The Dutch Revolt that broke out in 1566 developed into an exhausting war that ravaged the Brabant and Flemish countryside. 1576 was a particularly violent year. Mutinous soldiers were involved in furies in Aalst, Antwerp and a number of other towns while they pillaged and burnt down numerous villages on their way through the region.

According to the newly appointed priest of the small Brabant town of Zichem, ‘the crimes during this and the following years were so many, that farming was no use and the fields, deprived of their cultivators, produced no more than ill weeds.’ The chronicle of this Godfriedus van Thienwinckel (1546-1616), pastor of Zichem, over the years 1576-1616 is one like many others written by local officials, schoolmasters, priests, monks and nuns during this war, a bare, at first sight detached, enumeration of horrors, violent raids, fires, pestilence, hunger and hardship. In the winter of 1577, the Burgomaster of Zichem refused to let the Spanish army enter the town, thus provoking the violent sack of the town. According to Van Thienwinckel, at least 100 men and women were killed at that occasion, the old town burned down and later on the burgomaster and some other officials were hanged from the windows of the castle. In the year after, even more inhabitants were killed by the pestilence. In august 1578, pillagers raided the church while Van Thienwinckel was saying mass. The pastor, trying to preserve the silver chalice in his hands, was beaten and dragged to a certain place outside of town where he was finally rescued by fellow inhabitants. In 1580, the town was first raided again by a gang of robbers and subsequently taken by those who Van Thienwinckel considered the enemy: the beggar army of the prince of Orange. From that moment the last clerics from Zichem had to take refuge elsewhere. ‘Oh! Sin that causes this terrible scourge upon the people.’ In 1583, after the Spanish army recaptured the towns of Diest and Zichem, Van Thienwinckel came home to assess the damage. He found the town largely destroyed and desolated, and ‘ridiculed by all passing by’.

Part of the chronicle is devoted to the documentation of all church possessions, both objects and buildings, that got destroyed or lost or sold in the subsequent years of war. Ironically most of them had to be sold by the inhabitants because of the taxes that burdened the devastated town.

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2 Ibidem, 20.

3 Ibidem, 21.
The chronicle of Van Thienwinckel is far from unique. Many of his contemporaries described their experiences of life-threatening situations during violent civil conflicts, or the sacks, raids and massacres by vagabonds, mutinying soldiers, or the armies of either the Spanish king or the Dutch rebellions. Although the interpretation of this type of sources is far from straightforward, they are our best evidence when we want to find out how the survivors of violence coped with their presumably distressing memories.

Nowadays, when people have been victims of violent assaults or natural disasters our medical services assure that they will need mental care. The psychological damage of traumatic experience is considered to be important, because it can lead to a great variety of symptoms and functional impairments even in following generations. According to part of the psychiatric literature, people in warzones all over the world have a chance of about 30 to 40% to develop PTSD. Neuro-imaging has shown that areas of the brain may be damaged by psychological trauma and innumerable medical demographic studies have mapped the incidence of posttraumatic disorders in post-war societies and among veterans.

Could Van Thienwinckel, or any of his contemporaries who went through a long period of suffering, insecurity, violence, deprivation and social chaos, have developed a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? Most of you will probably say that we can not know the answer to this question as we lack sources. Many psychiatrists will argue that a well founded diagnosis requires much more knowledge on Van Thienwinckel's physical and mental condition than can be obtained from his chronicle. Nevertheless, in this paper I will argue that early modern victims of war cannot have suffered from PTSD. Although the syndrome has biological or physical effects in human brains and bodies, the conditions for its development are cultural.

Even when he would be alive and present here, it is true that Van Thienwinckel would be unable to provide us with the information we need, because we would ask him about things that would not make sense to him. Traumatic memory is a modern concept, as are

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our ideas of the self and the meaning of life. Modern so-called cross-cultural psychiatry encounters many problems diagnosing post traumatic disorders in non-western cultures. The actual amount of stress and anxiety people experience is difficult to measure because people have different coping strategies and evaluate stress differently. Moreover, it comes through in the way in which survivors conceptualise and make sense of that experience. In this process, cultural premises, society and politics play a crucial role.

A number of psychologists characterize PTSD in terms of a loss of meaning in the victim’s world or the undermining of the unconscious models or ‘schemata’ that structure reality. People lose confidence in humanity and the future and feel socially detached. In modern psychiatric literature much attention is also paid to the feeling of loss of identity, ‘shattered identity’ or the disintegration of the self. According to Patrick Bracken and others, the inability to cope with these feelings and the loss of meaning is a problem of post-modern Western society.

