans also gave desensitization as an example of good conduct. They related having deliberately 'built a kind of shield around myself' because they needed it 'to do my job'. Consider what former Dutchbat III private Frank has to say.

> On social patrols, I didn't go inside houses. I wanted to keep a distance, I didn't want to bond too much with the people [because] that makes you weaker. I didn't want to go and drink Slivovitz [local brandy] with them. You have to do your job.

Frank had fully experienced the fall of Srebrenica. He felt that because he had kept a distance throughout his mission, he had been able to stay alert and keep functioning.

Like Frank, many veterans saw emotional and moral detachment as professionalism. Indeed, this is what they had been taught in training, including phrases such as 'you can switch off emotions'. Traditionally, soldiers are trained in 'disciplining the emotions' (Bourke 1998), and in being able to 'suck up' feelings that may hinder them in performing well (Molendijk et al. 2016). This includes a process of self-distancing and to some extent even self-dehumanization (Verrips 2004), as is indicated by the names Dutch soldiers call themselves, such as 'bodies' and 'carcasses'. As mentioned before, soldiers teach themselves and each other to stay aware of the fact that they are 'just instruments of the state'. Accordingly, the interviewed veterans linked emotional and moral detachment to professionalism. Some seemed to approach detachment as a goal in itself, others explained it as a way to prevent doubts and worries, and yet others seemed to see it as a way to be able to do what they thought was morally right: their 'duty'.

The Military Profession in Relation to Civil Life

While the abovementioned justifications may work in a military belief system, they have little impact on potential tension between the military belief system and the beliefs soldiers have developed as civilians. In the civilian world, justifications such as following orders, reciprocity and numbness do not apply as they seem to do in the military. Violence and killing, specifically, are not as easily justified in a civilian setting as they are in a deployment area, both in legal and in moral terms (cf. Bica 1999, Shue 2005, Bredow 2006). Certainly, in both military and civilian contexts, violence is only permitted in certain circumstances. However, in the civilian world, these circumstances tend to be far more restrictive and violence is not called 'use of force' but simply 'violence'. As Sørensen states, 'While the social

norms governing civilian life prohibit and sanction violence, it is central to the soldier's profession' (Sørensen 2015, p. 233).

This raises the question of how soldiers deal with such cultural and moral differences. While reintegration after deployment may be hard for some, many can clearly make the transition to civilian life without significant problems. As various scholars (e.g. Senger 1985, Bourke 1999, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013) have noted in surprise, after having fought and killed without restraint on a mission, many soldiers can pick up their lives afterwards as civilians and never use violence again. These scholars wondered: why does war not produce aggressive individuals in general, and how can so many veterans re-adapt, on their return from deployment?

A frequently offered answer to these questions is that both soldiers and society at large distinguish between the civilian and military moral sphere, and accordingly, between two distinct role moralities (Senger 1985, Bourke 1998). Hence, it is argued, a distinction is made between 'killing' and 'murder' and between 'using force' and 'committing violence': the context defines the morality of violence. Soldiers are able and willing to fight and kill in war without remorse because it occurs in a military context, while in other contexts, their civilian morality prevails (Senger 1985, Bourke 1998). This argument is in line with the general notion that people always hold multiple beliefs and have multiple identities, without necessarily being aware of it (e.g. Ewing 1990, Jones and McEwen 2000, Roccas and Brewer 2002, Zigon 2008, De Swaan 2015). With respect to conflicting beliefs and identities, it has been noted that people may employ fragmentation (Tsang 2002) or compartmentalization (e.g. Roccas and Brewer 2002, De Swaan 2015). These mechanisms deal with conflicting beliefs and identities by keeping them in separate 'compartments' of the self and act on each other only in distinct contexts. By not activating incompatible identities at the same time, people can maintain each one separately.[2]

The accounts of the interviewed veterans echo the notion of compartmentalization. In typical military parlance, veterans often said they 'switched mindsets'. One veteran phrased it as follows: 'I always kept in mind, what's there is there and what's here is here, period'. Many veterans said, 'I just did my job' on deployment, and at home 'I'm just a civilian'. In a military context, they did what their superiors told them without needing to fully understand the purpose of their assignments, while in a civilian context, they would rather engage in discussion before following orders blindly. In the field, they had brothers-in-arms for whom they would risk their lives and opponents they would shoot without hesitation, while at home, their world was far less dichotomous than a realm of friends and foes. On deployment, they may have acted negatively and even aggressively to the locals because 'that's just the way it is' over there, but at home, they would not act like that at all.

2 De Swaan (2015) invokes the concept of compartmentalization to examine the question of why so many people in history have been willing and able to engage in torture, rape, mass murder and so on. He uses the concept to explain, inter alia, how a man can be a cruel torturer and simultaneously a loving husband and father. Crucially, De Swaan argues that compartmentalization at the micro-level usually occurs in the broader contexts of social, institutional and political compartmentalization, which allowed individuals to mutilate and kill other humans without becoming changed in all aspects of their lives.

Meanwhile, many veterans emphasized that they did not find their job so extraordinary. They stressed that soldiering is a *job*, and away from that job, they are simply civilians.[3] Some veterans asked rhetorically if their job is so different from that of a police officer. They said that just like police officers, soldiers act in the name of the state, exist for the benefit of their fellow civilians, and kill only in self-defense or to protect others. Sure, they added, some of their fellow civilians are opposed to the use of force, but don't they have the luxury to oppose violence because of the very fact that soldiers take up that nasty job for them? Don't soldiers go to war so that others do not have to? 'Some men are morally opposed to violence. They are protected by men who are not', several veterans posted on Facebook.

Statements like these suggest that veterans' multiple mindsets are not simply a matter of split identities. Rather, it seems that they should be understood as interconnected mindsets that reinforce one another; the military mindset supports the civilian one, and vice versa. In the above statements, the veterans implied that like civilians, they find war nasty, which, however, would make soldiering a more virtuous instead of a less virtuous profession. Regular civilians would enjoy the luxury of judging war from a safe distance without worrying about how they can have this luxury in the first place. But soldiers would have the moral courage to go to war. By claiming that society needs people to fight for them, and that soldiers are the members of society who take up this dirty job, veterans asserted the presence of a 'yin/yang' kind of balance, not only between soldiers and society but also within themselves. This allowed them to justify soldiering, not *despite* the fact that soldiers are also non-violent civilians, but *because* of it. In this respect, considering themselves both soldiers and civilians made it easier rather than harder for them to do their job.

Maneuvering Through Tensions

The previous sections examined various ways in which veterans made sense of military practice, including events of violence. How to interpret these findings in a broader sense? Considering military violence, research often takes one of the two following approaches. One line research argues that it requires intensive cognitive and bodily conditioning for 'normal' people to be able to use force and kill, (e.g. Bourke 1999, Bandura 2002). These studies argue that although humans are generally reluctant to use violence, military training helps them overcome their moral inhibitions to fighting and killing. Training drills, strong group cohesion and conditioned obedience to military superiors would produce a certain moral 'desensitization'. Military training would alter soldiers' moral standards in favor of fighting, make them select collective interests over individual ones and stop them from questioning orders (e.g. Bourke 1999, Bandura 2002). Put differently, these studies argue that it is the power of denial, deresponsibilization and justification strategies that allows soldiers to perceive the use of force as completely acceptable conduct.

3 It may be worth pointing out that in the Netherlands the military does not penetrate a soldier's daily life to the extent that it does in the US, for instance. Due to the small size of the country, soldiers do not have to move for their job; most are able to go home every day. There are no military communities that house huge numbers of soldiers and their families, and most veterans I interviewed had more civilian than military friends.

Another line of research states that in many cases even intensive training cannot prevent feelings of guilt. For some years after the Vietnam war, it was common to describe trauma as 'a normal reaction to an abnormal event' (Nash *et al*. 2009, p. 791, Meichenbaum 2011, p. 325). Both Grossman (1995) and Bica (1999), in fact, suggest that lack of remorse after killing is the abnormal response. Grossman estimates that only two to three percent of all soldiers are capable of aggression without subsequent remorse, namely the percentage of 'sociopaths' that can be found in any male population (Grossman 1995, p. 182). Likewise, Bica explains the fact that some soldiers enjoy killing without developing feelings of guilt as 'a previous psychological abnormality, or some uncanny ability for rationalization and pretense' and asserts that many soldiers are 'profoundly affected by their participation in war' (Bica 1999, p. 88).

So, while studies on trauma point to military violence as the source of experiences of distress, studies of justification bring forward these strategies as ways in which people prevent distress when inflicting harm on others. Despite their differences, the two lines of research also have something in common: they both consider violence as something that in essence produces inner conflict. In the light of prevailing societal taboos on violence and killing, this contention makes sense. But what to make of the fact that many Dutchbat and TFU veterans simultaneously denied that their profession is morally complicated, let alone problematic? Considered from the view that military practice essentially produces dissonance and conflict, their denial would have to be interpreted as a self-deceiving strategy. However, I find that interpretation, which seems to say less about veterans' moral beliefs than about those of the researchers studying veterans, partially unsatisfactory. I found that although military practice certainly gives rise to tensions, it does not always produce as much conflict as one might expect given the circumstances in which soldiers operate. My findings led me to a middle ground between the view that soldiers never experience moral challenges and the position that they find violence actually highly problematic.

Let me explain my contention. Although the interviewed veterans sometimes drew a distinction between being a 'soldier' and a 'human being', they also spoke of military duties and values as personal commitments. Their narratives indicate that having control over life and death may not only be disturbing but also pleasurable, that insisting on following orders may not only mean refusing to accept responsibility but may also derive from a personal conviction that obedience is the right and responsible thing to do, and that shutting oneself off to suffering in others may not always imply moral desensitization but may also be necessary to continue doing good work. Moreover, the veterans' narratives indicate that although the political objectives of a mission may not give soldiers a sense of purpose, they could compensate for this lack of purpose by focusing on military goals (doing one's job) and personal goals (making at least one person smile and/or putting one's training into practice). Finally, the narratives show that while soldiers may experience dissonance between the military environment and society at large, they may also experience a sense of balance between the two.

That said, the interviewed veterans were not always consistent in their justifications, which suggests that although soldiering does not necessarily produce conflict, it is not altogether without tension either. In some cases, for instance, a veteran would invoke the rationale of rules and instructions as an absolute imperative overriding all other concerns

('we just have to do what we're told'; 'we're simply bound by the rules of engagement'), while in other cases, the same veteran would easily set this commitment aside (giving food to locals 'even though it was against the rules'; 'nice that we've got international laws, but war has never been anything pretty'). In these cases, veterans presented themselves as *either* obedient soldiers, autonomous moral agents, or humans with shortcomings pressured by the nastiness of war, not as all of these persons at one and the same time.

So, while the veterans' accounts indicate that the various roles that soldiers assume (instrument/agent; civilian/soldier) are not incompatible by definition, the inconsistency in their accounts on the whole suggests that these roles do not always co-exist in harmony either. When roles do conflict, it seems, soldiers respond by assuming one role and rejecting the others. By being inconsistent in this, they do not have to give up any of role. A flexible, sometimes inconsistent use of various justifications offers them a way to maneuver through the tensions they encounter when their multiple moral commitments turn out to be irreconcilable, without experiencing irresolvable conflict and without experiencing a loss of one of their self-perceptions.

This mechanism, it seems, is not confined to soldiers. As suggested before, people in general tend to see themselves and the world in terms of coherence, which is possible because people maneuver through life largely unreflectively (cf. Ewing 1990, Zigon 2008). The fact that one does not – and cannot – always behave consistently appears to be an unpleasant fact, and people need to deny unpleasant facts in order to protect themselves (Ewing 1990, Goleman 1996). That said, denial of tension appears to be particularly strong among soldiers, whom the military has taught to rely on a 'can-do' attitude and perceive doubt, uncertainty and conflict as 'bad'. Soldiers, it seems, tend to interpret situations such that they become uncomplicated and always soluble, while at the same time, they tend to deny that the very reason they adopt such an interpretation is because military situations are often complicated and without real solution.

Conclusion

Soldiers are both service members and civilians, and both instruments and agents. Because these roles involve competing moral requirements, one might expect military practice to be defined by fundamental tensions. But is this really the case in the experience of soldiers? In this chapter, I examined this question, by adopting a more open approach than the one that readily reduces justifications to evidence that soldiers actually find their job highly problematic. The aim of this approach was not to make a normative argument, but to better comprehend why and when soldiers do develop moral distress. I found that the interviewed veterans generally did not experience as much conflict as one might expect. Yet, this does not mean that they never felt tension, and when they did, they tended to resolve it by relying on the belief that all situations are ultimately uncomplicated and soluble. A flexible, sometimes inconsistent use of various unequivocal justifications enabled this.

In short, one could say, if one sees something as uncomplicated, it is uncomplicated. However, it seems, soldiers may also be confronted by events for which simple justifications

turn out to be untenable, especially since military missions are becoming ever more complex. Present-day missions are often asymmetrical, not 'fair play', and in most situations 'kill or be killed' does not apply. Contemporary soldiers often have to work among and sometimes with civilians, while insurgents may disguise themselves as civilians and use civilians as cover, thus increasing the risk of non-combatant casualties. Furthermore, today's soldiers often have to assume both combat and humanitarian roles. They may have to fight, build good relations with the local population, and engage in stabilization and reconstruction work, all in the same mission, and when these tasks conflict with one another they may leave a soldier unsure of the right thing to do. In other words, contemporary missions confront soldiers with many moral complexities that seem difficult to simplify and resolve. As I will argue in the next chapter, when a soldier is confronted by a high-stake situation that resists straightforward justifications, this may produce disorientating inner conflict. In fact, it could well be that some of the clear-cut explanations quoted in this chapter were actually attempts to stifle latent inner conflicts, which may or may not have turned out successfully.

6

Chapter 6. Moral Disorientation and Ethical Struggles: Moral Distress at the Individual Level[1]

Introduction

The previous chapter showed that soldiers may deal with the complexity of military practice by making soldiering less complex. Confronted by moral challenges on deployment, they may let one moral commitment override the other. If they do this flexibly, they can maneuver through situations without experiencing irresolvable conflict or having to abandon certain commitments entirely. With respect to the tension between being both soldier and civilian, they may compartmentalize these two selves, prioritizing the former in military contexts and allowing the latter to supersede in civilian contexts. If they interpret their two selves in terms of a 'yin/yang' kind of balance, they can see soldiering as justified, not in spite of the fact that they are civilians too, but because of it. Yet, as this chapter will show, these strategies do not always work. The complexity of morally challenging situations cannot always be simplified and particular actions cannot always be unequivocally justified or excused. In this chapter, I examine when and how moral challenges engender moral distress.

As I argued in Chapter 2, the current concept of moral injury conceptualizes moral distress as a conflict between a person's moral beliefs and an act of transgression, but it gives no consideration to the possibility that moral beliefs may conflict with one another. The implicit assumption seems to be that a person's moral beliefs constitute a harmonious unity (Molendijk et al. 2018). However, a person's moral beliefs constitute a complex, 'messy' total of multiple and potentially competing values (e.g. Zigon 2008, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013, Tessman 2014, Molendijk et al. 2018). Accordingly, although some events may certainly be experienced as unequivocal transgressions of all of one's moral beliefs, there may also be ambivalent experiences. In the previous chapter, I discussed moral tensions between being an instrument and an agent, and a soldier and a civilian. Here I explore the implications of such tensions for experiences of distress to refine the conceptualization of the potential conflicts at play in 'moral injury'.

This chapter examines the subquestion: Did Dutchbat and TFU veterans report distress related to moral challenges, and if so, what did these challenges and experiences of distress entail? I begin with two illustrative stories, after explaining why I chose to present my data like this. Then I discuss three main themes that emerged in the analysis of veterans' stories – value conflict, moral detachment and senselessness – arguing that each theme demonstrates an experience more complex than unequivocal wrongdoing. Next, I examine the impact of these experiences on veterans. I show that veterans may come to feel not only guilt and anger, but also profound moral disorientation, meaning that they may start to doubt their own and others' ability to do good, and even the very notions of good and bad. Finally, I argue for the value of understanding moral distress in terms of an ethical struggle, to go beyond a strict

1 A version of this chapter appeared in 2018 as 'Toward an Interdisciplinary Conceptualization of Moral Injury: From Unequivocal Guilt and Anger to Moral Conflict and Disorientation' in *New Ideas in Psychology*, 51: 1-8.

pathology-focused understanding toward one that can properly capture moral dimensions of moral distress.

Two Stories of Moral Distress

Although the accounts of moral distress I heard differed in content, they revealed similar themes. At the same time, they showed that veterans' experiences were always part of a larger story. Below, therefore, I will first take the time to relate the stories of two veterans, and subsequently discuss several themes that these and the other stories I heard had in common. Before doing so, let me explain in some more detail how I came to structure this chapter the way I did.

At the start of my study, I expected that the dissimilar ways in which Dutchbat and TFU veterans were exposed to violence would affect their experiences of moral distress differently. While Dutchbat troops were mainly bystanders of violence, TFU soldiers often had to use force. However, interestingly, the stories of both groups were mostly about failing to do something or letting people down, and seldom about active wrongdoing. As Chapter 7 will note, this similarity can partially be explained by the fact that both missions had many restrictions. In general, both groups had remarkably similar stories of moral distress. Therefore, it is the similarities on which I will focus in this chapter.

My findings also turned out to differ from my expectations in another way. Initially, I intended to analyze veterans' accounts by precisely distinguishing the specific values and interests at stake, expecting I would be able to identify, for instance, conflicts between a military value and a personal value. However, during the analytical process, I found two problems with this approach. First, the complex accounts could not be simply disentangled. Countless values and interests often played important roles and the veterans were often overwhelmingly unclear and uncertain about the specific conflicts they had experienced. My intended approach, then, would force the complexity of veterans' experiences to fit into prefabricated boxes. Moreover, it would turn the unintelligible aspects of veterans' stories into a legible overview, while this very unintelligibility was an important reason why their experiences made such a profound impact on them.

Further, although veterans' stories were often about specific events, they were never only about these specific events. Not one interviewed veteran invoked just the one disturbing event; there were always more. And when they described disturbing events, they typically set them in the context of things that happened before, during and after the events. Together, all these elements shaped the meaning veterans attributed to each of these events, and it is the meaning of an event that does or does not make it disturbing (see e.g. Janoff-Bulman 1992, Park 2010, 2013). Although some events are more likely than others to produce distress, meaning is not a property of an event. It is a subjective appraisal, informed by the context of the event (see e.g. Finley 2011, Muldoon and Lowe 2012).

For these reasons, I chose not to disentangle the very specific values and interests at stake in morally disturbing situations, but distinguished broader themes. My analysis uncovered the themes of value conflict, moral detachment, and senselessness. In addition, instead of

breaking down veterans' accounts directly into these three themes, I opted to first relate two stories – from one Dutchbat veteran and one TFU veteran – in their entirety.[2] These stories serve as contextualized examples of how these themes occurred in veterans' accounts, to illustrate the manifold ways in which all their experiences together shaped the significance of specific events. Also, in anticipation of the subsequent chapters, the stories serve to paint a picture of how the experiences were embedded in a particular sociopolitical context. Following the first two stories, I will weave in the accounts of several other veterans as further examples.

It should be emphasized that the way I present the two stories does not entirely reflect the fragmented ways in which the narrators and other veterans spoke about their experiences. Having tried a fragmented representation of their stories, I chose to follow narrative standards of chronological synchronization. Of course, presentation of data always requires some synthesis so that the reader can fully appreciate the result (even a fragmented representation inevitably would have involved modification). Yet, because complexity and unintelligibility are important themes in this and subsequent chapters, it is relevant to explicate this point. Instead of giving comprehensive accounts of distressing events, veterans often described them in general, distant terms ('I had to decide whether to approve an order to bomb a qala that had both my own troops and OMF in it. That moment is seared in my brain'.) or they gave details without much context ('So there you are. Blue helmet and Uzi. They waved: Bye! That's it'.). Even when they spoke about events in great detail, they often could not give clear explanations. Their accounts lacked the ordering structure and explanatory context that usually characterize stories. This is well-known in trauma studies, and the explanations for it range from unconscious avoidance behavior to neurological malfunction (Herman 1967, Hull 2002). Also, foreshadowing a finding I discuss further below, it seems that this lack of clarity was a manifestation of veterans' confusion as to what their experience entailed and meant.

Bob's Story: Srebrenica

Bob was one of the last conscripts to the Dutch military. He liked sports, and at the time he joined he was unsure of what he wanted in life. After his mandatory service, he volunteered to join the newly founded Air Maneuver Brigade, knowing that he would be sent to the former Yugoslavia. He saw the mission as a 'nice challenge'. His basic training was tough, especially mentally, but he completed it. He was proud to receive his red beret, which is worn only by members of the Air Maneuver Brigade. The preparatory phase for the Dutchbat mission in the former Yugoslavia started right after Bob completed his basic training. Bob remembers finding the transition between the two trajectories difficult. As an infantry soldier, he was drilled for combat in basic training, whereas the preparation for the Dutchbat mission focused entirely on his being a UN peacekeeper. It felt 'contradictory'.

2 To be clear, the story I selected, from a Dutchbat III veteran, is rather different from those of Dutchbat I and Dutchbat II veterans in that they did not experience the fall of Srebrenica. Yet, the selected story includes many experiences similar to those recounted by veterans of the first two battalions. Moreover, as suggested, the similarities extend beyond Dutchbat: their stories also have much in common with those of TFU veterans.

In January 1995, Bob was deployed as a private in Dutchbat III. His unit, the Bravo Company, was stationed in the town of Srebrenica. Soon, not only the discrepancies between his basic training and mission preparation became clear, but also between mission preparation and the actual mission. Bob's unit was trained to confiscate weapons to demilitarize the enclave. However:

> In one of the first weeks – we were on patrol – we hit a depot. Surely something was in there. But the locals threatened us with knives and other weapons. I wanted to go in, but I was told: 'No man, don't. We got to protect these people'. I thought, we've been training for this for months, but when we hit a depot (…), we just aren't allowed to go in. It was clear to me real quick: being here is nonsense.

Bob told me that he used to be a mild and kind, especially for an infantry soldier. In Srebrenica, whenever he could do something for the local people, he did it. Although it was against the rules, he gave away shoes and t-shirts, which he bought on the black market. But many things angered him. For instance, he heard that Bosnian Muslims (whom Dutchbat solders were supposed to protect against Bosnian Serb aggression) used their weapons (not confiscated by Dutchbat) to plunder and even kill in Bosnian Serb territory, and then returned to the enclave to be protected by Dutchbat. Bosnian Serbs did not show much respect either. Several times Bosnian Serb belligerents fired over the heads of Dutchbat soldiers on patrol to bully and intimidate them. As a result Bob thought: 'What am I doing here?'.

When they all began moving back to the compound, they were stopped by an 18-year old Bosnian Muslim boy with a RPG. 'A local boy could just tell us what to do'. Bob's unit stayed by their vehicle. One night, Bob saw two Bosnian Muslims approaching the vehicle. They fired a mortar at a small house near the post. Two Bosnian Serbs came running out; one was directly shot in the neck – 'his throat just went' – the other crawled toward the wounded man, and was killed right after. Bob was on the vehicle, manning a machine gun. 'I saw it happening, and said, let's shoot the hell out of them. But: "No no, we're not allowed to do so" (…) And that guy [one of the two killers] just waved at us with his gun'. After that happened, Bob remembers, while he was preparing noodle soup for his unit, he was surprised by fresh gunfire. This time it was Bosnian Serb forces responding to Bosnian Muslim fire, which only stopped after Bob's commander asked them to over the radio. All through this, the soup was bubbling away on the camp burner. When the gunfire stopped, Bob and his colleagues ate their soup. 'Weird', he would later call the situation in my interview with him.

As is now well-known, in July 1995 the entire enclave of Srebrenica fell into the hands of Bosnian Serb forces. Bob watched Bosnian Muslim soldiers fleeing the enclave through his night vision goggles. 'These soldiers knew what was coming', said Bob. 'They were supposed to protect their own civilians, but they just ran off'. Telling me this, Bob visibly got angrier and angrier. He told me how his unit eventually left their compound in Srebrenica town to go to the compound in Potočari, along with thousands of locals. He made the journey partly in an armored vehicle, partly on foot, dragging people along with him. It was 'one big fucking mess'. Constantly under fire, people with no legs crawled on their hands, and people in panic left behind family members who could not keep up. Bob finally arrived at

the Potočari compound, and heard later that his colleagues had to clean the tracks of their vehicle because 'there was stuff on them'. He is '99% sure' that they drove over people.

Several times in the interview, Bob contrasted how he thought that his deployment would go and how it actually went. At one point, for instance, he distinguished the 'controlled, professional' way in which he believes military action is supposed to happen from the reality of 'mayhem' and 'fear of dying'. At another point, he stated the following.

> War! War is… um… maybe action, what you see on TV. But here it was panic, misery, and crying and screaming and stink. Nothing, nothing like we thought it would be. That was definitely the case at the compound in Potočari. It was like a horror movie. The factory halls, they were overcrowded. Just people-people-people-people. You would walk over people. We had to collect weapons, because they might have weapons with them. (…) When I think about it now, I can't imagine it happened. You walked over people, dead ones among them. You just smell that people are dead. The smell of death, have you ever heard of it, when people are dead, that penetrating smell? You smelled it everywhere. And people lay in shit, in vomit. You walked over that. It's the worst thing I've ever seen. Degrading. Like animals. It was like a pig farm, stinking. People screamed, they clung to you. They'd make strange offers in return for food, if you know what I mean. I found it horrible.

Recounting experiences like these, Bob's tone and facial expressions switched back and forth between calm and angry, and angry and sad.

During the interview, Bob spoke ambivalently about the Bosnian Muslims. For instance, he explained that when his colleague was killed by a grenade thrown by a Bosnian Muslim, 'I was done with them', and that, weirdly, he understood that Bosnian Serb forces 'were done with their plundering and murdering' (which Bob had heard Bosnian Muslims regularly did in Bosnian Serb territory). Yet at other times, he made clear that 'I cared about them' and that 'we were a disappointment to the people'. At one point, Bob asked himself: 'Do I feel guilty?', and answered as follows.

> You can tell me a thousand times, you couldn't do a thing, but I was there. We could not, did not do a thing. You're standing there with all your training, which you want to put into practice but when it all happened we couldn't, we weren't allowed to do anything. [Pause.] We couldn't have saved all those people, I have no illusions about that. It was 300 men against 6000. If only they'd given us air support. If more people had died, they'd have intervened sooner. More people would have been saved, and we would've had a completely different story at home.

As is well-known, the story at home was harsh.

Back in the Netherlands, Bob started to drink and party a lot. 'I sought action-action-action, excitement-excitement-excitement'. He also got angry and aggressive. Bob remembered that shortly after his return, he ran into an acquaintance who told him, 'Hey those medals you got, better throw them into the fire', Bob explained. 'Yes, that escalated…

You can tell people a thousand times that things were different, but some keep on thinking: cowards. The government should've told the media: we're first doing an investigation, and then we can say something about it. They didn't do anything for us. They didn't do anything for us over there, and they didn't do anything for us here. Nothing at all'.

Bob kept quiet about his experiences for a long time. 'What can you say? People already have their opinion. I was way too scared of confronting questions, of accusations. Like, people have said to me, "You let people die over there". There's nothing worse you can say to me'. Bob surprised me by what he said next. Instead of repeating that things were different, he confirmed that he was still troubled by the same thought. 'Yes... all those people. I still see myself dragging people in a cart. Their own families walked away into the hills. Just left their own people. I dragged that cart, but I wasn't mobile anymore [because of dragging the heavy cart]. I had to let go. (...) I thought: if I'm dead I can't do anything for the people here'. It was due to such experiences that when people in the Netherlands accused Bob of cowardice, they articulated his own doubts.

Bob vividly remembered something special that happened amid all the inhumanity in the fall of Srebrenica. 'During that flight, I tell a boy to come with us to Potočari, but he says, "No, you can't protect us anymore". And he gives me a pack of Marlboro. (...) He waves, and walks away. I never saw him again. He must have thought, when those bastards catch me, they won't get this. That made a big impression, really a very big impression. Because we couldn't do anything, we were a disappointment to these people, and he still gives me that'.

Shortly after returning from his mission, Bob left the Army and joined the Military Police *(Marechaussee)*, 'so that I could help people'. However, 'now I had to deport illegal immigrants'. Bob became more and more 'explosive' at work, both to his colleagues and the immigrants he had to deport. He lost his mildness and kindness. He was also explosive outside work. Once he did 'something stupid' for which he had to appear in court. At home, he had countless arguments with his girlfriend. Meanwhile, Bob began questioning his own actions in Srebrenica more often. 'For a long time, I could handle myself: I did my best, I did my best. But, because I had to deport those illegals, I saw so much injustice again, things I couldn't grasp, couldn't control. You start doubting yourself. Am I doing good, or am I just putting people into misery? (...) And [the media] makes this image of you, and when things happen at work, I just couldn't handle it anymore'. Eventually, he was diagnosed with PTSD, which entitled him to a military invalidity pension.

Bob told me he was still very proud of his red beret, and his medal for wounded veterans (received for PTSD). He was proud he could 'put things in perspective', and now knew 'what's really important' in life. In fact, he was also proud of his deployment, and of 'what I did over there'. At the same time, he felt guilty about everything he didn't do. While he was proud of his red beret, his blue beret meant 'nothing to me', because he felt he let people in Srebrenica down, just as the UN and the government let all of them down. He felt that the mission in Srebrenica 'was one big charade'. Now he is doing better, but he still battles with his experiences. He cannot stand injustice – big or small lights, significant and insignificant injustice. For instance, in traffic, he often feels that other drivers are unfair, which makes him aggressive. He has learned to stop the car when that happens, to calm down. He is still suspicious of people: 'I quickly think the worst. What do you want from me?'. Yet, most times he is actually a mild and soft person 'always there for others', who would do anything for

people in need. Bob has never worn his blue beret again, but he has not thrown it away either because 'you can't throw away your past'.

Niels' Story: Uruzgan

A week before my interview with Niels,[3] I called him to explain a bit more about my study. I told him it was about having to make hard choices, seeing injustice, doing things that seem not right, et cetera, and how such things affect soldiers. 'Ah, so, ethics, dilemmas', Niels responded. 'Well, yes', I said, 'and everything around it'. He laughed. 'Avoiding big words for the soldiers, huh? Well, I've had dilemmas'. After summarizing some, which often involved local Afghans, Niels made clear that he did not like how the military tends to explain dilemmas in terms of moral clashes between civilized Dutch soldiers and immoral locals. 'I really think the dilemma lies in us, not them [the Afghans]', he says. 'Like, there is a wonderful idea in The Hague,[4] in the ivory tower, but in practice it's very different'. During the interview, it became clear what Niels meant.

Niels began his military career with the Marines because 'I didn't know what I wanted to do'. After some years, he left the military for some months, still not really knowing what he wanted. He liked what he had done in the military, but he wanted to do it 'at another level'. And so he became a military nurse. When I asked him why he chose this job, he said:

> I think the job chooses you. I'd been a medic in the Marines. I was interested in how the body works, and of course you have to have something caring in you. [Jokingly] During my nurse training, I had to look after little old grannies. Relaxed afternoons, walking round pushing wheelchairs. So yeah, I did have the caring thing.

He described his younger self as jovial, carefree. He had no great ideals, just thought he could nurse ill or wounded people.

Niels' Uruzgan mission was not his first, so he thought 'I understood war more or less'. But once in Afghanistan, he experienced things he could not understand. One impressive event occurred just two weeks after he arrived. His unit was on patrol, and as soon as they approached dangerous territory, Niels noticed kites and doves in the air wherever they passed. It was known that 'spotters' used such methods to broadcast the movements of patrolling units to the Taliban and other insurgents. A few hours after having seen the kites and doves, Niels' vehicle hit an IED [roadside bomb]. Niels saw 'a bright flash of light' and heard a blast. 'It felt like it all happened in slow motion', he remembered. Covered by a brown cloud of gravel and stones, Niels felt his drills kick in. He checked himself for wounds, called in on the radio, and checked if his colleagues were hurt. Fortunately, no one had serious injuries, or so it seemed. The rest of the day, Niels felt 'a strange cold mist' behind his eyes, and that night, he could not sleep.

3 Niels has written a book about his experiences (Veldhuizen 2014). At his request, I use his real name.

4 The Dutch government, parliament and Council of State are seated in The Hague.

The day after, he felt the desire to 'leave this backward country'. He had wanted to make a small contribution 'to improve the living conditions of the local population', but all through the sleepless night, he could only think of one ideal: 'making it home in one piece'. At the same time, he realized the people here lived 'in the anus of the world'. In Uruzgan, the problem was not just the threat of the Taliban and other insurgents, but also the dire conditions people lived in: severe poverty, families and tribes in conflict with one another, and corrupt war lords. These war lords and other influential men cooperated with both the coalition forces of ISAF and the insurgents, and had bachas (teenage boys) they used ('molested') for sex.[5] Moreover, rather than doing something about these 'assholes', the coalition forces 'let them govern a valley' and 'gave them money' because these men were valuable 'partners'.

One day at a police post, one 'asshole' offered Niels a *bacha*, which he refused angrily. A few moments later, he saw a local assistant trying to bring a young boy into the police post. The boy's eyes were 'hollow' yet 'full of fear'. Even after Niels told the assistant to take the boy back to his parents, he still felt powerless. Although he understands the military advantage of cooperating with influential locals, he has never been able to make peace with its implications.

Another memory that still disturbs Niels happened when his unit was on patrol after a cold winter's night. An old man approached the unit, carrying his grandson, covered with large infected burns. The man was desperate. All night long he had walked through the snow with his grandson to find medical care. Niels put an oxygen mask on the child, gave him a suppository, and inserted an IV line for fluids. The oxygen mask was adult-sized, as Niels did not have one for children. According to the official mission objective, the task of medical personnel was confined to treating their own troops, and thus not the locals. While this may seem sensible in theory, 'in practice, it made no sense at all', said Niels later. At the time he told his commander that the child needed to be flown to a hospital. Although this request interfered with the commander's original plans, the commander tried to arrange a helicopter for the child. However, they were told that because of snowfall, only a few helicopters were available. Niels recalled:

> They said there were not enough helicopters for ISAF personnel. So there was a delay. Meanwhile we got an order: we had to go find a Taliban fighter. So then you have to take off the oxygen mask and take out the IV. For a nurse, it doesn't make sense. I'd taken an oath as a soldier, but as a nurse I also had an oath. But those two promises are incompatible over there, you have to choose. In the end I chose soldier.

Niels says that 'I blame myself in hindsight. I think if we'd have helped that kid… One of the goals was to win hearts and minds. If we had helped, if we'd saved that child, then those families would've looked at us differently'.

Many events that haunted Niels after homecoming involved children. Besides the *bacha* and the sick child, Niels was once offered a baby by a distressed father in return for medical supplies. Presumably, he came to believe later, it was a desperate attempt to make life better for both this baby and the man's other child. Still another event involved a severely injured

5 See e.g. Schut and van Baarle 2017 and de Lind van Wijngaarden 2011 for more information about the practice of bacha bazi (also known as 'chai-boys' among western soldiers).

boy he had been treating no longer showing up for treatment. It turned out the boy's parents had sent him to the mountains to die.

When speaking of his deployment experiences, Niels often drew a distinction between doing and perceiving something 'as a soldier' and 'as a nurse', and between doing things 'as a professional' and 'as a human being'. He felt that he and his unit had done a good job on a military professional level in Afghanistan, but that they had failed on a human level. Even with respect to the military level, it seems that Niels is ambivalent. Consider for instance the following:

> 'Winning hearts and minds' is really a bullshit phrase. If you want to win hearts and minds, you have to create safety at least. And don't tell me we did, because why didn't people dare go out at night, why didn't they talk to us? We only made sure there was no fighting within a certain radius round the camps. But still, each week we found weapons and ammunition inside that circle. Just a big farce, we created a kind of false safety.

Back home, Niels began asking himself how and why the things that had happened could have happened, and what should and could have been done. He started to realize that he and his colleagues were well trained for combat situations – everybody knew the drill – but they 'had not learned how to deal with situations like these'. In his writings, he recounts. 'Various strange ideas and thoughts haunted my mind. Despite everything, I'd done my utmost in Afghanistan and I'd acted out of pure ideals, but in bed I couldn't be at peace with myself' (Veldhuizen 2014, p. 55, translation TM).

Niels developed sleep problems and began relying on alcohol to sleep. When he finally fell asleep, he often had nightmares about his deployment. Sometimes his loud screams woke his son, which made him feel terrible. He was quickly irritated and became increasingly aggressive to colleagues and his friends and family, too. One day, an incident took place on a day out with his wife, a couple of friends and all their children. His friends' son kept hitting Niels with a beach ball by accident until, suddenly, Niels found himself dragging the boy across the beach, shouting and cursing at him. Furious, he dropped the boy heavy-handedly before the boy's mother. The night after this incident, Niels and his wife talked about how he was not himself anymore. For a while, his family, friends and colleagues had seen him acting in ways they did not understand, and so had he. His wife insisted he sought professional help, which he did.

After finding help, Niels began writing and speaking in public about his experiences. He hoped that this would help others understand him better, and also help traumatized colleagues understand their own problems. Niels says he is now a changed person, who will never be the same again. Most of the changes are negative, he says, but he feels he has developed a broader perspective on the world. He now knows the world is not 'black and white' but has 'many shades of gray'. He wanted to act differently in Afghanistan, but he is not sure if he could have done anything differently. In his writings, he states: 'I can think back on Uruzgan, but never without pain, fear or shame. What we did in that desert was oh so important, but at the same time, completely useless' (Veldhuizen 2014, p. 117, translation TM).

Morally Distressing Experiences

As Bob's and Niels' accounts indicate, all the interviewed veterans told very personal stories, and in many ways, they may not be comparable. At the same time, their stories do reveal patterns. When veterans expressed guilt and anger, they often did not mention clear-cut transgressions, but more complicated situations. Typically, they expressed moral judgments and emotions in the context of one of the following three kinds of experiences.

Value Conflict

The first theme to arise in the accounts of many veterans concerns value conflict. For instance, Bob wanted to help people in need, but often he could not behave the way he wanted because he had to follow orders or he feared for his own life. Put differently, he experienced conflicts between the values of protection, obedience and self-preservation. Niels, similarly, experienced several value conflicts in Afghanistan, which he explained as clashes between his military values and his values as a nurse and a human being. For Niels, it was immediately clear that he was confronted by value conflict situations. In Bob's case, it seems his experience of conflict was compounded by the fact that acquaintances and media suggested he had done wrong.

Many other veterans recounted similar value conflicts. Dutchbat III veteran Daan, for instance, was in the Potočari compound when the stream of refugees poured in. The compound, soon filled with human feces, was far too small to house all the refugees, so the decision was taken to let only the wounded, the elderly, and women and children in:

> Imagine, it was 40 degrees. It was boiling hot, boiling hot. People pressed against one another, against walls, all together. Terrified. Terror in their eyes. I'm going to die, these people thought. Help me, help me. Old men, women, passed out. So, I threw them into the wheelbarrow and drove [them to the compound]. You did what you could. (...) At that point, you're doing it all wrong. Everything. (...) You can't choose between one human life and another. So yes, you always do the wrong thing.

Daan still vividly remembers, 'it was one big mess'.

