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To whom do national days matter? A comparison of national belonging across generations and ethnic groups in the Netherlands

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This paper studies to what extent participating in days for national commemoration and celebration is associated with feelings of national belonging, and to what extent this is comparable across generations and ethnic groups. Utilizing data from a national survey ($N = 4,505$), three major national days in the Netherlands are examined. We find that whereas participation in Queen's Day is associated with national belonging for all generations, for Remembrance Day this holds only for the generation born between 1945 and 1955, and for Liberation Day for the generations born after 1955. Moreover, for citizens with a non-Western origin, participating in national days is associated with national belonging more strongly than for citizens with a native Dutch or other Western background. These findings highlight the importance of paying attention to potential group differences in the association between participation in national days and feelings of national belonging.

Keywords: national days; national belonging; generations; ethnic origin; quantitative; Netherlands

Introduction

Over the last decades, processes of globalization and individualization have given rise to concerns about national identity in many Western European societies. A national identity – shared awareness by citizens of a society that they are members of a nation – has been theoretically argued to play a role in increasing feelings of solidarity and unity (David and Bar-Tal 2009). In an attempt to strengthen feelings of national belonging, politicians in various countries have proposed an amplified emphasis on national history (Duyvendak 2011; Miller and Ali 2014). In the Netherlands, the site of the current study, a recent example is the development of a national historical 'canon' to teach students more about the Dutch past (WRR 2007; Grever 2007). A more established attempt to stimulate feelings of national belonging through shared representations of history are national days – days on which the nation commemorates or celebrates a particular event (Etzioni 2000).

A vast amount of literature is available on the assumed relationship between national days and national belonging (for an overview, see Woods and Tsang 2014). Much of the canonical (often historical) work on this topic focuses on the top-down (elite) production of national day commemorations and celebrations, and assumes that

the organization and experience of national days are effective in generating national attachments (Gillis 1994; Spillman 1997). This supply-side assumption, which Fox (2013) refers to as ‘the view from above’, has long gone unchallenged. More recent literature has however taken a more critical stance, emphasizing that the extent to which national days are associated with feelings of national belonging depends upon how they are perceived by the intended audience (Elgenius 2011a; Etzioni 2000; Fox 2013; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Geisler 2009; Uzelac 2010). This demand side of the equation is rather neglected in the field; and when it is studied, this is typically done with qualitative methods (for an exception, see Meuleman and Lubbers 2013). The current study is one of the first quantitative analyses to empirically test the assumed relation between national days and national belonging on the level of the individual.

While it is often assumed that the nation resonates evenly across the population, the nation is not a homogeneous whole. Instead, it is comprised of a highly fragmented population in terms of, for instance, ethnicity, age and gender. Even though national days have been argued to mean different things to different people (Fox 2013; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Geisler 2009), little is known about how national days are perceived by different groups (Elgenius 2011a). Younger generations, as well as citizens with a foreign background, have been found to participate less in national days than older generations and citizens with a native background (Verhue and Koenen 2013). Unknown is whether the traditional ceremonies that accompany national days – originally intended for a different audience than that of today – also *function* differently for different individuals. This is of crucial importance as national days that relate to national belonging for only a selective group of people could reinforce societal stratification by including some while excluding others (see Collins 2004 on ritual insiders and outsiders). The present study thus adds to the existing literature on rituals and national belonging by investigating the relationship between participation in national days and national belonging among different generations, as well as among different ethnic groups.

Finally, this study focuses not only on whether, but also *which* national days are associated with feelings of national belonging. Following previous work on the role of national days (Renan [1882] 1990; Smith 2014), a distinction is made between national commemorations and national celebrations, as they may relate differently to national belonging. Furthermore, the implications of differentiating between national days with a specific national focus and national days with a more global content are studied. Utilizing data from a national survey, we focus on three national days in the Netherlands: Remembrance Day, Liberation Day and Queen’s Day. The current study thus aims to answer the question: To what extent are different national days related to feelings of national belonging, and to what degree is this comparable across generations and ethnic groups?

National days in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, Remembrance Day, Liberation Day and Queen’s Day are characteristic examples of days on which the nation commemorates or celebrates a particular event. Wars are prominent in national commemorations worldwide, in

particular the Second World War (Liu et al. 2005; McCrone and McPherson 2009). In the Netherlands, Remembrance Day (*Dodenherdenking*) is held every year on 4 May and is a typical illustration of a national war commemoration. It was originally initiated to remember and honour the victims of the Second World War, and to help to reconstruct the nation and boost national identity (Vermolen 1995). Since 1961, all civilians and members of the armed forces of the Kingdom of the Netherlands who have died during wars or peacekeeping missions since the outbreak of the Second World War are commemorated. Every year, commemoration ceremonies take place throughout the country and all citizens are invited to join in two minutes of silence at 8.00pm.

Liberation Day (*Bevrijdingsdag*), officially introduced in 1954 and held annually on 5 May, was intended as a day to celebrate the liberation of the nation from the German occupation of 1940–45. Nowadays, attention is also paid to current issues such as freedom and resistance to injustice worldwide (Vermolen 1995). Although 5 May is only an official public holiday once every five years, the Dutch are invited to raise their flags annually and festivities are organized every year throughout the whole country.

Queen's Day (*Koninginnedag*)¹ is another example of a national celebration, but in honour of the head of the state. Similar celebrations are hosted annually as a major event in many countries (Zerubavel 2003). Queen's Day has been declared a public holiday. Its content has remained fairly similar over the years: at the end of April, the Dutch celebrate the birthday of the head of the state, and with it the existence of the monarchy, with a variety of festivities such as markets, music performances and gatherings for drinks. A highlight of the day is that the royal family visits several Dutch towns, which is nationally broadcasted.