Let us start with what Van Thienwinckel actually writes about his feelings. We all know that we may not expect too much of this. Although primary emotions like fear, aversion, anger, happiness and grief, but also social emotions like pride, shame and sympathy can be observed in physical reactions in brain and body of both humans and animals all over the world, the expression of emotions is subject to the codes, genres and idiom available in a given culture. From our childhood onwards we learn to become aware of these expressions and adapt or control them according to the needs of the culture in which we live. Moreover, we learn to reflect on these emotions and give meaning to them.

In the chronicle by Van Thienwinckel we find the expression of mainly three key emotions: fear, horror and grief. The fear is described in retrospective: the people experienced terrible fear when disaster was prophesied by the appearance of a comet. The foreboding of disaster by divine signs like whales washed ashore, comets, eclipses or even complete battles seen in the sky are common in many chronicles and histories. Fear in life-threatening situations is often considered to be a sin as well as punishment for sin. Writing about former fear however can be considered as a proof of moral survival. Usually the survival is attributed to divine grace. Andreas Bähr argues that the fear in

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9 Susan J. Brison, Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self (Princeton, NJ, 2002); According to the ‘information processing model’ of Mardi Horowitz PTSD is literally caused by the cognitive incapability to fit the traumatic experience in pre-existing schemata. In other words, patients fail to integrate the traumatic memory into the system of belief about the self and the meaning of life. Cited by Bracken, “Post-modernity” 733-743 (p. 736).
11 Ramsay MacMullen, Feelings in History, Ancient and Modern (Claremont, CA, 2003), p. 73.
such narratives should not be considered as something psychological, not as an inner feeling of the individual but rather as an emotion through which the working of divine or cosmic powers can be sensed. This is even more the case in narratives in which the fear is experienced in a dream.\textsuperscript{13}

Sadness and grief are present in all accounts, but the reason that authors give for the distress, is in most cases the damage done to the community: the destruction of town or convent, the loss of prosperity and peace and the dispersion or death of its inhabitants. The image is one of desolation, disintegration and loss of honour and pride symbolized by the destruction of town walls, churches, town halls and belfries, the taking away of bells and the breaking of altars. Enumerations of communal material losses are typical for many of the sources I have seen. The loss of status, honour and, in some cases, freedom that is involved is sometimes accentuated by either the mocking of outsiders or the nakedness of victims and refugees. Typically victims are robbed of their clothes and shoes. Those who offer them refuge literally have to cover their shame.

Horror and disgust are expressed in descriptions of ‘furies’ in which innocents are killed in cold blood: children, the old and sick, pregnant women and so forth. Violation of virgins and nuns are also considered particularly foul. Descriptions of the suffering of harmless victims can be very emotive.\textsuperscript{14} Authors are shocked by the transgression of moral codes, including the codes of war that would legitimate the punishment of rebellious towns by sacking and the killing of the male inhabitants. Yet, killings without justification or after the breaking of a contract of peace and iconoclasm are considered unforgivable.\textsuperscript{15}

What emotions are noticeably absent? First of all, feelings of guilt. Although many authors wonder who is to blame for what happened, they do not reflect on their own role in the events unless this was a heroic one. Usually authors blame either public officers (for cowardice, or for disloyalty to the common good) or small groups of radicals who provoked the anger of the enemy and risked the lives of their fellow citizens.

Secondly, we find very little private grief about the loss of loved ones. Van Thienwinckel does not mention the death of any friend or relative while it seems unlikely that no casualties occurred in his own circle. No personal mourning can be found either in the account of Lambertus Hortensius on Naarden, who actually mentions the killing of

\begin{itemize}
\item I leave out examples and references here for the sake of space.
\item This is what happened in the Holland town of Naarden in 1572. Here a few hundred citizens were massacred after the surrender of the town and after the promise that the citizens would not be harmed. See for instance the account of Lambertus Hortensius: Lambertus Hortensius, Petrus Hofman Peerlkamp, en Albertus Perk, \textit{Hortensius over de opkomst en den ondergang van Naarden} (Kemink, 1866) 132.
\end{itemize}
his son before his eyes. Educated men like Hortensius, rector of the Latin School, were not expected to show grief about personal loss. Public opinion on good behaviour was inspired by Stoicism, ideas on *constancia*, the superiority of reason over emotions, firmness and self-control, as well as the Christian command of resignation to one’s fate and subjection to the will of God. Individuals that were of particular value to the community because of their civil virtues or piety, however, should be mourned openly.