Veterans' accounts of value conflict echo a well-known contention in moral philosophy: even when an individual has made the best possible decision in the face of a moral quandary, this does not make the decision 'right', because a value has still been transgressed (e.g. Williams 1973, Hursthouse 1999, Tessman 2014).[6] In other words, even when an individual gets their hands dirty for the right reason, this does not change the fact that they now have 'dirty hands' (cf. Walzer 1973, Wijze 2005). Indeed, though veterans who experienced value conflict knew they could not have avoided violating a value, this did not take away the painful

6 This is why I avoid the term 'moral dilemma' and use the less specific 'quandary' and 'conflict'. In the ethics literature, moral dilemma typically refers to situations in which neither option is better or worse than the other. Whenever one can make a best-possible decision, the situation is not a 'dilemma'.

realization that others had been wronged because of what they had or had not done. They felt they had done their best, but also felt they had done wrong.

The veterans who experienced value conflict in situations of human suffering seemed unable to justify these conflicts with the interpretations discussed in the previous chapter. No one said, for instance, that they 'just had to follow orders'. The high-stake situations forced them to choose between incompatible moral commitments, at least in their experience, and the fact that one moral commitment conflicted with another did not make either one less of a moral requirement. They could not 'solve' such situations either by certain behavior or by interpreting them in a certain way.

Moral Overwhelmedness/Detachment

A second theme the interviewed veterans related involves paradox. These experiences concern moral detachment resulting from being highly affected by the moral significance of a situation, at least initially. It is a form of denial, which occurs when one is vaguely aware that something is so overwhelming that one chooses to switch off to protect oneself. While all veterans reported such a mechanism to greater or lesser degree, those who found the experience painful had seen how it made them or others engage in what they would later come to perceive as cruel behavior.

Many veterans recounted shocking confrontations in situations where all compassion for fellow humans seemed to have disappeared, and all people cared for was themselves. Bob, for instance, had seen how tremendous fear made people abandon elderly family members. He had gone through times himself when all he thought about was staying alive. Niels, similarly, had witnessed how inhumane severe poverty made people resort to what he perceived as inhumane behavior, and he had found himself thinking that all he wanted was to make it home in one piece. Again, many other veterans related such experiences. Dutch soldier/novelist Roelen, for instance, wrote on his blog that there 'is no romance or humanity in war. In war, people fight and suffer. Ethics is a luxury which dies a hero on the battlefield in the fight to survive' (Roelen 2010, p. 1, translation TM).

Consider also the experience of Dutchbat III veteran Elisa, then a private. In her interview, she still vividly remembered how 'merciless' she became on her deployment. Her sympathy for the children in Srebrenica slowly changed into indifference, and she began making jokes she now defined as 'cruel'. For instance, sometimes she would throw a single sweet at a group of children so that they would jump on each other and fight for it. 'We were harsh, extremely harsh', she commented later. When the Potočari compound was flooded with refugees, Elisa and several colleagues distributed food to a crowd of women standing behind a rope, who they called 'cattle'. 'They cursed, screamed and spat in your face because they wanted more. Sometimes we had to push them back with the rope, and then the women in the back would fall to the ground. We just laughed'. In Elisa's recollection, she did all this because she had become 'completely insensitive'. Later she came to understand her insensitivity as a way 'to keep myself up', but now cannot imagine how she could ever have behaved like that.

I heard many stories like these, about how a state of moral detachment led to behavior that veterans would later come to see as inhumane.[7] At the same time, it is relevant to note, most of these veterans kept on trying to help others. Bob tried to take people with him in the flight to Potočari; Niels kept on treating sick and injured locals; Elisa distributed food to women. These veterans' temporary 'moral disengagement' – as Bandura (1999, 2002) famously called it – was not a matter of a complete and total failure to recognize the moral aspects of certain situations. The veterans never became entirely apathetic, which is relevant to note because it helps to better understand why many feel that they could and should have behaved differently. They 'turned a blind eye', it could be said, which is neither entirely deliberate nor involuntary. It involves being 'vaguely aware that we chose not to look at the facts without being conscious of what it is we are evading' (Steiner 1985, p. 161). In this case, the denial of the moral aspects of a situation is a partial denial (Grassiani 2009, p. 144); it is a paradox of 'knowing and not knowing at the same time' (Cohen 2001, p. 25). The accounts of many veterans seem to convey exactly this mechanism. Their descriptions show a self-protective moral disengagement without their being fully cognizant of it because of the very fact they were morally disengaged. Put differently, their accounts describe a partially chosen failure to grasp the moral significance of the suffering of others that existed in tandem with a painful awareness of it. The state they describe was thus a dual paradox. First, it was a state of feeling-and-not-feeling and of knowing-and-not-knowing. Second, it resulted from the choice to switch off without the choice being entirely voluntary.

The previous chapter discussed partially similar mechanisms of 'numbing'. Yet, whereas in the situations discussed in Chapter 5 this 'numbing' was invoked to justify or excuse their conduct, this was not the case for the situations described here. The veterans quoted in this chapter spoke about moral detachment in terms of a distressing revelation of the inhumanity that they and others were capable of. Apparently, for the situations described here, phrases such as 'you just become a bit numb' had ceased to work, because they could not make un-known the all too human capacity for selfishness and aggression, including their own.

Senselessness

A third often-heard theme related to the above is senselessness. On deployment, Bob remembers asking himself 'what am I doing here?', and thinking 'being here is nonsense'. Similarly, Niels felt that their presence in Afghanistan was 'useless', and found many things he encountered made 'no sense'. Uttering statements like these, Bob, Niels and many other veterans expressed feelings of senselessness in a twofold manner. First, an inability to see

7 I have not been able to convincingly verify the following, but according to rumor, several Dutchbat II soldiers gave local children in Srebrenica 'treats' that were actually jam-covered fuel tablets (NIOD 2002, p. 1248). Also, I have been told that Dutchbat III soldiers received oral sex from local women 'for five cigarettes'. With respect to TFU soldiers, I have been told that colleagues spat on local children throwing stones at them, and colleagues slapped children who kept trying to climb on their vehicles during patrols. None of the veterans I spoke with said they had done such things themselves, perhaps because none had actually done so, perhaps because they did not want to acknowledge that they had. In the latter case, it is conceivable that some behaviors remain too hard to admit to others, possibly even to oneself. Some veterans told me that indeed they were not yet ready to talk about 'some things' they had experienced.

the purpose of many things they saw and did, and second, an inability to make sense of those things.

The senselessness many veterans described recalls Lifton's work on US Vietnam veterans (Lifton 1973). The veterans that Lifton spoke to were confronted in Vietnam by a reality that contrasted drastically with the assumptions and pretenses on which the war was based. To cope with the absurdity and meaninglessness of the situation they were in, they began pretending that it was something they actually knew it was not. Later they recounted that they had been 'like boys playing soldiers', pretending to do a good job of killing (Lifton 1973, p. 168). On returning home, they came to see the war and their own participation in it as 'counterfeit'

The previous chapter showed that many of the interviewed veterans, at least initially, tended to dismiss political and other intangible goals as none of their business. Rather than pursuing such goals, they tried to find meaning in the directly significant act of being able 'to put my training into practice', and sometimes, in being able 'to give at least one person a smile on their face'. It seems, then, that soldiers do not necessarily need to feel that their job has a larger purpose. By defining other personal goals, they can still find purpose in their work. However, many accounts show that the veterans were often unable to put their training into practice, or actually make people smile. Bob had been unable to do his tasks or protect people in need, and Niels was unable to live up to the oath he took as a nurse. Bob, Niels and many others turned out to be incapable of doing what they had expected. Instead, they experienced value conflicts and moral detachment.[8] As a result, they began asking themselves, 'What are we actually doing here?'.

When one is confronted by morally disturbing experiences such as value conflict and moral detachment and there is no direct meaning to find in these experiences, an overarching purpose seems to become necessary, so that one's experiences are still meaningful. However, sometimes, there is no overarching purpose or righteousness. In this case, Lifton suggests (1973), the only option left to find peace may be to acknowledge and condemn the complete senselessness of a situation. Yet, people at home may keep holding on to what veterans see as justifying rhetoric. Consequently, veterans may feel that the 'counterfeit universe' is not just 'over there' in the war, but omnipresent in the world to which they have returned (Lifton 1973, see also Shay 1994).

Indeed, many interviewed veterans felt that their mission was 'one big charade' (Bob's words), 'one big farce' (Niels' words), 'pretend play' and 'a puppet show' (the words of countless veterans). Some drew some hope from the little things they could do, but they remained unable to give meaning to the suffering they had witnessed or caused by tying it to a larger purpose. None of it made sense to them. At the same time, political leaders and

8 In these circumstances, even the slightest gesture made a great impact. To take Bob's story as an example. He had been deeply moved when the Muslim boy gave him his cigarettes. Bob seems to have experienced the gesture as a sort of understanding or forgiveness, or human kindness at least. At the same time, it underscored the unfairness of the situation. Consider, also, the account of Dutchbat III veteran Daan, who rode elderly people in a wheelbarrow to the Potočari compound. When children and women were deported by bus, Daan broke into a kitchen cupboard, stole a box of candy and started handing the candy out to the children. 'It was nothing, completely nothing. But it was something', Daan stammered when recounting this. Distributing candy seems to have been his desperate attempt 'to give at least one person a smile on their face'. At the same time, his attempt made manifest the utter absurdity of the situation. In Daan's words: 'These kids, all smiling, smiling faces, at that very moment that they were witnesses to the greatest drama. Unbelievable'.

people at home did seem to hold on to the view that it did make sense, by letting them carry on with the mission as it was or by saying that things would have turned out well if only they had done something differently. As a result, not only their experience of value conflict and moral detachment made no sense to them, but on top of that, it made no sense that people at home pretended that all of it did make sense.

Moral Failure and Moral Disorientation

How can experiences of value conflict, moral detachment and senselessness have such a profound impact on an individual's life? And what impact? In the previous chapter, I discussed how veterans 'resolved' potential tensions with unequivocal interpretations. While these were sometimes inconsistent, the fact that they were tied to separate situations or selves enabled veterans to maintain a sense of coherence and consistency. In contrast, the accounts described in this chapter reveal the interviewed veterans' inability to use unequivocal interpretations and thus their inability to resolve experiences of conflict. Below, I juxtapose my findings on the impact of this inability with the current concept of moral injury and philosophical perspectives on moral conflict. This leads me to argue that irresolvable moral conflict may result in what I call 'moral disorientation'.

To recap, the current concept of moral injury describes morally injurious experiences as a conflict between a person's moral beliefs and an act of transgression. It is postulated that when an event is radically discrepant with a person's 'assumptions and beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness' (Litz *et al*. 2009, p. 698), the person will experience severe dissonance. That is, acts of transgression produce dissonance because people do maintain 'an intact moral belief system' (2009, p. 701). Dissonance could emerge, for instance, between the belief 'I am a good person' and the fact that 'I did something unforgivable'. Such dissonance, it is argued, often results in self-condemnation, a loss of trust in the capacity to be good and thus in self-punishing behavior and/or efforts to fight (perceived) injustice (Nash and Litz 2013, 2013). The concept of moral injury explicitly deviates from models that treat guilt and blame as the result of irrational thoughts and inappropriate emotions. Instead, it is considered 'important to appreciate that holding onto the idea of a moral self or a moral code may require that a bad act be judged as such' (2009, p. 703). Central in the therapy proposed, therefore, is forgiveness – either of the self or of others – and accordingly, the acceptance of imperfection. Integrating a moral transgression into one's moral belief system (e.g. 'I am a good person, but I do make mistakes'; 'the world is benevolent, but not absolutely') would reduce the experience of conflict such that one would be able to maintain 'an intact, although more flexible, functional belief system' (Litz *et al*. 2009, p. 701).

In many ways, the stories of the interviewed veterans fall in line with the current concept of moral injury. Many spoke of conflict that unsettled the moral beliefs and expectations they had held prior to their deployment. Many struggled with profound guilt. Many developed a desire to help people as a way to make reparations or simply because they could not stand injustices any longer. Some veterans also turned to self-harm as a form of making amends. At the same time, many became so fixated on injustice that they began responding

to small perceived injustices with exaggerated anger, sometimes with aggression. Many became distrustful of people; they readily thought that people were insincere and had bad intentions. Many slid into a negative spiral of doing things that made them feel guilty and ashamed afterwards, causing them to do things that made them feel guilty and ashamed afterwards, and so on.

Besides this correspondence with the current moral injury model, the veterans' stories revealed something else. When veterans spoke about morally disturbing experiences and their resultant feelings of guilt or blame, they rarely did so as unequivocally as suggested in the current model of moral injury. Some veterans explicitly expressed uncertainty or confusion about the significance of their experience. They said that they 'can't work it out' and 'can't solve it', or their experience caused 'a short circuit in my head'. Others expressed uncertainty or confusion implicitly and perhaps unconsciously, uttering ambivalent, even conflicting interpretations of their experience. For instance, some veterans constantly switched between saying 'I did wrong' and 'I didn't do anything wrong'. Generally, some expressed both profound guilt and great pride with respect to the things they had done. Some switched between speaking with resentment about the 'fucking backward' locals in their deployment area and sympathetically calling them 'the poor bastards'. Some emphasized that there is 'no right or wrong but only survival in war' but also said that they blamed themselves or others for what they had done on their deployment. Some veterans expressed great suspicion of the military and politicians but also said they would give anything to serve in another mission. Some accused judgmental Dutch civilians of 'not understanding shit' but said they judged themselves in the same way. Some said they had learned 'to put things in perspective' but admitted they could get angry about trivial things. And, some switched between saying 'I can't stand injustice any longer and 'I've become completely indifferent to it all'.

Bob, for instance, struggled with the question: am I doing good, or am I just putting people into misery? The stories of Bob and other veterans conveyed all sorts of ethical questions. How to do right when forced to choose between two evils? What do right and wrong mean in the battle for survival? What is goodness when it only confirms the evilness of a situation? Was I a good soldier, and is being a good soldier really good? Do my guilt and other worries make me a good or a bad soldier, and a good or a bad human being? What do good and bad even mean?

Of course, veterans' statements of non-guilt could just be what they tell themselves, while their stated guilt is what they really believe, or vice versa. Yet, keeping the established theoretical insight in mind that morality is not harmonious but 'messy', I propose another view. I contend that in many cases, veterans' expressions of guilt and non-guilt may *both* be considered genuine, even though they conflict, because when experiencing irresolvable moral conflict, it makes sense to feel guilty and not guilty at the same time.

Tessman (2014) calls irresolvable moral conflict situations of 'unavoidable moral failure', which does seem a more adequate term for irresolvable moral conflicts than words such as 'transgression' or 'wrongdoing'. As suggested, when individuals are forced to choose between two evils, they may not consider themselves blameworthy but may still feel that they have failed morally. Even if they know they made the best choice possible, this does not take away the feeling that they have violated a moral requirement, and even if they know

they had no choice whatsoever, it does not take away the feeling that they failed to act upon their values. Similarly, when the enormity of other people's suffering, the own feeling of helplessness and instinct for self-preservation turn individuals to indifference, they may consider it understandable in the light of the circumstances, perhaps even unavoidable, yet, they may still feel that they failed to act in a morally responsible way.[9] Moreover, having experienced inescapable moral failure, individuals may feel that their belief in right and wrong failed *them*.

Of note, it certainly can be (and is) debated whether irresolvable moral conflicts truly exist in an objective sense, and if so, whether it is logical to experience negative feelings after an unavoidable failure (see e.g. Williams 1973, Marcus 1980, Tessman 2014, Brandenburg 2018). I must emphasize that when I speak of moral conflict and moral failure, I do not intend to make objective statements about morality. Rather, I speak about moral *experience*. So, whether or not irresolvable moral dilemmas exist objectively, in human experience they do. And, no matter whether the negative feelings following a moral dilemma are illogical, it does not mean that they are unfounded; they are founded when understood from the perspective of human experience.

The conflicts experienced by the interviewed veterans cannot be reduced in the way that the current concept of moral injury suggests. In the current concept, moral conflict is understood as a conflict between a person's moral beliefs of goodness and an unequivocal experience of wrongdoing. Accordingly, accepting being a good yet imperfect person is perceived as a way to reduce the conflict. However, the conflicts the interviewed veterans experienced messed up their notions of goodness and wrongdoing. In this case, accepting personal imperfection cannot help reduce the conflict, let alone resolve it.

What to call these kinds of irresolvable moral conflicts and their psychological impact? One veteran told me that he tried to make sense of the conflict he felt by distinguishing between 'culpable guilt', the result of unequivocal wrongdoing, and 'non-culpable guilt', the kind of guilt he carried. In a similar vein, two other veterans said they felt 'responsible' for their actions, but not 'blameworthy', because they had done their best. Moral philosophers, too, have sought terms for the psychological result of irresolvable moral conflicts. De Wijze (2005) suggests the notion of 'tragic-remorse', which, he says, differs from typical remorse in that it is for one's actions – or one's inaction, I should add – without feeling culpable for one's actions. It is remorse about the fact that the morally best option was merely the lesser evil, at best.

The notion of tragic-remorse applies well to the conflicts expressed by many Dutchbat and TFU veterans. However, it is still too limited a notion, as it evokes the image of an individual who acquiesces in the impossible situation he is confronted by, while irresolvable conflicts are overwhelming, things that people generally do not expect and are not readily willing to accept. Similar to notions of guilt and shame, the idea of tragic-remorse does

9 This point resonates with Calhoun's understanding of failure. 'Failure is not the same as culpable error', she writes (2016, pp. 27–28). 'Nor are failures simply excused errors. A good excuse gets one off the evaluative hook. To be excused is to have no reason to think badly of oneself or for others to think badly of oneself. To have failed, by contrast, is to have a reason to think badly of oneself and to expect others to do the same'. Calhoun adds that even when failures have been 'unavoidable', they 'leave their evaluative mark. They are sources of regret, shame, loss of self-esteem, and of the thought that one's character or life is blemished by falling short of some standard for what lives should look like' (ibid).

not account sufficiently for the profound confusion and 'short circuits' that characterized many of the stories I heard. This brings me to propose the notion of moral disorientation. Besides emotions such as tragic-remorse, it seems, veterans faced by moral failure may also be left with moral disorientation. While tragic-remorse is the result of having been forced to do wrong, or being unable to do right, moral disorientation is the associated loss of one's previous certainties about wrong and right; it is the loss of one's moral frame of reference and perhaps also of one's moral self-perception. Moral disorientation means that a veteran knows not only that people do not always practice what they preach, but that at times it is virtually or literally impossible to practice what one preaches. This knowledge is not easily comprehended and accepted. A confrontation with inevitable moral failure messes up one's moral beliefs, leaving one with profoundly unsettling questions about right and wrong.

Ethical Struggle

The distressing experience of moral disorientation may lead veterans to engage in trying to restore an orderly world of good versus evil, or alternatively, in viewing the world differently. Veterans may try to resolve their doubt and conflict, or find ways of living in a world fraught with both. The accounts I heard indicate that in trying to find moral 're-orientation', many veterans initially tried to restore a relatively 'black-and-white' world, with great exasperation and varying degree of success. If they failed, it seems, they eventually turned to accepting a more complicated and random world, in which the morally distressing event they experienced was not an exception to the rule but a tragic part of the world. How to understand these processes? Considering this question brought me back to existing theory on morality and ethics and led me to conceptualize veterans' responses to moral disorientation as an *ethical struggle.*

Specifically, I found Zigon's anthropological work on morality and ethics insightful for veterans' responses (2007, 2008). As Zigon argues, a person's moral beliefs must be seen as embodied dispositions that one usually enacts without deliberation. Reflection only occurs when one's largely unquestioned moral beliefs and behaviors are forcefully put into question by an intruding event. In the situation Zigon terms 'moral breakdown', a person starts to consciously reflect on and reassess his moral expectations and dispositions, trying to resolve the moral questions that have arisen. This reflective process, which entails conscious thinking about one's moral beliefs, is what Zigon calls ethics. Although only philosophers in general engage in ethics as a systematic study of morality, everybody engages at numerous points in their lives in ethical practice. Yet, for people experiencing moral disorientation, more personal issues are at stake than for professional philosophers. It is one thing to bow over a hypothetical dilemma for the sake of scientific knowledge, it is another to personally experience a moral dilemma with profound consequences. It is probably from this line of thinking that Zigon argues that people ultimately engage in ethical practice to return 'to the unreflective mode of everyday moral dispositions' (2007, p. 138). That is, when people engage in ethics, they do so in order to find comfort again.

Zigon emphasizes, however, that:

> this return from the ethical moment is never a return to the same unreflective moral dispositions. For the very process of stepping-out and responding to the breakdown in various ways alters, even if ever so slightly, the aspect of being-in-the-world that is the unreflective moral dispositions. It is in the moment of breakdown, then, that it can be said that people work on themselves, and in so doing, alter their very way of being-in-the-world (Zigon 2007, p. 138).

In other words, when a person's moral beliefs are forcefully put into question, this inevitably changes the person.

Relating my findings to Zigon's work, I came to conceptualize veterans' responses to the experience of moral disorientation as what I call an 'ethical struggle'. In line with Zigon's insights, I maintain that we all experience numerous minor moments of moral 'disorientation' and thus ethical 'struggle' in our lives. Such moments are generally relatively quickly overcome in the flow of everyday life. They allow one's moral expectations and beliefs to evolve slowly over a lifetime as life experience accumulates without engendering distress. However, as my findings indicate, a person may also experience major moral disorientation, which is far harder to overcome and disrupts his life completely. Whatever was taken for granted before, is not anymore. Major disorientation may arise through a single event or a longer period in life, and it may arise suddenly or build up over time. In any case, the disoriented person may face a long distressing period of ethical struggle. The struggle may end in the person finding moral orientation again, or it may be never-ending, making it impossible to ever find the complete comfort again of an unreflective mode. In the latter case, the person will never be able to get clear answers to such questions as 'how can you do right when forced to choose between two evils', and nor will he be able to simply 'get over' such questions. At best, he may find some comfort in accepting that there are no answers to these questions.

I find the notion of ethical struggle particularly useful because it helps to capture my finding that moral distress may entail profound moral disorientation which in turn may lead veterans to reassess their moral beliefs. To recapitulate, Litz and colleagues conceptualize moral injury as the result of an act that conflicts with one's deeply held moral beliefs, which are violated by the act but remain 'intact'. In other words, a veteran's moral beliefs would remain fixed. Yet, my findings showed that while the conscience of morally distressed veterans did indeed seem to remain intact at a very basic level (if not, feelings of guilt and blame could not arise), their specific moral beliefs may not. Veterans may no longer be able to take for granted the aptness of their previous moral beliefs. They may start to doubt their prior beliefs about the goodness of people, and, moreover, whether good and bad actually exist. Such disorientation forces veterans to find new ways in which to understand their own and others' actions in moral terms, for instance by inventing words such as 'non-culpable guilt'.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the 'moral' in 'moral injury'. Departing from the insight that a person's moral beliefs are 'messy' rather than a harmonious system, I investigated the possible implications of this complexity for experiences of moral distress. I found that morally distressing experiences may not only entail unequivocal experiences of moral transgression, but irresolvable moral conflict as well, with particular psychological consequences. A morally distressed veteran may feel genuinely guilty and not guilty at the same time, and he may genuinely view something as inhumane cruelty and as non-suited for such moral judgments at the same time. Accordingly, moral distress may entail not only unequivocal moral thoughts and emotions, but also unsettling moral disorientation, involving the loss of previous certainties about right and wrong. In response to such moral disorientation, a morally distressed veteran may engage in a painful ethical struggle. Although his conscience has remained 'intact' in the very basic sense that he does not lapse into complete apathetic nihilism, his moral beliefs may change profoundly.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in the current concept of moral injury it is stressed that a veteran's moral judgments should be taken seriously rather than approached as misplaced interpretations that need correction. In contrast to dominant understandings of PTSD, the concept of moral injury is built on the contention that veterans' moral emotions do not always result from distorted thoughts and faulty logic, but may come from an appropriate acknowledgment that people are capable of wrongdoing. My findings support this contention. They indicate that terms such as 'mental illness' and 'disorder' fall short to describe veterans' painful awareness of the possibility of moral failure, and to capture the moral disorientation and ethical struggle that may come with this realization. This is not to say that veterans' moral struggles might not entail judgments and emotions that could be called misguided and misplaced. However, my findings suggest that their confusion should not readily (or only) be conceived of as a disorder, but rather (or also) as an ethical struggle, and in contrast to frameworks of mental illness, the notion of ethical struggle does not begin with disorder but with the experience of crushed moral certainties.

In fact, in some respects the notion of ethical struggle is even more appropriate than 'moral injury', because while the concept of moral injury goes beyond conventional understandings of mental disorder, it still builds on the medical analogy of injury. Although an injury analogy is apt in the sense that something is not whole anymore, and it hurts, it also suggests that experiences of moral distress are localized injuries while the rest of the moral body has remained – or should remain – the same. To reiterate, the current moral injury concept contends that injured veterans maintain an 'intact moral belief system', or at least, that they should work toward this by appreciating 'the time-locked context-specificity' of their experiences (Litz *et al.* 2009, p. 703, see also Paul *et al.* 2014, Griffin *et al.* 2017, Held *et al.* 2018). In this respect the injury analogy is potentially problematic. While a physical injury and its potential effect on the rest of the body may be healed by focusing on the injury itself, this does not seem to apply to a moral injury. A moral injury may entail questions and insights about the self and the world that go beyond and deeper than the event. A veteran's experience may have shattered his trust in people's ability to do right; moreover, it may have

shattered his very moral frame of reference with which he used to make judgments about questions of wrong and right. He may struggle not only with moral questions such as 'am I/are others good or bad?' but also with such ethical questions as 'what is good and bad?'. And so, it does not seem sufficient to focus on treating the distress directly related to an event (the injury), for instance by making a person capable of forgiving the self or others for the event. It also seems necessary to address the more general disorientation and ethical struggle that may have been engendered by the event (the changed moral body). To be sure, this does not mean that 'moral injury' should be replaced by a new term. Any analogy has its own problems. Rather, it should be appreciated that moral injury is more than a local injury, and thus can leave more than a scar. A morally distressing experience can change a person radically and irreversibly.

7

Chapter 7. Political Betrayal and Reparations: Moral Distress in Relation to Political Practices[1]

Introduction

The previous chapters discussed the motives of Dutch veterans to enlist and serve in military operations abroad. Their motives resonate with what has been documented internationally: soldiers fight for themselves and their buddies, and are seldom concerned by political questions surrounding the mission on which they are sent (e.g. Bourke 1999, Gibson and Abell 2004, Bar and Ben-Ari 2005, Finley 2011, Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013).

The soldiers and veterans I knew prior to this research all reported political disinterest, including senior officers working at a political level themselves. Although they did have opinions on political topics, they tended to disconnect them from their job. They would say, for instance, 'My job's got nothing to do with politics' or 'Politics don't matter to me', 'I'm just an instrument of the state'. This is why I initially saw no major problem in the depoliticized approach of most research on military trauma. However, my view changed when I started to speak to veterans with distress. Many of these veterans turned out to be rather concerned by political questions. As discussed in the Chapter 6, for example, their experiences of conflict and senselessness had made them consider the overarching purpose of their mission. Moreover, closer analysis of the political disinterest of non-distressed veterans revealed something more complicated than mere indifference. For one, saying that 'my job's got nothing to do with politics' because a soldier is 'just an instrument of the state' is a contradiction in terms. Indeed, it turned out that if being an instrument of the state produced morally distressing experiences, soldiers often started to realize that politics had a lot to do with their job.

In this chapter I delve into the ways in which soldiers' jobs are related to political practices, examining the subquestion: Did the political practices surrounding the Dutchbat and TFU missions play a role in experiences of moral distress among veterans deployed on these missions, and if so, how? In contrast to the previous chapter, here I discuss the experiences of Dutchbat and TFU veterans separately because I found several relevant differences between the two groups. Yet, as will become clear, I identified even more remarkable parallels. While the focus is on the accounts of morally distressed veterans, in the final section I will juxtapose their experiences with those of veterans who reported no distress at all.

1 A version of this chapter appeared in 2018 as 'The Role of Political Practices in Moral Injury: A Study of Afghanistan Veterans' in *Political Psychology*, (E-pub ahead of print). DOI: 10.1111/pops.12503: 1-15.

I begin by discussing several general political characteristics of the Dutchbat and TFU missions, reflecting on the extent to which these characteristics may have either reduced or increased soldiers' vulnerability to developing moral distress. In the subsequent sections, I zoom in on the Dutchbat and TFU missions, examining the experience of Dutchbat and TFU veterans in the context of the particular political practices that shaped their missions. The discussion of each mission is divided in two parts. In the first I describe the interviewed veterans' experiences; in the second I discuss what happened at the political level to facilitate these experiences, building on the literature on the political practices that characterized the Dutchbat and TFU missions. Then I compare the two missions and relate my findings to the concept of moral injury. The two missions, despite being very different in several aspects, turned out to be quite similar at the fundamental level, not only regarding the surrounding political issues but also the ways in which veterans experienced and responded to these issues. Subsequently, I propose to add the notions of 'perceived political betrayal' and 'seeking reparation' to the concept of moral injury. Finally, I reflect on how the concepts of PTSD and moral injury themselves have particular political significance.

Some General Characteristics of the Missions

> Ha-ha, that's a typical civilian thing, asking about the point of the mission. I've never heard a soldier say, what's the purpose of this, are we doing something useful? No. [short silence] Look, the downside is, of course, you only start asking yourself this kind of question when someone close to you dies. See, and then: what's the point? You know. For those shit Afghans, when we leave again, everything is fucked again. (...) But yeah, do you have to stand behind your mission? No. (...) I'm nothing but an extension of politics, and politicians have some interests somewhere, and that's what we're for. No, look, if you're really idealistic, you'll get such questions, if you really have that illusion, because I see it as nothing but an illusion, when you think, okay, I'm going to make the world a better place. (...) If a guy said something like that, here, during an intake, it would mean he has no idea what the job is about.
> (Infantry sergeant, basic training instructor)

Many interviewed veterans recounted that prior to their deployment, they already expected not to agree with all the political aspects of their missions, but they saw this as inherent to their profession. What aspects? In this section I sketch several general political features that the Dutchbat and TFU mission, and many other recent Dutch missions, had in common.

I reflect on how these features may have both decreased and increased the risk of moral distress among Dutchbat and TFU veterans and discuss several coping strategies that the interviewed veterans adopted to deal with anticipated political problems, even at the start of their military career.

In Chapter 2, I cited several studies describing how in the past disillusioned soldiers felt betrayed when they realized they had been given with false images of the enemy (e.g. 'gooks' in Vietnam) (Lifton 1973, Shay 1994, Bica 1999), false self-images (e.g. 'noble warriors') (Lifton 1973, Bica 1999), and a false idea of the mission's cause (e.g. national security or liberation) (Gutmann and Lutz 2009, Sherman 2011) or a questionable mandate (e.g. far-reaching authorization for the use of force) (Shay 1994, Boudreau 2011). While I would not want to argue that the interviewed veterans for this study were deployed in ways that corresponded neatly with the reality they would encounter, it does seem that their expectations were more reserved than described by the abovementioned authors. I heard no veteran say or suggest that he was taught to hate his opponents, or any other people in the area of deployment. Some veterans did report feeling hate for opponents or hostile civilians, but their hate developed during rather than prior to their deployment. Also, while many veterans reported feeling guilt, no one ever spoke of previous self-perceptions in terms of heroism and nobleness. Only a couple of veterans said they had used force legally but, in hindsight, immorally. Finally, I met only one veteran who had become anti-war, incidentally without developing psychological difficulties.[2]

Many explanations are possible for the differences in the accounts of the interviewed veterans and the studies cited above. One is that most studies focus on anti-war veterans, and it is likely that their experiences and interpretations differ from those of veterans who do not oppose to military intervention. Even among traumatized veterans, only a minority become anti-war (see e.g. Drescher *et al.* 2013). Another explanation may be that these studies focus on US veterans deployed on war operations in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. These troops operated under more permissive Rules of Engagement than other militaries did (Cole 2009, Weitsman 2010), with images of heroic warriors promoted in both military and civilian society (Lifton 1973, Bica 1999, Finley 2011, Farnsworth 2014).

The Dutch troops in Afghanistan – whose mission was not a conventional war operation – were far more restricted than their US colleagues were (cf. Cole 2009, Nagl and Weitz 2010, Weitsman 2010, Klep 2011). In general, although recent Dutch operations such as the

2 This Afghanistan veteran now looks at his mission and the military as follows: 'They [Afghan people] die in their own country, in their own house, because some force is employed to serve the interests of a small group of people. That's aggressive. But if I behave aggressively in the Netherlands, it is condemned, even in the military'. He does not feel troubled by his new-found understanding. He does not regret his mission or feel guilty because, as he told me, he was young at the time and did not understand the implications of his mission. In fact, he feels that it is due to his deployment experiences that he is able to see what he sees now.

mission in Afghanistan did involve combat, they were not typical war operations, but rather 'operations other than war' or 'peace support operations' (Pugh 2018). In line with this, in recent Dutch missions political leaders refrained from describing the warring parties in terms of evil and the mission in terms of being 'either with or against us' (cf. NIOD 2002, Van der Meulen 2004, Klep 2011, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). Further, although political leaders generally spoke positively about the Dutch troops – at least in advance of the missions – they did not frame them as hero-warriors, which is in line with the Dutch national self-image as non-martial and conflict-aversive (Klinkert 2008, Zaalberg 2013). Dutch political narratives, then, refrained from promoting overly martial self-perceptions and demonic constructions of others. This reserve, together with the practical restrictions that the Dutch political leadership imposed, arguably decreased the incidence of force in ways the Dutch troops would later come to regret. Put differently, it seems that the political practices of recent Dutch missions carried a lower risk of morally distressing situations than, for instance, those of recent US missions.

That said, I have two important remarks. Restrictive mandates and reserved narratives are coins with two sides. First, restrictive mandates may not only protect soldiers from doing things they might later come to regret, but also leave them powerless in situations where robust intervention does seem required. Likewise, reserved narratives may not only discourage soldiers from resorting to violence, but also leave them unprepared for the violence they do face. Second, while the pre-deployment attitudes and expectations the veterans recounted were partially in line with the political narratives of their mission, in several important respects the two also stood in contrast to each other. In fact, the veterans' attitudes and expectations partly seemed a counter-reaction to perceived political illusions.

Later on in this chapter I will elaborate on how the political narratives and mandates of the Dutchbat and TFU mission had substantial downsides. Here, let me expand upon the remark that many soldiers seemed to reject part of these narratives and mandates prior to deployment. At the political level, the objectives of the Dutchbat and TFU mission were framed in altruistic and relatively ambitious terms. The mission in Srebrenica was a peacekeeping operation to help protect a Safe Area (Honig and Both 1996, Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002), and the mission in Uruzgan was supposed to make a substantial contribution to safety and reconstructing the region (Klep 2011, Ruijter et al. 2011, Grandia 2015). In contrast, as mentioned before, the vast majority of the interviewed veterans had far lower, more self-oriented expectations. About half did believe they would be able to help the local population, but when they did, they thought of very specific contributions such as helping to build a school. The other half did not wonder if their activities would be of value to the local population. They focused on personal military goals such as 'putting my training into practice' and 'doing my job under pressure', and thought of local benefits only as 'a big

plus'. Besides a matter of personal preference, these attitudes may be considered a counter-reaction to perceived political illusions. Remember, for instance, Mushin explaining how he warned idealistic newcomers: 'Fucker, you'd better not think like that, you'll come back broken'. Also, consider the words of Anton, who remembered his commander telling him with a laugh that his mission would be 'hopeless, in a valley, that can't be defended' and thus 'another typical UN operation'. Expressions like these indicate that, even before their mission began, many veterans anticipated a gap between political reality and military reality.

So, most veterans did not go away with complete faith in the design and presentation of their mission at the political level. Yet, rather than turning them against their mission, this skepticism reinforced their focus on their military duty. Specifically, it seemed to engender an indifference to politics, a pragmatic 'can-do' attitude and relatively low expectations. Political disengagement can then be understood as a preventive coping mechanism for self-protection. However, as the following sections will show, political disengagement cannot fully prepare soldiers for morally challenging situations. For one, being mentally prepared for something is not the same as bodily and emotionally experiencing it. Moreover, as Chapter 6 showed, many interviewed veterans found themselves unable to fulfill even their relatively modest goal of putting their training into practice. When they did, political questions surrounding their mission suddenly became very relevant.

Dutchbat and TFU

The following sections focus on the Dutchbat and TFU missions, to examine experiences of moral distress in which political practices seem to have played a contributing role. As explained, the Dutchbat and TFU mission are discussed separately, with each discussion first taking time to recount the veterans' experiences and then connecting them to issues at the political level.

Dutchbat, UNPROFOR: On the Ground

Many of the Dutchbat veterans interviewed shared the sentiment with the Dutch public that something had to be done about the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Yet, considering their limited means, few believed that it was possible to make a huge difference. At the same time, they all did think it would be possible to simply perform their tasks, such as disarming belligerents and carrying out patrols. However, reality turned out to be different.

'Pretend play': Powerlessness and Senselessness

Many veterans said that soon after they arrived, when they drove from the airport in Croatia to their compounds in Bosnia, they were confronted by the fact that as UN peacekeepers they had little to say. At each of the many checkpoints and roadblocks that the Bosnian Serb army had set up, they had to stop, line up and wait to be checked until they were eventually given permission to continue (see also NIOD 2002, p. 231). Consequently, the journey to Srebrenica became a first clear sign that as UN peacekeepers they were 'toothless paper tigers' without authority. In the course of their mission, this was confirmed time and again. For instance, both Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims regularly shot over their heads, the former to intimidate them, the latter to provoke fire by the Bosnian Serb forces. As a company commander of Dutchbat I later recalled: 'it sometimes seemed as if the notion of a "safe area" only existed in the media!' (cited in Klep and Winslow 1999, p. 104).

Dutchbat II veteran Karel, a private in Srebrenica, said this about powerlessness.

> We couldn't do a thing. Our weapons and munitions were not in order. (...) Morale plummeted because of that. No maintenance, no hand grenades, I could go on and on. You had nothing. I could just as well have walked round with a water pistol, because it doesn't do anything. (...) In The Hague they made these pretty orders, and you have to carry them out. For instance, the Muslims were not allowed to have weapons. There you are, you spot a group of twenty belligerents, and you're with seven. And they [the belligerents] are all armed. And then? Just go and disarm them? [He laughs bitterly.] With twenty rounds, you have to take weapons away – in practice it just doesn't work. These people walk away, just ignore you. Actually, considering the number of people they had [compared to the Bosnian Serb belligerents], I can't blame them. (...) We weren't allowed to fire. To yell: stop or I'll use force, and then aim your weapon. [He laughs bitterly.] People knew that we wouldn't shoot. (...) In the beginning [you're] serious about it. 'It can't be possible'. Slowly, you start saying, 'well we had a nice walk, spoke to some civilians, got information'. (...) If you try ten times to take weapons off people, and you can't, well you just can't. Then you have to try something else, collect information, to still be useful.

Like Karel, several other veterans related how the restrictions imposed on them caused them to develop their own initiatives, sometimes against the rules. Frustrated by the prohibition to fire back when belligerents fired over their heads, for instance, they sometimes did it anyway, without asking or reporting it to their commanders at the compound. Still, such alternatives 'didn't change anything', one veteran remarked.

In any case, none of it could eliminate the profound 'complete pointlessness' many veterans started feeling. Consider the account of Dutchbat II veteran Gerard, then a corporal. One day he

saw Bosnian Serbs execute some Bosnian Muslims in front of their home. He was not allowed to intervene, and when he reported what he had seen, his commanders ignored him.

> It moved me very, very deeply. I saw something terrible, so inhumane, that you execute other people consciously, and nothing gets done about it. I reported it, a couple of times actually, and they just dismissed it as, 'Oh well, an incident', and 'Maybe something else happened, did you really see what you think you saw?'

