

A compelling monologue on idealism and powerlessness

Para

DAVID VAN REYBROUCK

In 'Para', ex-military Nico Staelens tells the audience about the Belgian intervention in Somalia (1992-1993), which was part of a UN humanitarian mission. As elite members of the Belgian army, paratroopers were deployed to defuse the local conflict. Although the purpose of the mission was to bring peace to an unstable situation, Belgian media featured stories of soldiers violating human rights. Fifteen years later, this military humanitarian intervention – the longest in Belgian history – is perhaps also the least remembered.

This is no ordinary piece of theatre. No, this is an event of national importance: an exercise in remembrance and empathy.

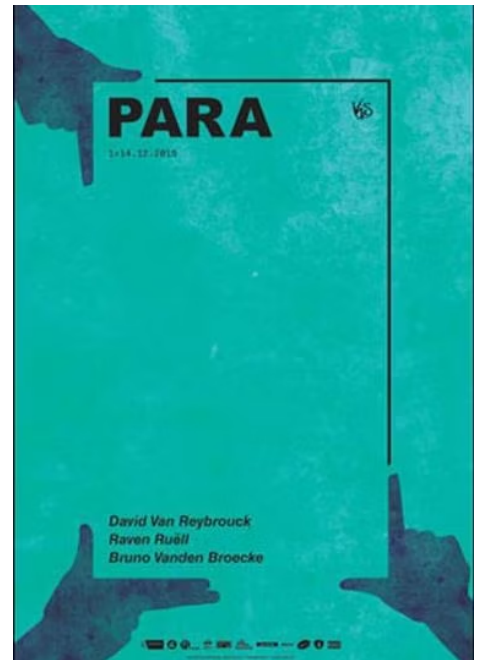
DE STANDAARD

Years later Staelens, now employed as a gym teacher in the countryside, shares his side of the story with the audience. Initially he sticks up for himself, boasting about the number of troops and bragging about his army training. He describes the members of his squad as close friends and partners in adventure.

As Staelens continues his account, however, it becomes clear that it wasn't an entirely peaceful mission. The audience learns about the mistakes made by Belgian soldiers, but also about Staelens' own tough time as a sergeant separated from his wife and young child. This monologue is neither an indictment nor a celebration, but instead explores the complex tragedy of international peace operations. It is a tale of idealism and incompetence, of noble objectives and dirty business.

Top-level theatre that explodes your conscience like an expanding bullet.

KNACK FOCUS



AUTHOR



David Van Reybrouck (b. 1971) is an archaeologist, a philosopher and a writer. His digging and thinking result in literary nonfiction, theatre plays, poetry and prose. After his award-winning debut, Van Reybrouck received national and international praise and prizes for his epic history of Congo, as well as for his urgent call for democratic reform. In 2016 he wrote the official Dutch Book Week essay. Listen to David Van Reybroeck on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders. Photo © Lenny Oosterwijk

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