Finally, none of the chronicles describe prolonged feelings of stress and emotional disorder. Neither do they refer to the consequences of war experiences on the authors’ post war life and well being. We find no mention of feelings of social detachment or an experienced loss of meaning in life.

Of course our beliefs about self and reality have changed enormously since the late sixteenth century. For the sake of time I will skip here the immense body of literature on the development of the modern self and just examine two important features of the experience of the self by war victims around 1600.

First of all, this 16th century self is less autobiographical and, obviously, less oriented towards personal fulfillment within earthly life. Van Tienwinckel’s task in life is to take care of the church and the religious community in Zichem. In fact, the war creates the opportunity to show his dedication. Earthly life offers grief and suffering, but this suffering is not without meaning: It strengthens devotion and subjection to an almighty God. Our modern experience of self is shaped by personal recognition and autobiographical memory and perspectives. The expression of what we feel and the memory of what we have experienced are of great importance in the process of modern identity formation. No wonder that we experience loss of self when our autobiographical course is obstructed and our existence is threatened with destruction. However, to Van Thienwinckel mortal life and the body is just one part of his self. The best part of him consists of an immortal soul that is in the hands of God and provides for continuity no matter what happens.

Secondly, in the 16th century, the observation of psychological processes has not yet been shaped by knowledge of unconscious mechanisms, and a concept of memory that is broadened to the memory of physical and emotional experiences. Some authors suggest that modern trauma psychology has created PTSD by making the concept of the traumatised individual available to the broader public. According to sociologist Frank Furedi, before the 1970s, media coverage of disasters would focus on the resilience of communities, while individuals remained silent about their personal experiences.

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16 Ibidem, 161. Although some authors have suggested that this is due to shame as the son of Hortensius was a bastard, this seems very unlikely to me. On page 162 Hortensius ads: ‘… but this should be more than enough about what happened to me personally.’
17 Justus Lipsius, *De Constantia Libri Duo : Qui Alloquium Præcipuè Continent in Publicis Malis*, (first edition Leiden 1584), translated in many languages …
18 There are examples of this in almost all texts I have seen. Shall be added in the next version.
Nowadays the focus has shifted to the psychological state of the individual creating a cultural narrative of vulnerability. Parallel to this process the concept of victimhood has broadened enormously. In the 19th century soldiers died heroically for their fatherland, yet, during or between the two World Wars also soldiers became victims of war, while this victimhood, just like the death of civilians increasingly was considered meaningless.

At the same time, cross-cultural medical research suggests that of all coping strategies, solidarity of victims and witnesses, and the rebuilding of the social world is most crucial, and more effective than any mental assistance or medication. This is what most past societies and victims used to do unless this process was hindered by the political situation or prolonged crisis.

The silence of victims may be inspired by the wish to forget and go on with one’s life, but is also related to the social context and the prevailing memory culture. We do not know when Van Thienwinckel wrote his chronicle (it ends in 1616 when he dies), but the last seven years of his life and of the chronicle coincided with the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621), a period of relative stability and recovery. In Zichem, the Habsburg archdukes had restored Catholicism and unity. The Calvinists were expelled and the experiences of the inhabitants of towns like Zichem could be framed in a convenient narrative of good and evil, heroes and cowards, the true believers and heretics.

Van Thienwinckel makes use of the narrative schemata that make sense of what happened to him. He does not dwell with his personal fate, but describes a collectively endured punishment of God, to which pestilence, hunger, fires, the Spanish and rebel armies have been instrumental. He ends his chronicle with listing his efforts to restore the church in its old glory. He got ill but survived the plague and claims to have initiated the pilgrimage to the local virgin of Montagu (Scherpenheuvel).

Conclusion:

It is very likely that Van Thienwinckel will have had nightmares and distressing memories of the threatening situations he experienced. Of course the devastating war will have had an impact on his physical and mental health. But yet, his life made sense, suffering may have deepened his trust that redemption would follow hereafter. This is what we can read in his chronicle: identification with church and community no matter what happens, and full submission to his fate.

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