According to Gerard, his entire mission was like this. 'Patrols, patrol reports... it all disappears in a drawer'. As a result, he said, 'You start doubting. Yourself first, of course. Then the leaders, the reason why we were there, the mandate'. Gerard was not alone in this. Many veterans said that they began to feel powerless and senseless. Specifically, they developed the sense that the mission was a 'charade' in which Dutchbat was forced to engage in 'pretend play'.

'Left to our fates': Abandoning and Being Abandoned

Besides powerless and senseless, many veterans said they felt they had let the local population down, and felt 'abandoned' and 'left to our fates' in turn. By way of illustration, the following memory, posted by former NCO Ramon on a Facebook page by and for veterans, is worth quoting at length (with permission).

> In the beginning the patrol goes smoothly and no extreme things take place. The fact that a person reloads his AK47 and points it at me is not special anymore. [But] all of a sudden, a mother approaches us and gives me a baby. I look at the little thing and see that it's sick. Before I can react, the mother is gone and comes back a bit later with a second baby. She asks us if we want to take the babies with us to a safer area, because there are signs that their village will be attacked soon and that nobody will survive. (...)
> When we go on a mission we are dealing with 'Rules of Engagement'. You could say [these are] the rules of the game determined by the UN. One of these rules is that we cannot take locals in our vehicles. Cannot move [people]. The counterparty could accuse us of being biased, of ethnic cleansing. So here is the urgent request of a mother with two sick babies and there are the Rules of Engagement. What should I do? I'm a soldier and follow the Rules of Engagement or I'm human and take the mother with the two sick babies to a hospital. (...)
> Eventually we decide, by mutual agreement, that we will take the mother and two sick babies and bring them to a hospital. On our way to the hospital, we have to pass a roadblock of the other party [Bosnian Serbs]. This group of over 40 people will not let us leave with their 'enemy' just like that. While a colleague is negotiating with the commander of the

> group, one of them walks over to me and points his gun at me. Without thinking I draw my own and point it at him. (...) He looks at me pugnaciously, sticks up his middle finger, turns around and walks away. Slowly I hide my weapon back in my holster.
> After a long time of negotiating, we are finally allowed to leave the area with the mother and babies. A little later we leave [them] at the hospital and head back to the headquarters. As usual we need to report after each ride/action. I report to an officer and he yells at me. 'Who do you think you are? Billy the Kid? Who gave you permission to ignore the Rules of Engagement? Are you Mother Theresa?' (...)
> At that point I didn't realize the effect this would have on me. Years later in the Netherlands, I didn't dare make any more choices in my job. Suppose I had to choose again. I might make the wrong decision and be condemned again. For years I wondered: The man who follows the Rules of Engagement, is he a better soldier than me? Am I a better person than the soldier who follows the Rules of Engagement?

Clearly, Ramon's story speaks of a dual feeling of abandoning others and being abandoned. Again, he was not the only one; many soldiers developed this feeling.

Consequently, many soldiers became demoralized. For some, the only remaining motive was to 'get back in one piece'. As part of the black humor that developed, the song 'We gotta get out of this place' became a favorite sing-along, and such graffiti as 'UN, United Nothing' and 'No teeth...! A mustache...? Smel [sic] like shit...? Bosnian girl!' was scrawled on the compound walls. Also, as discussed, some soldiers started to pull cruel jokes on the local population, such as throwing sweets at groups of hungry children so that they would fight each other for them.

The stories of Dutchbat III veterans convey especially intense sentiments of abandoning others and being abandoned. The diary of a Dutchbat III soldier quoted in the study by Honig and Both (1996, p. 136) offers direct insight into the mood of soldiers in June 1995.

> 9 June: At the end of six months. I ask myself the question: what was the point of our presence? I have no answer.

> 10 June: We all feel the same. A great lack of understanding at the higher levels. We are being forgotten.

> 11 June: The Muslims are provoking the fighting. 'Get out of here as quickly as possible', the lads are saying. The people in The Hague don't know what's happening here.

As is well-known now, Srebrenica fell a month a later. All Dutchbat III veterans I spoke to vividly remember the morning of July 11. The massive air strikes they expected, about which the Bosnian Muslim population had also been informed, never came. Only later in the day, two F-16s came (see also NIOD 2002, p. 1700). Former private Klaas is one of the veterans who recounted, in a choking voice, the hope he felt that morning. 'It's very special what it does to you', he related. 'It gives you a good feeling. Support's coming, help's coming'. When it turned out the air strikes would not come after all, he was devastated. 'For the umpteenth time, you feel yet again that you can't make it happen, that as the UN you can't help people the way you promised you would'. As was the case for Klaas, the lack of air strikes and the fall of Srebrenica that followed made many veterans feel both utterly disappointed and completely deserted.

'A knife in the back': Feeling Suckered in the Mission's Aftermath

The end of the Dutchbat mission in July 1995 did not end the soldiers' sense of abandonment. In contrast, the aftermath of the mission only amplified it and fueled the sense of being 'suckered'. Initially, however, it seemed that the opposite would occur. After the soldiers of Dutchbat III had left Srebrenica, they stayed briefly in a UN compound in Zagreb, Croatia, where they were warmly welcomed by the then Dutch crown prince and several politicians. The Dutch media also hailed them as heroes initially (see also NIOD 2002, p. 2331, Klep 2008, pp. 82–3). Yet, at the end of July, when more information about what had happened came to light, the picture began to change drastically.

Former private Anton recounted the following about this. In Zagreb, he said, 'they all wanted to have their picture taken with us'. Yet, back home, he read in a magazine that several politicians said that they had actually not wanted to go to Zagreb but felt pressured because the Dutch crown prince was going. Anton knew one of these politicians. He called him, confronted him with the statement and said: 'I saw you, you were all too happy to take a picture with everybody'. The response was – Anton still remembered the exact words – 'That's politics'. It made him furious. 'First, they want to take a picture with us, because you're a hero. And then a week later, when it turned out to be murder, "No, we only went because we couldn't stay behind". Piss off. It made an impression on me… "That's politics"…'.

Many veterans remembered the strongly worded calls from parliamentarians to explain what had happened in Srebrenica (see also NIOD 2002), which they experienced as 'a knife in the back' and 'betrayal'. Parliament had encouraged the government's decision to send troops to Srebrenica, and had initially welcomed them back as heroes. Now, it demanded explanations for the fact that Dutchbat had not prevented the mass slaughter in Srebrenica. Several veterans described these demands as 'trying to pass the responsibility onto Dutchbat'.

Many veterans did recall support from the Dutch Minister of Defense, who kept emphasizing that Dutchbat had been unable to prevent the tragedy and the responsibility lay with the UN and the international community (Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, p. 2232). They were also angry that the Dutch government took no responsibility for sending them to and then 'abandoning us in Srebrenica'.

The public and parliamentary calls for explanations led to debriefings by the Military Police (Marechaussee) (NIOD 2002, p. 2332), which were done in such a way that several veterans experienced them as another 'stab in the back'. Instead of 'being allowed to vent some emotions', they were 'interrogated like criminals'. Several veterans remembered being ordered by their superiors to remain silent about what they had witnessed. Take Isaac, who had taken the initiative in Potočari to search for evidence of war crimes committed by Bosnian Serbs. He said that instead of 'being thanked for risking my life to do my duty, even more than my duty, I was treated as a nuisance'. Later he found out that elements of his declaration never appeared in the debriefing report.[3]

Notably, Dutchbat I and II veterans also felt attacked by the commotion surrounding the Srebrenica tragedy, as well as Dutchbat III veterans who were on leave (and prevented from returning by Bosnian Serb belligerents) during the fall of Srebrenica. Like Dutchbat III veterans, they had been intimidated and witnessed violence and suffering, and felt unable to do anything about it. Consequently, the mistreatment of Dutchbat felt personal.

'Doesn't somebody have to pay for the mistakes?' Demanding Truth and Compensation

In 2002, shortly after the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) presented its much-anticipated report on the Srebrenica mass murders, the cabinet resigned. Prime Minister Wim Kok gave a statement in which he acknowledged that the Netherlands, 'as a member of the international community (…) shares political responsibility for bringing about a situation in which such an act was possible' (quoted in Van den Berg 2014, p. 110). Also, he insisted that the soldiers of Dutchbat 'were not responsible for what happened there' (ibid). In 2006, moreover, the Ministry of Defense bestowed an insignia on the soldiers. To many veterans, however, it was all 'too little, too late'. Most reported mixed feelings. They saw the insignia, for instance, both as 'a sign of recognition' and as 'a fake gesture'. As one veteran explained, it was like 'if we give them a badge, they will keep quiet, we won't hear from them anymore now they feel recognized'. As another veteran emphasized, 'I didn't need a medal. We need to be compensated for the misery, for the betrayal, that's what we are

3 The debriefing reports led to no prosecutions of Dutchbat veterans (De Volkskrant 1999). However, several official inquiries followed, with differing conclusions on how much Dutchbat could be held accountable for the tragedy (see NIOD 2002, Van den Berg 2014). Several legal claims were also filed against the UN, the Dutch state, and Dutchbat leadership (see e.g. Eigenraam 2014, Gerechtshof Arnhem-Leeuwarden 2015).

waiting for'. Many veterans stated that rather than an insignia, 'we need the truth to finally come out' and 'we need answers'. Their general feeling was that Dutchbat had been punished disproportionally, while the political leadership was merely concerned with safeguarding its own interests and reputation.

Around the turn of the millennium, dozens of Dutchbat veterans diagnosed with PTSD filed a personal injury claim against the Dutch Ministry of Defense, stating that the Ministry had offered insufficient aftercare and thus had breached its duty of care. Several of the interviewed veterans had filed a claim. All said that they had done it partly because they felt they had been offered inadequate care, but mainly because they generally felt 'left to our fates' and 'abandoned' from the start. Many veterans denounced the Ministry of Defense for 'going to great lengths', including appealing to higher courts, to avoid paying out the claims.

On Veterans Day, 2016, the then Minister of Defense declared that the Dutchbat mission 'was – already in advance – impossible to accomplish' (NRC 2016).[4] Several veterans saw this as an important statement that made them feel 'finally recognized'. Others, however, felt it was still 'too little, too late'. Some of these veterans joined a new collective lawsuit that resulted from the Minister's statement. One lawyer assisting in this claim argued that the Minister's statement had 'expanded Dutchbat's judicial playing field': Dutchbat veterans now were no longer forced to limit their complaints to aftercare and therefore no longer needed a PTSD diagnosis to claim government compensation (NOS 2016). While the personal injury claims that several Dutchbat veterans filed concerned insufficient aftercare, this new claim, rather, entailed that the Dutch state had knowingly sent Dutchbat soldiers on a 'mission impossible' and had failed to admit this afterwards when the soldiers were the subject of public accusations (BNR 2016, NRC 2016). An ex-Dutchbat officer explained his motive to join the claim as follows: 'Doesn't somebody have to pay for the mistakes back then? The only way you have is to demand compensation' (quoted in Koelé 2016, translation TM). In 2018, the group of veterans joining the claim had grown to 230 (Van Joolen 2018), one third of the former battalion. In 2018, the Ministry of Defense announced a study into the needs of Dutchbat III veterans with respect to healthcare and recognition, in response to which the group withdrew their claim. Their lawyer explained that 'it was never about money for Dutchbat', but that the financial claim was intended as 'leverage' to enforce adequate aftercare and societal rehabilitation (Van Joolen 2018).

Dutchbat, UNPROFOR: Political Practices

4 Although the then Minister of Defense said something similar in 2013 ('Dutchbat soldiers [were] saddled with an impossible assignment') (NRC 2016), this was the first time the political leadership admitted that the infeasibility was clear in advance, thus implying that the government could have known better.

This section attempts to place the accounts of the interviewed Dutchbat veterans in a broader political context. First, it discusses their deployment in the context of political conflicts and compromises made before and during the mission. Second, it discusses their homecoming in relation to the political silence and ambiguity in the aftermath of the mission.

The Mission: Conflicts and Compromises

As the previous section showed, the distress of Dutchbat soldiers related directly to an utter inability to carry out their tasks and responsibilities. What they wanted to do they could not do, and what they did do often seemed to have no point. As a result, many developed strong feelings of powerlessness and senselessness, specifically a sense of 'pretend play'. Many felt they had abandoned the local population, but also felt abandoned themselves by the Dutch government and the UN. This was especially the case for Dutchbat III soldiers.

In part, the soldiers' difficulties can be related to problems in their mandate. As has been documented, there was a great mismatch between the objectives and military capabilities in Dutchbat's mission (e.g. Honig and Both 1996, Klep and Winslow 1999, Vogelaar and Kramer 2000, NIOD 2002, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2003, Rapporteur Report 2015). The soldiers of Dutchbat were deployed without adequate resources to do their job of patrolling and demilitarizing the area, sent as peacekeepers to an area where there was no peace to keep. Accordingly, the declaration of Srebrenica as a demilitarized Safe Area was violated not just when it was under direct attack, but on a daily basis. Before the mission started, several civilian and military experts, including the UN Security Council, estimated that several thousand fully armed ground troops at least – not just several hundred lightly equipped soldiers – would be needed to protect Srebrenica from Bosnian Serb attacks (NIOD 2002, pp. 573; 740; 777; 822; 1842, Rapp 2015, p. 9).

Besides the discrepancy between goals and resources, Dutchbat's mandate contained vague wording. Dutchbat and other UNPROFOR troops were mandated 'to deter attacks against the Safe Areas' and 'promote the withdrawal' of forces other than those of the Bosnian government, but no explicit authorization was given to 'defend' Safe Areas and 'secure' or 'enforce' the withdrawal of belligerents (Faix 2010, p. 142). This vagueness arose from ambiguity in the newly developed concept of 'Safe Area'. In contrast to 'safe haven', for instance, 'Safe Area' was defined as requiring the permission of both warring parties for that area while the deployed peacekeepers took an impartial position. This definition caused ambiguity in the mandate because it implied that a Safe Area could not be coerced even if deemed necessary for the safety of the area (NIOD 2002, p. 601, Rapp 2015). As a result, it was unclear what exactly was expected in the case of intimidation or attack (Kroon *et al.* 1997, p. 61, Klep and Winslow 1999, p. 104, Faix 2010, p. 142). It was also unclear what 'self-defense'

entailed and what the member states of the UN would do in the case of escalation (Kroon *et al.* 1997, pp. 60–61, NIOD 2002). Shortly before the fall of Srebrenica, the soldiers of Dutchbat III were explicitly authorized to resort to force (NIOD 2002, p. 1665), but they still had only few troops and little resources, and they never gained significant support from other militaries or substantial air support (Honig and Both 1996, NIOD 2002, Rapporteur Report 2015).

What caused the mismatch between goals and resources, and the ambiguity in the mandate? While many different factors played a role, two root problems appear to have been particularly significant. First, there was a tension between the UN and several member states' desire to intervene in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia on the one hand, and, on the other, the unwillingness to get involved in a war in a possibly doomed mission (e.g. Honig and Both 1996, Westerman and Honig 1998, NIOD 2002, Rapporteur Report 2015). While many countries voiced the need for intervention, many were unwilling to send their own troops. In practice, they left 'peacekeeping operations on the ground to other countries' and/or provided 'arms to the Bosnian government so that the Bosnian people could do their own fighting' (NIOD 2002, p. 869). Also, there was much disagreement on the approach to take to the conflict (e.g. Honig and Both 1996, Westerman and Honig 1998, NIOD 2002, Rapporteur Report 2015). As a result, the establishment of Safe Areas may have 'had less to do with the reality of Bosnia-Hercegovina than with the need to achieve a compromise in the Security Council and with the wish to diminish the tensions that had arisen between the United States and Europe concerning the right approach' (Blom 2002, p. 1, see also NIOD 2002, Rapporteur Report 2015). Establishing Safe Areas was seen as 'better than nothing' (Westerman and Honig 1998, p. 15). In hindsight, involved officials called the declaration of Srebrenica as a Safe Area 'a fake solution' intended mainly *'pour la galerie'* (Rapporteur Report 2015, pp. 13–14). According to former UN official Tharoor, 'one of the fundamental problems we had throughout this operation is that diplomatic drafting conducted with great finesse and aplomb by very skilled diplomats served as an end in itself. It was not linked to operational realities on the ground' (Rapporteur Report 2015, p. 14). So, political disagreements were resolved by compromise, and the discrepancies and ambiguities that characterized Dutchbat's mission seemed at least partially a result of these compromises (cf. NIOD 2002, p. 373).

Second, there were tensions between, on the one hand, the desire of both the Dutch government and a large part of the Dutch parliament and public to address the humanitarian emergency in the former Yugoslavia and, on the other hand, objections (voiced by other parliamentarians, media commentators and military experts) that the proposed mission risked failure and undesired consequences of escalation (e.g. Honig and Both 1996, Westerman and Honig 1998, Blom 2002, NIOD 2002, Rapporteur Report 2015). Critics pointed out, for instance, that the establishment of Safe Areas 'would cross the line between peacekeeping and peace-enforcement' and the operation would require many more

troops and international involvement (NIOD 2002, p. 822 ff.). While the Dutch government said it understood the criticism, it persisted in its intention to deploy Dutch troops with the support of broad parliamentary and public agreement (e.g. NIOD 2002, p. 534). This persistence should be understood in the context of a strong sense that 'something had to be done' (e.g. Honig and Both 1996, Westerman and Honig 1998, Blom 2002, NIOD 2002). Rumors of concentration camps and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia brought back images of World War II and the associated feeling of 'never again' fueled the urge to intervene (NIOD 2002, pp. 534, 3385). So the question of intervening seems to have become a case of 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' (NIOD 2002, p. 126). The Dutch government decided on 'do', and deployed troops to Srebrenica without being properly able to oversee potential consequences (Westerman and Honig 1998, Blom 2002, NIOD 2002).

Throughout the mission, national and international tensions continued. At the UN level, conflicts were resolved with compromises and at the Dutch national level, disagreements were solved by letting perceived moral obligations prevail over objections to the potential consequences. Also, rather than that an overarching plan was agreed on, 'a mix of stop-gap measures' and 'short-term policies' kept being adopted (Rapporteur Report 2015, pp. 42; 43). Accordingly, the policy-making process drifted into a 'muddling through' scenario (Blom 2002, NIOD 2002, pp. 671, 1371–1471). Accordingly, the policy-making process drifted into 'muddling through' (Blom 2002, NIOD 2002, pp. 671, 1371–1471). The mission remained a peacekeeping operation, under persistent political disagreements over the use of force and importance of impartiality (NIOD 2002, p. 1368, Rapporteur Report 2015). Thus the political reality became Dutchbat's reality: muddling through.

The Aftermath: Offering Closure or Closing Off?

As for Dutchbat's homecoming experience, a theme that emerged in the accounts of virtually all the interviewed veterans was feeling 'suckered' and let down. Specifically, many veterans came to regard both the mission and its aftermath as a political 'charade', and as 'a knife in the back'. In their experience, the political leadership was less concerned with offering 'closure' to the veterans and more with 'closing off' the debates surrounding Srebrenica. This, in turn, triggered a search among veterans for 'the truth' and compensation from the political leadership.

What was the political context of this experience? On the one hand, both the UN and the Dutch government put much effort into bringing Srebrenica's events to light and learning from them. At the international level, the Srebrenican tragedy and other failed peace operations in Somalia and Rwanda led the UN to extend the options and activities of peace missions, as documented in reports published in 1995 ('Supplement to an Agenda for Peace')

and 2000 ('Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations'). Among other recommendations, these reports advised that peace operations should be more 'robust', meaning that peacekeepers should be authorized to defend not just themselves but the mandate as well, and they should be properly equipped to execute and defend their mandate (Johnstone *et al*. 2005). At the national level, the Dutch government commissioned NIOD to conduct extensive research into the events in Srebrenica, and meanwhile began to apply the 'lessons learned'. Among these lessons were new requirements for clear rules on decision-making surrounding peace missions (TK 2000, Wessel 2008) and improvements to military aftercare (TK 2003, Vermetten and Olff 2013). Moreover, as mentioned above, the government assumed responsibility by resigning after the publication of the NIOD report, explicitly emphasizing that Dutchbat was not responsible for the events (Van den Berg 2014).

However, taking these measures freed the Dutch government from accountability in other ways. Commissioning the NIOD investigation allowed the government to refuse to comment on the Srebrenican tragedy until the findings came out, while resigning after the report was published in 2002 meant that the government did not have to discuss the findings or its implications in political debate (Veteraneninstituut 2002, Klep 2008, Van den Berg 2014). As Klep (2008, pp. 162–5) argues, the government's response to the NIOD report was a defense mechanism 'in triplicate'. First, it endorsed the report's general conclusions; second, it commented critically on parts of the report; and third, it stated that the report's conclusions resonated with the 'lessons learned' that the government had already drawn and applied previously. Falling back on this defense mechanism instead of instigating a sincere discussion, Klep contends, the government neglected to address its responsibility for the failure of its policy. As Van den Berg puts it, the Dutch government's actions were primarily aimed not at sincere engagement with either Dutchbat or the Bosnian Muslim survivors but at 'damage control' and 'closure' of the Dutch political debate on Srebrenica (Van den Berg 2014, pp. 114–5).

Whether or not it can be said that the government failed to take adequate responsibility, the abovementioned studies offer a context in which the experiences of Dutchbat soldiers can be understood. It took seven years before the government officially assumed responsibility for the failed mission, and in these years, Dutchbat veterans had to undergo painful debriefings and were repeatedly confronted by public debates and accusations against their conduct. When the government eventually accepted responsibility in 2002, it did so elusively ('as a member of the international community') (Van den Berg 2014, p. 110), while subsequent governments would deny further responsibility. In lawsuits filed by Dutchbat veterans, for instance, the government insisted that it bore no guilt for the circumstances in which the Dutchbat soldiers had ended up and that it had not breached its duty to care (Outeren 2011, Centrale Raad van Beroep 2013, Koelé 2016). In short, in the many words it did express, the

Dutch government remained both vague and reserved about the question of responsibility for the events of Srebrenica. Moreover, because it did not literally remain silent, it was able to assert that it had done the opposite. Understood as such, it becomes comprehensible why Srebrenica's political aftermath amplified the feelings of powerlessness, senselessness and abandonment that many Dutchbat veterans had already developed on their mission, and why it led many veterans to demand 'the truth' to be found and be given both symbolic and financial compensation.

TFU, ISAF: On the Ground

In 2006, 11 years after the fall of Srebrenica, four years after the Dutch government resigned over the Dutchbat mission, the Task Force Uruzgan mission began. Different from Dutchbat's peacekeeping mission, TFU was part of a NATO-led counterinsurgency operation. While the Dutch public and parliament debated whether TFU would involve reconstruction or combat, the soldiers about to be deployed to Uruzgan all knew that they would likely engage in combat. As a former private put it, 'Of course we knew. We trained for it, we had Rules of Engagement, we had the material and the Battle Group was far bigger than the PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team]'. Virtually all the interviewed veterans said they looked forward to the prospect of fighting. After all, action was one of the reasons they had joined the military, and they had been trained in combat for a long time. The next section examines their deployment and homecoming experiences in detail. First it discusses the experiences and then places them in the broader political context.

No Permission to Fire, 'Just make sure the flag is planted'

Former NCO Julian was one of the veterans lamenting this reticence. In illustration, he offered an anecdote of how he and his colleagues had once observed a man digging a hole. IED's ('roadside bombs') were responsible for a high rate of casualties in Afghanistan, and it seemed obvious that this man was about to bury one. Still, they were not allowed to do anything about it. The next day, much to their chagrin, they did find an IED where the man had been digging. According to Julian, 'Often those Battle Group commanders, they're afraid. They want to become a colonel afterwards [and] they can't have it on their resume that something went wrong. You really see it. They really don't want to take any risks'. Clearly, Julian referred to a fear of the political risk of casualties rather than the risk of casualties as such.

Many veterans told stories similar to Julian's. Daniel, for instance, who was an NCO in a mortar platoon in Uruzgan. He was always at work, even at night and felt extremely

responsible for his colleagues, especially since he felt he could not count on his superiors. Once, without waiting for permission, he took it upon himself to provide fire support to colleagues engaged in heavy combat.

> They only had a few rounds left, and they called for help on the radio: 'Guys we won't make it, it's over'. And we were so busy trying to get permission to fire. (...) And at one moment (...) I put down the phone and said: 'I'm going to fire now'. (...) At that point the Taliban were throwing hand grenades over the wall, that's how close they were. (...) I said, 'I'm just going to do it, it's over. And we'll just stand in front of that green table [military court]. But we're going to defend this one. We could let it go wrong (...) and see how the Netherlands would respond'. And that day, we made it. It cost us only one dead guy... Could have been lots more if we'd done it differently. (...) There was always fear – that wasn't said aloud – but always fear at the higher level: what political consequences will this have? And that assessment was always made. They never said it directly, but I always felt it. Political consequences. Like, this is not why 'The Netherlands, Inc' went here.

Back home, Daniel's life became 'a living hell'. He said: 'Everything was an obligation for me. Every decision I made, I made it in my head with the same weight as, will I fire or won't I fire? (...) Each time I put that weight in. Well, you can't keep doing that'. Eventually, Daniel collapsed and had to seek professional help.

Officer Ted was a commander at the level that Daniel and other veterans complained about. Yet, like Daniel, Ted spoke with frustration about confrontations with reluctant superiors, for instance, when he initiated a particularly offensive operation in order to clear a certain area from insurgents and increase safety. The Chief of Defense was against the operation because of the high casualty risk involved, for both the own troops and the local population, but Ted convinced him by insisting that bringing safety would actually prevent casualties. Still, a general was sent out from the Netherlands to tell him that 'if things go wrong, you're accountable'. Ted felt they probably did this 'so that they could say, we sent someone'. Dryly, he remarked, 'So I had a sleepless night because of that "support" from the Netherlands'. He recalled what he was told just before he went to Afghanistan:

> 'Don't move too much, just make sure the flag is planted'. That is really what was said to me. Then, you realize that this is actually the only thing of interest that counts back in the Netherlands: scoring internationally. (...)Kick the can down the road; plant the flag; the Netherlands are in the game. What do we want to achieve in this country? That's not an interesting question for politics.

In Ted's experience the Dutch military leadership did not care about the situation in Afghanistan as much as it cared for political support.

Similarly, officer and then Battle Group commander Mark voiced frustration about being prohibited from cooperating with a militia leader who had turned out to be corrupt and violent to people from tribes other than his own (see also De Munnik and Kitzen 2012, p. 157). 'You can't work with [him], because the Dutch government called him a criminal, but on the ground you see he's an important partner with (…) about a thousand well-armed soldiers', Mark told me. 'What do you do? Do you say, I won't pay you anymore, you're not my partner anymore? Just like that? Knowing that afterwards I'll get IEDs in my area every day, while he always stuck to our agreements and made sure that we could drive from A to B safely?'. Mark said, 'I understand the Dutch government's idea, and I have similar values and norms, but on the ground it just looks different from what it looks like in political The Hague'.

Complicating the situation further, some veterans maintained that the Dutch should have cooperated even less with dubious local figures than they did. Military nurse Niels, for instance, could not see cooperating with corrupt warlords who abused local boys as a way to win 'hearts and minds'. At the same time, he believed that the Dutch had not always fought hard enough.

> If you don't have to fight, you should talk. But if you have to fight, you should fight hard. In the Netherlands, in politics, you can't say that out loud. (…) Those moments when we had to fight, I believe, we should have either fought harder or outmaneuvered [fighting]. One of the two. Now it was just putting Band-Aids on bullet holes.

Although Niels' view of the approach they should have taken somewhat opposed Mark's, both maintained that going half-way was the worst thing to do. Like Mark, Niels concluded that 'there is a wonderful idea in The Hague, in an ivory tower, but in practice it's very different'.

'Is this winning hearts and minds?'

Alongside imposed reticence, many TFU veterans were frustrated by the strategy of winning 'hearts and minds'. Though most believed in the importance of getting the local population on your side, they could not get their heads round the 'stupidity' of some of the 'winning' things they had to do. As then Marine Donald for instance cynically related, some units had to patrol highly dangerous routes and 'hand out pens-and-shit in remote villages'. Several veterans, discovered that even after they had won the population's hearts, 'you [still] don't have their minds'. Former private Lars put it as follows.

> They don't want to talk to you, or they lie to you. (...) You would rather side with someone who kicks you than with someone who gives you a cookie. That's what these people did. And who can blame them? (...) What does ISAF do? Well, ISAF walks around, maybe builds a water pump, and then we leave. The Taliban don't leave.

Due to such complexities, many veterans were unsure about the extent to which their approach truly helped get the population on board, wondering 'is this winning hearts and minds?'

Meanwhile, the veterans who did have confidence in the chosen approach also disproved of certain politically imposed obligations. Ted, for instance, lamented 'the idiocy' of the Dutch government prohibiting Dutch soldiers to cooperate with the US-led troops on Operation Enduring Freedom. While it was supposed to ensure that the Dutch focused on reconstruction and stayed out of the US War on Terror, according to Ted, the result was counterproductive. He explained that US troops would often be 'pounding through villages' where he had been planning to carry out reconstruction, remarking that 'you create your own Taliban like that, rather than trying to conquer hearts and minds'. To prevent these troops 'from doing things that'd spoil my operations', he had to 'streamline our operations'. Therefore, he frequently went against the mandate to cooperate with OEF's commander anyway, which helped him to 'create something long-term'. Still, when a parliamentary commission visited him in Uruzgan, he noted with disappointment, the commission was mainly interested in 'how many water pumps we had installed', because, he suspected, 'that's nice for national consumption'.

The story of then private Servie offers a tangible example of how confusion about the way the Dutch tried to win 'hearts and minds' aggravated an already distressing deployment experience. In a Dutch TV series (Kruispunt TV 2016), he recounts that when he was stationed in a house compound, every night he was on watch duty he heard a boy of about fourteen crying. He was a bacha – known as a 'chai-boy' to Western soldiers – a boy sold to wealthy, powerful men for entertainment and sex (see also de Lind van Wijngaarden and Rani 2011, Schut and van Baarle 2017). During the day, Servie often saw the boy watching him.

> I often thought to myself, he's asking for help. And you couldn't do anything. You couldn't say, like, let's just take him with us and protect him. And then you're sitting at your post in the evening and just hear the kid crying. What a harrowing sound. And... you feel... so fucked up. You come back, and then the colleague who takes your place tells you that that kid shot himself in the head with an AK that day. Then you think to yourself, I should've done something. But, I wasn't allowed to. And later you come home, and you start looking into it – maybe I should've done that sooner – but then you start hearing that it was not allowed under the Taliban regime. Abusing boys, you'd get killed for that.

> We put a police chief there, under our NATO regime, and it could happen all over again. These things are so contradictory, they eat at you.
> (Kruispunt TV 2016, translation TM)

Ten years later, Servie wrote the following on his Facebook page (quoted with permission): 'I/we didn't do nothing to stop the injustice this boy was subjected to……. instead I obeyed orders like a good soldier. (…) I just closed my eyes and pretended it didn't happen. Now this boy is one of the demons that haunts my dreams every night for the past 10 years'. Back home, Servie felt great sadness, which soon changed into anger and paranoia: he suspected his close ones of trying to do something to him (Bulters 2016). Eventually, Servie sought help. He was diagnosed with PTSD and was given an assistance dog, which now wakes him up before he wakes himself with his own screams, dreaming of the events in Afghanistan. In his nightmares, the boy and other dead people still approach, asking 'Why did this happen?' (Kruispunt TV 2016).

'The bigger picture': Denial of One's Experience

Many veterans said that the higher levels had not taken their views seriously, both during and after the mission. Instead, they said, their superiors frequently evoked 'the bigger picture' to dismiss differing opinions. Several former privates, for instance, voiced frustration about senior officers' insistence that TFU had made much progress regarding safety, despite what they had seen in Uruzgan. As one put it, the safety of which higher levels spoke was a matter of 'false safety, false virtue' *('schijnveiligheid, schijnheiligheid')*. Senior officers criticized the fact that while they tried to understand the government's interest in maintaining international alliances and public support, the political realm did not take their own insights and concerns seriously.

In a Dutch documentary filmed in Afghanistan in 2006 (Franke 2006), a NCO utters the following cynical words. 'Many soldiers, and I'm thinking mainly of commanders, are quickly forced to do politics at their level instead of practicing their profession. (…) Now you see that permission has to come from The Hague for almost every assignment; (…) the armchair warriors have an opinion on everything' (translation TM). In the same documentary, an intelligence officer voices the following criticism.

> When 90% of the soldiers here say, like, listen, there is a buildup of Taliban, then you should take it seriously. And the situation is (…) that The Hague decides, no, that's not the case, and so nothing, nothing's done about it (…) because their intelligence says it's not needed and it isn't all that bad. [Our intelligence] is partially put aside and they make up a politically sound story to sell to parliament, with all the possible consequences for the men on the ground here (translation TM).

On the day the intelligence officer said this, a Dutch unit hit an IED.

The criticism voiced in this documentary resonates with what many veterans told me. Then private Maarten, for instance, said that even if he knew in advance that political stories were often different from reality, he was still surprised by how big this difference was. 'That it would be censured *that* much, I really didn't know', he told me. 'At one point, we had moments when it really went crazy. But then I called my parents, and they said "We just saw on the news how well it's all going over there". Then I thought, how is this possible! A crazy-ass war is going on here, and in the Netherlands, it's all fine'.

Several veterans said that they had been ordered to keep quiet about their experiences when they phoned home because information 'could fall into the wrong hands'. According to then NCO Daniel, however, those 'wrong hands' were not only the Taliban's but also 'the media's hands' because, meanwhile, he and his colleagues read in a newspaper that their commander had said, 'There have been sporadic engagements but it's not that bad'. As Daniel said, soldiers tell each other that 'our biggest enemies are not outside the gate, but above us, that's who our biggest enemies are'. Many veterans spoke of similar experiences, in which they felt 'betrayed' by the higher levels. Though they agreed they were not in the best position to judge issues, such as how much their mission had contributed to the reconstruction of Uruzgan, they felt that what they had seen had often been denied or distorted under the guise of 'the bigger picture'.

A Desire to be Taken Seriously

The veterans who eventually sought help to cope with the distress they developed nearly all remembered the help-seeking process as a struggle. It took most veterans a battle 'to finally admit to myself I needed help', and another battle 'to actually get help'. On the one hand, many veterans praised the fact that in recent decades, significant strides have been made with respect to aftercare. On the other, many were angry about the many things that had gone wrong in their case, including no response to their requests for help, lost files, and 'being sent from pillar to post' in general. Speaking of this, a good number of veterans said that they thought the military organization at large was more concerned with financial interests than their personal well-being.

Several veterans emphasized that most of the military mental health care workers they met had good intentions, but good intentions were not enough to keep the system from failing. Former NCO Bas, for instance, told me that 'you first have to cross a gigantic dead-end labyrinth to eventually hear that you should have taken another labyrinth'. He could not understand that in Afghanistan, he could be sent 'to look at the stone where a Tali-dress [a man wearing traditional dress code] had called his mother', whereas in the Netherlands, the

organization seemed unable to keep sight of its own veterans. He felt that in return for his loyalty to the military, he had received only 'slices of crap in my neck'.

On several occasions I directly observed tension between veterans and an organization, for instance at a symposium for military professionals where I was invited to speak about moral injury. At one point, a veteran in the audience asked why moral injury is not an officially recognized illness, to which I responded that it is still a relatively new concept and that an additional challenge pertains to whether or not moral injury should be understood as a mental disorder. A military officer then stood up and said that he often had to deal with veterans without PTSD who demanded a PTSD diagnosis only because they wanted money, and that he thought this was the downside of turning something into an official diagnosis. At once, another veteran jumped up. He exclaimed angrily that he would give back his military invalidity pension straight away in return for an accurate diagnosis of his problems. As was the case for this veteran, underlying expressions of anger about the military mental health care system generally were the veterans' anxious call to be taken seriously in their problems.

TFU, ISAF: Political Practices

The above section showed that while TFU soldiers were in considerably better circumstances than their Dutchbat colleagues, the TFU mission was certainly not without its problems. This section tries to understand these problems in their political context. First, it discusses the deployment experience of TFU veterans in the context of political conflicts and compromises made before and during their mission. Second, it discusses their homecoming experiences in relation to political silence in the aftermath of the mission.

The Mission: Conflicts and Compromises

When TFU veterans experienced distress, it often involved an inability to act in the face of human suffering. Similar to Dutchbat veterans, TFU veterans mentioned powerlessness and senselessness, and confusion as to whether they had actually helped or abandoned the local population. They also spoke of feeling abandoned by the political leadership. In contrast to Dutchbat veterans, however, they did not direct blame primarily at formal restrictions such as their Rules of Engagement. Instead, they blamed the informal influence of political desires and sensitivities. Many veterans felt they had only been sent to Afghanistan 'to plant the flag' and do things 'nice for national consumption', not to actually achieve anything in the country.

What happened at the political level to make this possible? The soldiers' difficulties can partly be related to the lack of clarity on their mission objectives. In the decision-making

process leading up to the mission, what exactly was supposed to be achieved in Uruzgan was never properly addressed (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015, Amersfoort 2016, Hekman 2017). The decision-making process centered on *how* Dutch troops would be deployed to Uruzgan before the decision-makers properly discussed what they would need to achieve in the region and why they would want to go there in the first place (Grandia 2015, pp. 121–5; 206). One decision-maker later acknowledged, 'It was more important to provide troops for at least two years instead of achieving a certain objective like a stable environment' (cited in Grandia 2015, p. 135, translation in original). Consequently, troop size, budget and time frame determinations were based not so much on the mission objectives and the situation in Uruzgan – still unclear – but on the political situation in the Netherlands (Grandia 2015, pp. 121–5; 206, Kamminga 2015).[5] The first rotation of soldiers was sent to Uruzgan without an overarching plan, which was left up to the commanders in the field to decide (cf. Grandia 2015, pp. 139–40, Amersfoort 2016, Hekman 2017).

Besides lack of clarity regarding the mission objectives, the experience of TFU veterans can be connected to a discrepancy between the political framing of the mission and Uruzgan's operational reality. While the Dutch government pointed out from the start that the mission could not be categorized as either a combat or reconstruction operation, it also insisted that the emphasis would lie on reconstruction (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010, Klep 2011). In theory, the dichotomy of combat versus reconstruction existed only in Dutch debates, but because it had become political and public reality, the consequences of the dichotomy affected the military reality (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Klep 2011, Grandia 2015, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). There were formal consequences – such as the imposed non-cooperation between ISAF and the US-led OEF troops – and informal consequences, namely the fear of political repercussions that was generally not explicated but felt at all levels of the military organization. The veterans' stories indicate that the reticence of many commanders not only prevented casualties but also created risky situations. For instance, as an evaluation of the mission also points out, it 'resulted in time-consuming verification procedures to make sure that Dutch conditions had been met before (air) support could be given' (Ruijter *et al*. 2011, p. 47). Moreover, it caused commanders to withhold information to the Netherlands about what really took place in Uruzgan.

