



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Crises as a mirror of the nation: the role of morality, nationalism, and religion in creating ontological security in the wake of MH17 and the Brussels Attacks

Wollenberg, D. van den

Citation

Wollenberg, D. van den. (2026, September 11). *Crises as a mirror of the nation: the role of morality, nationalism, and religion in creating ontological security in the wake of MH17 and the Brussels Attacks*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4309527>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4309527>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

When nations are confronted with crisis, political leaders not only respond to events but also shape how those events are interpreted. Through public statements, they construct meaning during periods of uncertainty, justify political action, and help societies make sense of crisis. While scholarship has emphasized nationalism and religion as frameworks for meaning making in such moments, this thesis argues that morality is equally significant..

Drawing on the theory of ontological security, which refers to a sense of stability in how societies understand themselves, this book examines how political leaders use national, religious, and moral discourse to make sense of crises. It focuses on two major European cases: the Dutch response to the downing of Flight MH17 in 2014 and the Belgian response to the Brussels terrorist attacks in 2016. Based on longitudinal content analysis and extensive interviews with political leaders and senior advisers, the book traces both the public narratives surrounding these crises and the political processes through which they were constructed.

The analysis shows that moralist discourse was used most consistently and most frequently to give meaning to these crises. Nationalist discourse was employed more selectively, depending on the audience and context, while religious discourse played little structural role and was sometimes deliberately avoided. The book further demonstrates that interpretations of crisis are shaped through highly concentrated and improvised decision-making processes that reflect ingrained understandings of national identity. By revealing how meaning is constructed in moments of crisis, this book offers new insights into political legitimacy, national identity, and crisis governance.



NATIONALISM



MORALITY



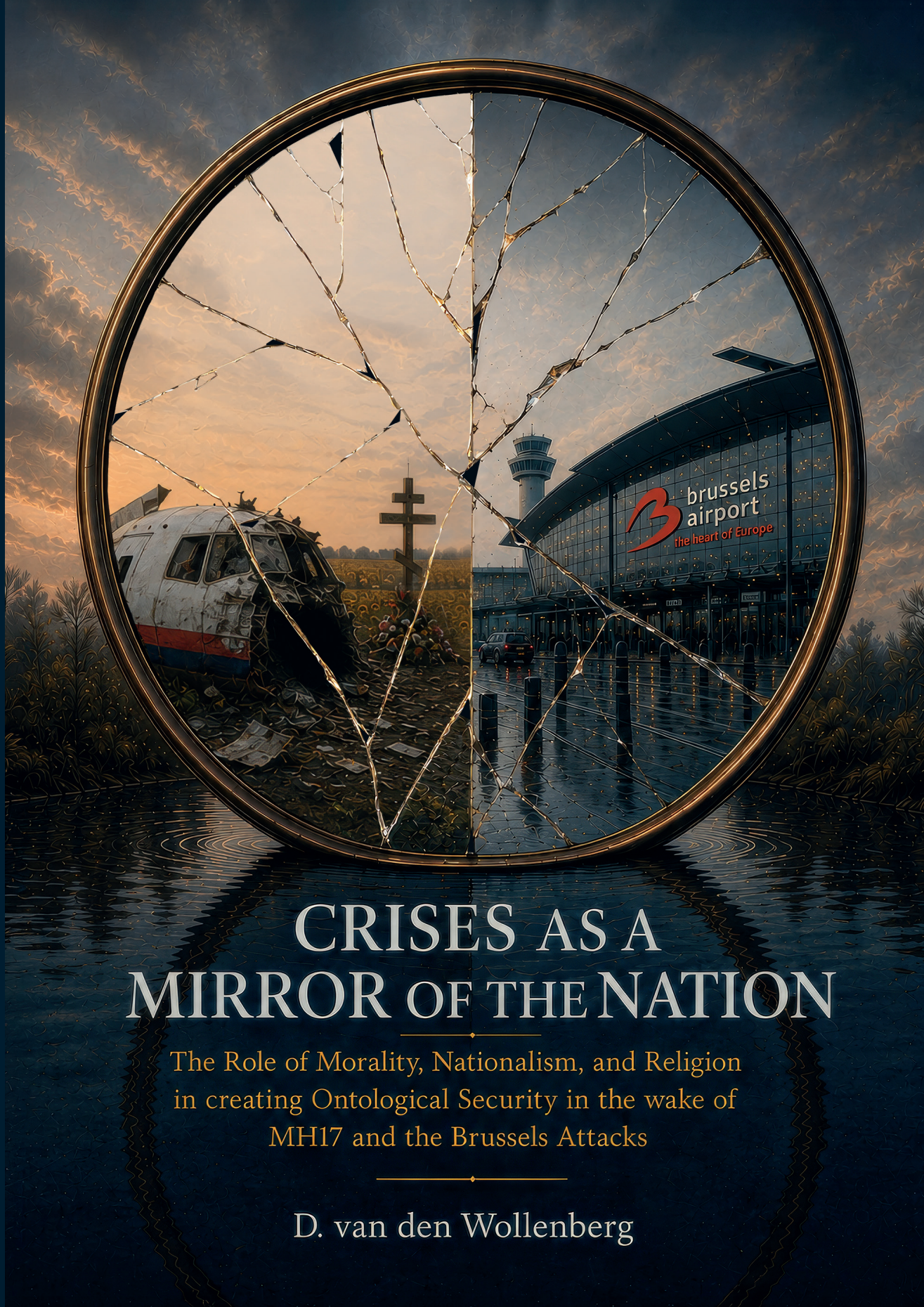
RELIGION



9789493124516

CRISES AS A MIRROR OF THE NATION

| D. van den Wollenberg



CRISES AS A MIRROR OF THE NATION

The Role of Morality, Nationalism, and Religion
in creating Ontological Security in the wake of
MH17 and the Brussels Attacks

D. van den Wollenberg