As in the Dutchbat mission, the problems in the TFU mission (lack of clarity on mission objectives and discrepancy between political framing and military reality) can in turn be linked to two larger unresolved issues. To start with the first, the objectives of the mission seem to have remained vague because, both nationally and internationally, its purpose

5 It might be worth noting that the limited number of TFU troops was a 'self-inflicted wound', as initially the military staff demanded no more than 1000 troops. However, it is also worth noting that this was done to ensure political support for the mission (Grandia 2015, p. 122).

remained unclear, and it is virtually impossible to formulate clear goals without having a clear purpose. At the international level, the contentious relationship between the ISAF mission and War on Terror produced confusion. Although the ISAF mission and its allegedly humanitarian objectives were officially separate from the War on Terror, it existed only on account of the US invasion in Afghanistan and the US-enforced regime change (Ducheine and Pouw 2012, Pounds *et al.* 2018), which made its legitimacy questionable and purpose ambiguous.[6] At the Dutch national level, this lack of clarity was compounded by a lack of political consensus on the reasons for sending Dutch troops to Uruzgan. The decision to send troops to Afghanistan was motivated by the desire to present the Netherlands as a trustworthy partner of NATO and the US, but the specific purpose of being in Afghanistan was less clear (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015). Among those involved in the decision-making process, the assumed purpose varied between 'prevention of terrorism on Dutch soil, the development [of] Uruzgan, eliminating the Taliban, support for the facilitation of democracy in Afghanistan, etcetera' (Grandia 2015, p. 125). According to military historian Klep, it was more important for the Dutch government 'that the Netherlands was present in southern Afghanistan, than that it was clear what exactly had to happen' (Klep 2011, p. 191 emphasis in original, translation TM).

Notably, since 1995 the Dutch government has used a decision-making framework specifically designed to prevent ill-considered decisions on military intervention. This 'Assessment Framework' *('Toetsingskader')* was introduced just before the fall of Srebrenica and revised in 2000, partly because of that tragedy (TK 2014). However, the framework was not used as intended. In theory, it should guide the decision-making process with a range of political and military questions, concerning the mandate, feasibility of the mission, use of force, and safety issues with regard to the Dutch troops (Wessel 2008). In practice, the decisions regarding whether and how to deploy troops to Uruzgan had already been taken, and the Assessment Framework was mainly treated as a checklist procedure. The framework thus became an end in itself rather than a means for decision-making (Klep 2011, p. 191, Grandia 2015, p. 149).

Besides lack of clarity on the mission's purpose, a second unresolved issue concerned the tensions between the government's wish to send troops to Uruzgan and the parliamentary and public fear that the mission would become a war-like operation. Throughout the mission, parliamentary and public debates centered on whether it would be a 'combat mission' or a 'reconstruction mission' (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). Increasing criticism that it was a combat operation disguised as a reconstruction mission eventually played

6 In 2001, shortly after the infamous 9/11 attacks claimed by al-Qaeda, US-led troops invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban government. Although the US justified the invasion as a legitimate self-defense under UN Charter, it occurred without UN authorization. After the Taliban government was toppled, the UN did authorize the establishment of ISAF and its objective to secure the environment in and around Kabul and help with the reconstruction of Afghanistan in support of the newly established government (Grandia 2015, pp. 81–7, Pounds et al. 2018, p. 211).

a significant role in its termination in 2010 (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). Yet, importantly, it was not only aversion to fighting that engendered this criticism, but the government's failure to provide a compelling explanation of the mission (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016). The persisting criticism, then, seems partially a result of the first issue of lacking clarity on the mission's purpose.

The Aftermath: Seeing the Bigger Picture or Closing one's Eyes?

As for the aftermath, one of the biggest problems revealed in veterans' accounts was the lack of political acknowledgment of the problems they had faced. While their deployment had left them wondering how far political intentions had gone beyond 'just plant the flag', they felt that critical questions about their mission were too often avoided or dismissed by references to 'the bigger picture'. Likewise, with respect to mental health problems, they felt that the political leadership was more concerned with saving face and money than taking their problems seriously.

Indeed, in debates on whether or not the mission had been successful, the government has always rejected criticism and insisted that progress had definitely been made (see e.g. De Volkskrant 2011, Wansink 2015, Hekman 2016, Lighthouse Reports 2016). With respect to criticism about the discrepancy between political rhetoric and military reality, however, politicians did agree that that 'haven't been convincing enough' (quoted in Grandia 2015, p. 148). That said, they also sidestepped other criticism. As Van der Meulen and Grandia argue, 'to suggest that in essence it was a failure of strategic communication is indirectly to claim that deep down the cause itself and its translation in a lengthy military operation, was or should be beyond doubt and discussion' (Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, p. 29). By pointing out and taking responsibility for failing to represent the mission properly, political leaders implicitly dismissed criticism of the mission itself as invalid.

In relation to this, it might be worth considering a previously discussed instance in detail. The previous section quoted an intelligence officer stating in a documentary that, 'in The Hague', local intelligence was sometimes dismissed as 'it's not that bad' in favor of 'a politically sound story (...) with all possible consequences for the men on the ground'. This documentary led to parliamentary questions, which the government answered by declaring that both 'in the area of operations and elsewhere, the aim is to get as complete a picture as possible of the situation in the area' and that the Special Forces 'are a special unit with a specific education and tasks' which 'sometimes can lead to less insight into the more nuanced and sometimes more reserved method of the commander of the TFU in Uruzgan' (TK 2007, pp. 129, translation TM). While it seems justifiable to state that soldiers on the ground cannot see what actors at higher levels do see, using 'the bigger picture' like this invalidates the perceptions and criticism of the lower ranks.

With respect to veterans' complaints about the military's mental health care system, the non-availability of information on this issue makes it harder to analyze their experiences in a broader context. Clearly, over the years, the Ministry of Defense has considerably improved its mental health care system (Vermetten and Olff 2013). Yet, it has also been acknowledged that notwithstanding the improvements made, in 2012 the mental health care policy was still 'too fragmented' and so veterans were often still sent from 'pillar to post' (TK 2012, p. 4). Since then, it must be noted, many additional regulations[7] have been set in place, but the experiences of most veterans date from before these regulations went into effect. In general, it is important to note that military mental health care by definition is a practice in which personal concerns may conflict with organizational and political interests (Bourke 1999, Pols and Oak 2007). The task of mental health professionals in the military has always been more complex than simply serving the interests of soldiers. Historically, their main task was to maintain combat readiness (Bourke 1999, Pols and Oak 2007). While recent decades have seen increased attention for the care of individual soldiers as clients, it seems that military mental health care will always have the dual aim of serving both the soldier-client and the military organization, which may lead to conflict.

Parallels between Dutchbat and TFU: Perceived Political Betrayal, Seeking Reparation

Having zoomed in on the Dutchbat and TFU missions separately, in this section I compare the two cases and reflect on several overarching issues that both the missions and the veterans' responses to them had in common. This leads me to suggest that perceived political betrayal and resultant searches for reparation are important elements to consider in moral injury theory.

Unresolved Issues

Almost all the interviewed veterans from Dutchbat and TFU, both with and without distress, spoke about how political problems and failures had adversely affected their mission. Yet, the way in which they did differed. Veterans who had not directly experienced disturbing situations that they related to political problems spoke about it with only mild frustration or even in a shoulder-shrugging manner, but those scarred by such experiences expressed

7 In 2012, the Veterans Act ('*Veteranenwet*') was signed into law, solidifying the government's special duty of care of veterans, including soldiers with deployment experience still in active service, and the Veterans Decree ('*Veteranenbesluit*') of 2014 formulated rules for this duty. A national office for veterans ('*Veteranenloket*') was also established in 2014, ensuring that veterans have somewhere central to go for coordinated assistance.

profound pain and anger. Regarding the differences between Dutchbat and TFU veterans, the former generally reported a stronger sense of political failure than the latter, both with respect to deployment and aftercare issues. These differences partially explain why many Dutchbat veterans filed judicial claims against the Dutch state while most TFU veterans did not, and why the veterans who filed a claim had all developed distress.

Apart from these differences, the stories of Dutchbat and TFU veterans were remarkably similar. Speaking of morally distressing situations, both groups often mentioned the inability to act in the face of human suffering. This experience engendered feelings of powerlessness and senselessness, and confusion as to whether they were actually helping or rather letting the local population down. Both groups also spoke of feeling abandoned by the political leadership. With regard to the aftermath, one of the biggest issues that emerged in the accounts of both groups was the lack of political acknowledgment of the problems they had faced. Consequently, both groups voiced demands for 'truth' or at least a desire to be taken seriously, with Dutchbat veterans filing judicial claims to demand recognition and compensation.

In short, there were more similarities than differences in the stories of the Dutchbat and TFU veterans. This is remarkable considering that at first glance, their missions were different. Dutchbat was a 'blue helmet' peacekeeping mission while TFU's mission was a 'green helmet' counterinsurgency operation involving combat. The TFU mission had a clearer mandate and more resources and opportunities available. However, further analysis of the missions showed that, at a fundamental level, they did indeed have far more in common than not (see also Table 3).

Both Dutchbat and TFU missions demonstrated:

- discrepancies between the why (overarching purpose), what (objectives) and how (resources and opportunities) of the mission;
- ambiguity regarding the why, what and how of the mission;
- discrepancies between soldiers' operational experience and political narratives, before, during and after the mission;
- lack of political acknowledgment of the issues and thus of the role of political practices in distressing experiences.

The Dutch government, international actors, parliament, the public and the military leadership all played roles in these issues. All had different interests and perceptions, which led to actual conflict or risked conflict. The conflicts were often avoided or resolved by compromises, for instance, by caveats or intentional ambiguity in the mission mandate. While compromises smoothed the disagreements between actors, they did not truly solve the problems, but only created new ones, such as those listed above. That is, in practice, compromises often did not mean that actual synthesis was achieved – that conflicting views

and interests were truly reconciled – but rather, that conflicting views and interests were handed down or left to the lower levels to deal with.

Besides conflicts and iatrogenic compromises, there was the problem of silence. In the case of the Dutchbat mission the political leadership initially kept quiet about problems with the mandate, and only acknowledged its own responsibility when it could declare it had ensured that future soldiers would no longer be deployed under an impossible mandate. That is, the political leadership acknowledged the problems in a manner that limited their responsibility to avoiding the same problems in future missions, turning them into outdated 'lessons learned' already applied in policy. These issues were taken out of a narrative of blame and inserted into a narrative of progress (see also Rijsdijk 2014). Likewise, for TFU's mission, the political leadership evaded criticism by evoking 'the bigger picture' and rephrasing problems as 'we haven't been convincing enough'. In both missions, moreover, criticism was avoided by refocusing deployment-related distress on mental health care. Mental health care is about better training, good aftercare, and if necessary, therapy, and not about improving a mission's mandate or the political narrative of the mission. Looked at through a mental health care lens, the solution, and thus the problem, lies in soldiers' resilience, not in political practice.

Table 3: Political problems regarding the Dutchbat and TFU mission

	Dutchbat, UNPROFOR	**TFU, ISAF**
Veterans' experiences	'Pretend play': powerlessness and senselessness	No permission to fire, 'just make sure the flag is planted': powerlessness and senselessness
	'Left to our fates': abandoning and being abandoned	'Is this winning hearts and minds?': abandoning and being abandoned
	'A knife in the back': suckered and let down in the mission's aftermath	'The bigger picture': denial of one's experience in the mission's aftermath
	Demanding truth and compensation	Desire to be taken seriously
Unresolved issues regarding the mission	Discrepancy between goals (demilitarization, etc.) and resources (resources for peacekeepers)	Discrepancy between mission frame (reconstruction) and operational experience (reconstruction and combat)
	Ambiguity regarding the mission (what is a 'Safe Area'? what are we allowed to do?)	Ambiguity regarding the mission (what to do besides plant the flag?)
	Lack of acknowledgment of these problems and their micro-level impact	Lack of acknowledgment of these problems and their micro-level impact
Larger unresolved issues	National and international: conflicts between felt moral obligations ('something must be done') and fear of undesired consequences ('unfeasible mission')	National and international: conflict and diffusion as to the mission's purpose (national security, NATO obligations; the Afghan people, etc.) and nature (reconstruction and/or combat)

Political Betrayal and Reparations

Considering the veterans' experiences in relation to the above issues makes it possible to better comprehend their responses. When problems at the political level remain unresolved, they are likely to affect soldiers at the micro-level. As the previous section discussed, many interviewed veterans said that on deployment they developed the feeling that they were acting in a 'charade' or 'puppet show', a feeling which Lifton has aptly called the experience of a 'counterfeit universe' (1973). For veterans who experienced disturbing situations, this meant an inability to find meaning in specific experiences of injustice and a sense that they had been done wrong, whereas the political leadership denied this. Accordingly, they felt 'abandoned', 'suckered' and 'betrayed'.

Trauma scholars Smith and Freyd (2014) recently introduced the notion of 'institutional betrayal', which applies well to the experiences described here. The scholars define institutional betrayal as 'experiences of violations of trust and dependency perpetrated against any member of an institution' (2014, p. 577), a concise definition worth breaking down. Dependence is the reliance on a person or institution for one's well-being and safety (Freyd 1996, Smith and Freyd 2014). Trust is the expectation that this other will be benevolent, or at least do no harm, while, by definition, it also means uncertainty regarding the other's ability and willingness to do so (Lewis and Weigert 1985). Dependence and trust, thus, occur in relations of inequality and reinforce one's state of vulnerability (Hosmer 1995). Betrayal, finally, is the willing violation of this social relation, and moreover, the violation of fundamental moral principles: it is a betrayal of 'what's right' (Shay 1994). Interestingly, research indicates that people's aversion to betrayal is so great that they prefer to run greater safety risks than subject themselves to the possibility that an agent promising to protect their safety may violate this promise (Koehler and Gershoff 2003).

To work as a soldier is to work as an instrument of the state in war zones, which, thus, is to put oneself in a state of great vulnerability and to relinquish a great deal of control over one's safety to the political leadership. Though most of the interviewed veterans went on their mission with a good amount of political skepticism, they did expect the political leadership would try to prevent traumatic situations. Doing their job thus implied dependence and required trust, which in the experience of some veterans was violated. In line with the words veterans used, this might be called 'institutional betrayal', or, to be specific, 'political betrayal'.

In response, many interviewed veterans began seeking symbolic and material reparation in the political domain. All felt strongly that the political leadership owed them compensation for the conditions in which they had been placed. Some, moreover, became preoccupied with a search for 'the truth' that would force the government to admit its failures. Also, many veterans were angry about errors in the military mental health care system. They had experienced these errors as another act of negligence when they were particularly dependent

and vulnerable. Some veterans could not accept their PTSD diagnosis and the accompanying invalidity pension as sufficient compensation. They believed the government owed them more than a military invalidity pension – certainly more than a regular disability pension – because their suffering entailed more than that. To them, their suffering was not caused by risks that are simply part of the job, but by avoidable political failure. This belief led so many Dutchbat veterans to file a lawsuit against the Dutch state.

Note that the sense of betrayal was generally not without doubt and disorientation. To many interviewed veterans, their mission was not just about political betrayal, it was also the best experience they had ever had; many would give anything to go on another mission. Also, while they felt the political leadership had done wrong, they did not always know what the right course of action would have been. They seemed unsure of the extent to which responsibility for their actions was internal or external. Still, just as their guilt, though often accompanied by profound confusion, had triggered an urge to make amends toward others, their sense of betrayal caused a need for the political leadership to make reparations toward them.

‘PTSD’ and ‘Moral Injury’ as Double-Edged Swords

As various scholars argue (e.g. Shephard 2001, Withuis 2010), recent decades have seen a shift from a tendency to accept pain as a tragic part of life to the idea that, when a bad thing happens, someone is responsible for it. Accordingly, a shift has taken place from the view that suffering is to be endured quietly to a ‘trauma culture’ of openly assuming victim status (e.g. Shephard 2001, Withuis 2010). At first glance, then, veterans’ judicial claims against the Dutch state may seem a symptom of this cultural development. Such an explanation, however, while valid in a general sense, is too simple. Veterans’ claims generally did not start from the notion of trauma, but from a sense of betrayal. Usually they accepted their PTSD diagnosis with great reluctance and mixed feelings, and used it to demand recognition and compensation not only because they thought that PTSD deserves recognition and compensation, but also because they believed that their particular problems were caused by political failures. That is, the PTSD label offered them a culturally accepted way to appeal to political leaders to take accountability for these failures. To repeat the words of a Dutchbat veteran quoted earlier: ‘Doesn’t somebody have to pay for the mistakes back then? The only way you have, is to demand compensation’. Ironically, the medical language of PTSD allowed veterans to go *beyond* the individualizing and depoliticizing boundaries of medical models and sue the political leadership for their suffering. These veterans, then, should not only be regarded the product of a ‘trauma culture’, but as political agents strategically using the culturally acknowledged concept of trauma as a political weapon.

At the same time, once veterans accept labels such as 'trauma', 'PTSD' and 'moral injury', these labels may come to influence their self-understanding. Diagnoses have become idioms of distress, and idioms inevitably shape the ways in which people experience themselves and the world (see e.g. Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Lock and Nguyen 2010). In fact, a diagnosis may even become an identity (Hacking 1986). The chance of 'PTSD' becoming an identity seems particularly high in military settings, as accepting the diagnosis that opens the way to self-understanding, recognition, help and compensation also means abandoning a sense of self in terms of stoic toughness. Consider, for instance, the following: 'I couldn't make myself believe that I had received a medal of valor and was now sick at home. Evidently I couldn't handle stress. My masculinity was gone' (quoted in Veteraneninstituut.nl 2017). Especially when a veteran's self-perceptions of soldier, partner and parent center on a single self-image of toughness, it seems, accepting a PTSD diagnosis may result in a great loss of identity, as it means that he has to say goodbye to the idea that good soldiers can do their job without having problems and good partners/parents never get sick and helpless.[8] When this is the case, 'PTSD' may come to substitute the veteran's lost positive self-image completely.

A PTSD diagnosis is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, because 'PTSD' has become formally and socially a legitimate condition, accepting a diagnosis can increase understanding and recognition from the social environment and offer the opportunity to demand compensation. Moreover, accepting 'PTSD' as part of oneself, although it requires accepting having a mental disorder, can help transform a self-image of bad person into a less negative self-image of a good soldier, partner and parent suffering a bad condition. However, on the other hand, the social, financial and psychological advantages of the diagnosis may also impede recovery, because recovery would mean the end of these benefits. In psychological circles, this paradox is known as 'primary gain' and 'secondary gain', which refer to the direct and indirect benefits of symptoms that may perpetuate the symptoms and thus hinder recovery, often without the person in question being aware of it (Fishbain *et al.* 1995). It seems that especially when veterans lose all their previous self-images and are left with 'PTSD' as their sole identity, they run the risk of getting stuck into a vicious circle of victimhood and helplessness. Unlike 'PTSD', the concept of moral injury allows veterans to have a damaged conscience rather than a disease. At the same time, it does carry the same risk of getting stuck, and perhaps even more so since it frames veterans' suffering as possibly appropriate. As such, moreover, it may make veterans believe that recovery and happiness is unhealthy and undeserved.

Conclusion

8 See also Linville's theory of 'self-complexity', which contends that when an individual's 'self-aspects' are closely associated, he is more vulnerable to negative affect and self-appraisal in response to life events (Linville 1987).

This chapter examined the role of political practices surrounding military intervention in experiences of moral distress. As discussed, many interviewed veterans were little concerned with political questions when they joined the military, and it seemed that their time in the military initially only reinforced their political disengagement, offering them a preventive coping mechanism to deal with potential clashes between political reality and their deployment experience. However, political disengagement could not take away the fact that their profession is directly linked to political practices, and it could not fully protect them from developing distress.

Virtually all interviewed veterans said political failures had adversely affected their mission. Yet, it was only those who related facing disturbing situations due to political failures who expressed anger and a painful sense of betrayal. Comparing Dutchbat veterans with TFU veterans, their stories turned out remarkably similar with respect to political dimensions of their experiences, and further analysis revealed that these similarities related to the fact that at the political level, too, the Dutchbat and TFU missions had much in common. Contrary to expectations, a morally distressing *inability* to act emerged as a major theme in the stories of both Dutchbat and TFU veterans, and in both cases, this inability could be related to political restrictions and problematic compromises. Consequently, veterans of both groups had developed strong feelings of political betrayal and had sought symbolic and material reparations from political leadership, including efforts to find 'the truth' about the events that had caused their suffering

These findings show that political practices are crucial to consider as potential factors in moral distress. Doing this helps one gain much-needed insight into both contextual sources of moral distress and the veterans' responses. Current studies on 'moral injury', for instance, mainly emphasize the infliction of harm and killing as morally distressing experiences, which seems to be the result of these studies' focus on conventional combat operations. As current research does not attend to the wider context of veterans' deployment experiences, it has gone unnoticed that other veterans may suffer from experiences other than inflicting harm and killing. Moreover, it has gone unnoticed that moral distress may engender reactions directed at political leadership. As my findings make clear, not only active engagement in combat but also an inability to act may engender moral distress, and moral distress may not only involve feelings of guilt and shame, but also a sense of political betrayal and a consequent search for reparation. These elements, therefore, should be incorporated in the concept of moral injury.

To be sure, as long as there is war, soldiers will be confronted by moral quandaries. In part, this is due the fact that as long as there is war, the political leadership will be confronted by moral quandaries. They will have to decide whether to send soldiers to a human emergency

even if it might have disastrous consequences, or whether to collaborate with local warlords. Such dilemmas may constitute scenarios of 'damned if you do, damned if you don't'. That said, political practices can also adversely affect soldiers in ways that are not completely unavoidable. This, however, is not always acknowledged by either the political leadership or in current models of PTSD and moral injury. The problem of such silence is twofold. First, it means that insufficient attention is paid to the ways in which political practices can cause or prevent distressing situations. Second, it means that the biggest part of the burden of military suffering is loaded onto the shoulders of individual veterans, which may be felt as (yet another) political betrayal and thus cause or amplify moral distress.

In the final section of this chapter, I considered the concepts of PTSD and moral injury in terms of primary and secondary gain for veterans. But equally important is the question of what is the 'gain' for political leadership? Although PTSD's official status as a work-related disability makes the government responsible for symbolic and material support, as a medical concept, it decontextualizes veterans' suffering as a disease resulting from the stressors of war. It keeps the focus on the psyche of the individual soldier and away from the political leadership sending soldiers to war. The lawsuits filed by Dutchbat veterans against the Dutch state illustrate this well: as long as Dutchbat veterans based their complaints on diagnoses of PTSD, they could only call out the government for failures with respect to aftercare, not for the direct ways in which its practices contributed to their problems. With respect to the causes of veterans' suffering, 'PTSD' releases the government from blame. The concept of moral injury, in contrast, enables veterans to claim that political practices have contributed to their problems. However, 'moral injury' is not (yet) an officially recognized medical condition, and this is where the dilemma of medicalization re-emerges. While the medicalization of 'moral injury' would make its judicial recognition as a work-related disease possible, this very development would likely re-disconnect it from its political context.

8

Chapter 8. Societal Misrecognition and (Self-)Estrangement: Moral Distress in Relation to Public Perceptions[1]

Introduction

'Have you ever been deployed?'
'Have you killed anyone?'
'Do you have any problems now?'

Numerous veterans told me that people typically asked these three questions upon hearing they had served in the military. Generally the veterans tried to avoid answering, finding the questions a rude testament to civilian misunderstanding of military practice.

It is well-documented that veterans often avoid speaking about their deployment. Some studies understand this silence resulting from the fact that, unlike civilians, veterans are not just eyewitnesses to war but also acquire knowledge of war 'with their flesh'. Being a 'flesh witness', it is argued, translates into feeling that 'those who were not there cannot understand it' (Harari 2008, p. 231) and in the sense of a military 'us' versus a civilian 'them' (Sørensen 2015). Another line of studies points to war's potential for trauma as a reason for its 'unspeakability'. These studies show that traumatized veterans often (subconsciously) try to banish their traumatic memories (see e.g. Herman 1967), thus regarding their silence as a type of avoidance behavior, which is one of the official symptoms of PTSD (DSM-V 2013). Shame is also known to be a reason for silence (Lee et al. 2001, Herman 2011). Further, trauma studies describe a belief among traumatized individuals that no one is capable of understanding their pain, which some scholars suggest is misplaced fear (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1993), while others assert that pain, as an utterly 'interior' experience, simply resists linguistic expression (Scarry 1985, p. 5). The idea of trauma resisting linguistic expression is supported by research in the field of neurobiology, which indicates that neurological malfunction (e.g. decreased activity in Broca's area) may play a role in people's incapability to attach semantic representations to traumatic events (Hull 2002).

The accounts I heard from veterans resonate with theories of avoidance behavior, feared misunderstanding and the linguistic resistance of overwhelming suffering, as well as with analyses pointing to a more general tendency among veterans to claim non-transferable knowledge of war. Yet, while all these explanations thus seem valid, they are limited to the veteran's psyche, and as the previous chapter demonstrated, contextual factors should also be considered when examining veterans' experience. With respect to moral distress, society obviously constitutes a relevant social context. On returning home from deployment, a soldier may recall the values he held as a civilian member of society and accordingly realize he has violated these values. Alternatively, he may initially be certain that he acted according to society's moral standards and may only start to doubt himself after public condemnation.

1 A version of this chapter appeared in 2018 as 'Moral Injury in Relation to Public Debates: The Role of Societal Misrecognition in Moral Conflict-Colored Trauma among Soldiers' in *Social Science & Medicine*, 211: 314-320.

In this chapter, I focus on the subquestion: Did public perceptions of the Dutchbat and TFU missions and of the military in general play a role in experiences of moral distress among veterans deployed on these missions, and if so, how? As in the previous chapter, here I focus on the accounts of morally distressed veterans, but in the last section juxtapose their experiences with those of veterans who reported no distress at all. I start by sketching the wider societal context in which Dutch veterans are embedded, discussing prevailing Dutch attitudes toward the military in general. Then I turn to the specificities of the two case studies. First, I examine the public criticism of the Dutchbat mission. Second, I analyze the mixed responses that the TFU mission received. The case studies will show that, despite the differing public responses, I identified more striking parallels than differences in the experiences of both Dutchbat and TFU veterans. As will become clear, both public criticism and admiration may be experienced as misrecognition. In the final sections I reflect on these findings, explaining the similarities I found by considering the common one-dimensionality of the public perceptions surrounding the missions. I argue that the experience of societal misrecognition may directly and indirectly contribute to moral distress; indirectly, by amplifying feelings of guilt, anger and/or moral disorientation, and directly, by engendering a sense of estrangement from society and oneself.

Dutch National Attitudes toward the Military

The military is not a rabble of armed bandits. It is an organization granted power by the state to operate as 'people with arms' in the name of the 'people without arms' (Rukavishnikov and Pugh 2006, p. 131). At least in democratic societies, this means that although the public may support or oppose particular operations, they consent to the existence of the military as such. In any case it means that soldiers have good grounds to claim so. Yet, the way in which society relates to its armed forces varies from one country to another.

In the Netherlands, opinion polls conducted since 1963 show that a steady majority of the public supports the armed forces (Schoeman 2008, Blauw Research 2012). At the same time, the Dutch public seems ambivalent toward the military. Between 20 and 35 percent consider the armed forces a 'necessary evil', and between 10 and 20 percent believe it is 'unnecessary' or 'hardly necessary'(Schoeman 2008, Blauw Research 2012). This seems partly because the Dutch public does not see the current military as 'serving our country' (Ministry of General Affairs 2006, Motivaction 2018). Also, it has been argued, the image of military violence does not sit well with the national self-perception of being a 'civilized' nation (Dudink 2002, Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005, Soeters et al. 2007).

In line with self-perceptions, Dutch society's prevailing view of its armed forces is as a relatively non-martial military that favors peaceful solutions over violent ones and generally acts in morally responsible ways (Sion 2006, Zaalberg 2013). Images are seldom one-on-one representations of reality, and this also holds for the Dutch self-image. Considering recent missions, for instance, it can be said that many national militaries focus on non-violent strategies of diplomacy and development (Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012, Zaalberg 2013), whereas the Dutch also used force (Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005, Zaalberg 2013).

Nevertheless, the powerful image exists. As a famous sociological expression goes: 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas and Thomas 1928, p. 572). A national self-image shapes public and political perceptions. For instance, a past image of Dutch non-martial humanitarianism informed the creation of a dichotomy between US 'terrorist hunts' versus Dutch 'friendly' methods (TK 2006, p. 18), which have been proudly but somewhat inaccurately labeled 'the Dutch approach' (Klep 2011, Zaalberg 2013, Grandia 2015). This image, in turn, has become a target of criticism in the Netherlands. Dutch media commentators used it to describe 'us' as being overly preoccupied with maintaining a sense of 'moral superiority' while caring too little about the reality (Dudink 2002, p. 44, NIOD 2002, pp. 123–4). Similarly, the Dutch Association of Infantry Officers used the image to criticize the army for losing its warrior spirit and becoming averse to risk (Van Bemmel 2011).

As this chapter will discuss in more detail, it seems that Dutch societal attitudes to the military are characterized by a degree of discomfort and uncertainty as to whether the armed forces are mostly 'necessary' or mostly 'evil'. In the case of Dutchbat, soldiers were criticized for having failed to do the 'necessary'. The Srebrenica tragedy came to be seen as testifying to Dutchbat's unwillingness to fight, and even to 'us', the entire Dutch nation, being 'too sweet for war' (Van der Meulen 1998, pp. 37–38). In contrast, the mission in Afghanistan showed Dutch soldiers willing to engage in combat, but their fighting generated both praise and criticism for being unnecessarily aggressive ('evil').

Chapter 5 showed that soldiers may cope with tensions between the military and society by interpreting the two worlds in terms of yin and yang, as opposites that exist only by virtue of each other. In doing so, they simultaneously affirm and bridge a gap between the military and civilian world, which seemingly enables them to reject potential public criticism without completely separating themselves from society. However, such rejection cannot eliminate the influence of public opinion on political decision-making and thus on the missions soldiers are sent on. Also, as will become clear, yin-yang constructions cannot entirely protect soldiers from the effects of harsh critiques directed at them, and they cannot always prevent inner conflict developing, as they cannot take away the fact that the person moving between the military and civilian worlds, however flexible he may be in negotiating the two, is still the same one person.

Public Perceptions and Morally Distressing Experiences

This section discusses the experiences of Dutchbat veterans with public perceptions of their mission and, subsequently, those of TFU veterans, by focusing on two events that each sparked much societal attention: the fall of Srebrenica and the Battle of Chora in Afghanistan. While these two extreme events are not representative of all Dutchbat and TFU veteran experiences, they are illustrative in the sense that their extremity manifests public expectations and beliefs that surrounded the missions in general.

The following two discussions – of the fall of Srebrenica first, then of the Battle of Chora – are each divided into three sections. The first part describes the public responses to the event

in question, the second part examines how veterans experienced these public responses, and the third part reflects on how the veterans' personal experiences related to public perceptions and on why public perceptions took shape the way they did.

Dutchbat, UNPROFOR: The Fall of Srebrenica

In the Netherlands, there was a clear 'public mandate' for intervention in the former Yugoslavia (Van der Meulen 2004, p. 34). Opinion polls held in 1992 indicated that 68% of the Dutch public thought that humanitarian intervention in Bosnia was justified; 63% believed that military force was permitted to enforce peace (Ten Cate 1998, p. 86). Dutch media repeated and reinforced this attitude. From mid-1992 on, media commentators began making highly morally charged comparisons of the situation in Bosnia to World War II and the Holocaust, thus strengthening the imperative that something had to be done (Wieten 2002, pp. 3382–3, Algra *et al*. 2007). For a whole year after 1993, one current affairs television program invariably closed with the words: 'And still there is no intervention' *('En nog steeds wordt er niet ingegrepen')* (NIOD 2002, p. 746). Forceful military intervention never happened but the UN did decide to establish several 'Safe Areas', of which the Srebrenica enclave was one.

The massacre in 1995 meant the end of the UN mission, and unsurprisingly brought about heated debates throughout Europe but especially in the Netherlands because of the involvement of Dutchbat. The drama confirmed the opinion of those who had called for robust military intervention, while it forced those who supported a peacekeeping mission to reevaluate their views (cf. Van der Meulen 1998, Klep and Winslow 1999). In the Dutch media, the narrative emerged 'that the Netherlands had been put back in its place, never having been a military-minded country, and had been punished for its overly idealistic ambition of wanting to be "the best student in the international class"' (Klep and Winslow 1999, p. 116). Beyond all this, the Srebrenica debacle led to sharp criticism of the Dutch soldiers involved.

Initially, the soldiers of Dutchbat III were hailed as heroes. The Dutch Minister of Defense immediately emphasized and would keep emphasizing that the soldiers bore no blame in the tragedy. But the mass murder in Srebrenica soon raised questions, and constantly emerging scandals about the conduct of the Dutch peacekeepers – of which the Minister was unaware – led the media and parliamentarians to question their innocence (NIOD 2002, pp. 2327–8). While statements defending the soldiers did appear, criticism dominated the media, including claims of Dutchbat having been 'passive' and 'cowardly' (Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005, Van de Bildt 2015). Most criticism conveyed the view that Dutch soldiers, members of an allegedly idealistic non-violent country, had had good intentions but had also been unprepared, naïve and driven by self-preservation (Van der Meulen 1998, Klep and Winslow 1999, NIOD 2002, Van der Meulen and Soeters 2005).

Among the revelations leading to public controversy was a video recording of Dutchbat commander Karremans making a toast with Mladić, the commander of the Bosnian Serb forces, at a meeting that took place just before the fall of Srebrenica (NIOD 2002, p. 2024). Another shocking revelation was an evacuee list prepared by the deputy commander of Dutchbat during the fall of Srebrenica, and a roll of film containing photos of Bosnian

Muslim corpses taken by a Dutchbat soldier (NIOD 2002, p. 2287). Yet another infamous image entailed video recordings of drinking, dancing and partying Dutchbat soldiers at a UN base in Zagreb, Croatia, where they had been sent after the fall before being flown back to the Netherlands (NIOD 2002, p. 2275). In Zagreb, moreover, Commander Karremans spoke the soon-to-be infamous line that in this war one could not distinguish between the 'good guys' and 'bad guys' (NIOD 2002, p. 2259). Then there was the story of Dutch troops driving over Muslim refugees, which Prime Minister Kok said 'dismayed' him, stating that there could be 'no question of understanding whatsoever' if this incident had really happened (NRC 1998) – which later turned out to indeed be the case (NIOD 2002, p. 2380). These and other stories came to signify cowardice in public narratives; indeed 'Dutchbat' soon became synonymous with 'cowardice' (Van der Meulen 1998, NIOD 2002, pp. 2024; 2245). The scandals fueled doubts that the Dutch soldiers had not just been cowards but had even been accomplices in the mass murders (Van der Meulen 1998, De Graaff 2006). Meanwhile, the Dutch government refused to take the blame for the drama (Van den Berg 2014).

By end 1995, public and parliamentarian focus shifted to the Dutch government, the UN and the international community (NIOD 2002, pp. 2330–1). These levels confirmed that significant constraints had been imposed on the Dutch soldiers who had also been denied international support in the fall of Srebrenica despite repeated requests (ibid). In the following years, the image of the Dutch troops shifted from 'cowards' to 'powerless victims', reinforced by additional revelations offering more context to the scandals that had dominated the public debate. In 1999, uncut footage of the Karremans-Mladić toast was shown in public, revealing a an aggressive Mladić uttering threats at an exhausted Karremans, thus fostering the belief that Karremans had actually had little chance to negotiate with Mladić (NIOD 2002, p. 2024). As for the footage of the partying Dutch soldiers, it became clear that many had been crying rather than dancing, and for other soldiers, dancing had been a form of release from the tension that had built up in the previous days and weeks (NIOD 2002, pp. 2276–7). The incident of an YPR driving over refugees also came to be seen in a new light, as an accident that happened in the immense chaos and panic of collective flight following the fall of Srebrenica, when the YPR was under fire (NIOD 2002, p. 2374, Trouw 2002).

Although public feelings of understanding and even sympathy for Dutchbat's 'mission impossible' began to develop at the end of 1995 (Klep and Winslow 1999, p. 117), the soldiers were not entirely let off the hook. In 1996, for instance, a satirical play called 'Srebrenica!' portrayed them as dumb and racist, driving over Muslims without a care (Kieskamp 1996). And in 2000, 40 well-known Dutch writers and media commentators wrote an open letter demanding that the Dutch government should take responsibility for the 'blatant disgrace' that 'Dutchbat had not made a serious effort to save lives', (Giphart *et al*. 2000).

Some critics saw Dutchbat's failure to prevent the tragedy as representative of the Netherlands at large (Van der Meulen 1998, Westerman and Honig 1998). They came to the conclusion that 'we' are 'too sweet for war' and 'always yielding' (Van der Meulen 1998, pp. 37–38). Some compared the Dutch soldiers' alleged passivity to 'our' 'spinelessness' in World War II (De Swaan 1995, Van der Meulen 1998, pp. 37–38). Moreover, as members of Dutch society, some felt jointly responsible for the events of Srebrenica and thus ashamed, not on the soldiers' behalf, but 'personally ashamed', as Dutch sociologist De Swaan said about himself (De Swaan 2004). A Dutch journalist said he felt that 'we put them on the train to Auschwitz

again' (Van den Boogaard cited in De Graaff 2006, p. 44). With articulations like these, critics explained the fall of Srebrenica as an outcome of a moral weakness that all Dutch citizens possessed: cowardice (cf. Van der Meulen 1998, De Swaan 2004).

The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) published a much-anticipated report of the events of Srebrenica in 2002. Besides extensively documenting the events, the report included a detailed analysis of how the Dutch media had become involved in 'a somewhat one-sided fixation on incidents and on the "scandal" element of Srebrenica' (Wieten 2002, p. 3416). Within days of the publication – even before the government resigned in response – various media commentators published *mea culpas* in agreement, looking critically back on their own writings. The editor-in-chief of De Volkskrant, for instance, stated that 'we, and you and I have shaped a rather stereotypical image of the Bosnian conflict and the Dutch involvement in it. We, some more than others, have offered too much morality, too few facts, too many opinions, too little analysis and too much emotion' (Broertjes 2002, cited in Rijsdijk 2012, p. 116). The chief-editor of Trouw wrote a similar acknowledgment, that at the time of the conflict, 'journalists who persisted to draw a more complex reality came under pressure within their own circle. Also in this newspaper' (Van Exter 2002).

In 2006, all Dutchbat III veterans were decorated with a 'Dutchbat III insignia', not to reward them, it was emphasized, but as a sign of recognition. A large part of the public seemed to approve this decoration, but several protests were organized as well, indicative of the still lingering suspicion of veterans (Van de Bildt 2015). Television programs treated the decoration as a subject deserving satire. One show, for instance, jokingly depicted a Dutchbat veteran saying 'if only we'd known that we would get decorated for this later, we'd have given away women and children as well' *(Dit Was Het Nieuws 2006)*. The Dutch public, thus, seemed divided on the issue.

Over the decades, a large part of the public seems to have become sympathetic to the soldiers of Dutchbat III (Algra *et al*. 2007) and recent media coverage of the Srebrenica tragedy has mostly been supportive (see e.g. Müller 2010, Outeren 2011, Lindhout 2012, Koelé 2016). Yet, articles still appear that accuse the soldiers of lacking willingness to fight (see e.g. Koelman 2015). Though most people now seem to agree that Dutchbat had no other option, some still believe that the soldiers should have tried anyway and fought themselves to death (cf. De Graaff 2006, Telegraaf 2016).

Dutchbat, UNPROFOR: Veterans' Experiences

Frustration and Anger

The stories that circulated in the media about Dutchbat after the fall of Srebrenica stood in stark contrast to the veterans' personal experience and therefore engendered frustration and anger. The stories infuriated many veterans, especially those about the party Dutchbat troops allegedly held after they arrived in Zagreb, and the Karremans-Mladić toast, filmed just before the fall of Srebrenica. Consider for instance the following two quotes.

> Well, it wasn't a nice party! Why weren't we allowed to be glad we survived? It's those press mosquitoes saying, thousands of people die and Dutchbat celebrates. Just *think* before

you say something like that. Just go and see one of us, [you'll see us] sitting at home, crying at four in the morning. They really hurt people. (…) The same thing happened with Karremans. 'Toasting with Mladić'. Yes, it all depends on the context. Sure, it wasn't the smartest thing to do, but it's not like he had anything to do with it [the fall of Srebrenica]. (Bob, then a Dutchbat III private)

> It wasn't a party. It was a release. People had just come back, they were crying, they were broken. (…) And that [picture of] Karremans' toast, you can't fix that. You always see that, never pictures of Karremans requesting air support, for instance. (Arie, then a Dutchbat III platoon commander)

Many veterans told me it still infuriated them when articles appeared stating that they had 'surrendered without a fight', or been 'unwilling to fight', that people had been 'murdered before their very eyes', or that 'the blue helmets stood by and watched the mass slaughter' (see e.g. Koelman 2015, Telegraaf 2016, Trouw 2018). Similarly, editorials considering the question 'would those men still be alive if another military had been there?' infuriated them (see e.g. Koelman 2015). Exasperated, they told me that Dutchbat '*did* resist' by taking up blocking positions. 'We tried to help the women and children' and that people were 'murdered under the eyes of Dutchbat is bullshit!'. One veteran commented, 'All these years, that's how it's been, and when you keep repeating a lie, it becomes a reality'.

Many veterans said that media criticism had influenced their interactions with friends and acquaintances. Dutchbat III veteran Tim, in Srebrenica a private, related the following.

> All of a sudden it was in the news, Dutchbat III were cowards, and had abandoned the enclave. And all your friends, who'd spoken about you with appreciation, a week or two later, suddenly started making jokes about you. (…) People have all kinds of opinions of you, people who can't make a proper judgment at all. Everybody had their opinion. At first only the media confronts you with it, but later when you go out to a bar, it happens there, too. That people have their opinions. Yes, that became harder and harder to bear. (…) 'Oh, you're one of those cowards who gave up their weapon?' Yes, and I'd get aggressive… I hated it. I really felt personally attacked.

Like Tim, several other veterans admitted that when directly accused or mocked by people, they were not always able to control their anger.

Notably, some veterans also said that their initial welcome as heroes did not feel right either. Take the account of former NCO Huib about Dutchbat III's reception in the UN compound in Zagreb, where they were sent after the fall of Srebrenica.

> I don't have the best memories of Zagreb. (…) Strange mixed feelings. You arrive in Zagreb. Well, you arrive, and you're received as heroes. It's the very last thing I felt I was. A hero. I'm not a hero. (…) I felt a certain powerlessness, that's what dominated. (…) They sent out, probably well-intended, some tree huggers [mental health professionals]. [One] says, 'So how does it feel to be a hero?'. I say, 'What makes you think I'm a hero?'. And then he says,

> 'How does it feel now that it's over?'. I say, 'Those are your words. First, I'm not a hero, I don't feel like a hero. Second, it's not over'.

Huib remarked, 'This man can't have been too pleased with me'.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the group of veterans feeling attacked by public criticism was not limited to those directly involved in the fall of Srebrenica. Dutchbat I and Dutchbat II veterans also felt attacked by the commotion surrounding the tragedy, as well as Dutchbat III veterans on leave whose return had been prevented by Bosnian Serb belligerents. Like the directly involved, they also experienced this as personal mistreatment.

In relation to this, many Dutchbat veterans seemed to feel that there were only two diametrically opposed positions to choose from: pro-Dutchbat and anti-Dutchbat. Several explicitly expressed this feeling, others did so implicitly in their comments. While some veterans agreed with public criticism of Dutchbat III commander Karremans, many forcefully defended him, emphasizing that like all Dutchbat soldiers, he was bound hand and foot, and that the criticism of him was typical of how Dutchbat as a whole was misunderstood. Similarly, while many veterans were furious with the Dutch government, some also became angry when others pointed fingers at the government. They expressed anger, for instance, about the legal claims Bosnian Muslim survivors filed against the Dutch state, emphasizing that, like them, the Bosnian Muslim belligerents – 'their own people' – had fled in the face of the Bosnian Serb attack. As this comment illustrates, some veterans felt that the legal claims against the Dutch state were attacks on themselves. Others, empathizing with the claims, noted that the survivors filing claims and those lamenting them were both angrily accusing each other of not understanding their side.

Silence

While there was much frustration and anger in the accounts I heard, there was more. Many veterans (Dutchbat I and II veterans included) told me that they had refused to talk about their experiences for a long time. When I asked why, most mentioned a combination of things, which, in the words of Dutchbat III veteran Anton, made a 'poisonous cocktail'. Like many of his former colleagues, he first mentioned the mental 'short circuit' being powerless in Srebrenica caused, second, being abandoned by the UN and the Dutch government, and, third, the many scandals in the media which 'repeated the fucking images endlessly'. Anton explained, 'Put all that together, I stop talking'. The following quotes reveal similar explanations.

> You're being called a war criminal. I didn't dare tell people that I'd been there. (Piet, then a Dutchbat III private)

> In the local supermarket, you'd get: 'How could you let that happen?' Well there you are, tongue-tied. You want to react physically, but you know that's no good either. At the time, I was in a mode that it [reacting violently] actually could've happened. (John, then a Dutchbat II private)

> You can't defend yourself. And then, you bottle it all up, and, yeah… Nowadays (…) I *have* to respond. When I read something, I can't control it, my heart beat goes up. I just struggle with that. (Matthijs, then a Dutchbat I NCO)

> I had a jacket that said 'Srebrenica'. I was called a coward on the street. (…) I walked on, took off my jacket, I've never worn it again. (Anton, a Dutchbat III private)

Public accusations, coupled with veterans' fear of being unable to control their anger, led many veterans to keep quiet about their experience. This unwillingness to talk also emerged in my research directly. Many veterans told me that, five or ten years ago, they probably would have declined my interview requests because they would have been too afraid I was going to distort their stories. They felt that people had become milder toward Dutchbat over the years, and as a result, they said, they now dared speak up. Still, many of them were suspicious at first. Several veterans admitted they had searched my name on the internet before agreeing to an interview. Moreover, two veterans I contacted angrily refused to be interviewed because 'they were done with people twisting the story'.

Many veterans not only remained quiet in public about their experience, but did not tell their families either. They did not want to bother family members with their problems, whom they believed would not be able to understand anyway. Several veterans suggested that at home, it was not the fear of accusations that made it hard for them to talk, but that questions of blame were waved off altogether. As one veteran explained, family members would often say things like 'don't worry so much, it wasn't your fault', or, 'it was over there, not here'. Consequently, he said, 'You don't want to admit you're suffering. You're angry with everyone, but you don't want to admit that you have problems yourself'.

Disorientation and Alienation

In addition to anger and silence, public criticism had a more profound effect on the interviewed veterans. Many of the accounts I heard suggested that it amplified or perhaps even caused moral disorientation and a sense of alienation from society. Take Bob's account, for instance, which was discussed in detail in Chapter 6. To repeat a quote drawn upon before:

> What can you say? People already have their opinion. I was way too afraid of confronting questions, of accusations. Like, 'you let people –', people have said this to me – 'you let people die over there'. There's nothing worse you can say to me. (…) Yes… all those people. I still see myself dragging people in a cart. (…) I dragged that cart, but I wasn't mobile anymore. I had to let go.

According to Bob, media criticism only 'added to my guilt'.

Dutchbat III veteran Erik, who was a private in Srebrenica, related a similar experience.

> Imagine King's Day [a national holiday in the Netherlands]. All the streets are packed. People everywhere, along the canals, people everywhere. A family falls in the water. Father, mother, two children. You're the only one to jump in the water to help them. Nobody moves, nobody does anything. You save the mother and children, the father drowns. You get out, and everybody points at you: it's your fault the father drowned. That's Dutchbat. You did your utmost and [his eyes well up] still, you're blamed. I guess older soldiers are maybe better at putting things in perspective, but a boy of 20 [himself], just out of diapers, he can't handle that. (...) Now people know far more about what really happened so I don't have to blame myself as much as I used to.

The next day, Erik sent me an email in which he elaborated on some of the things he had said during the interview, including the analogy above.

> Just to come back to the canal example. If all those people thanked you for saving the woman and children and didn't blame you for the drowned man, you'd feel far less miserable! Then you'd have done your utmost and you'd be appreciated! Then you'd feel less guilty, maybe not guilty at all!

Erik's email seemed to indicate outrage and lingering self-doubt and disorientation, feelings he confirmed on enquiry.

To explain how public criticism had affected them, veterans sometimes used historical analogies. Dutchbat III veteran Philip was on leave during the fall of Srebrenica but still felt accusations of Dutchbat III were direct attacks on him. He compared Dutchbat's experience to that of Vietnam veterans, to criticize the way Dutchbat III had been treated, saying that in both cases the public had quickly shifted from support to condemnation. Yet he also admitted that public criticism had led him to doubt himself, and when he did so, he compared himself to the soldiers of Nazi Germany in the aftermath of World War II.

> I get stuck in that I think, emotionally, should I have refused [going to Bosnia]? Was I... - I wasn't on the wrong side at all but at one point I got the idea, like, yeah now I know what it's like to come back like a Wehrmacht soldier after World War II and find out that you're in the wrong club. And I know it's exaggerated, and doesn't make any sense, but that's what it feels like.

Philip told me that he had been angry 'for 19 years'. He had had many sleepless nights, 'not because of nightmares, but because I was always watching documentaries, trying to understand things'. He wanted to know 'which story is the right story', but he could not find one that matched his experience. The fact that the only stories he could find felt distorted not only made an impactful in itself, it also seriously hindered him from examining his own feelings. Public criticism made him furious, but he did not want to give in to his anger because it felt egotistical 'that I'm whining about this while 8000 people died over there'. He felt guilty, but could not let himself be guilty because 'if I asked myself questions, I felt, like, I was like the rest of the Netherlands attacking Dutchbat with unfounded accusations. I can't

do that either'. As a result, Philip said, 'I can't find …, yeah, I hate the word, but I can't find closure. And it still keeps on festering'.

Like Erik, Bob and Philip, many veterans admitted that people's allegations infuriated them, on the one hand because they thought that the people had it 'all wrong', and on the other, because at the same time they were haunted by the fear that these people were actually right.

Tragedy versus 'Whodunit'

The previous sections showed that the public debates following the fall of Srebrenica affected the Dutchbat interviewed veterans in several ways. Many Dutchbat veterans were frustrated by the voiced criticism, experiencing it as distortions of what had actually happened. At the same time, the criticism exacerbated or perhaps even caused feelings of guilt and disorientation in many of them. No prevailing story matched their experience, which rendered the veterans silent and complicated their efforts to make sense of their experience, not only due to the accusatory nature of the stories, but also because of the stories' simplicity. This section attempts to better understand the difference between the veterans' perceptions and prevailing public stories, and to reflect on why the public narratives took shape the way they did.

The veterans' accounts were about the utter inadequacy of putting 'right' and wrong' in neatly demarcated boxes. The ways in which veterans framed their experiences can be seen as a tragedy. A tragedy acknowledges that inescapable situations may arise in which people, as a result of cruel bad luck and human vulnerability and error, become part of evil (cf. Golden 1975). A tragedy reveals 'a glimpse of something that men cannot accept: the truth of their own violence' (Pellón 1988, p. 40). It unmasks as an illusion the notion that good character prevents people from wrongdoing and instead tells a story of fragility and violence as inherent to the human condition. This does not mean that a tragedy absolves perpetrators from responsibility and blame. On the contrary, an aspect of classic tragedy is that the wrongdoer is eventually punished by the gods. A tragedy conveys the message that people are all flawed and capable of wrongdoing.

While the accounts of the interviewed veterans can be called a tragedy, the narrative that dominated public debates is reminiscent of a 'whodunit', that is, a detective story that begins with a murder and proceeds by unraveling the facts and solving puzzles, which eventually leads to the resolution of the crime and the identification of the murderer. Instead of relating human vulnerability to evil, a whodunit attributes weaknesses and violence to particular actors labeled 'guilty'. As discussed, even before the mission started the public debate tended to interpret the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in a framework of 'good guys' and 'bad guys', with comparisons to World War II and the Holocaust as symbols of ultimate exceptional evil (Wieten 2002, p. 3414, Algra *et al*. 2007). While Dutch peacekeepers were 'good guys' before and during the mission, shortly after the drama, which category they actually belonged to became an urgent question (Wieten 2002, p. 3414, Algra *et al*. 2007). To be clear, with the whodunit analogy I do not intend to ridicule the Dutch debates, nor to deny that on many

levels failures seem to have taken place, but to capture how public debates came to focus on scandal and addressed the question of blame in sometimes too simplistic terms. For part of the public, Dutchbat were simply lamentable victims, for another part, they were simply blameworthy perpetrators, but generally they were not something in between or both at the same time (Wieten 2002).

Of course, given that the media is tasked with oversight of government, combined with the necessity to hold audience attention, journalists are compelled to find and report 'scoops' of misconduct with a certain degree of simplification (Griffin 2010, pp. 8–9, Dimitriu and Graaf 2016, p. 17). Yet, the appearance of whodunit narratives seems to have another reason, namely the fact that Dutchbat's failure to prevent mass murder shocked the Dutch public, including journalists, especially since they had come to interpret the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in terms of World War II. The debacle assaulted collective assumptions that Dutch soldiers would not allow war crimes to take place. It flew in the face of the conviction that 'we' would not let something like the Holocaust happen 'ever again' (Dudink 2002, NIOD 2002, p. e.g. 123-4; 564; 865; 3414, Algra *et al.* 2007). A UK newspaper put it as follows. 'The nation that saw itself as the protector of Anne Frank and the inheritor of a great tradition of tolerance was confronted with the possibility that its sons and daughters had become accomplices to some of the most heinous war crimes in Europe since the Second World War' (quoted in Algra *et al.* 2007, p. 404).

Violent events such as the fall of Srebrenica, then, may damage not only the expectations and beliefs of the people directly involved, but those of society at large. Consequently, society tends to create particular national narratives to remove this threat to the status quo (Tal 1996, Edkins 2003). It defends its present order 'by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives (twice- and thrice-told tales that come to represent the story of the trauma) turning it from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained and predictable narrative' (Tal 1996, p. 6). That is, a society reconstructs events that threaten the social fabric into stories that offer 'closure' and ensure continuation of the existing state of affairs (Tal 1996, Edkins 2003).

The unsettling discomfort that the Srebrenica debacle engendered in the Dutch public seems to have provoked a desire to expel this discomfort. One way to do so was by restructuring it into a legible story of exceptional violence for which certain actors are responsible. A tragedy offers no clear answer to the events it conveys, but a whodunit does, and in providing answers a whodunit gives the notions of good versus bad meaning again. While explanations such as 'cowardice' are embarrassing, they do make sense.

Even explanations that include society as a whole, and thus oneself, in the cowardice equation seem less uncomfortable than no explanation at all. [2]

So how exactly does this public response relate to Dutchbat's experience? According to Rijs, the Dutch 'journalist was more like [the] Dutchbat soldier than he wants to admit' (Rijs 1998). The Srebrenican debacle has been widely referred to as a 'national trauma' and an 'open war wound' (Wieten 2002, p. 3414, Praamsma *et al*. 2005, Rijsdijk 2012, pp. 115–6). Indeed, like Dutchbat veterans, the Dutch public felt their own moral disorientation and (self-)doubt, as they struggled with questions as to what happened in Srebrenica and whom to hold accountable. In both groups, one might say, the events disrupted a sense of security and disturbed the self-images, and the ruptured assumptions drove both groups to try and overcome the unsettling questions that emerged from it.

However, the variance between veterans' accounts and public narratives (tragedy versus whodunit) also indicates an important difference in the ways the two groups responded to the 'national trauma'. Perhaps better said, it shows that terms such as 'trauma', though insightful, are somewhat inadequate to describe the experience of Dutch society as a whole. Let me briefly recap the experiences of moral failure and disorientation described in Chapter 6. Many Dutchbat veterans, although they tried initially, were unable to restore disrupted assumptions of good versus bad; they could no longer trust in the benevolence of the world or their own benevolence. They had lost their 'cloak of safety', to use the evocative metaphor that psychiatrist Shay uses in the context of trauma (1994, p. 185). In contrast, while the Dutch public also appeared shaken in their moral assumptions by the events in Srebrenica, they were still able to interpret these events as something that must have been caused by identifiable and exceptional factors, making it possible to keep wearing the cloak of safety.

TFU, ISAF: The Battle of Chora

This section turns to the TFU mission in Uruzgan, Afghanistan. Public narratives on this mission were generally more diverse than in the Dutchbat case. But as will become clear, they still posed problems for the veterans who served on this mission. The Dutch contribution to the ISAF mission in Uruzgan never enjoyed broad support, but it was never opposed by a broad majority. When the mission started in 2006, opinion polls indicated that between 38% and 47% of the Dutch public supported it while between 24% and 28% opposed it (Ministry of Defense 2010). The following years witnessed a slow but steady decrease in supporters and an

2 The lengthy report on Srebrenica by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) can perhaps also be understood as a narrative of tragedy. The accounts of many Dutchbat veterans and the report are both overwhelming. Both convey the view that you cannot single out specific factors or actors responsible for the events. Historian/psychologist Runia (2004), noting the overwhelming complexity of the NIOD report, explains it as deriving from a subconscious re-enactment of traumatic Dutchbat experience. Runia argues that the NIOD researchers exhibited avoidance behavior as they wanted both to address and (subconsciously) avoid the question of what happened in Srebrenica. In contrast to Runia, my findings lead me to conclude that if anything could be interpreted as avoidance behavior, it is the tendency in public debates to restore an orderly world by simplification rather than an unwillingness to simplify complex events. In any case, the NIOD report does convey immensity and inconclusiveness, which can be interpreted as an expression of a sense of tragedy.

increase in opponents. In 2010, when the mission was terminated, opponents (41%) slightly outnumbered the supporters (33%) (Ministry of Defense 2010).

As noted before, the government's decision to contribute troops to the ISAF mission was not so much the result of public calls to intervene in Afghanistan as of international alliances (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015). Still, public opinion played a role in the decision-making process. Among other factors, anticipated public criticism of the 'war mission' of the US in Afghanistan (TK 2006, p. 17) resulted in the formal separation of TFU and OEF activities (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015). At the same time, it was paradoxically expected that the mission would refute the reputation of the Dutch as 'too sweet for war' (Klep 2011, p. 77, Grandia 2015, p. 114). Both expectations turned out to be correct. While the mission's design was adapted to meet the anticipated objections, this could not prevent the rise of heated debates on whether the Dutch operation was actually a 'combat mission intentionally disguised as reconstruction mission', which lasted throughout the deployment (Dimitriu and Graaf 2016, p. 14). At the same time, news of Dutch engagement in combat bolstered the reputation of Dutch troops as a military that was willing to fight (see e.g. Klep 2011).

The Battle of Chora, which involved intense fighting in and around the town of Chora, points to the ways in which military actions affected public debates. The battle was preceded by an insurgent's suicide attack on 15 June 2007, killing a Dutch soldier and at least five Afghan children. The next day, hundreds of insurgents attacked the Chora district. Quickly, it was decided that the district should not be left in the hands of insurgents, and the intense three-day battle followed, fought with heavy weaponry (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007, Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012, pp. 82–3). Eventually, they regained control of the district. A Dutch captain involved in the battle, who had also been deployed to the enclave of Srebrenica in Dutchbat III, urged his soldiers on with the slogan 'rave the enclave'. Both he and media commentators would later recall that in contrast with Srebrenica, the Dutch had now been able to effectively defend the area they were supposed to defend (Algemeen Dagblad 2007a, Boom 2007, Eijsvoogel 2007). 'My men were extremely motivated', the Dutch captain told a journalist shortly after the battle. 'This time we *did* have the resources to fight back hard and sweep away these guys. I was surprised that they kept coming. But we stood our ground' (quoted in Boom 2007, translation TM). Indeed, the Dutch troops had robust Rules of Engagement, sufficient troops and heavy weaponry, including F-16s and Apaches, enabling air support (Algemeen Dagblad 2007a, Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012). That said, they had far too few soldiers and military resources to maintain control over the district of Chora, and by the end of 2007 it was in the hands of the opponents again (Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010).[3] The battle had caused the death of one American soldier, one Dutch soldier, sixteen Afghan soldiers and dozens, perhaps hundreds of insurgents. Moreover, dozens of Afghan civilians had also been killed, most of whom, it seemed, by the Dutch bombardments (Boom 2007, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007, Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012, p. 83).

The Battle of Chora soon became the subject of extensive media reporting (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007, Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012). This bolstered the image of the Dutch troops in the Netherlands (see e.g. Klep 2011) but the many casualties it had caused also gave

3 It never was the objective to occupy the district of Chora. Since it was clear from the start that there were far too few troops to achieve this, the goal was limited to 'frustrating' the Taliban (Dimitriu and de Graaf 2010).

rise to criticism. Shortly after the battle, the Dutch troops were confronted by the fact that the Dutch parliament demanded an investigation into the battle (Eijsvoogel 2007). Besides the Dutch armed forces, the UN, the ISAF commander and an Afghan commission for human rights also launched their own investigations (Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012).[4] Although the resulting reports did not lead to in trials, they received substantial attention in the Dutch newspapers and television programs. Particular attention was directed to the allegation that the Dutch troops had acted unnecessarily heavy-handedly, and journalists accused the Ministry of Defense of having concealed the many civilian casualties in the battle (see e.g. Marlet 2007, Trouw 2007).

Parliamentarians critical of the Afghanistan mission took the Battle of Chora as an opportunity to debate its continuation, arguing again that it had become too much of a 'combat mission' (Algemeen Dagblad 2007b, Trouw 2007). The government, however, responded by emphasizing that especially now, stabilization and reconstruction would be feasible. The Dutch could not just abandon their NATO allies (Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, p. 27). Initially, this response helped defend the continuation of the mission (Van der Meulen and Grandia 2012, p. 27). However, over time, the gap between domestic perceptions and the reality on the ground became progressively clear, and parliamentary and public opposition mounted. As noted before, this opposition may have had to do more with the initial framing of the mission (which many perceived as deceptive) than with unconditional public opposition to the use of force (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2001). Whatever the reasons, the public expected the TFU mission to be a 'reconstruction mission', and the more it became clear that it was a 'combat mission', too, the more public support dwindled (ibid). In 2010, the Dutch mission in Uruzgan was terminated.

TFU, ISAF: Veterans' Experiences

Frustration and Anger

'Nothing happens here, it's totally safe here, only very friendly people!', Dutch soldier filmed in Afghanistan said this sarcastically, expressing his annoyance about the Dutch public's wariness of the use of force in Afghanistan (Franke 2006). This soldier's sarcasm resonates with the accounts of many of the interviewed TFU veterans. Though most agreed with the prevailing criticism in the Netherlands of the US troops (who they accused of behaving like 'cowboys'), they believed the Dutch public were both naïve and arrogant in how they saw the situation in Afghanistan. The following sections discuss how TFU veterans perceived the Dutch perceptions of their mission and how it affected them, beginning with the frustration and anger that many expressed.

4 The reports concluded that the methods were heavy-handed but accorded with the Rules of Engagement. Only the ISAF commander's report found the use of armored howitzers without directly identifying military targets against the Law of Armed Conflict. However, the Secretary General and Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO disagreed with this conclusion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007, Olsthoorn and Verweij 2012).

Former private Boris, for instance, told me the following.

> Going forward strewing teddy bears, long live the rainbow, the bees, the butterflies, you know... That's how people here would like to see it. But that's not how it is. [I ask him, 'Would you like the government to say: but they are fighting'?] Well, ha-ha, politicians don't even dare say the word 'fighting'. I don't think the Dutch would ever see it like this.

Many veterans were particularly frustrated by how often people 'just had their opinion ready'. They all shared anecdotes of occasions when people, after learning they were in the armed forces, quickly steered the conversation into 'a speech on everything that's wrong with the Afghanistan mission'. It was not the criticism that bothered them – they too were critical of their mission – but the fact that someone was explaining their own field of expertise back to them in an accusatory manner, like 'Aunty Trudy who'd read about it once, sitting on the couch'.

Several veterans remembered often being asked how they dealt with 'having murdered [sic] people'. Some also admitted they had gotten furious in response. Former private Servie, for instance, (quoted in Chapter 7 on failing to stop a young boy's abuse and suicide) recounted the following.

> Not long after [I came back from Afghanistan] I went out with my girlfriend, for a drink. I was talking to someone, don't remember what about exactly, probably about my deployment. What I do know is that he called me a filthy murderer, and... [chokes up] then I got my first black out. I did things I don't remember anymore. I know from what I was told that I ... er... hit women. And I gave four men a broken nose.

Looking back, he realized that he had 'gone completely crazy'.

So, the Afghanistan mission engendered not only criticism but also admiration. However, many veterans felt that even expressions of interest and appreciation were often clouded by people's attitudes, as if the critics were 'watching monkeys in the zoo'. To repeat an earlier quote, when people heard that an interviewee was in the military, they typically asked, 'Have you ever been deployed?', 'Have you ever killed anyone?' And, 'Do you have any problems now?' The veterans found these questions sensationalist and inconsiderate.

The account of Jan, a NCO in Afghanistan, offers an example of how distressed veterans experienced questions like these. During his deployment, Jan witnessed a lot of blood and suffering. While gory things never troubled him, he did struggle profoundly with the death of a colleague, killed by a suicide bomber, for which he still feels responsible. A few weeks before this happened, Jan and his colleagues had been surprised by a man wearing an explosive belt, who changed his mind at the last moment and fled before they could do something. Ever since Jan has been troubled by the question, 'was the suicide bomber who killed [my colleague] later'. While successfully keeping his inner struggles a secret from his environment, he has not always been able to hide the frustration triggered when thoughtless people ask about his deployment. For instance, once a close relative tried to convince him to share his deployment story, exclaiming, 'You never talk about Afghanistan'. Initially,

nothing happened. Jan insisted that he did not like to talk about Afghanistan, which reason she eventually accepted. But that evening, when they were surfing TV channels and a horror movie came up, she turned away and said she could not watch such movies, which triggered him. At once he responded, 'And you ask me what I experienced in Afghanistan? You want me to tell you about pink dust clouds, about losing buddies, but you can't even watch *this*?' Jan told me about this incident with a mix of frustration and embarrassment. He clarified that he did not mean that people should be capable of watching scary movies on TV before they can ask him about his deployment experience, but that many people beg for shocking stories while not actually wanting to hear them.

Silence

Besides frustration and anger, silence emerged as an important theme in the accounts I heard. After recounting experiences of combat, civilian casualties, fear and joy, many veterans remarked that they usually did not share this much with others out of a fear of being misunderstood. One veteran put it as follows. 'I'm careful about telling things to people who can't imagine it, who'd think, "This guy is not right in the head"'. Veterans who did not report deployment-related mental health problems usually told me about their reticence with nonchalance. They would, for instance, tell me about the running gag among Dutch soldiers of responding to questions of what they do for a living by saying they are a dolphin trainer, a student of necrophilia or something equally silly. Distressed veterans, however, generally spoke about the communication difficulties they experienced as something that hurt and isolated them.

Sjaak's account provides an insightful illustration of this. Speaking of his combat encounters, the then private explained that the Taliban often fired from qalas [units of houses] and corn fields – 'you don't see a thing' – and admitted that he might have hit a civilian instead of an insurgent. Also, he commented that at the time, especially after he had lost a close colleague, he 'really wished' he had been able to see up close the guys he had possibly 'wacked'. Further, he told me how not long after his buddy was killed, his unit caught an alleged Taliban fighter, whom he had to guard. He strongly felt the urge to hit the man, which he did not do, 'because you just don't do that', but he fully understood when a colleague from another unit had not been able to resist the urge in a similar situation and had hit a Taliban fighter. Like many other veterans, Sjaak found direct questions about his combat experiences rude. When I asked why, he explained that of all the people who had ever started a conversation by asking him about this topic, no one had been genuinely interested. He sketched the following scenario.

> Okay, so imagine, I don't know this guy and suddenly I say, 'did you ever kill someone?' And he says 'yes', without blinking. Later, I go to a mate of mine. 'Listen to this', I say. 'There's a guy and he says without blinking that he's killed someone. He's fucking sick in the head, man'. It's just a nice story, so people have something to tell each other, they don't really care about it in any way other than that.

Negative experiences like these led Sjaak and many other veterans to stop telling people they were in the military.

Disorientation and Alienation

A military psychiatrist once warned me that from the perspective of the armed forces, the term 'moral injury' could be interpreted negatively as signifying that soldiers are more likely than others to commit immoral acts. Yet, when I reiterated this possible connotation to veterans, they always laughed and responded along the lines of 'but of course we are, we get sent to war!'. Some exclaimed that they could not understand how people can deny that war encourages people to do things they might not otherwise do. They called this a prime example of keeping up appearances. As discussed above, confrontations with societal perceptions not only elicited cynical laughter, but silence, too. Moreover, it made many veterans feel a stranger to society.

Like many veterans, Björn believed that people who admired the Dutch troops' conduct in Afghanistan would be shocked when they heard actual stories of combat. According to this former NCO, 'People here have no idea what all those people have experienced, what they did'. He found it understandable because 'people only know war from video games, bam-bam-bam, and when you're killed, you press the X button and start again'. But this was why, he said, it was difficult to share his experiences with people who had not been there. 'I can show video clips that we made over there, but I see that people often watch like it's a movie'.

Many veterans tied people's perceptions of military practice to societal double standards regarding the military. Former platoon commander Henk had opposed the political motives for sending troops to Afghanistan, yet had been for the mission. But in the Netherlands, he said, 'You have to come up with an excuse for why you are in the military'. According to Henk, many Dutch civilians like to see violence 'as something sad and horrible' because it is 'nice and easy', while also enjoying the privilege of having armed forces. He elaborated on this point as follows.

> We don't want to know about the price we pay for it. It's like, we want to eat meat, but we don't want to know how these cows were butchered. (...) We only want to eat meat butchered without violence, but that's of course impossible, to get meat without violence.

Note that he said '*we*' rather than '*they* don't want to know'. When I mentioned this to Henk, he replied it was not a mistake, and that 'I also know that, if we'd really follow our moral compass, we'd be in Africa or somewhere right now, where the really serious conflicts and genocides are, but that's not where our interests lie'. Many veterans, while lamenting civilians' lack of understanding, also admitted having mixed feelings about their profession.

Some veterans reported feeling confused as to which world they belonged, the civilian or the military world. Former NCO Bas, for example, wrote the following on his Facebook page (quoted with permission).

> I can't find the 'civilian switch' anymore. I don't think I have it. I don't understand lunchboxes. I don't understand that people happily join traffic jams every day, on their

> way to fancy office buildings where they walk out at 17:02 to repeat the traffic jam ritual. If I had an opinion of a colleague's behavior I'd still want to say how I feel. I could still do that but probably I'd be called into the boss' office five minutes later, to explain why my colleague is crying and hugging the radiator. (...) I left service out of anger, sadness, and frustration. I left because I thought I'd become unfit. Unfit for another deployment. I was empty. I didn't want to become a soldier who tried to avoid deployment. (...) I know so well that things will never be the same. And yet, if it were possible... I miss it.

Like Bas, many veterans no longer understood the worlds that used to be their own. Some felt alienated from both the civilian universe and the military world. As one veteran put it, they were 'stuck between two worlds', finding it hard to 'even understand myself'.

Not/Wanting to Hear About Violence

The previous sections discussed how the TFU mission elicited both criticism and admiration from the Dutch public and showed that the interviewed veterans often perceived both responses as misunderstandings. They felt both distorted their mission and this not only angered them but rendered them silent, made them feel alienated from society and caused them to feel disoriented about who they were and where they belonged. As I did in the Dutchbat case, now I will reflect in some more analytical depth on why TFU veterans felt misunderstood by the Dutch public and why Dutch public perceptions took shape the way they did.

Various surveys indicate that although a large portion of the Dutch public disapproved of the mission in Afghanistan, an even larger part perceived the veterans as courageous, or at least victims of war (e.g. Netherlands Veterans Institute 2014a, 2014b, TOS 2015). At the same time, however, only a minority of Dutch veterans seems to have felt societal appreciation. In line with my research findings, the majority of surveyed veterans answered the statement 'as a veteran I feel appreciated by society' with 'neutral' (53%) or 'disagree' (26%) (Netherlands Veterans Institute 2014c). Several factors can account for this ostensible discrepancy. First, veterans may notice negative responses more than positive reactions. Second, veterans may experience criticism of their mission as personal criticism (Algra *et al.* 2007). A third, related reason may lie in some veterans' inclination to readily reject non-military perceptions as erroneous (Harari 2008, Sørensen 2015).

However, besides military distrust and cynicism, and in relation to it, it seems that the specific narratives that are formed in public debates should also be taken into account. Consider the following result of another survey. Consider the result of another survey, which asked Dutch veterans to answer several hypothetical descriptions of veterans. The majority said that they found 'hero', 'courageous' and 'brave' 'unsuitable' (Blauw Research 2013). This indicates that the lack of appreciation many veterans reported might not just be a matter of miscommunication. Instead, it suggests that admiration in the form of romantic images have an important element in common with condemnation: both may be experienced as oversimplified caricatures.

In the experience of many veterans, most people simultaneously do and do not want to hear about their deployment experiences. They want to hear about the killing, what it feels like, and whether it is hard. Yet, veterans noticed, people often seem to expect a particular response: they expect to hear that the veteran is still burdened by the fact that he killed, or they simply want to hear a sensational story about the thrilling madness of war. Instead, veterans' stories are often about the moral complexity of violence and the utter illusion of Rambo-like imaginings. They are, for instance, about the normalcy of cheering and laughing when seeing a blast of fire, the piercing cries of soldiers at the loss of a buddy, the black humor used to cope with this loss, the easy acceptance of 'collateral damage' resulting from combat, and, at the same time, about profound feelings of guilt at being unable to save a child from abuse. Or, they are about killing in fear and revenge, feelings of brotherhood, aggression against strangers on returning home, fundraising for aid organizations in Afghanistan, suicide attempts as a spouse and parent, and simultaneous feelings of hate and 'homesickness' for war. Such stories are destabilizing; they mess up the notions of perpetrator and victim, normal and abnormal, and good and evil.

Indeed, violence in general causes discomfort in society and provokes efforts to expel this discomfort (Tal 1996, Griffin 2010). War stories are attractive, but only as long as they allow us 'both to feel a sense of our own mortality and to hold that sense at bay' (Brothers 1997 cited in Griffin 2010, p. 8). In this sense, violence is tantamount to sex: although most of us do not find it wrong by default, it may cause discomfort, and while we are fascinated by it, especially by its excesses, we are also repelled by it; in particular, we are repulsed by the idea of doing it for a living. As this analogy further suggests, the discomfort invoked by violence lies not simply in the fact that it means a physical threat, but also in that it is taboo, like in sex, a symbolic threat. Throughout history, many societies have increasingly regarded violence as deviant and uncivilized, and since military violence is employed in the name of society, its moral status has become highly contentious (Christensen 2008, Griffin 2010, De Swaan 2015). As a result, the military operates in the margins of society, where violence is to take place, while at the same time it is closely and suspiciously monitored (cf. Bredow 2006, De Swaan 2015). At the level of representation, the gore of military violence is carefully kept out of frame (cf. Griffin 2010, De Swaan 2015), and what is in the frame is 'cleansed' by romantic justifications ('hero') combined with euphemisms ('use of force', 'collateral damage', 'casualties') (cf. Christensen 2008).

So to expel the discomfort of violence, it must either be condemned as immoral, or, in order to accept it back into the realm of the normal and justifiable, it must be 'sanitized'. This can be done by representing military actions as humanitarian efforts, or conversely, as action movie scenes, and the most unnerving actions may be attributed to 'a few bad apples'. Consequently, military conduct can be justified and perhaps even glorified, while at the same time, the soldier and his violence are kept at a distance. Again, Shay's cloak of safety (1994, p. 37) forms a helpful metaphor. A cloak of safety allows people to keep right and wrong separate from one another and to keep wearing this cloak, people cannot allow unsettling complexities to penetrate it.

As argued, morally distressed veterans are no different in this respect. Like any other person, it seems, they try to hold onto their cloak of safety. Yet, in many cases it seems as if their cloak has been irreparably ruptured by irresolvable moral disorientation. Consequently,

they may feel alienated from the prevailing societal perceptions of military practice. In fact, they may start telling themselves that civilians are all 'naïve', 'spoiled' people, who 'don't understand shit about it anyway'. In this case, they start doing the very thing for which they charge public opinion: creating one-dimensional caricatures.

Parallels between Dutchbat and TFU: Societal Misrecognition and (Self-) Estrangement

As was the case Chapter 7, comparing the stories of the veterans interviewed revealed not only differences but also, and above all, striking similarities. To start with the differences, mostly the veterans who had experienced distressing situations on deployment related that a sense of being misunderstood by the Dutch public had hurt them. The themes of anger, silence, moral disorientation, and estrangement from both society and the self emerged mostly in their stories. That said, though the veterans without deployment-related distress did not say that public misunderstanding had caused them pain, many did express a similar sense of being misunderstood by the Dutch public. In line with this, their stories similarly conveyed, although to a lesser degree, the themes of anger, silence, disorientation and estrangement.

Comparing Dutchbat and TFU, it became clear that the Dutchbat veterans generally reported a stronger sense of frustration and anger in relation to Dutch public perceptions than the TFU veterans did. This difference can be related to the fact that overall TFU troops faced less harsh criticism than the soldiers of Dutchbat, and TFU troops were also admired. However, the same themes of anger, silence, disorientation and estrangement emerged in the stories of both groups. In fact, veterans spoke of misunderstanding not only in relation to public criticism, but also in response to heroic and other too-positive images. As with public criticism, they regarded such images as overly simplistic caricatures. Thus, most veterans interviewed – whether or not they had experienced distressing deployment events; whether they were Dutchbat or TFU veterans – expressed remarkably similar feelings regarding public perceptions, though it was only the veterans with deployment-related distress who spoke about this with pain.

Considering these similarities between veterans despite the different public perceptions, one might want to conclude that public factors actually play little or no role in moral distress. However, my findings indicate that the issue is more complex. On the one hand, it is possible that upon their return home from deployment, veterans will in any case experience a degree of anger, silence, disorientation and estrangement vis-à-vis society, regardless of the specific public perceptions surrounding their mission. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, studies have shown that a profoundly shocking experience may in itself lead to problems in linguistic expression (Scarry 1985, Hull 2002), avoidance behavior (Herman 1967, 2011) and fears of misunderstanding (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1993), while 'flesh-witnessing' war may lead to a sense of estrangement from the home society among veterans in general (Harari 2008, Sørensen 2015). That being said, the similarities between the experiences of Dutchbat and TFU veterans also seem to lie in the fact that the public perceptions of their mission shared an essential feature. In both cases, public debates revealed a certain discomfort about military practice and therefore created relatively one-dimensional images

of the Dutchbat and TFU veterans, thus denying the moral complexity of these veterans' actions and experiences. Below, I reflect on these parallels and their implications for the understanding of moral distress.

Both Dutchbat and TFU veterans generally felt understood by their fellow veterans, because soldiers 'speak the same language' or because 'words are not even necessary'. Yet, communicating and sharing their pain with non-veterans, including family and friends, could be extremely difficult. For such interactions, no words were readily at hand, and the words that were used did not necessarily mean the same to all interlocutors. To recall veterans' accounts of cheering when seeing a fire blast, using black humor about death, suicide attempts, missing war, and so on; what such accounts meant to the veteran in question often signified something else to the other person. Consequently, many veterans developed both anger and disorientating self-doubt, and became silent and estranged from both society and themselves.

In my analysis of how these different experiences and responses related to one another and to moral distress, misrecognition emerged as the overarching theme, a term that many veterans themselves used also in relation to public perceptions. This misrecognition did not mean a lack of admiration – most veterans turned out to find admiration just as problematic as criticism – but a kind of misunderstanding. Turning back to existing theory, my analysis led me to philosopher Honneth's conceptualization of misrecognition (see e.g. Honneth 1997, 2005). As Honneth writes, the significance of recognition lies in the fact that it is about a moral relation with others, which may be respected or violated. Misrecognition, then, is a violation of one's *moral relation* with others. Strikingly, although Honneth is in no way concerned with the notion of 'moral injury' as developed in the context of deployment-related suffering, he uses this exact term several times to describe the result of misrecognition. According to him, it is the experience of 'not being recognized in one's own self-understanding that constitutes the condition for moral injury', which he described as the awareness of a 'moral injustice' (Honneth 2005, p. 47). One could say that misrecognition does injustice to a person's experience and thus do moral damage.

As Das argues, to utter 'I am in pain' is to make a claim asking for recognition (Das 1996, p. 70). However, such a claim is not easily made. Besides the risk of being denied, another obstacle is that it can only be made with difficulty outside the prevailing narratives and frames of reference of a particular community, which can make it very hard to even articulate such a claim (cf. Das 1996). No one is completely free in his choice of words and, particularly, in the meaning of those words, because the social environment shapes and limits the words and meanings available for one's experiences. The words may be there, but their appropriateness and significance is not up to the individual. The individual has to deal with others' perceptions of what his experiences signify and what kind of person he is, and when he feels that these perceptions are distortions, the 'recognizability' of his pain and thus its 'speakability' are already problematic beforehand.[5]

5 It seems worthwhile to mention the work of Butler (2009) on 'recognizability'. Butler theorizes that people who do not conform to particular norms are quickly excluded from the schemes that determine who is regarded a subject worthy of grief, for instance in the case of non-Western victims of US state violence.

Fussell explains the unspeakability of war experiences as follows. 'Logically, there is no reason why (...) language could not perfectly well render the actuality of (...) warfare: it is rich in terms like *blood, terror, agony, madness, shit, cruelty, murder, sell-out and hoax, as well as phrases like legs blown off, intestines gushing out over his hands, screaming all night, bleeding to death from the rectum*, and the like' (1975, pp. 169–170 italics in original). Yet, while we have 'made unspeakable mean indescribable', it 'really means nasty' (1975, p. 170 italics in original). Along the lines of Fussell's argument, my findings indicate that the problem of 'unspeakability' is not only that words are unavailable but also that words (e.g. 'I feel guilty' and 'I miss war') are given or refused particular meanings. When veterans feel their words are distorted in public debates, they may choose to remain silent. As a result, their deployment memories become what Das would call 'poisonous knowledge' (Das 1996, pp. 84–5): swallowed as poison and hidden in the own body, painful and incapable of being shared with society but as such also protected from distortion.

Yet, as this metaphor indicates, even if veterans choose to remain silent, misrecognition may damage not only their moral relation with others but also how they relate to themselves (see also Honneth 1997). In other words, when public perceptions are at odds with veterans' personal experience, this may cause not only a sense of social estrangement, but also a disturbed self-understanding. Notably, this does not necessarily mean that veterans will completely internalize public perceptions: all the veterans I spoke to felt to a greater or lesser extent that prevailing narratives 'did not match'. Yet, this mismatch can hinder veterans in making sense of their experiences, as that would have to happen outside existent representations. This, in turn, may amplify or possibly even cause feelings of self-doubt and moral disorientation. Accordingly, veterans' sense of social estrangement, which can be defined as feeling cut off from society and lacking a sense of belonging, may also contribute to a sense of self-estrangement, that is, to a feeling of being removed from oneself. Indeed, the self is always embedded in society. Society offers its members a moral framework of values and norms, and thus, when one becomes a stranger to society, one may also become a stranger to oneself.

Conclusion

This chapter showed that not only veterans may struggle with the moral significance of military intervention, but society as well. It seems that the more society experiences a violent event as unsettling, the more it feels compelled to lock up the event in neatly closed 'wrong' and 'right' boxes. In this process, categories such as hero, victim and perpetrator may emerge. A hero has only used force against evil enemies and in defense of the innocent. A victim is a survivor whose potential self-blame is noble but inappropriate, and a perpetrator is simply a criminal and a sinner, who, depending on one's ideological perspective, is a bad apple unrepresentative of the military or a typical soldier. Although creating such categories may resolve societal discomfort with military intervention, it does so by denying the existence of human fragility, complexity and conflict.

Interestingly, the concept of moral injury *itself* seems to have become something unsettling, as indicated for instance in the concern raised by a Dutch military psychiatrist regarding the concept's potential connotations of immorality. In the US, similar concerns can be heard. At an annual conference on combat stress in the United States, a Marine commander said he was 'insulted' by the term 'moral injury', because it would imply that soldiers' problems are a result of unethical conduct (McCloskey 2011). In fact, to avoid this connotation, the US Marines Corps now employ the euphemistic term 'inner conflict' instead (Nash and Litz 2013, p. 368). Responses like these underscore that the concept of moral injury has the potential to reveal moral complexities that would otherwise remain unseen, and that such moral complexities arouse discomfort.

As I have made clear, societal discomfort with military intervention may have important implications for veterans' moral relation to both society and themselves. As is the case for all human beings, veterans depend on the shared narratives of society for the development of their life stories and 'the moral' of these stories. Therefore, when they feel that public narratives misrecognize their experience, this process may be distorted. Even when veterans reject rather than internalize these narratives, misrecognition is not without personal consequences. For one, public narratives may still influence the ways in which soldiers are sent on a mission and perceived afterwards. What is more, even without leading to internalization, public narratives may still hamper veterans' self-understanding. As Chapter 6 showed, it is difficult in itself to make sense of experiences for which there are no words, such as feeling guilt and non-guilt at the same time, and problematic public narratives will only add to this difficulty. Ultimately, problematic public narratives can contribute to a sense that the veteran has, quite literally, lost himself to his deployment.

Part Three

Conclusions

Part III. Conclusions: Theoretical and Practical Implications

In the final two chapters of this dissertation, I discuss the implications of my findings. In Chapter 9, I answer the research questions posed in the Introduction, summarizing the major findings and turning these into a refined conceptualization of moral injury. Also, I reflect on the broader theoretical contributions of this study and propose possible directions for future research. In Chapter 10, I discuss, in depth, this study's implications for the individual, military, political and societal level.

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Chapter 9. Conclusions: Theoretical Implications

The aim of this study was to advance the empirical and theoretical understanding of moral, political and societal dimensions of deployment-related moral distress, and thus contribute to the concept of moral injury and practical interventions to address and prevent moral distress. I achieved this by examining moral dimensions of experiences of distress, and the role of political practices and public perceptions in experiences of moral distress in Dutchbat and TFU veterans. In this chapter, I take stock of my findings, and discuss their implications for the concept of moral injury.

Main Research Findings

In order to be able to contribute to moral injury theory, I took a critical stance to the current concept of moral injury and any conceptualization of deployment-related suffering. To begin with, I explicitly distinguished between the concept and phenomena of moral injury (calling the first 'moral injury' and the second 'moral distress'), thus refraining from reifying 'moral injury' as an objective thing. I found that although the concept of moral injury is explicitly intended to address moral aspects that the concept of PTSD fails to grasp, it focuses mainly on the 'injury' while attending too little to the 'moral'. Also, as with the PTSD concept, it overlooks the wider context of deployment-related suffering. As my research focus, therefore, I chose the to-date insufficiently addressed moral and sociopolitical dimensions of moral distress, to advance the concept of moral injury.

In terms of research strategy, I adopted a qualitative, grounded theory approach, enabling me to inductively study phenomena about which existing theory is limited. My case studies focused not just on combat – the current focus of moral injury research – but also on peacekeeping. Specifically, I analyzed the Dutchbat and TFU missions, a 'blue helmet' UN peacekeeping mission met with harsh public criticism and a 'green helmet' NATO counterinsurgency mission that encountered mixed public response. I did not select a sample of veterans who matched the symptoms defined in the current concept of moral injury, but went for a more open, unspecified selection of veterans, including veterans with minor or no psychological problems at all. Finally, in analyzing the case studies, I went beyond the predominantly psychological perspective of the current concept of moral injury, and adopted a combination of psychological, philosophical, anthropological and political scientific perspectives. Together, this allowed me to examine experiences that overspill the boundaries of the current concept of moral injury and explore other than psychological interpretations for the experiences.

Taking the stories of 40 Dutchbat and 40 TFU veterans as starting points, I examined moral dimensions of experiences of distress, and the role of political practices and public perceptions in experiences of moral distress, during and after deployment. The veterans' related their reasons for joining the military, their expectations of deployment, the reality of

deployment, their experience of returning home, the distress that some developed, and how they responded to this distress. It became clear that when veterans struggled, their struggles were never confined to deployment, but also lay in the problems of resuming civilian life. Specifically, many veterans related a post-deployment spiral of guilt and anger, leading to destructive and neglecting behavior toward themselves and their loved ones, increasing their guilt and anger, and so on. While each of the stories I heard proved to be unique, together they revealed insights into more than just the variety of veterans' experiences. They also showed patterns. These patterns included many parallels between the stories of Dutchbat and TFU veterans as well as between the stories of distressed and non-distressed veterans, while the differences between these groups turned out to be largely gradual, not fundamental. I analyzed the patterns and differences I found with the help of existing theory on trauma, morality and sociopolitical aspects of mental suffering, and information about the sociopolitical characteristics of the Dutchbat and TFU mission, which generated insights into how veterans' stories related to their wider context. Chapters 5 to 8 presented my findings.

In Chapter 5, I focused on the stories of veterans who reported no or hardly any deployment-related distress, as well as on the 'pre-distress' memories of veterans who did eventually develop distress (both of which turned out to be very similar). Analyzing the stories, I tried to understand how soldiers perceive their profession in the first place and what cognitive strategies they tend to use to cope with moral challenges during and after deployment. This, in order to better understand why and when moral distress does arise. The interviewed veterans' accounts indicated that moral challenges often emerge in both 'blue' and 'green' operations. Also, their accounts showed that while the specific content of the cognitive strategies that soldiers use for moral challenges may vary, in essence they are remarkably similar. When experiencing moral tension, soldiers seem inclined, at least initially, to employ justifying simplifications to resolve the tension, relying on the belief that all situations are ultimately uncomplicated and soluble. For instance, faced with moral challenges on deployment, they may tell themselves that 'some things just happen in war', or they may employ formulas such as 'I just have to follow orders', 'it was him or me' or 'I treat them as they treat me'. Also, to resolve possible tensions arising from being both a soldier and a civilian, they may compartmentalize their military and civilian selves, prioritizing the former in military contexts and allowing the latter to supersede in others. The veterans' stories showed that soldiers may interpret the compartmentalization they employ, of which they are often aware, as the necessary burden required by their profession, which allowed them to interpret soldiering as morally right not *in spite* of the fact that they are civilians too, but *because* of it.

Simplification and compartmentalization appeared in virtually all veterans' stories, distressed or not. Yet, the stories showed that these strategies can fail. In Chapter 6, I examined the specific moral dimension of moral distress, honing in on the stories of veterans who reported moral distress. In examining this dimension, it became evident that the moral complexity of particular quandaries cannot always be simplified and that particular actions cannot always be unequivocally justified or excused. These actions were condemned. Yet, just as veterans were unable to unequivocally justify or excuse these actions,

they usually could not unequivocally condemn them. When the interviewed veterans related morally distressing experiences, their stories spoke of value conflicts in which adhering to one value inevitably means violating another, of moral detachment resulting from the overwhelming significance of a situation, and of senselessness. These situations did not involve straightforward moral transgressions (the focus of current studies on 'moral injury'), and thus do not allow clear-cut interpretations (which soldiers tend to employ). While many veterans blamed themselves or others for these situations, they often felt uncertainty and conflict with respect to judgments. That is, besides guilt, shame and anger, morally distressing events often engendered a profound sense of moral disorientation. Many veterans lost their trust not only in the goodness of both themselves and the world, but also in the very notion of good and bad. This painful loss forced them to engage in an ethical struggle against previous moral expectations and beliefs, in the attempt to resolve the arising moral questions and find moral re-orientation again.

Besides moral distress at the individual level, I examined the role of political practices in moral distress in Chapter 7. Specifically, I examined whether and how political decision-making and framing surrounding military missions contributes to the emergence of particular morally distressing experiences for soldiers 'on the ground', both during and after deployment. While virtually all the interviewed veterans spoke about how political practices had adversely affected their deployment, it was the veterans who related facing disturbing situations due to political practices who spoke about how political failures had wrapped their mission in pain. Remarkably, although the Dutchbat mission was a peace mission while TFU's mission was a counterinsurgency mission involving combat, comparing their stories revealed striking similarities. Both groups related similar themes of powerlessness, senselessness and abandonment both during and after their mission. Further analysis showed that these similarities were related to the fact that on the political level, too, the missions had far more in common than expected. To be sure, compared to the Dutchbat mission, the TFU mission had a clearer mandate, more resources available and an improved mental health care system. However, at a more fundamental level, the two missions were characterized by similar unresolved conflicts, including discrepancies in the why (overarching purpose), what (objectives) and how (resources and possibilities) of the mission, ambiguity regarding the why, what and how of the mission, discrepancies between soldiers' operational experience and political narratives, and lack of political acknowledgment of such issues and thus of the role of political practices in distressing experiences. As became evident, political compromises do not always mean that problems are solved. On the contrary, rather than achieving true reconciliation of conflicting views and interests, compromises may mean that conflicts are left to lower levels to deal with. As a result, veterans' stories showed, soldiers may develop profound feelings of political betrayal and, in turn, seek symbolic and material reparations from the political leadership, for instance by filing a lawsuit against the state to enforce apologies and compensation.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I examined the role of public perceptions of military missions and the military in general in experiences of moral distress. Dutchbat veterans faced harsh criticism, while the TFU mission evoked both negative and positive reactions. Despite the different public responses, the two groups had striking parallels, as was the case with respect

to political practices. While the Dutchbat veterans interviewed generally reported a stronger sense of frustration about Dutch public perceptions than the TFU veterans did, both groups spoke of anger, silence, disorientation and estrangement in relation to the Dutch public. My findings showed that veterans perceived both public criticism and admiration as simplistic distortions that did injustice to their deployment experience. The greater the distress with which veterans struggled due to their deployment experiences, the more they were usually affected by public perceptions. While their experience may in part be explained in terms of misguided fears and judgments on their part, it also turned out that in both missions public narratives did indeed convey rather one-dimensional images of perpetrator and victim, normal and abnormal, and good and evil, which stood in stark contrast to veterans' personal experience. Many veterans experienced this one-dimensionality as societal misrecognition of their deployment experiences, which particularly affected the veterans struggling with their experiences, leading to a sense of estrangement among them. In fact, this experience of societal misrecognition often engendered not only a sense of estrangement from society, but also from themselves.

Refining the Concept of Moral Injury

Drawing my research findings together and juxtaposing them with the current concept of moral injury, the following conclusions emerge (see Table 4). In line with the current concept (Litz *et al*. 2009, 2015, Nash and Litz 2013), my findings indicate that the feelings of guilt, shame and anger with which veterans may struggle require an approach that takes these feelings seriously. Veterans' moral emotions and judgments cannot simply be lumped together under the umbrella of subjective experience, if only because they may need different responses. The veteran who blames himself for having survived an attack while his colleague died might be helped most by having his thoughts challenged and his feelings of guilt alleviated, whereas the veteran who feels guilt for having actively hurt other people may instead find meaning most in having his sense of accountability confirmed and self-forgiveness. In other words, veterans' moral distress should not be readily explained away as misguided, but requires considering their moral judgments and emotions as possibly appropriate. This is in line with the current moral injury concept.

Table 4: The Current and a Refined Conceptualization of 'Moral Injury'

	Current concept	Refined Concept		
	Individual level	Individual level	Political context	Societal Context
Moral beliefs	Coherent system	Complex constellation with potentially competing beliefs		
Morally injurious event(s)	Moral transgression	*and/or* Perceived moral failure	Perceived political violations of trust and dependency	Perceived societal misrecognition
Moral injury	Blame of self and/or others	*and/or* ° Tragic remorse ° Moral disorientation ° Sense of betrayal ° Estrangement of self and others		
Responses	Self-handicapping behaviors, self-injury	*and/or* Ethical struggle	Seeking political reparation	Seeking societal recognition
Factors	° The event ° Belief in the self and world as good and meaningful	*and /or* ° Belief in the self and world as logical, coherent and fair ° More specific beliefs, e.g. 'can-do'	° Discrepancies between the why, what and/or how of the mission ° Ambiguity regarding the why, what and/or how of the mission ° Discrepancies between political narratives and operational reality ° Lack of political acknowledgment of aforementioned issues	° Black-and-white narratives (perpetrator; hero; victim)

Yet, my study also yielded insights different than found in other research on moral injury. Confirming existent philosophical and social scientific theory on morality, it showed that a person's moral beliefs are not a coherent system, as the current concept of moral injury implies, but a complex constellation. Soldiers are both instrument and agent, civilian and soldier, and their multiple roles come with potentially competing moral requirements. My research showed that while soldiers are generally able to resolve minor conflicts between competing moral requirements by means of strategies of simplification and compartmentalization, these strategies may fail in the case of more severe conflicts, with particular implications. My findings demonstrated that 'morally injurious' situations may involve more ambiguous and ambivalent experiences than unequivocal transgression, which, moreover, may have important sociopolitical aspects. I often found that veterans paradoxically feel both guilty and non-guilty, both responsible for their own acts and betrayed by the political leadership, both misrecognized by societal simplifications and rightly judged by society for their actions. Fundamentally, they may feel they failed morally but at the same time develop the sense that their moral beliefs and expectations failed *them*. As is the case for unequivocal emotions and judgments, paradoxical feelings cannot be readily interpreted as misguided. Rather, they should be understood as the result of the moral complexity of the situations veterans encountered.

In line with this moral complexity, my findings showed that moral distress may involve more than the guilt, shame and anger emphasized in the current concept of moral injury. Veterans may also experience the complex emotion of tragic-remorse, which is remorse about the fact that the morally best option in this situation was merely the lesser evil, and they may feel moral disorientation, which is the loss of previous certainties about wrong and right, thus a loss of the moral frame of reference and perhaps also of the moral self-perception. In addition, when veterans perceive distressing experiences as partially caused by the wrongdoing of others, they may develop a sense of betrayal, including violated trust and dependency. Perceived societal misrecognition of the experiences with which they struggle, moreover, may engender anger while at the same time amplifying or even causing self-doubt. In turn, veterans may develop a sense of estrangement from both society and themselves, involving both the feeling of being cut off from society and the sense of being removed from oneself.

Such experiences may provoke a variety of behavioral responses. As indicated in existing research on moral injury, this includes self-handicapping and self-injury behavior (Frankfurt and Frazier 2016). Additionally, my research showed that veterans may engage in an ethical struggle with previous moral expectations and beliefs. And they may seek political reparation, demanding political amends and financial or symbolic compensation. Further, they may seek societal recognition, specifically societal justice for their experiences.

Regarding types of potentially morally distressing events, the current concept of moral injury acknowledges that not just acts of commission (e.g. killing) but acts of omission (failing to prevent human suffering) may also engender moral distress. Nevertheless, the literature on moral injury focuses almost exclusively on conventional war and combat situations, particularly the impact of killing (see e.g. Bica 1999, Litz *et al*. 2009, Drescher *et al*. 2011, Brock and Lettini 2012). In the two missions I examined, however, by far the most reported distressing experience was not active infliction of harm, but *inability* to act in the face of human suffering. The potential of non-action being morally distressing, thus, should also be taken into account.

With respect to factors other than the event, the current concept of moral injury points to the basic human assumption that the self and the world are good and meaningful (Litz *et al*. 2009, Nash and Litz 2013). My findings indicated that beliefs about the self and the world as logical, coherent and fair may also play an important role in moral distress, potentially engendering profound moral disorientation when veterans are confronted by events that testify that the self and the world are utterly illogical, incoherent and unfair. The same goes for other beliefs, such as the military ‘can-do’ attitude which considers doubts, conflict and uncertainty bad things.

Besides personal beliefs, my research indicated, contextual factors such as political practices and public perceptions often play an important role in moral distress. While I described veterans’ experience in terms of *perceived* political betrayal and societal misrecognition, I also maintain that these themes are more than a matter of subjective experience. This is in line with epistemological foundations of this study, which involve an approach to human experience in terms of meaning-making processes while appreciating that people’s experiences are not just intra-psychic processes but also informed by contextual factors. Building on these crucial insights, I analyzed veterans’ stories in relation to existing

literature on the Dutchbat and TFU missions, and this led me to argue that just as veterans' own agency in their suffering should be considered, the role of sociopolitical factors should be taken seriously.

Regarding political factors, it became clear that as political decisions and narratives move down the chain of command, they affect soldiers at the micro-level. While conventional 'green helmet' war operations increase the risk of soldiers developing moral distress because of their active use of violence, 'blue helmet' peace operations increase the risk of moral distress related to failure to act. Most importantly, perhaps, is the extent to which a mission's character matches or conflicts with operational reality. The Dutchbat mission, for instance, was a peacekeeping operation to a war area where there was little peace to keep, and consequently created morally critical situations for Dutchbat soldiers on a daily basis. In relation to this, the specific ways in which competing political and public perspectives and interests surrounding a mission are dealt with are relevant. For instance, if restrictions are imposed on a 'green helmet' mission in response to political and public objections, as was the case in the TFU mission, soldiers can feel helpless in the same way that 'blue helmet' peacekeepers can feel. The other way around, if soldiers are asked to use robust force in a mission that is supposed to center on humanitarian acts, they may come to regret their actions in retrospect. Generally, discrepancies and ambiguities in the why, what and how of a mission, and lack of political acknowledgment of such discrepancies and ambiguities seem to increase the risk of soldiers developing feelings of guilt, shame, moral disorientation and betrayal. Today's military interventions often involve many parties besides the national government, including international actors, parliament and the public, resulting in conflicts and compromises. Consequently, my findings suggest, many present-day missions are likely to have moral distress-inducing problems of discrepancy, ambiguity and lack of political acknowledgment.

In addition to political practices, societal perceptions may play a role in moral distress. While it may come as no surprise that public criticism can adversely affect veterans, my findings showed that overly sympathetic representations, too, can contribute to the emergence or persistence of moral distress, because they turn veterans into a caricature. Images of hero, perpetrator and victim all deny agency and responsibility on the side of either the veteran or others, and in doing so more generally misrecognize the moral complexity of what veterans did and failed to during their deployment. As such, these images imply a certain misrecognition that does injustice to veterans' experience and hinders their making sense of their experiences. In many present-day societies, public discomfort with military intervention and related orderly images of hero, perpetrator and victim can be signaled. In some societies, images of perpetrator and victim might be most prevalent, while in others the image of hero is dominant, but their shared one-dimensional character will in all cases contribute to experiences of misrecognition among veterans.

As a final remark, it is worth explicating that morally distressed veterans are not just passive recipients of sociopolitical forces, but also active agents demanding political reparations and searching for societal recognition. In fact, it seems that the individual, political and societal levels continuously exert reciprocal influences on one another. Therefore, although Table 4 shows these levels in distinct columns for reasons of legibility, they might also be imagined as different angles of one triangle.

Moral Injury as a Manifestation of Latent Tensions

Although this study focused on personal suffering, it is also insightful in a more general sense. As a study of mental 'breakdowns', it not only shed light on the breakdowns themselves, but also made manifest underlying structural tensions and vulnerabilities that normally remain hidden. To draw on Freud's crystal metaphor, '[i]f a crystal is thrown to the ground, it will break into pieces, not in a random way, but according to specific fault-lines which, although they are invisible, have been predetermined by the structure of the crystal' (Freud cited in Corveleyn 2009, p. 87). By investigating the crystal pieces of moral distress, this study offered insight into both sociopolitical fault-lines of military practice and fault-lines of the human psyche. That is, it made manifest moral tensions that military practice and its sociopolitical aspects poses to *all* soldiers, whether or not they develop distress as a result of these tensions, and offered insight into basic vulnerabilities to moral distress that most people seem to have in common, whether or not they are soldiers.

Specifically, this study indicated that military practice almost inevitably comes with tensions between being both a human agent and a political instrument, and both a civilian and a soldier. Also, it showed that specific political practices and public perceptions may aggravate these tensions. Conflicting political interests may result in compromises that pass the conflicts to the ground level, and public sensitivities may engender distorting simplifications of soldiers' conduct in a mission. Such simplifications, in turn, may encourage the creation of problematic political compromises, and vice versa. At the same time, these processes tend to conceal themselves. Political compromises pass conflicts to lower levels in a way that simultaneously obscures this fact, and societal simplifications at once distort soldiers' own stories and render them unrecognizable. Consequently, the role of political compromises and societal simplifications in soldiers' well-being tends to stay out of the picture. At least in part, this problem is just as inevitable as the issue of soldiers having to incorporate the multiple roles of instrument/agent and civilian/soldiers. Political leaders will always have to negotiate between what is best for their troops and other important interests, while it is usually impossible to determine in advance the specificities of a mission. Military missions will therefore always be characterized by conflict and a degree of unclarity and ambiguity. Also, it seems, the public will always try to keep the specter of war at bay. Like soldiers, the political leadership and society at large will always have to deal with moral challenges related to military intervention.

This brings me to the point that people generally seem vulnerable to moral distress. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, most people hold the unarticulated belief that the world makes sense and has a certain order and fairness to it, even when they simultaneously know on another level that this is not always the case (see also Ewing 1990, Janoff-Bulman 1992, Cohen 2001). Although this belief seems particularly strong among soldiers, whom the military has taught to rely on a 'can-do' attitude, it is something that most people have in common, soldiers and civilians alike. In most people's lives, this belief will be violated many times. It seems safe to assume, then, that some degree of moral disorientation and moral distress, rather than a condition that befalls only an unfortunate few soldiers is something that many people will experience in their lives. Indeed, as suggested before, moral distress is most accurately represented not as a yes/no dichotomy but as a continuum ranging from relatively

mild, temporary feelings of guilt and anger to a profoundly destructive spiral of negative moral emotions. That said, moral distress also clearly has a fundamental aspect. In the case of everyday moral conflict, people will often successfully use simplifications and justifications without even being aware of it. But major moral conflicts, instead, may reveal the utter illusion of such coping strategies and give rise to moral distress. In other words, it makes a huge difference whether the aforementioned crystal is scratched but in one piece, or fractured beyond repair.

Moral Injury and PTSD

How do the findings of this study relate to PTSD theory? In the course of my research, many people asked me this question. Specifically, I have often been asked precisely how moral injury overlaps with and differs from PTSD, and whether particular cases are PTSD or moral injury. Yet, questions like these are not as simple as they seem. As made clear throughout this study, 'PTSD' and 'moral injury' are not distinct entities to be unraveled by science, but abstract creations of science. As conceptual lenses, they focus on particular elements of mental suffering while analyzing them from particular perspectives, with particular implications, which may change over time. Hence, this study cannot provide a single 'right' answer to questions such as those mentioned above. In fact, it showed that such questions are not always the most useful, as they tend to reify the concepts of moral injury and PTSD.

However, what this study does offer is several considerations for how to understand and approach deployment-related suffering. First, it showed that the non-moral medical approach of the current concept of PTSD is flawed. Specifically, it confirmed existing research on 'moral injury' arguing that deployment-related suffering may not always be characterized by events of life-threat and fear-related symptoms (focus of much current PTSD research), but also by moral conflict and moral conflict-related emotions, which should not readily be labeled the result of 'distorted cognitions' (as in the current DSM classification of PTSD), but considered as possibly appropriate. Moreover, this study showed that deployment-related suffering should be understood not only in terms of mental illness, but also as an ethical struggle, and not only as a disorder in the mind of the veteran, but also as a manifestation of political and societal disorder.

Together, these insights indicate that while concepts such as 'PTSD' are helpful for the understanding of deployment-related suffering, veterans' distress should not be encapsulated in a strictly psychiatric lexicon, if only because its salience exceeds the scope of what has been called mental disorder. This is not just a theoretical issue but also has very practical implications. On the one hand, this study showed, the medicalization of deployment-related suffering into a mental health issue enables veterans to receive judicial, political and societal recognition for their distress. On the other hand, if 'moral injury' is medicalized in this way, it will be disconnected from its political and societal context in other ways, as political and societal problems will be redefined as individual mental health problems. Considering that research on 'PTSD' originally contained political critique but soon became dominated by a non-moral, non-political medical discourse (Hautzinger and Scandlyn 2013), such a future for 'moral injury' is particularly conceivable.

The Study in a Wider Context

This study may also have some insights to contribute to other lines of research. First, it may be relevant to research on moral responsibility and blame. Recent philosophical works on these issues emphasize that responsibility and blame are to be understood by reference to the moral emotions that people's actions provoke in themselves and others (Eshleman 2016). At the same time, it is debated whether there can be responsibility without blame (Pickard 2017, Brandenburg 2018). This study offers insight into the emotional dimension of this question. As shown, people may feel they are guilty and non-guilty at the same time for their actions, and accordingly may perceive neither straightforward condemnation nor exemption as appropriate responses, but rather interpretations in terms of 'non-culpable guilt' or 'non-blameworthy responsibility'. Paradoxical utterances like these may make sense given the moral complexity of a situation, and in such situations should be understood as genuine rather than that only one of two conflicting statements is acknowledged as truly expressive of a person's experience. On the emotional level, it thus seems, there can certainly be responsibility without blame. Yet, as this study also showed, people tend to find (ostensible) paradoxes illogical and discomforting. Researchers are people, too. Therefore, researchers should be particularly aware of potential tendencies in themselves to readily approach contradictions in research data as 'kinks' that need to be ironed out. When taking contradictions and other inconsistencies in people's stories seriously, it becomes possible to illuminate aspects of people's experience that might otherwise be set aside.

Second, to move the sociopolitical level, this study may be relevant to conflict studies. In recent decades, research on military and humanitarian intervention has directed increasing attention to post-conflict measures, particularly to reconciliation by material compensation and apologies, for instance (Kriesberg 2016). Also, research on non-violent social conflict has focused on the calls for recognition and reparations heard from a variety of emancipatory social movements today (O'Neill and Smith 2012). This study sheds light on the impact of experiences of injustice and the resulting need for acknowledgment and correction, and supports the idea that recognition and reparations are important to help people who feel wronged move forward. In line with this, it supports the contention that interventions focusing on recognition and reparations may foster reconciliation and conflict transformation. At the same time, this study perhaps also offers a warning against implementing interventions as mere means to the end of stability and peace. For apologies and compensation to be effective – that is, to promote reconciliation rather than reinforce a relation of enmity – it seems that their recipients need to experience them as genuine.

Finally, on a fundamental epistemological level, this study offers both researchers and mental health professionals relevant considerations concerning the approach to people's personal realities. While it is important to critically examine and challenge the ways people construe and give meaning to the world, it is equally important not to reduce their realities to 'merely a matter of interpretation'. To be able to make a distinction between, for instance, survivor guilt and feeling guilty over having actively hurt others, one cannot indiscriminately approach all realities as mere variations of subjectivity. This is not to deny that people's realities are always shaped by individual and collective beliefs and assumptions, as for

instance cognitive psychology and social constructionism correctly emphasize, but to assert that one cannot stop there. As crucial as it is to unpack people's realities as cognitive models or social constructions, it is also important to critically consider the relative appropriateness of these models and constructions in relation to intersubjective realities.

Limitations and Future Directions

In the following, final chapter of this study, I discuss and consider in detail the practical implications of my findings. Before doing so, here I discuss my study's main limitations and propose several directions for further research. In particular, the scope of this study is relatively limited. I focused on Dutch veterans of only two missions, and the striking similarities between the two led me to focus on the features they had in common rather than their differences. Furthermore, I focused only on the role of sociopolitical factors in moral distress and not, for instance, on organizational factors or personal characteristics. Although my aim was to take a descriptive, not normative approach, this focus inevitably had normative implications. While I tried to approach sociopolitical factors as 'simply' a context that shapes soldiers' and veterans' experiences and as such may play a role in the development of moral distress, doing so meant that I drew all attention to these factors while keeping the focus away from the role of other factors in moral distress. Finally, also with respect to sociopolitical factors this study has been incomplete, as I did not disentangle different levels and types of political practices and public perceptions.

Consequently, there are several relevant issues that I have not been able to address in this study. In addition, questions have emerged as a result of this study. In what follows, let me discuss these issues and questions as directions for future research. A first suggestion is to conduct further research on moral, political and societal dimensions of moral distress, including statistical and longitudinal research to zoom in on factors and relations discussed in this study. Also, it would be valuable to conduct further case study research comparing several types of conflict, interventions, national militaries, and populations in terms of religion, ethnicity and gender. As stated before, current research on 'moral injury' focuses mainly on clinical questions of diagnostics and treatment and leave contextual factors largely unaddressed. Consequently, the concept risks turning into a purely psychiatric category strictly focused on the individual. This particularly warrants further research on moral, political and societal aspects.

Second, it is worthwhile to examine the role of factors other than sociopolitical ones in moral injury such as personal characteristics and military organizational factors. Since personal characteristics are already examined in clinical studies (Frankfurt and Frazier 2016, Jinkerson 2017), let me briefly explain the relevance of focusing on the military. On the one hand, the military's intensive rites of passage and family-like structures make it a loyal 'brotherhood', while on the other, it is a biopolitical institution that has to maintain soldiers' health only to put them in health-threatening situations. These complex, partially paradoxical dynamics warrant investigation into the specific military context of moral

distress, at the level of both military units and the military institution at large. It would be interesting to consider not only how dominant structures shape and constrain soldiers' agency, but also how soldiers respond to them.

Third, research on appropriate interventions for moral distress will be valuable. Since the factors shaping moral distress lie at different levels, solutions should also be sought at different levels. At the same time, ill-considered interventions may be counterproductive. As argued in the previous chapter, for instance, interventions that attempt to impose a justifying sense of purpose on soldiers do not so much prevent moral distress as increase the chance that soldiers do things that they will later come to regret and retrospectively develop 'puppet show' experiences. Therefore, careful research into the question of interventions for moral distress seems needed.

Fourth, it would be insightful to examine the issue of moral distress among non-military populations. Two examples are police officers and hospital personnel. Like soldiers, these professionals are likely to face life-and-death situations in which their actions have major consequences, while at the same time, they depend heavily on decisions made at higher levels and are relatively often the topic of public debate. Besides certain professions, it would be interesting to focus on communities such as churches and sport clubs, both to examine feelings of guilt and shame and experiences of betrayal by the community.

Fifth, I encourage research on moral distress in the context of conflict resolution and transformation. I have mentioned that genuineness seems crucial for effective intervention in recognition and reparations. At the same time, my research also showed that morally distressed individuals may get stuck in feelings of victimhood and anger, especially when victimhood has come to define their identity. With this in mind, I hypothesize that initiatives in recognition and reparations may in some circumstances reproduce dynamics of conflict rather than stimulate resolution and reconciliation. Questions like these seem worth examining.

Finally, and in relation to the previous suggestions, further critical research into the *concept* of moral injury is warranted. Specifically, it would be interesting to critically examine the causes and implications of the concept's current popularity. Besides positive implications, such as the potential to address moral issues and contextual factors, the concept undoubtedly will have undesirable consequences, especially when it gains the appearance of something that can only be cheered for. As mentioned, for instance, ill-considered interventions to combat moral distress may turn out to be counterproductive. Potential consequences like these demand continuous critical examination of the concept of moral injury.

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Chapter 10. Practical Implications

What do the findings of this study imply for practice? Given the nature of the research topic – moral distress – I found this question particularly important, deserving thorough deliberation. This involved identifying the main implications for the individual, military, political and societal levels, followed by a new search for relevant literature, in line with the grounded theory approach of this study. Eventually, a variety of considerations and suggestions emerged. This chapter is devoted to discussing these, moving from the individual level to the military, political and societal levels

The Individual and Interpersonal Level

Beginning at the individual and interpersonal level, the following implications pertain to morally distressed veterans, therapists, religious/spiritual counselors, colleagues, family members, friends and other individuals. The considerations and suggestions concern the value of focusing on guilt and blame, addressing shattered assumptions, developing a more elaborate moral vocabulary, and encouraging both introspection and 'extrospection'.

Guilt and Blame

One of the key insights resulting from this study's findings is that moral distress is inherently tied to moral questions of guilt, shame and blame, questions that need to be taken seriously. Litz and his colleagues have also made this point, but given that therapists are 'often too eager to relieve guilt, and, thereby, undermine the patient's need to feel remorseful' (2009, p. 703), it seems an important one to underscore. As Litz and colleagues argue, morally distressed veterans should be able to speak about the event without it being excused and thus without it being invalidated. In relation to this, self-forgiveness can be an important step toward healing from moral distress (Litz *et al.* 2009, Nash and Litz 2013). My research suggests, moreover, that such space for moral judgments and forgiveness is also valuable in cases of perceived betrayal and anger, when blame is directed toward others. For instance, my research points to veterans' felt need for genuine remorse and genuine efforts of reparation on the part of the political leadership, in order to restore a violated moral relation of dependency and trust.

At the same time, my findings indicate that when veterans keep feeling that they or others fail in correcting the injustice done, they remain unable to grant themselves or others forgiveness. This brings me to Lifton's work on military trauma (1973), in which he distinguishes between 'static guilt' and 'animating guilt'. Static guilt, Lifton claims, is an unproductive kind of guilt, often felt at only the unconscious level. It brings the veteran no further, leaving him stuck in a spiral of guilt, shame and anger, and in feeling unworthy

of good things to happen. Static guilt means that the veteran keeps focusing on perceived guilt and cannot envision himself beyond that guilt. Animating guilt, in contrast, involves an 'active imagery of possibility beyond the guilt itself' and 'bringing oneself to life around one's guilt' (Lifton 1973, p. 127). It entails an interaction between blaming oneself and having a vision of a future where this may no longer be necessary. For this reason, Lifton argues, animating guilt is the kind that can foster healing. Following Lifton, a similar distinction might be made between static blame and animating blame. In the case of static blame, the veteran remains stuck in anger against those who hurt him and perhaps also in ever-failing attempts to make the wrong-doers correct their wrongs. Animating blame, in contrast, involves anger about the injustice done by others in combination with an imagery of a life beyond a preoccupation with anger, even if this injustice will never be corrected. To be sure, transforming static guilt and blame to animating guilt and blame is easier said than done, but it seems that an awareness of such a distinction might be an important starting point for veterans stuck in moral distress.

Some might be inclined to say that, at least in clinical practice, a focus on forgiveness of self and others is inappropriate, as this would force the therapist to judge the accuracy of a patient's feelings while the therapist's moral judgment should be irrelevant. However, it should be noted, efforts to alleviate guilt are just as much based on a moral judgment as a focus on forgiveness is. Making a moral judgment is inevitable and always bears relevance. For one, it influences the course taken in therapy sessions, as the therapist has to decide whether or not to try to challenge the patient's feelings of guilt and anger or treat them as appropriate emotions. Furthermore, just as ill-considered condemnation of a patient's actions might harm the patient, the opposite might also be harmful. When a veteran's expressions of guilt are met with efforts of deresponsibilization, he may perceive this as yet another moral betrayal and feel further alienated from others (see also Lifton 1973, Bica 1999, Boudreau 2011). As stated, judging one's own actions as wrong and 'owning up' to them may be imperative to make sense of them.

Addressing Ethical Struggles

A second consideration for the individual level concerns the value of going beyond the specific morally distressing event. My research showed that veterans may struggle not only with feelings of guilt and anger about a particular event, but also with a more general sense of moral disorientation and resultant ethical questions. Though Litz and his colleagues likewise acknowledge that a 'morally injurious event' violates 'beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness' (2009, p. 698), their treatment model is confined to beliefs about the event and does not address wider beliefs. To reiterate a metaphor used earlier, their model addresses the injury, but not the changed moral 'body'.

Reviewing the literature on treatments that might help fill this gap brought me to the Shattered Assumptions Theory (Janoff-Bulman 1992), which does attend to a person's wider beliefs, claiming that an event is traumatic because it shatters core assumptions about the self and the world. According to this theory, all people initially hold the unconscious

assumption that the world is benevolent (that people essentially are genuine), that the world is meaningful (that things in life generally make sense, that life is fair and that people get what they deserve), and that the self is worthy (that they themselves ultimately are good persons worthy of good things). Exposure to utterly cruel or meaningless events violates these assumptions. Proper treatment, therefore, has to address not only the traumatic event but also the assumptions it has shattered, namely by promoting a more flexible self- and world-view that can be reconciled with the trauma. This more flexible view would hold that '[t]he world is benevolent, but not absolutely; events that happen make sense, but not always; the self can be counted on to be decent and competent, but helplessness is at times a reality' (Janoff-Bulman 1992, p. 174).

The Shattered Assumptions Theory approach makes it possible to address the potential damage done to a veteran's fundamental moral beliefs. Yet, two things might be added to this approach. First, besides the beliefs and expectations that most people arguably hold (the world as benevolent, and so on), beliefs and expectation that are more particular to certain groups or individuals may also be worth addressing. In the case of a morally distressed soldier, one could think of typical military values such as comradeship and courage. Also, one could consider the soldier's military role. A commander will feel particularly responsible for his unit's safety, whereas a military nurse will feel particularly committed to helping others without exception. Explicating the role of such more specific beliefs and expectations may help veterans to make sense of their moral distress.

Second, it may be necessary to address ethical questions before being able to work on a more flexible self- and world-view. As argued, a veteran's experience may have shattered not only his trust in people's ability to do right, but also his trust in the very notion of 'doing right'. It may have damaged the very moral frame of reference which he used to make judgments of right and wrong. It seems that in cases of what I call moral disorientation, something else has to happen before a veteran can come to believe that 'the world is benevolent, but not absolutely'. In such cases, the veteran struggles not only with moral questions of 'am I/are others good or bad?', but also with ethical questions of 'what is good and bad in the first place?'. These ethical questions, then, should also be addressed. This could mean, for instance, that the veteran obtains a better understanding of morality in general and the moral complexity of war and military action in particular, to be better able to make sense of the disorientation he feels, and thus to find re-orientation.[1] The more elaborate moral vocabulary argued for in the previous section could provide helpful words in this process.

The Value of a Moral Vocabulary

A third consideration resulting from this study concerns the value of an elaborate vocabulary to deal with moral distress. My findings indicate that both veterans and their environment

1 Similarly, Vietnam veteran/philosopher Bica (1999, p. 82) argues for the value of enabling a 'morally injured' veteran 'to understand the theoretical nature of war – its moral, social, and political underpinnings – the profound indoctrination process he has endured, the nature of moral values, and the existential reality of war'. However, as his use of 'indoctrination' indicates, Bica bends toward an anti-war approach that frames military ideals and self-perceptions as deceptive myths, which may not be helpful to veterans who do not agree with this stance.

currently lack the language to address the potential moral ambivalence of veterans' experiences. They lack, for instance, a proper word for feeling guilty and not guilty at the same time and generally lack available 'stories' with which to grasp and explain experiences of moral distress. This absence is not just an issue of representation and communication. As shown, language and stories are of paramount importance for making sense and coming to terms with one's experiences.

Several other scholars have also noted that present-day societies lack adequate language for the moral complexities of military practice. Verkamp (1993), for instance, contends that soldiers' feelings of guilt are often reduced to an issue that needs psychological treatment, while Kinghorn (2012) argues that the moral aspects of war acts tend to be judged in legal terms only, namely by the standards of the Geneva Conventions and military Rules of Engagement. Verkamp (1993) and Tick (2005) point out that societies used to have spiritual and symbolic practices to guide warriors through warfare, but these no longer exist.

These developments are problematic for the same reason: veterans are left without constructive narratives to deal with the moral impact of having gone to war. No matter how legally justified the actions of a soldier are, these actions may still have wounded him. Similarly, no matter how dysfunctional guilt feelings may be in psychological terms, these feelings may also be considered appropriate. It should be added, however, that no matter how 'inhumane' and 'monstrous' an individual's actions may be according to societal standards, the tragedy of violence is that it is very human.

Addressing the moral impact of military practice, then, seems to require a more complex moral vocabulary than one limited to binary categories such as 'guilty–innocent', 'responsible–not responsible', 'perpetrator–victim', 'inhumane–humane' and 'functional–dysfunctional guilt'. It seems to require a better understanding of such terms as 'values', 'norms' and 'dilemmas'. As Dutch soldiers have reported (Baarle et al. 2017), understanding ethical terms helped them to recognize, understand and communicate about moral dilemmas on deployment, which indicates that having a more elaborate moral vocabulary may also work preventively.

Of course, in addition to separate words, narratives play an important role in meaning-making, and besides language, the role of practices should not be forgotten. These issues are addressed in the section on the societal level (see below), which will discuss ancient and new 'purification' rituals and the narratives they convey about war.

Encouraging both Introspection and 'Extrospection'

A final important suggestion for the individual level concerns the value of going beyond introspection. As this study showed, moral emotions are not only about one's relation to oneself but also about one's relation to others. Anger is usually directed at another person, and feelings of guilt and shame have to do with how one perceives oneself as seen through the eyes of others. Accordingly, moral distress may provoke certain behavior to others, for instance, a preoccupation with injustice expressed in volunteer work and/or in aggressive responses to daily injustices.

Because moral distress has such a strong social dimension, a veteran should be enabled to look not only inward but outward as well. Lifton (1973) and Bica (1999), who share this contention, point out the importance of enabling a veteran to understand his experience in the context of the images and rhetoric prevailing in society about war, the armed forces and military action. Regarding active forms of 'extrospection', Litz *et al.* (2009) emphasize the healing power of 'making amends', while Shay (1994) argues for being able to share one's experiences with the wide community without condemnation. Shatan (1973) says that collective self-help efforts may be instrumental in healing. In short, looking outward and going outside the self, both figuratively and literally, may help morally distressed veterans re-engage with the world in which they live.

The Level of the Military Organization

Just as it may be valuable for veterans to look outward, it is important that efforts to address moral distress go beyond the level of the individual veteran. Before considering this study's implications for the political and societal level, it is worth looking at a level that has received no explicit attention so far, namely the level of the military organization.

When researchers and policy makers discuss how the military can help prevent mental health problems, the answer is usually: good training, ethical leadership and unit support (see e.g. Cossar 2008, Jones *et al.* 2012, Vermetten *et al.* 2014). This is also the case in discussions on 'moral injury' (Kilner 2002, Shay 2002, Frankfurt and Frazier 2016). A currently popular answer is resilience, which refers to the ability to 'bounce back' after stressful events. Resilience-promoting training and leadership, it is believed, would substantially decrease the risk of PTSD and other disorders and possibly even foster 'post-traumatic growth' (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1993, APA 2011, Eidelson *et al.* 2011, Lester *et al.* 2011, Boermans v. 2012, Mulligan *et al.* 2012). But what do 'good training', 'ethical leadership', 'unit support' and 'resilience' entail exactly? The interpretations given are diverse, if formulated at all, and often without critical consideration (see e.g. Eidelson *et al.* 2011, MacLeish 2012 for critical evaluations).

Below, I consider two prevalent, generally unquestioned interpretations: encouraging a sense of purpose and promoting a can-do mindset. This will show that what may seem good, ethical, and so on, may have considerable downsides. After discussing these two interpretations, which serve as a warning against the perils of imposing a sense of purpose and a one-dimensional can-do mindset, I will discuss several alternatives.

Encourage a Justifying Sense of Purpose?

Given that feelings of guilt and senselessness contribute to moral distress, it may seem helpful to convince soldiers that their actions were actually justified and meaningful. Indeed, such efforts have been signaled, in the US armed forces at least. US military chaplains and psychologists have reported trying to help soldiers struggling with guilt by justifying their

actions (Lifton 1973, Kilner 2010). Currently the largest resilience training program in the US military encourages a sense of meaning and purpose in personnel in order to prevent mental health problems (Hammer *et al.* 2013, Matthews 2013). According to US Lieutenant-colonel Kilner (2002, 2010), military leaders have 'the obligation to justify killing' so that soldiers will not suffer guilt.

While explicit justification may apply to some armed forces more than others, many militaries depict military practice as virtuous and meaningful, for instance in their recruitment campaigns (see e.g. Woodward 2000, Dutch Ministry of Defense 2013, 2017, Hein 2014). However, my findings showed that some situations do not allow soldiers to see their job as such. They suggest that veterans may see more value in condemning their own or others' actions and in denouncing their mission as meaningless, whereas the imposition of a justifying sense of purpose may instead create a 'puppet show' experience of fakeness and betrayal. This is in line with literature showing that both confidence and doubt can offer guidance, and that not only pride but also guilt, blame and regret can give meaning to one's life (Lifton 1973, Held 2004, Litz *et al.* 2009, Rietveld 2009), and with the fact that military practice is inevitably morally complex. Imposing a justifying sense of purpose, thus, may actually have iatrogenic consequences. It may not only give rise to a sense of betrayal after soldiers return from deployment, but also increase the risk that they will do things on deployment they will later come to regret.

Overly laudatory portrayals of mental health interventions, it is worth noting, carry similar dangers. Current studies on resilience emphasize that deployment is an opportunity for personal growth and speak ambitiously about the potential of resilience training to prevent mental health problems (Eidelson *et al.* 2011, MacLeish 2012). These studies hypothesize, for instance, that resilience skills enhance the 'ability to handle adversity, prevent depression and anxiety, prevent PTSD, and enhance overall well-being and performance' (Reivich *et al.* 2011: 26). Similarly, as critical scholars have pointed out, evaluations of the currently largest resilience training program have been 'overly enthusiastic', continuing a 'history of hyping that began with the program's initial development roll-out' (Eidelson and Soldz 2012, p. 1). Rather than promote positive thinking in soldiers, such keen hype may adversely affect them. To be sure, emphasizing resilience over a focus on mental disorder has its benefits. But, again, incorrect claims that good training will protect soldiers from mental health problems may both encourage them to do regrettable things and, afterwards, engender a sense of betrayal.

Promote a Can-Do Mindset?

While training instructors and commanders may stress that military practice is just and purposeful, at the same time, a 'can-do' mindset is often encouraged in the military, especially in informal talk. A can-do attitude entails the belief that all situations are ultimately solvable and all tasks ultimately doable, and extensive deliberation on larger questions is unhelpful (Soeters *et al.* 2006, Arundell 2009). Differently put, it entails a no-nonsense solution-directed pragmatism, which readily sees worries about the meaning

and purpose of one's work as obstacles to problem-solving. Indeed, as this study discusses throughout, Dutch soldiers tend to discard the belief that their job serves a higher purpose even before their deployment, and focus on doing their job as best they can instead. A study of US soldiers likewise found that '[q]uestions as to the purpose of their deployment would typically be answered with an "it's my job" reply, leaving the issue of purpose to politicians' (De Rond and Lok 2016, p. 1982).

On the one hand, a focus on 'can-do' may help soldiers protect themselves from worrying about the 'why' of their actions. However, on the other hand, avoidance tends to leave them unprepared in case 'why' questions do come to occupy their minds. If soldiers are confronted with situations that seem truly senseless, they may find themselves looking for an overarching purpose, and, consequently, the 'why' may turn out to be personally relevant after all. When this is the case, a can-do attitude, the coping strategy on which they have come to rely, cannot help them.

Another problem is that the can-do attitude carries problems of rigidity. While it is the opposite of dogmatism in the conventional sense, it is similarly rigid in that irresolvable situations are considered out of the question. Again, such rigidity may help soldiers protect themselves against confusion and conflict. Yet it leaves them without adequate coping mechanisms for situations that simply resist resolution because in all the openness that can-do encourages, uncertainty and conflict are considered bad things. So, just as dogmatism causes dissonance when it becomes impossible to hold onto one's principles, the ostensibly flexible military can-do attitude is counterproductive when moral quandaries turn out to be irresolvable. Neither attitude allows soldiers room for accepting uncertainty and conflict.

Acknowledge Moral Complexity and Paradoxes

Although both an unquestioned belief in the justness of military action and a 'can-do' mindset may be useful in many respects, they may not be adequate and perhaps even counterproductive when it comes to moral distress. Meanwhile, many militaries have implemented a range of specific interventions that convey promising alternatives, or at least constitute fruitful grounds for a more adequate approach.

Two interventions are mental health training and ethics education. The first usually comprises a combination of field exercises and classroom psycho-educational sessions. In the field exercises, soldiers are trained in stress-response regulation (cf. Britt *et al*. 2006, Robson and Manacapilli 2014), while in the classroom, they are equipped with information about types of stressors, effects of stress, and types of support available in the military (cf. WRAIR Land Combat Study Team 2006, Sharpley *et al*. 2008, Vermetten *et al*. 2014). Ethics education focuses on issues of morality, and usually consists of classroom sessions on how to recognize moral aspects of deployment situations, make morally responsible decisions and take responsibility for decisions made (see Baarda and Verweij 2006, Robinson *et al*. 2008). Each intervention in its own way creates space for an appreciation of the potential impact of military practice on soldiers.

Still, it seems that some modification would be useful. First, as others have also noted, 'despite growing evidence that demonstrates a bidirectional link between stress and ethical behaviors, it continues to be the case that mental health training (...) and ethics training are developed and delivered completely independent of each other' (Thompson and Jetly 2014, p. 3). Mental health training tends to focus on stress and PTSD, whereas ethics education is mostly concerned with moral decision-making (ibid). The link between the two thus needs to become an explicit point of attention.[2] Moreover, it should be given proper attention. For instance, it has been reported that some versions of ethics education focus on 'the creation of morally upright persons through the instillation of certain key qualities or dispositions of character' (Robinson *et al.* 2008, p. 1). While this may protect soldiers from doing things they will later regret, once again, it may also engender a 'puppet show' experience. To overcome this problem, ethics education should always include attention for the constraints imposed on soldiers and the limits of adhering to one's values in the face of value conflicts. Both ethics and psycho-education would benefit from realistic teaching methods. As mentioned, both interventions are generally confined to classroom sessions, sometimes in the form of PowerPoint presentations (see Warner *et al.* 2011, Vermetten *et al.* 2014), with the risk that moral dilemmas are treated as 'brainteasers'. Conversely, in the course of my research I have noted a tendency in some basic training instructors to use education tools for ethics training as 'instruction cards' for real-life dilemmas, thus turning dilemmas into 'can-do' challenges that can be solved with a checklist. Integrating ethics education in field exercises, it seems, would allow realistic, experience-oriented training, thus credibly showing how stress plays a major role in moral decision-making, and vice versa (see also Warner *et al.* 2011, Thompson and Jetly 2014).

A third intervention worth mentioning is the work of military chaplains – called 'mental caregivers' *(geestelijk verzorgers)* in the Dutch military – who help soldiers deal with questions of conviction, values and meaning, either in religious or non-religious terms. Their job might be understood as a kind of moral counseling.[3] Their jobs usually include individual counseling, educational sessions and sessions of (spiritual) reflection (cf. Hetebrij 2007, Besterman-Dahan *et al.* 2013). A large part of their work involves simply 'being there' in the workplace, including during exercises and deployment, so that they are easily accessible in both a physical and mental sense (cf. Hetebrij 2007, Besterman-Dahan *et al.* 2013). Because of this, the work of military chaplains seems particularly suitable and valuable for soldiers struggling with moral distress. Yet, as stated before, this is only the case as long as quick justifications and rationalizations are avoided and, instead, moral complexity is acknowledged.

Two words of caution are in order regarding the limits of interventions such as mental health training, ethics education and moral counseling by chaplains. First, the ease with which isolated interventions may change military norms such as 'can-do' should not be overestimated. Even if soldiers accepted, for instance, that it is crucial to acknowledge the

2 To be sure, forcing soldiers to reflect on the moral dimensions of their job may increase the chance that they experience moral tension. However, besides other objections to deploying morally unreflective soldiers, the partial inevitability of moral distress suggests a preference for ethics training over no such preparation.

3 In the Dutch armed forces, chaplains come from several religious backgrounds (Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam or Hinduism) as well as from a humanist background.

complexity of military practice, they remain part of a cultural system which encourages a no-nonsense can-do attitude, and flexibly switching between the two attitudes is only easy in theory. Second, cultural change may be partially undesirable. As anthropologists have often pointed out, approaching cultural beliefs and practices as merely 'barriers to progress' is to fail to appreciate that cultures are never free-floating but always embedded in particular logics and concerns (see e.g. Nichter and Lock 2002).[4] The can-do attitude, for instance, is functional with respect to the short-term demands of military deployment as it lets soldiers make quick decisions in critical situations and handle acute stress (Weiss 1995, Molendijk *et al.* 2016). So, the very notions that deny soldiers appropriate coping mechanisms for moral distress may be crucial for functioning in the short run, a paradox that seems inherent to military practice. In fact, paradoxes like these are part of the moral complexity I have been emphasizing. Rather than trying to solve such paradoxes, or worse, denying them, it seems best to explicitly acknowledge and discuss them throughout various interventions.

The Level of Political Practice

Though soldiers may initially believe that their job has nothing to do with politics, this study showed that their dependency on the state becomes irrefutably manifest when this relation is violated. Indeed, just as soldiers are not entirely autonomous but part of the military organization, the military is embedded in the political domain. In this section, I reflect on what can be done at the political level to address moral distress, proceeding from abstract considerations to more practical suggestions.

The Ethics of Responsibility and the Ethics of Conviction

This study showed that political malpractice or error may contribute to the onset of moral distress in soldiers. Turning this finding around, it seems that morally responsible political practice may work protectively. At the very least, it seems that the absence of political malpractice or error would decrease the risk of moral distress in soldiers. However, it is not automatically evident what this would entail. The intervention in Srebrenica, for instance, did not lack good intentions. But the felt moral obligation to intervene gained the upper hand over concerns about adverse consequences, leading to a highly problematic mission in which soldiers felt utterly powerless (Honig and Both 1996, NIOD 2002, pp. 867–8). Clearly, good intentions are not enough.

Yet, it would be equally simplistic to dismiss actions based on felt moral obligation as naïve, futile idealism. To move beyond this, an understanding in terms of Weber's

4 This point is particularly warranted given the ever-growing body of studies on what has been dubbed 'barriers to mental health care' in the military (e.g. Hoge *et al.* 2004, Pietrzak *et al.* 2009, Gould et al. 2010, Kim *et al.* 2010, Iversen et al. 2011, Vogt 2011, Garcia *et al.* 2014).

(1946) distinction between the ethics of conviction and responsibility seems useful.[5] The deontological ethics of conviction is based on principles ('we have the obligation to help people in need'); the utilitarian ethics of responsibility is focused on consequences ('we have to assure that our actions do more good than harm'). Weber acknowledges that the two kinds of ethics are ultimately irreconcilable, as adhering to principles may have undesired consequences, while achieving objectives may require violating principles. However, he maintains that one can never simply set aside one or the other because that would imply either disregard to foreseeable bad consequences or indifference to the means by which the end in view is attained. According to Weber, one should always remain concerned about both fundamental moral principles and the outcomes of one's actions. This tension, he argues, is what constitutes the challenge of acting morally responsibly: trying to force the two ethics together and accepting the associated paradoxes (Weber 1946).

In the context of military intervention, the notion of 'virtue by proxy' is relevant. Ignatieff (1996, 2004) coined the notion to describe a policy of calling for action while getting others to engage in this action for them. He uses it in the context of the war in the former Yugoslavia to describe how several countries voiced the need for intervention only to leave actual intervention to others (Ignatieff 1996, 2004). Following Ignatieff, one could say that military intervention, by definition, is an act of 'virtue by proxy', executed by military troops on behalf of the political leadership that decided it (see also NIOD 2002, p. 869).

It seems that in making a decision of moral action 'by proxy', one should seek a balance between the principles-based ethics of conviction and the consequences-based ethics of responsibility. Yet, again, this is not all. The Dutch mission in Uruzgan demonstrates that further specification is warranted. As discussed, the Dutch government imposed several restrictions on this mission. While as such parliamentary and public objections were taken seriously, it was less clear to what extent it served the interests of the Dutch troops and the Afghan population, as some restrictions actually hindered the troops in creating safety and stability in Uruzgan. When discussing the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility, then, a crucial question to ask is: vis-à-vis whom? For whom are perceived moral obligations fulfilled, and for whom are the consequences of decisions taken into account? So, when political decision-makers balance moral obligations and potential consequences, the interests of both the local population and the own troops should be included in the decision-making process. Put differently, to reduce the risk of moral distress, political leaders should try to bring together an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility with regard to all parties involved, not only before embarking on a military mission, but also after its termination.

'Just War' Criteria as a Guiding Framework

To achieve a balanced combination of conviction and responsibility in political decision-making, more specific guidance would be useful. Such guidance is offered by the framework

5 NIOD's extensive report on Srebrenica uses Weber's ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility (NIOD 2002, p. 124), arguing that in deciding to send troops to Srebrenica, the Dutch government let the ethics of conviction prevail over the ethics of responsibility, while the opposite was the case in many other countries.

provided by 'Just War', a tradition of centuries-long deliberation on the ethics of military intervention, including contributions from Plato, Cicero, Augustine, Grotius and Walzer (see e.g. Walzer 1977, Evans 2005, Baarda and Verweij 2009, Orend 2013). Over the centuries, these and many other thinkers have formulated a range of moral criteria for military intervention. Although Just War thinkers were originally concerned only with classic warfare, increasingly they have expanded their scope to other types of military intervention, noting that at least in part, Just War criteria can also apply to peacekeeping operations (Pfaff 2001, Brough *et al.* 2007). Together, the criteria can be understood as a framework that combines the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility.

Admittedly, the Just War Tradition is certainly not without problems, as I discuss in the next section. Nevertheless, it seems it can give political leaders helpful guidance, not only because it combines the ethics of conviction and responsibility, but also because it covers all phases of military intervention, namely before, during and after. As my research findings indicate, it is not just post-mission mental health care but political practices in all three phases that are relevant to veteran well-being. For classical Just War thinkers, this would be self-evident, as they understood the three phases of military intervention as inextricably connected with one another (Verweij 2015). However, many contemporary Just War theorists insist that pre-, peri- and post-intervention criteria are separate, arguing for instance, that an intervention can be started for just reasons but carried out unjustly (Orend 2013, p. 33). Whether or not one agrees with this contention, my study showed that the three categories are clearly interrelated in the issue of moral distress. If political leaders decide on an intervention supposedly to establish peace but in reality for diplomatic interests, soldiers run an increased risk of retrospectively regretting what they did during that intervention. In turn, in the soldier's experience an unjustly terminated mission renders the actions taken during the mission more easily unjust, as it leaves fewer gains to compensate for the damage done and lives lost. In short, the grounds on which political leaders resort to decide on military intervention inevitably affect soldiers' conduct during the intervention and their retrospective appraisal of their own conduct, such that political practices influence soldiers' vulnerability to developing moral distress even before the mission begins.

To turn to the specific criteria of the Just War tradition, the first set involves conditions for embarking on a military intervention. For this phase, the following interrelated conventions have been established. The military intervention should have a just cause (e.g. end the violation of human rights); it should be conducted with the right intention (e.g. it cannot be for material gain); it should be declared by a legitimate political authority (e.g. the UN); it should be a last resort, only selected when other means do not work; the anticipated benefits should be proportionate to the anticipated harm, and, finally, the intervention should have a reasonable probability of success. Note that the first three criteria mostly express the ethics of conviction, while the last three can be linked to the ethics of responsibility.

Three moral criteria are included for conduct in conflict situations (see e.g. Walzer 1977, Evans 2005, Baarda and Verweij 2009, Orend 2013). Non-combatants can never be intentionally involved in the conflict, the use of force and other actions should be in proportion (because an act should seek to minimize overall suffering), and the good effects of an act should

outweigh the bad. Here, the first criterion is exemplary of the ethics of conviction while the last two express the ethics of responsibility.

The moral criteria for ending interventions are recent additions to the tradition, in line with general trends in approaches to violent conflict, which attribute increasing importance to post-conflict intervention (Kriesberg 2016). The criteria of this third category deal with the mission-termination phase and the morality of post-intervention settlement and reconstruction. Of the various conditions proposed (see e.g. Orend 2002), those proposed by Evans (2005) are particularly relevant to this study. He outlines three criteria: terms should be co-established to make peace just and stable and address the injustice that prompted the intervention; full responsibility should be taken for one's share of the material burdens of the aftermath; and full, proactive participation should be undertaken in forgiveness and reconciliation processes. Each of these three criteria can be seen as a combination of the ethics of conviction and responsibility.

All the criteria listed above, it seems, are valuable for reducing the risk of moral distress. Or, to turn it around, it seems that the risk of moral distress increases when any of these criteria are violated. Therefore, they all are relevant to veteran well-being, yet only as long as they are approached as inextricably interrelated rather than checklist bullet points.

Beyond a Checklist Application of Existing Criteria

The warning against approaching Just War criteria as bullet points brings me to the question: how to integrate the criteria of the Just War Tradition in political practice? To an important extent, this has already been done. At least in a formal sense, the tradition has found a firm place in politics. At the international level, its core criteria have been incorporated in the formal frameworks of the UN (Falk 2004, Baarda and Verweij 2009, Dorn 2011). Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter impose a general prohibition on the use of force, and the exceptions they stipulate include individual or collective self-defense, last resort and proportionality. In addition, the recently introduced principle of the 'Responsibility to Protect', endorsed in 2005 by all UN members states, affirms that they may take coercive action against another state if the latter fails to protect its citizens from avoidable catastrophe (Iancu 2014). International Humanitarian Law also lays down criteria for conduct during a mission, including special protective status for non-combatants and that the principles of necessity and proportionality must dictate the use of force (Falk 2004, Baarda and Verweij 2009, Dorn 2011).

At the Dutch national level, Just War criteria are included in the Assessment Framework ('Toetsingskader'), which the government introduced in 1995 just before the fall of Srebrenica, and expanded in 2000 partially as a result of the Srebrenican tragedy (TK 2014). This framework includes the requirements that a military mission serves the interests of the Netherlands, including protecting international peace and security, and that it is effected conform international law and on the basis of a clear mandate. It also stipulates clear international agreements, a concrete military assignment, attainable political and military goals, a clear command structure, feasible military tasks and a good exit strategy. In 2014, protection of the civilian population and aftercare for deployed soldiers were added as focal points (TK 2014). The same year, the Veterans Decree *('Veteranenbesluit')* came into force, which

set detailed rules for the government's special duty of care to veterans as laid down in the Veterans Act *('Veteranenwet')* of 2012.

So, practical moral criteria for military intervention in line with what I suggested above already exist. However, this does not mean that they always work as intended. In the context of moral distress, I identified at least three important preconditions that should be met before the criteria will actually work. A first, understandable imperative is that the political leadership should go beyond paying mere lip service to the criteria. This is not as easy as it may sound. Consider for instance cases in which the main reason for intervention is in the interest of securing inter-state relations or economic motives. For obvious reasons, one will hardly ever hear political leaders admit this; instead, they will put forward such concerns as self-defense and humanitarian obligations (cf. Berkowitz 2013, Dimitriu and Graaf 2014). In these cases, Just War criteria do not guide political decision-making so much, or not at all, but rather become window-dressing tools. As such, the criteria may work counterproductively.

A second precondition is to consider criteria in relation to one another and not misapply them as a mere checklist (Crawford 2003, Walzer 2006, Megoran 2008, Dorn 2011, Verweij 2015). For the TFU mission in Uruzgan, the Dutch Assessment Framework was used as a checklist (Klep 2011, Grandia 2015). In 2011, the then prime minister even spoke of 'ticking boxes' when discussing a planned police training mission in another region of Afghanistan (Klep 2011, p. 228 translation TM). The problem with using checklists is that it can too easily justify an intervention: if each criterion is satisfied somewhat, the political leadership might declare the intervention 'just' (Dorn 2011). The fundamental issue underlying this problem is that Just War criteria are considered in isolation while, as argued, they are inextricably connected (Verweij 2015). Checklist boxes such as 'proportionality' are actually rendered meaningless when the box for 'intentions' reads 'dubious', or when 'objectives' are 'unclear', because questions considering the proportionality of violence cannot be sensibly answered when the purpose of this violence is questionable. Yet, the checklist approach can still tick off the criteria of proportionally.

Third, the use of criteria cannot avoid excluding relevant actors in the decision-making process. Consider the fact that civilian protection and veteran aftercare have recently been added as explicit focal points in the Dutch Assessment Framework. If these issues had always been treated seriously, it seems, this addition would have been unnecessary. As argued, when insufficient attention is given to if and how a mission may actually benefit or disadvantage the local population and deployed soldiers, it may lead to feelings of senselessness and betrayal in soldiers. So, when assessing a proposed mission, it is important to take into account its effects on all parties that, willingly or not, are involved in the mission (see also Myers 1996).

Ultimately, the three points above all seem to boil down to the problem of Just War frameworks being cut loose from their context. When this occurs, important moral questions become mere judicial issues, and useful guides for reflection become ends in themselves. And for all the justificatory work that the Just War criteria may do, they never simply make an intervention just and thus never simply prevent moral distress. In fact, veterans' experiences of fakeness and betrayal indicate that Just War rhetoric may even be a source of moral distress. This is a crucial argument in Meagher's highly critical work on the Just War Tradition (2014). According to Meagher's pacifism-inclined reasoning, the Just War Tradition is the root cause of moral distress as it deceives soldiers into an inherently immoral project. I do not entirely

agree. That is, my findings do confirm that the Just War Tradition can and is abused as a cover up for material self-interest, and that justifying rhetoric may contribute to moral distress when soldiers come to experience their mission as unjust. However, my findings contradict Meagher's contention that *by default* Just War criteria form the cause of moral distress rather than are a partial solution to it. Many interviewed veterans developed moral distress, not because they had used force, but because they had not. More generally, most veterans did not oppose to military intervention as such, but to the specific ways in which their mission had taken shape. These veterans would have been helped neither by being allowed to act without moral restrictions, nor by being completely prohibited to act, but rather, by gaining conditional authorization to intervene in accordance with Just War criteria.

To be clear, my contention is not meant to be an all-encompassing, normative argument for military intervention as such, but is confined to the question of how political practices can protect soldiers from developing moral distress. When reflecting on this question, I come to the conclusion that the moral difficulties of military intervention can never be truly overcome, and that an approach should be adopted that acknowledges this. So, whereas Meagher argues that the phenomenon of 'moral injury' testifies to the inherent unjustness of war and that we must therefore reject the Just War Tradition, my findings lead me to claim that it testifies to the moral complexity of military intervention and therefore black-and-white solutions should be refused. I postulate that a sincere, careful consideration of the admittedly limited, subjective and perhaps even paradoxical notion of 'just war' is preferable over rejecting the notion because it is limited, subjective and perhaps paradoxical. The same holds for combining the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility, which ultimately exist in irresolvable tension with one another. I contend that a sincere attempt to balance the two kinds of ethics is preferable above rejecting one of the two because of this tension. Using flawed moral criteria for military intervention as guidance, while recognizing that military intervention will always remain morally problematic, may be as close as one can get at the political level to reduce the risk of moral distress.

The Societal Level

In this section, I turn to the level of society at large. First, I discuss an issue that recurred throughout this study: the problem of ostensibly supportive images of hero and victim. Subsequently, I discuss several ancient and present-day rituals as examples of imageries that may resonate better with veterans and may be more helpful to address moral distress.

Supporting Veterans as Heroes and Victims?

Unsurprisingly, while veterans find accusations painful and isolating, this study showed that images of veterans as heroes or victims may also not be experienced as supportive. Why is this? Let me start with the image of hero. To call veterans heroes is to admire them for their courage and strength while acknowledging that they have faced hardships. Hence,

heroization may seem the ultimate form of recognition. However, as discussed, most interviewed veterans did not see much value in being applauded as heroes. Many called it complete nonsense. Those reporting feeling guilt objected the most to being called a hero, explaining that it made them feel extremely uncomfortable and aggravated their guilt.

Two related problems with heroization can explain veterans' resistance. First, heroization means that the ugly side of working in war zones is 'sanitized'. Veterans may have gotten their hands dirty and feel unable to wash them clean, but as heroes they are transformed into noble supermen, while questionable conduct is attributed to so-called bad apples. Second, heroization means deresponsibilization. To idolize veterans is to deny that they could make mistakes and to withhold the possibility of remorse. Heroization, in short, does no justice to their experience and in fact denies their humanity (see also Lifton 1973, Morris 2013, Farnsworth 2014).

If heroization fails to recognize the moral impact of military action on soldiers, what about the focus on PTSD? After all, this concept is the result of a search for exactly such recognition (Young 1997, Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Withuis and Mooij 2010). At first glance, a PTSD frame does seem helpful as it serves the interests of both veterans and society. It offers society an answer to the question of how can veterans live with having fought and killed ('they can't just live with it'), and as such, it opens up a way for civilians to identify and sympathize with them. Moreover, it does so without forcing civilians to choose a political side. Though the birth of the PTSD concept went hand in hand with critique of the Vietnam war (e.g. Lifton 2005), its present-day use offers society a way to acknowledge the suffering of veterans without having to pass either positive or negative judgment on the mission in which they served.

However, the benefits also have their downsides. While a PTSD frame acknowledges deployment-related problems, it portrays veterans as victims of war, and as with heroization, victimization leaves veterans no space to feel remorse. What is more, a PTSD frame tends to reduce suffering to an internally contained mental disorder and readily denies responsibility for all actors involved. By medicalizing veterans' suffering as a disease caused by the stressors of war, it disregards not only the veterans' own agency, but the potential role of society and politics in their suffering. Like heroization, one-sided representations of veterans as victims of PTSD allows sympathy but at the price of overly simplifying and perhaps glorifying their suffering.

Purification and Reintegration Rituals

What follows from the above considerations is that to address moral distress at the level of society, its representations need to make sense to veterans. In the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the value of a more elaborate vocabulary for moral phenomena. Yet, appropriate narratives and practices are important as well. Interestingly, there are many insightful examples of what adequate societal narratives and practices could look like. Many societies used to have rituals for returning soldiers which acknowledged the moral complexity of military intervention and involved both the returned soldier and society (cf. Verkamp 1993, O'Donnell 2015). These rituals might serve as indicative examples of how societal narratives and practices may not only estrange veterans but also foster moral re-orientation and societal reintegration.

One well-documented example concerns Christian ritual practice in early medieval times. As documented by Verkamp, the 'Christian community of the first millennium generally assumed that warriors returning from battle would or should feel guilty and ashamed for all the wartime killing they had done' (Verkamp 1993, p. 11). It was believed that although the evil in which warriors had participated might have been necessary, it was still evil. And so, rather than dismissing guilt and shame 'as insignificant or irrelevant', returning warriors were encouraged to seek resolution (…) through rituals of purification, expiation, and reconciliation' (Verkamp 1993, p. 11). Elsewhere there were comparable rituals for warriors, including several Native American nations who cleansed warriors of their 'inner pollution' with sweat lodge rituals and by sharing war stories (O'Donnell 2015).

Purification rituals still exist today. They have been documented in the context of the Mozambican Civil War, which ended in 1992 (Honwana 1999, Granjo and Nicolini 2006). Here, these rituals served to cleanse returned (child) soldiers from the spirits of people they or others had killed, as well as the spirits of people whose death had been caused by war in other ways. It was thought that these spirits could create problems and disrupt life in the families and villages of the soldiers. Besides the soldiers themselves, their family and ancestral spirits were required to be present at these rituals, which would take several days, and included soldiers re-enacting war moves with a pestle pole, which, notably, did not signify a weapon but the family and the house. This re-enactment served as a form of catharsis. The soldiers would have to take herbal remedies to cleanse their bodies internally, through inhaling and drinking, and externally through bathing and massage. Besides re-establishing spiritual balance, the rituals served to restore the social balance disrupted by war. Precisely, spiritual and social (im)balance were seen as inextricably connected. This is why the final rituals, centered on the soldiers' homecoming, always entailed the villagers' acceptance of the soldiers' regret and welcoming them back in a festive manner (Honwana 1999, Granjo and Nicolini 2006).

It is worth noting that while the ancient Christian rituals centered on guilt and penance, the Mozambique rituals focus on moral imbalance and restoring harmony (cf. Granjo and Nicolini 2006). That said, Christian, Native American and Mozambican rituals also have important characteristics in common. To list some key characteristics, they all:

- involve an understanding of military action as something that may be morally 'polluting'
- involve an approach to moral pollution as something more complicated than the effect of unequivocal wrongdoing, without releasing veterans from responsibility for their acts
- combine physical, psychological and social elements in dealing with the impact of deployment
- are not just for the veteran but demand active engagement by the wider community
- are simultaneously purification and reintegration rituals
- and aim to guide homecoming soldiers find a new inner and social balance.

To be clear, despite what the notion of 'purification' suggests, no ritual entailed an expectation of complete individual cleansing and social restoration. The rituals were rites of passage,[6] meaning that returned soldiers did not re-assume their pre-deployment status but took the new status of veteran in the community. In line with this, the aim was to re-establish a certain spiritual and social balance, not make things exactly as they were before.

Today's Dutch society has no institutional practices with these characteristics, and it seems safe to assume that this is the case in many other societies. There are speeches, medals and an annual Veterans Day, but these rituals are isolated celebrations of veterans' supposedly exceptional status. They address the moral significance of military intervention only superficially, leaving deeper discussion to the private rooms of therapists. As such, moreover, they may even deepen the distance between veterans and society.

How to address this problem? In any case, not by simply copying and implementing one of the above rituals, it seems. A ritual derives its meaning from its relation to larger material and ideational frameworks (see e.g. Van Gennep 1909, Turner 1969, Geertz 1973), and when an existing ritual is mimicked in an entirely different context, its meaning inevitably changes (Johnson 1995, Aldred 2000). Hence, it can happen that a ritual signifying moral complexity and purification in Mozambique becomes an alienating charade if implemented in the Netherlands.

Interestingly, however, the stories of the interviewed veterans indicate that in the absence of existing meaningful rituals, they invented their own symbolic acts. Many Dutchbat veterans, for instance, have returned to Srebrenica to walk the locally organized annual March of Peace *(Marš Mira)*. This march follows, in the opposite direction, the route taken by thousands of Muslim refugees after the fall of Srebrenica. Some veterans still go there every few years, by themselves or with their family and colleagues. Of the veterans speaking about this, some said they did the march to get a better picture of what they had experienced; others said they did it to 're-do' their tour but with a better ending this time; some said it was a kind of apology, a way to show accountability and remorse; others maintained it was to show solidarity to local survivors of the tragedy, to whom they felt connected. Many veterans mentioned several of these reasons.

A second activity many of the interviewed veterans recounted was sharing their experiences. Some veterans wrote down their experiences, either in a diary or blog solely meant for friends and family, or in a book to be read by Dutch society at large. Others have given guest lectures on their deployment in Dutch schools as part of an initiative organized by the Netherlands Veterans Institute. Yet others shared their story with journalists or researchers – me, for instance. Again, the reasons given for doing this were versatile, and again, many gave several reasons. They began talking about their experience to gain a better picture of it; to 'confess' the mistakes they had made; to help others (family, friends, colleagues, society in general) understand what it was like; to obtain recognition both for themselves and fellow sufferers, and/or to warn politicians about the consequences of their decisions.

6 'Rites of passage', coined by anthropologist Van Gennep (1909) and expanded by anthropologist Turner (1969) refer to three phases: separation (of the old status/world), liminality (transition between the two statuses and worlds), and reincorporation (into the new status and new world (Van Gennep 1909, Turner 1969).

Similar to communal rituals mentioned above, these newly created 'rituals' allowed veterans to deal with their moral distress in ways that acknowledged moral complexity and opened up space to re-connect with others. Also, the rituals did not entail an illusionary promise of returning to a previous innocence, but offered a step toward a new way of engaging with the self and the world. In many ways, then, these new rituals answer the question of how to address moral distress in present-day societies. However, in one essential respect the new rituals still lack what their predecessors did have: involvement on the part of society. This is unfortunate in many ways because besides being vital in themselves, societal recognition and engagement seem to be significant motivators for change at all discussed – individual, military and political – levels.

Conclusion

It could be said that problems of black-and-white approaches constituted the common thread running through not only this final chapter, but through this entire study. As became clear, to find words for disorientating experiences and connect to people without similar experiences is often difficult in itself. If society then seems to offer only black-and-white narratives of heroes, victims and perpetrators, this exacerbates this difficulty. Conversely, so long as veterans disengage from society, they perpetuate these narratives, making the problem of estrangement a two-way street. With respect to political practices, black-and-white narratives also thwart a nuanced approach to the moral dimensions of military practice. They cause the notion of Just War to either be misapplied as a simple affirmation of the righteousness of warfare, or to be rejected as an impossible paradox. When misapplied as simple justification, soldiers are deployed with dangerous illusions. When rejected because it is paradoxical, all that is left is either a radical interpretation of military intervention as always evil and nothing but evil, which in its simplicity is just as unhelpful as unequivocal justification, or an interpretation of military intervention as something for which normative judgments are inappropriate, which leaves no space for moral questions at all. In discourse dominated by black-and-white narratives, recognizing complicated moral understandings is already a problem beforehand, and when this is the case, such understandings may not even be able to enter the discourse.

Reflecting on the practical implications of this study, I considered several alternatives to black-and-white approaches. I discussed, inter alia, the value of a more elaborate moral vocabulary, the decision-making framework of the Just War Tradition, and purification and reintegration practices. These approaches share several crucial characteristics: they recognize the existence of moral distress, they do it justice by considering guilt and anger as possibly appropriate feelings, they offer a language and practice for moral complexity, they stress both individual responsibility and contextual factors, and they acknowledge the inevitability and at times insolvability of moral conflict.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Topic List

[While I always carried a copy of the topic list with me, I usually did not have to look at it.]

Pre-interview
Repeat information mentioned in email

- This interview is for a scientific research that focuses on how soldiers and veterans deal with challenges during deployment and after homecoming. The research also focuses on the role of political decision-making and public opinion in soldiers' and veterans' deployment and homecoming experiences. One of the goals of the research is to better understand deployment-related stress and mental health problems.
- The research is a scientific study, and I'm a researcher in what is called the social sciences. I'm thus not a therapist but a scientist. I'm not trained to give any information or advice regarding psychological problems or other deployment-related problems.
- There is a central office for advice or help. It's called the *Veteranenloket*, website *Veteranenloket.nl*. I also wrote the address in my email to you.
- A bit about me: I have been doing research on military topics for several years now. I became interested in this topic as a result of friendships with soldiers.
- This interview will be completely anonymous. In my publications/talks/all my contacts with other people, I will never use your real name, always a pseudonym. If necessary I'll also leave out details such as specific dates and locations.

New information

- This interview won't be an interview in a very formal format with a list of questions to tick off, but more like a normal conversation. So you're also free to deviate from my questions and whatever else you'd do in normal conversations.
- The topics I want to discuss are your reasons for joining the military, your military education, your deployment experiences and your homecoming experiences, and all other experiences that may have something to do with this.
- I would like to record the interview so that I don't have to write during the interview. Nobody except me will have access to the recordings. Is that okay?
- You do not have to answer any question if you don't want to.

Topic list

[Most interviews lasted between three and five hours. I probed deeper into answers when the interviewee discussed impactful experiences, topics related to morality (injustice, guilt, shame, etc.), the mission's political and/or societal dimensions or other relevant topics]

Motivations for joining the military/the mission

- When did you join the military? Why?
- What trade and weapon did you choose, why?
- Can you tell me about your training and education?

- Was it what you expected of it? Why (not)?
- What was easy? What was difficult?

- Did you feel it changed you?
- Did you feel being a soldier is very different from a civilian job? (Is a soldier 24/7 a soldier? How does that work?)
- Does your work has to be useful in your eyes? Why (not?) What does being useful mean to you?

Deployment expectations and experiences

- How many times have you been deployed? When and where?
- How was the first time?
- What did your friend and family think of it?

- In what function were you deployed to Srebrenica/Uruzgan?
- Can you remember what you expected of that mission?
- What did you hope the mission would be like?
- How was the first week of the mission?
- Can you tell me about the rest of the mission?
- Was it what you expected of it? Why (not)?
- What was easy? What was difficult?

- Did you personally stand behind the mission?
- Did it matter whether or not the mission had some kind of point? Why (not)? What did matter to you?

Impressive or difficult experiences during deployment

- Are there moments or events that you would call impressive, in a good or negative way?
- Can you tell me about these moments/events? (Ask about them in detail)

[Whenever appropriate:]
- Why, exactly, did this moment/event impact you?
- Had you ever expected you could experience something like this? Why (not)?
- Were you prepared for something like this? Why (not)?
- Can you remember how you felt about it back then? How do you feel about it now?

<u>Homecoming</u>

- How were the last weeks of your mission?
- Before returning home you went to Zagreb/Crete. Can you tell me a little about that?
- How were the first days and weeks of being back in the Netherlands? How did you experience it? What did you do?
- How was it to see friends and family again?

- Was it what you expected of coming home? Why (not)?
- What was easy? What was difficult?
- After those first weeks, how was it?

<u>Possible impact and help seeking</u>

- What, would you say, does your time in the military mean to you and your life?
- What about your deployment more specifically?
- How did it influence you?
- Do you feel it changed the way you look at things or deal with things? Why (not)? Positive/ negative?
- What things are you proud of? What things aren't you proud of?

- What things helped you deal with difficult experiences?
- Are there things that made your problems worse?

[If not addressed yet:]
- Did you go to a counselor/chaplain?
- To someone else?
- Did you go in therapy?
- [If so:] What made you go? How did you experience it? [If not:] Would you ever consider it?
- Do you have a diagnosis? [If so:] How was it to receive this diagnosis? [If not:] What do you think of when you think of PTSD?
- Did therapy help you?
- Did you seek help in other ways?

In research circles, there's a relatively new concept: 'moral injury'. Do you know it? [Explain concept.] What do you think about the term moral injury?

Closing questions

- What did you think of this interview/conversation?
- Any questions you found strange?
- Are there things I didn't ask about? [take time]

Post-interview

Explain: I can always be reached via email for questions about the research, or if you think of anything you haven't told me yet and which might be interesting for the research.
Repeat info about being a scientific researcher instead of therapist, and the *Veteranenloket* as the central office for questions or help regarding personal situations.
Ask: do you have a colleague or acquaintance who might also be interested in an interview?
Explain: preferably not a close friend, because I want to reach a range of soldiers/veterans as wide as possible.

Appendix B. Data Coding Results

The individual level

How did Dutchbat and TFU (ex-)soldiers in general make sense of and cope with (potential) moral challenges related to their profession?

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th colspan="2">Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>No justification needed</td><td colspan="2">No justification needed</td><td rowspan="7">Making soldiering less complex</td></tr>
<tr><td>Contrasting with murderers/ mercenaries/ robots</td><td rowspan="5">Justifications and rationalizations</td><td rowspan="6">Inconsistency in interpretations</td></tr>
<tr><td>Doing good things</td></tr>
<tr><td>Rules & instruction</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reciprocity</td></tr>
<tr><td>Distancing & numbing</td></tr>
<tr><td>Switching civilian/military mindsets</td><td>Compartmentalization</td></tr>
</table>

Did Dutchbat and TFU (ex-)soldiers report distress related to moral challenges, and if so, what did these challenges and experiences of distress entail?

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th>Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>Unequivocal transgression</td><td>Unequivocal transgression</td><td>Unequivocal transgression</td></tr>
<tr><td>Value conflict</td><td rowspan="3">Equivocal experiences</td><td rowspan="3">Moral failure</td></tr>
<tr><td>Overwhelmed/detached</td></tr>
<tr><td>Senselessness</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th colspan="2">Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>Self-blame</td><td rowspan="2">Unequivocal (self-)blame</td><td rowspan="2">Equivocal (self-)blame</td><td rowspan="3">Moral disorientation

Ethical struggle</td></tr>
<tr><td>Blame of others</td></tr>
<tr><td>Questions/uncertainty regarding responsibility and blame</td><td colspan="2">Questions/uncertainty</td></tr>
</table>

Moral distress in relation to factors at the political level

Did political practices surrounding the Dutchbat and TFU missions, including decision-making practices related to the mission design, its framing and practices in the mission's aftermath, play a role in experiences of moral distress among deployed (ex-)soldiers, and if so, how?

UNPROFOR

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th colspan="2">Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>Powerlessness and senselessness</td><td rowspan="3">Experiencing political displacement of problems</td><td rowspan="3">Experiencing political silence</td><td rowspan="3">Experience of institutional betrayal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Abandoning and being abandoned during deployment</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feeling suckered and let down in the mission's aftermath</td></tr>
<tr><td>Demanding truth and compensation</td><td colspan="2">Demanding truth and compensation</td><td>Seeking reparations</td></tr>
</table>

ISAF

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th colspan="2">Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>Powerlessness and senselessness</td><td rowspan="3">Experiencing political displacement of problems</td><td rowspan="3">Experiencing political silence</td><td rowspan="3">Experience of institutional betrayal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Abandoning and being abandoned during deployment</td></tr>
<tr><td>Denial of one's experience in the mission's aftermath</td></tr>
<tr><td>Desire to be taken seriously</td><td colspan="2">Desire to be taken seriously</td><td>Seeking reparations</td></tr>
</table>

Moral distress in relation to factors at the societal level

Did public perceptions of the Dutchbat and TFU missions and of the military in general, as expressed in for instance public debates, play a role in experiences of moral distress among (ex-)soldiers deployed on these missions, and if so, how?

UNPROFOR

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th colspan="2">Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>Public accusations</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Feeling misunderstood</td><td rowspan="4">Experience of misrecognition</td></tr>
<tr><td>Frustration and anger</td></tr>
<tr><td>Silence</td><td rowspan="2">Societal estrangement</td><td rowspan="2">Self-estrangement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disorientation and Alienation</td></tr>
</table>

ISAF

<table>
<tr><th>Initial codes</th><th colspan="2">Focused codes</th><th>Core categories</th></tr>
<tr><td>Criticism and admiration</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Feeling misunderstood</td><td rowspan="4">Experience of misrecognition</td></tr>
<tr><td>Frustration and anger</td></tr>
<tr><td>Silence</td><td rowspan="2">Societal estrangement</td><td rowspan="2">Self-estrangement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disorientation and Alienation</td></tr>
</table>

Summary

Summary

Military intervention is a collective enterprise which may have great moral impact on soldiers. Although this has since long been known, most current conceptualizations of military distress pay marginal attention to its moral and sociopolitical-political aspects. Current concepts such as 'post-traumatic stress disorder' tend to focus on fear-related pathology rather than moral conflict, and on the psyche of the soldier rather than of the people who send soldiers on a missions and welcome them back. To address these gaps, the present study examined potential moral dimensions of deployment-related distress and the role of political and societal factors in this.

The focus is on the relatively new concept of 'moral injury', which refers to the suffering that may arise when a person's expectations and beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness are violated, either by him- or herself or by others. Both academic and public discourses have quickly embraced the concept, but it is still in development. Though explicitly intended to address the moral aspects that dominant trauma models fail to grasp, it focuses mainly on the 'injury' while attending too little to the 'moral'. Also, as in current trauma models, it overlooks the wider context of deployment-related suffering.

These shortcomings are translated in the following research objective: **to advance the empirical and theoretical understanding of moral, political and societal dimensions of deployment-related moral distress**, and in doing so, contribute to the concept of 'moral injury' and to practical interventions to address and prevent moral distress. (To avoid confusion and explicitly refrain from the reification that often plagues research on psychological concepts, a distinction is made between the particular concept of 'moral injury' and the label 'moral distress', created to refer to phenomenon that this concept aims to account for.)

An interdisciplinary theoretical framework was developed to achieve the research objective, integrating perspectives from the fields of psychology, philosophy, anthropology and political sciences. This made it possible to move from the predominantly psychological perspective that the current concept of moral injury employs to gain a more comprehensive understanding. To gain thorough insight into potential moral and sociopolitical dimensions of moral distress, two qualitative case studies were conducted among (1) Dutchbat veterans been deployed to Srebrenica, the former Yugoslavia, and (2) TFU veterans deployed to Uruzgan, Afghanistan. Drawing on 80 in-depth interviews (40 per case), this study examined moral dimensions of experiences of distress, and the role of political practices and public perceptions in experiences of moral distress, during and after deployment. Although the initial plan was to compare the Dutchbat mission, as a 'blue helmet' peace mission, with the TFU mission, as a 'green helmet' counterinsurgency mission involving combat, the two cases turned out to be remarkably similar with respect to moral, political and societal dimensions of moral distress.

Before focusing on stories of moral distress, in order to better understand why and when moral distress arises, this research explored **how soldiers perceive their profession in the first place and what cognitive strategies they tend to use to cope with moral challenges during and after deployment**. The research findings showed that soldiers generally do not experience as much moral tension as one might expect considering their circumstances. Yet, as the findings also showed, this does not mean that they never experience tension, and when they do, they tend to employ justifying simplifications to resolve tension, relying on the

belief that all situations are ultimately uncomplicated and soluble. Moral challenges seem to arise relatively often in both peace missions and combat operations, and while the specific content of the justifying simplifications that soldiers use in peace missions and combat operations may vary, in essence they are remarkably similar. In the face of moral challenges during deployment, soldiers tell themselves that 'some things just happen in war', or they may employ formulas such as 'I just have to follow orders', 'it was him or me' or 'I treat them like they treat me'. To resolve possible tensions arising from being both a soldier and civilian, they tend to compartmentalize their military and civilian selves, prioritizing the former in military contexts while allowing the latter to supersede in others. Many tend to interpret the compartmentalization they employ, of which they are often aware, as the necessary burden required by their profession. Consequently, it is not in spite of but because of the fact that they are also civilians that they are able to interpret soldiering as morally right.

Second, this research zoomed in on the stories of veterans who reported distress related to moral challenges, to examine **what the moral challenges and experiences of distress of morally distressed veterans entail**. This investigation showed that the aforementioned cognitive strategies can fail: the moral complexity of situations cannot always be simplified and these situations cannot always be unequivocally justified or excused. At the same time, it turned out, this complexity often also made it impossible to unequivocally condemn these situations. The morally distressing experiences of which veterans spoke were often situations of value conflict, moral detachment and feelings of senselessness. These situations did not involve clear-cut experiences of wrongdoing (the focus of current studies on 'moral injury'), and accordingly did not allow straightforward interpretations (which soldiers tend to employ). While veterans often blamed themselves or others, they usually also experienced uncertainty and conflict with respect to these judgments. That is, besides feelings of guilt, shame and anger, morally distressing events often engendered a profound sense of moral disorientation. Many veterans lost their trust not only in the goodness of both themselves and the world, but in the very notions of good and bad. This painful loss forced them to engage in an ethical struggle with previous moral expectations and beliefs, in an attempt to resolve the moral questions that had arisen and find moral re-orientation again.

Third, this research examined **the role of political practices in experiences of moral distress**. Specifically, it examined whether and how political decision-making and framing surrounding military missions may contribute to the emergence of particular morally distressing experiences for soldiers 'on the ground', both during and after deployment. The stories of Dutchbat and TFU veterans turned out to be remarkably similar with respect to political factors, and further analysis showed that these similarities were related to the fact that at the political level as well, the Dutchbat and TFU missions had far more in common than not. To be sure, compared to the Dutchbat mission, the TFU mission had a clearer mandate, more means and possibilities and an improved mental health care system. However, at a more fundamental level the two missions turned out to be characterized by similar unresolved conflicts, including (1) discrepancies between the why (overarching purpose), what (objectives) and how (means and possibilities) of the mission, (2) ambiguity regarding the why, what and how of the mission, (3) discrepancies between soldiers' operational experience and political narratives, before, during and after the mission, and

(4) lack of political acknowledgment of such issues and thus of the role of political practices in distressing experiences. As became evident, when problems on the political level remain unresolved, they will likely affect soldiers on the micro-level. Moreover, political compromises do not always mean that problems are solved. On the contrary, rather than achieving true reconciliation of conflicting views and interests, compromises may mean that conflicts are left to the lower levels to deal with. As a result, veterans' stories showed, soldiers may develop profound feelings of political betrayal and, in turn, seek reparations from the political leadership.

Fourth, this research gained insight into **the role of public perceptions of military missions and the military in general in experiences of moral distress**. Specifically, this part of the study focused on the public criticism that Dutchbat veterans faced and the mixed reactions that the TFU mission evoked. Despite the differences in public response, the two groups revealed many striking parallels. The research findings showed that not only public criticism but also admiration may be experienced as misrecognition, and that perceived societal misrecognition may directly and indirectly contribute to moral distress. At the same time, it became clear that it is not just soldiers and veterans who may struggle with the moral significance of military intervention, but society as well. Yet, in the two examined missions this led to the opposite of mutual rapprochement between veterans and society. Public debates seem to resolve potential discomfort through orderly narratives of perpetrator and victim, normal and abnormal, and good and evil, which many veterans experienced as societal misrecognition and accordingly led to a sense of estrangement. In fact, this experience of societal misrecognition often engendered not only a sense of estrangement from society, but also from themselves.

Fifth, this research **compared and integrated the abovementioned insights with the current concept of moral injury, in order to refine the concept**. In the current concept, a person's moral beliefs are implicitly understood as a coherent system, a potentially morally injurious experience is defined as an individually perpetrated moral transgression, and moral injury is conceptualized as blame of self and/or others. In the refined concept developed in this research, moral beliefs are understood as a complex, 'messy' constellation. As potentially morally injurious experiences, experiences of moral failure, political violations of trust and dependency and societal misrecognition were added to the concept. The possible responses included experiences of moral disorientation, political betrayal and estrangement from oneself and society as well as ethical struggle, a search for political reparations and a desire for societal recognition.

Finally, this study reflected on **practical implications of these theoretical insights for the individual/interpersonal, military, political and societal level**. In doing so, several valuable approaches to military practice and deployment-related suffering emerged, including a more elaborate moral vocabulary, the decision-making framework of the Just War Tradition, and purification and reintegration practices. These approaches share several crucial characteristics: they recognize the existence of moral distress, they do it justice by considering guilt and anger as possibly appropriate feelings, they offer a language and practice for moral complexity, they stress both individual responsibility and contextual factors, and they acknowledge the inevitability and at times insolvability of moral conflict.

Samenvatting

Nederlandse samenvatting

Militaire interventie is een collectieve onderneming die een grote morele impact kan hebben op militairen. Hoewel dit al lang bekend is, besteden de meeste huidige conceptualiseringen van militair lijden nauwelijks aandacht aan morele en sociaal-politieke aspecten. Huidige begrippen zoals 'posttraumatische stressstoornis' richten zich op angstgerelateerde pathologie in plaats van op morele conflicten, en meer op de psyche van de militair dan op de mensen die militairen op een missie sturen en ze weer terug ontvangen. Om deze lacunes te vullen onderzocht deze studie potentiële morele dimensies van uitzendgerelateerde problematiek en de rol van politieke en maatschappelijke factoren hierin.

De focus van dit onderzoek ligt op het relatief nieuwe begrip 'morele verwonding', dat verwijst naar het lijden dat kan ontstaan wanneer iemands verwachtingen en overtuigingen over goed en kwaad en persoonlijke goedheid geweld aan worden gedaan, door zichzelf of door anderen. Het begrip is al snel omarmd in zowel het academische als maatschappelijke discours, maar bevindt zich nog in de ontwikkelingsfase. Hoewel het begrip expliciet bedoeld is om de morele aspecten te vatten die huidige traumamodellen niet meenemen, concentreert het zich voornamelijk op de 'verwonding' en maar weinig op het 'morele'. Net als huidige traumamodellen laat het bovendien de bredere context van uitzendgerelateerd lijden buiten beschouwing.

Deze tekortkomingen zijn vertaald in de volgende onderzoeksdoelstelling: **bij te dragen aan het empirische en theoretische begrip van morele, politieke en maatschappelijke dimensies van uitzendgerelateerd moreel lijden, en daarmee bij te dragen aan het concept 'morele verwonding' en aan praktische interventies om moreel lijden aan te pakken en te voorkomen.** (Om verwarring te voorkomen en om expliciet de reïficatie te vermijden die onderzoek naar psychologische concepten vaak plaagt, is een onderscheid gemaakt tussen 'morele verwonding', dat een specifiek concept is, en 'moreel lijden', een label dat is gecreëerd om te verwijzen naar het verschijnsel dat dit specifieke concept tracht te vangen.)

Om de onderzoeksdoelstelling te bereiken is allereerst een interdisciplinair theoretisch raamwerk ontwikkeld dat verschillende perspectieven op het gebied van psychologie, filosofie, antropologie en politieke wetenschappen integreert. Dit maakte het mogelijk om de overwegend psychologische benadering die het huidige concept hanteert uit te breiden naar een meer omvattend perspectief. Om diepgaand inzicht te krijgen in potentiële morele en sociaal-politieke dimensies van moreel lijden zijn twee kwalitatieve casestudy's uitgevoerd onder (1) Dutchbat-veteranen, die uitgezonden zijn geweest naar Srebrenica, voormalig Joegoslavië, en (2) TFU-veteranen, die uitgezonden zijn geweest naar Uruzgan, Afghanistan. Aan de hand van in totaal 80 diepte-interviews (40 per casus) onderzocht dit onderzoek morele dimensies van ervaringen van moreel lijden onder deze veteranen, tijdens en na uitzending, en de rol van politieke praktijken en publieke percepties in ervaringen van moreel lijden. Hoewel aanvankelijk het plan was om de Dutchbat-missie, als een 'blauwhelm'-vredesmissie, te vergelijken met de TFU-missie, als een *counterinsurgency*-missie inclusief vechten, bleken de twee casussen opvallend vergelijkbaar wat betreft morele, politieke en maatschappelijke dimensies van moreel lijden.

Als eerst, en voordat het onderzoek zich toespitste op verhalen van moreel lijden, werd onderzocht **hoe militairen hun beroep in de eerste plaats zien en welke cognitieve strategieën zij gebruiken om te copen met morele uitdagingen tijdens en na de uitzending**. Dit, om beter te begrijpen waarom en wanneer moreel lijden ontstaat. Uit de onderzoeksresultaten bleek dat militairen over het algemeen niet zoveel morele spanningen ervaren als men zou kunnen verwachten gezien hun omstandigheden. Tegelijkertijd lieten de bevindingen ook zien dat dit niet betekent dat ze nooit spanning ervaren, en wanneer ze dat wel doen hebben ze de neiging om rechtvaardigende simplificeringen te gebruiken om zo deze spanning op te lossen, bouwend op de overtuiging dat alle situaties uiteindelijk ongecompliceerd en oplosbaar zijn. Morele uitdagingen lijken relatief vaak voor te komen tijdens zowel vredesmissies als gevechtsoperaties, en hoewel de specifieke inhoud van de rechtvaardigende simplificeringen die militairen gebruiken in vredesmissies en gevechtsoperaties kan variëren, zijn ze in essentie opmerkelijk gelijk aan elkaar. Geconfronteerd met morele uitdagingen tijdens uitzending vertellen militairen zichzelf bijvoorbeeld dat 'sommige dingen gewoon gebeuren in oorlog', of hanteren ze formules zoals 'ik moet gewoon instructies opvolgen', 'het was hij of ik' of 'ik behandel hen zoals ze mij behandelen'. Om potentiële spanningen op te lossen tussen het zijn van zowel militair als burger blijken militairen geneigd tot het compartimentaliseren van hun militaire en civiele zelf, waarbij ze in militaire contexten prioriteit geven aan de eerste terwijl ze de laatste in andere contexten laten prevaleren. Bovendien beschouwen velen deze compartimentalisering, waarvan zij zich vaak bewust blijken, als de noodzakelijke last die hun beroep vereist. Hierdoor is het niet *ondanks* maar *dankzij* het feit dat zij ook burgers zijn dat zij het militaire beroep als moreel juist kunnen zien.

Ten tweede zoomde dit onderzoek in op de verhalen van veteranen die psychische problematiek rapporteerden, om te onderzoeken **wat de morele uitdagingen en ervaringen van lijden van moreel 'verwonde' veteranen inhouden**. Hieruit bleek dat bovengenoemde cognitieve strategieën kunnen falen: de morele complexiteit van bepaalde situaties kan niet altijd worden vereenvoudigd en deze situaties kunnen niet altijd ondubbelzinnig worden gerechtvaardigd of verontschuldigd. Tegelijkertijd bleek dat, vanwege deze complexiteit, veteranen vaak ook niet in staat waren om deze situaties ondubbelzinnig te veroordelen. De ervaringen waarover veteranen spraken waren vaak situaties van waardeconflict, morele loskoppeling en gevoelens van zinloosheid. Deze situaties betroffen geen ondubbelzinnige ervaringen van morele schendingen (die wel de focus zijn van huidig onderzoek naar 'morele verwonding') en stonden daarom geen eenduidige interpretaties toe (die militairen normaal gesproken geneigd zijn te hanteren). Hoewel veteranen zichzelf en/of anderen deze situaties vaak kwalijk namen, ervoeren ze vaak ook onzekerheid en conflicten met betrekking tot deze oordelen. Dat wil zeggen, naast schuldgevoelens, schaamte en boosheid ervoeren zij vaak ook een sterk gevoel van morele desoriëntatie. Zij verloren niet alleen hun vertrouwen in de goedheid van zowel zichzelf als de wereld om heen, maar ook in de noties van goed en slecht als zodanig. Dit pijnlijke verlies dwong hen ertoe een ethische strijd aan te gaan, een worsteling met vroegere morele verwachtingen en overtuigingen, als een poging om de morele vragen die waren ontstaan op te lossen, zoekend naar morele heroriëntatie.

Ten derde onderzocht dit onderzoek **de rol van politieke praktijken in ervaringen van moreel lijden.** Meer specifiek werd onderzocht of en hoe politieke besluitvorming en 'framing' rondom militaire missies bijdroegen aan het ontstaan van moreel verwondende ervaringen voor militairen 'on the ground', zowel tijdens als na hun uitzending. De verhalen van Dutchbat- en TFU-veteranen bleken opvallend gelijk aan elkaar wat betreft politieke factoren, en verdere analyse liet zien dat deze gelijkenissen gerelateerd waren aan het feit dat de Dutchbat- en TFU-missies ook op politiek niveau veel meer met elkaar gemeen hadden dan niet. In vergelijking met de Dutchbat-missie had de TFU-missie zonder meer een duidelijker mandaat, meer middelen en mogelijkheden en een verbeterde geestelijke gezondheidszorg. Maar op meer fundamenteel niveau bleken de twee missies gekenmerkt door vergelijkbare onopgeloste conflicten, waaronder (1) discrepanties tussen het waarom (overkoepelend doel), wat (doelstellingen) en hoe (middelen en mogelijkheden) van de missie, (2) ambiguïteit met betrekking tot het waarom, wat en hoe van de missie, (3) discrepanties tussen de operationele ervaring van militairen en politieke narratieven, voor, tijdens en na de missie, en (4) gebrek aan politieke erkenning van dergelijke kwesties en dus van de rol van politieke praktijken in psychische problematiek onder militairen. De onderzoeksbevindingen lieten zien dat wanneer problemen op politiek niveau onopgelost blijven, ze waarschijnlijk hun doorwerking zullen hebben op militairen op het microniveau. Bovendien bleek dat politieke compromissen niet altijd betekenen dat problemen worden opgelost. Integendeel, compromissen kunnen betekenen dat conflicten aan de lagere niveaus worden overgelaten in plaats van dat daadwerkelijke synthese van tegengestelde opvattingen en belangen wordt bereikt. Als gevolg hiervan kunnen militairen diepgaande gevoelens van politiek verraad ontwikkelen en op hun beurt reparaties van het politieke domein gaan zoeken.

Ten vierde heeft dit onderzoek inzicht verkregen in **de rol van publieke percepties van militaire missies en de krijgsmacht in ervaringen van moreel lijden**. Meer specifiek richtte dit onderzoeksdeel zich op de publieke kritiek waarmee Dutchbat-veteranen werden geconfronteerd en de gemengde reacties die de TFU-missie opriep. Ondanks deze verschillen in publieke respons lieten de twee groepen opnieuw veel opvallende overeenkomsten zien. Zo werd duidelijk dat niet alleen maatschappelijke kritiek maar ook bewondering kan worden ervaren als miskenning, en dat maatschappelijke miskenning direct en indirect kan bijdragen aan moreel lijden. Tegelijkertijd bleek dat het niet alleen militairen en veteranen zijn die kunnen worstelen met de morele betekenis van militaire interventie, maar dat dit ook geldt voor de samenleving als geheel. Echter, in de twee onderzochte missies leidde dit tot het tegenovergestelde van onderlinge toenadering tussen veteranen en samenleving. In publieke debatten leek eventueel ongemak te worden opgelost door middel van ordelijke verhalen van dader en slachtoffer, normaal en abnormaal, en goed en kwaad, wat veel veteranen ervoeren als maatschappelijke miskenning en wat daardoor leidde tot een gevoel van vervreemding. Bovendien leidde deze ervaring van maatschappelijke miskenning vaak niet alleen tot vervreemding van de samenleving, maar ook van henzelf.

Ten vijfde werden **de bovengenoemde inzichten vergeleken en geïntegreerd met het huidige begrip van morele verwonding, om zo tot een meer verfijnd concept te komen.** In het huidige begrip worden de morele overtuigingen van een persoon impliciet begrepen als een samenhangend systeem, een potentieel moreel verwondende ervaring wordt

gedefinieerd als een individueel begane morele overtreding, en morele verwonding wordt geconceptualiseerd als veroordeling van het 'zelf' of anderen. In het verfijnde concept dat is ontwikkeld in dit onderzoek, worden morele overtuigingen begrepen als een complexe, 'rommelige' constellatie. Als potentieel moreel schadelijke ervaringen zijn ervaringen van moreel falen, politieke schending van vertrouwen en afhankelijkheid, en maatschappelijke miskenning toegevoegd aan het concept. Als mogelijke reacties op dergelijke ervaringen zijn ervaringen van morele desoriëntatie, politiek verraad en vervreemding van zichzelf en de samenleving toegevoegd, evenals ethische worsteling, een zoektocht naar politieke reparaties en een verlangen naar maatschappelijke erkenning.

Ten slotte werd gereflecteerd op **praktische implicaties van deze theoretische inzichten voor het individuele/interpersoonlijke, militaire, politieke en maatschappelijke niveau.** Hieruit kwamen verschillende waardevolle benaderingen van de militaire praktijk en uitzendgerelateerd lijden voort, waaronder een meer uitgebreide morele vocabulaire, het besluitvormingskader van de Traditie van de Rechtvaardige Oorlog, en praktijken van purificatie en re-integratie. Deze benaderingen hebben enkele cruciale kenmerken met elkaar gemeen: ze erkennen het bestaan van moreel lijden en doen hier recht aan door morele oordelen te overwegen als mogelijk gepast; ze bieden adequate taal en praktijken voor morele complexiteit; ze benadrukken zowel individuele verantwoordelijkheid als contextuele factoren, en ze erkennen de onvermijdelijkheid en soms onoplosbaarheid van morele conflicten.

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Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

Tine Molendijk (born February 23, 1987 in Ezinge, the Netherlands) is a cultural anthropologist with a special interest in the topics of violence, military culture and mental health, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and moral injury. She obtained a bachelor's degree (2011) and master's degree (2012) in cultural anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, and carried out her doctoral research at the Centre for International Conflict Analysis and Management (CICAM) at the Radboud University Nijmegen (2016-2019). Before starting her doctoral research as PhD candidate, she worked as a researcher at the Netherlands Defense Academy, where she examined military training in stress and ethics. Prior to that, she was a researcher in a project on the use of neurobiological material in forensic psychiatric reports at the Department of Clinical Genetics at the VU Medical Center. She also lectured in various courses in cultural anthropology and philosophy of science at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam.

This dissertation is the result of her doctoral research. Besides this dissertation, she has published in international peer-reviewed journals (*Social Science & Medicine; Journal of Military Ethics; New Ideas in Psychology; Political Psychology*), national professional journals (*Militaire Spectator; Tijdschrift Geestelijke Verzorging*), and books for popular audiences (*Moral Injury: Verborgen Littekens*). She has also written about her studies in newspapers and magazines (*Volkskrant, De Groene Amsterdammer*) and has given lectures, presentations and workshops to diverse audiences (military instructors, health care professionals, veterans, aspirant-officers).

Dissemination of Research Findings

Dissemination of Research Findings

In addition to this dissertation, the findings of this study have been disseminated in other ways. The list below presents an overview of the academic, professional and popular publications and talks that directly resulted from this study.

Academic Publications (English)

2019. The Role of Political Practices in Moral Injury: A Study of Afghanistan Veterans. *Political Psychology*, 40(2): 261-275.

2018. Moral Injury in Relation to Public Debates: The Role of Societal Misrecognition in Moral Conflict-Colored Trauma among Soldiers. *Social Science & Medicine*, 211: 314-320.

2018. Toward an Interdisciplinary Conceptualization of Moral Injury: From Unequivocal Guilt and Anger to Moral Conflict and Disorientation. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 51: 1-8.

Academic Publications (Dutch)

2019. (together with D.E.M. Verweij) Voorkomen is beter dan genezen: Moral injury vanuit macro- en micro-perspectief [Prevention is Better than Cure. Moral Injury from a Micro and Macro Perspective]. In: M. van der Giessen, P.H. Kamphuis, E.R. Muller, U. Rosenthal, G. Valk, and E. Vermetten, eds. *Veteranen: Veteranen en veteranenbeleid in Nederland*. Deventer: Wolters Kluwer, 165–184.

2018. Moral injury en erkenning: Eenduidige verhalen over oorlog tegenover tegenstrijdige uitzendervaringen. [Moral injury and Recognition: Unequivocal Narratives about War versus Contradictory Deployment Experiences.] In: D. Muller and E. Kamp (Eds.) *Moral injury: Verborgen littekens van het innerlijke strijdveld*. Delft: Eburon. 89-101.

2017. Oude en nieuwe rituelen voor moral injury [Ancient and New Rituals for Moral Injury]. *Religie & Samenleving*, 12(2/3): 221–229.

Publications and Appearances in Professional and Popular Media

2019. ‘Ben ik een slecht mens?’ [‘Am I a bad person?’] *Checkpoint*, 20(5): 15.

2019, June 7. Interviewed for: Moreel verwond [Morally Injured] [Radio documentary]. *Radio Doc, Radio* 1. Amsterdam: Radiomakers Desmet. Available on: https://www.2doc.nl/documentaires/series/radio-doc/Nieuws/Oorlog-verstoort-gevoel-van-goed-en-kwaad-bij-soldaten.html.

2019. Buiten de behandelkamer. [Outside the Therapist’s Office.] *Impact Magazine*, 2019(1): 18-20.

2018. Epilogue. In: F. Kurstjens and A. Staaks, *Mijn groene pak: Een boek over moral injury* [Semi-biographic novel about a Dutch veteran's deployment experiences and related mental health problems]. Eindhoven: Lecturis. ISBN: 9789462263000.
2018. Interviewed by Anne Dirks in: 'En, nog iemand doodgeschoten?' De morele wonden van veteranen. ['And, have you killed anyone?' The Moral Injuries of Veterans.] Vrij Nederland [News magazine].
2018, May 7. Oorlogswonden zijn van ons allemaal. [War Injuries Are of Us All.] *Nederlands Dagblad* [Newspaper].
2018, May 5. De morele verwondingen van Nederlandse militairen. [The Moral Injuries of Dutch Soldiers.] *De Volkskrant* [Newspaper].
2018. Moral injury, politieke praktijken en publieke debatten. [Moral Injury, Political Practices and Public Debates.] *Tijdschrift Geestelijke Verzorging* [Journal for chaplains and moral counselors], 21(89): 51.
2018. Twee persoonlijke verhalen over *moral injury*. [Two Personal Stories of Moral Injury.] In: D. Muller and E. Kamp (Eds.) *Moral injury: Verborgen littekens van het innerlijke strijdveld*. Delft: Eburon. 19-30.
2017. Onderzoek naar trauma: Wie ben ik om hierover te schrijven? [Studying Trauma: Who Am I to Write about It?.] *Antropologen.nl* [Website of the Dutch Anthropological Association]. Available on: antropologen.nl/onderzoek-naar-trauma-wie-ben-ik-om-hierover-te-schrijven.
2017. Interviewed by Trivizier in: Moral Injury: Op zoek naar een nieuwe 'gedeelde taal'. [Moral Injury: In Search of a New 'Shared Language'.] *Trivizier* [Journal of the Dutch Military Trade Union], 1/2: 20-23.
2016. (together with C. Brinkgreve) Moral injury: van ziekte naar schuldgevoel [Moral Injury: From Illness to Guilt Feelings.] *De Groene Amsterdammer* [News magazine], (140)3: 40-43.

Selection of Talks

2019, June 4. Invited speaker for a train-the-trainer course on military ethics for military ethics instructors in the Dutch armed forces. The Hague, The Netherlands.
2019, April 10. Invited speaker for a workshop on moral injury for military chaplains at the Netherlands Veterans Institute. Doorn, The Netherlands.
2018, November 9. Invited speaker for a train-the-trainer workshop for military instructors in mission-specific training at the School for Peace Missions. Harskamp, The Netherlands.
2018, June 20. Invited speaker for a workshop on moral injury for healthcare professionals working with people with intellectual disabilities, organized by PRISMA, Biezenmortel, The Netherlands.
2018, April 12. Invited speaker at *Almost Sunrise*, documentary presentation and discussion session for military moral counselors and veterans, organized by Diensten Geestelijke Verzorging. Zeist, The Netherlands.

2017, October 10. Wat is Moral Injury? [What is Moral Injury?] Invited speaker at *#Samenvoorwaarts*, symposium by and for veterans, organized by Freebird69 and Dorstige Types. Otterlo, The Netherlands.

2017, June 7. Oude en nieuwe rituelen voor moral injury. [Ancient and New Rituals for Moral Injury]. Invited speaker at *Wat niet weg is is gezien*, symposium organized by Commissie Wetenschap and Vereniging voor Geestelijk VerZorgers. Utrecht, The Netherlands.

2017, March 3. Invited speaker at *Tegenlicht Meet Up: Sushi in Kabul*, documentary presentation and discussion session. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

2016, December 12. 'Moral injury'. [Moral Injury]. Invited speaker at *Moral injury: Verborgen littekens van het innerlijke strijdveld*, symposium organized by Dienst Humanistische Geestelijke Verzorging. Doorn, The Netherlands.