Theory

National days and feelings of national belonging

The scientific acknowledgement of rituals as an impulse for feelings of group solidarity and belonging dates back to Durkheim ([1912] 1995). According to Durkheim, rituals heighten a so-called 'collective consciousness' by producing a momentarily shared experience among its participants. Although this concerns a temporary state, collective consciousness assumedly carries over into more prolonged feelings of group solidarity (see Collins 2004 for a review). Even though many studies depart from this theoretical framework, Durkheim's work was based upon religious rites in small pre-industrial societies and does not necessarily apply to (post) modern societies. In the current study, we therefore build upon literature that has developed a more nuanced stance on the role of commemorations (Gillis 1994; Spillman 1997) and national days (Elgenius 2011a; Etzioni 2000; McCrone and McPherson 2009; Uzelac 2010; Woods and Tsang 2014) for feelings of national belonging. It is argued that national symbols (e.g. flags, anthems) and ceremonies (e.g. national days) have the ability to visualize the nation and remind people of why they belong together. As such, they may function as rituals and might be associated with feelings of national belonging. This more recent research suggests that rituals

can be carried out privately as well, whereas Durkheim assumed that physical co-presence was necessary for the integrative function of rituals. It is therefore expected that, regardless of whether carried out publicly or privately: Participation in national days is positively related to feelings of national belonging (hypothesis 1).

Different types of national days

At the same time, it has been argued that no uniform impact of national day participation on feelings of national belonging can be expected as these days are open to diverse and sometimes non-national meanings (Elgenius 2011a; Geisler 2009; Uzelac 2010). The function of national days for the construction of national identities has been claimed to depend on the specific type of ritual. According to Smith (2014), it is important to distinguish between commemorative and celebratory events. This argument is based upon Renan's ([1882] 1990, 19) claim that 'periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs because they impose duties and require a common effort'. This is especially the case for cultural traumas, caused by events so terrible that they leave an irrevocable mark upon a group's consciousness and memories (Alexander 2004). Considering the appalling events that happened in the Netherlands during the Second World War, with over 210,000 Dutch citizens lost to the war (Statistics Netherlands 1949), this period can be considered a major cultural trauma for the country. Applying Renan's claim to the current research context therefore leads us to expect that: Participation in Remembrance Day is related more strongly to feelings of national belonging than participation in Liberation Day (hypothesis 2a) and Queen's Day (hypothesis 2b).

It is furthermore relevant to consider the extent to which the nation is the centre of attention on the day itself. Many national days have shifted focus over the years to adapt to changing societies (Elgenius 2011b). This has also been the case in the Netherlands, where the 'national' aspect of Remembrance Day and Liberation Day has been replaced by a more differentiated way of commemorating and celebrating, no longer focusing only on (Dutch) victims of the Second World War, but on freedom and resistance to injustice worldwide (Vermolen 1995). Both national days have thus gained a more global focus, creating room for a multiplicity of meanings. Instead of being associated with feelings of *national* belonging, participating may be more strongly related to feelings of solidarity with members of other nations. In contrast, Queen's Day still focuses solely on the celebration of the nation and the centrality of the monarchy, leaving less room for other meanings. Following this line of reasoning, we formulate an alternative hypothesis to hypothesis 2, namely: Participation in Queen's Day is related more strongly to feelings of national belonging than participation in Remembrance Day (hypothesis 3a) and Liberation Day (hypothesis 3b).

Different types of audience

The ultimate outcome of national days has been claimed to depend upon how it is received by the (intended) audience (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Geisler 2009; Uzelac 2010). Both generational cohort and ethnic origin are expected to be relevant in this context. Different birth cohorts recall different historical events, and these memories

are derived mainly from events experienced in adolescence and early adulthood. Older generations, especially those who were between the ages of ten and thirty during the Second World War, were found to indicate this war as more important than were younger cohorts (Schuman and Corning 2011; Schuman and Scott 1989). Hence, when participating in Remembrance Day and Liberation Day, older generations may more readily recall this trauma than younger generations and as such may experience stronger feelings of national belonging.

In addition, different generations have been socialized with a different content of Remembrance Day and Liberation Day (Vermolen 1995). Those born before 1961 have grown up with days dedicated to the rebuilding of the nation and boosting national identity. In contrast, those born after 1961 have been socialized with an increasingly globalized content. Older generations may thus experience national days more in terms of a national context than younger generations. In line with this argumentation, Verhue and Koenen (2013) found that older age groups more often specifically commemorated Dutch victims of the Second World War on Remembrance Day than did younger groups. On Liberation Day, older people were found to concentrate more intently on the link with the Second World War as well. Since both the past and present content of Queen's Day focuses on the national context, no generational differences are expected in the connection with feelings of national belonging for this particular day. It is predicted that: The positive relationship between participation in Remembrance Day (hypothesis 4a) and Liberation Day (hypothesis 4b) and feelings of national belonging is less strong for younger generations than for older generations.

In addition to generational differences, the association between national days and national belonging may depend on ethnic origin. Although reference to a shared past is expected to increase feelings of national belonging through collective remembering, not all citizens share this history (Devine-Wright 2001; Liu and Hilton 2005). A substantial number of societies today now consist of many different cultures and ethnicities (Castles 2000). In the Netherlands, over 20% of the population has a foreign background (Statistics Netherlands 2014a). These groups may differ in the importance attached to certain historical events compared with residents with a native Dutch origin. In line with this argumentation, US emigrants from the former Soviet Union were found to indicate home country events as more important than historical events related to their current country of residence (Corning 2010). Hence, although participation in national days may still be associated with heightened feelings of collective belonging, for citizens with a non-native background the collective is not necessarily *national*.

Whereas Queen's Day in the Netherlands leaves very limited room for alternative meanings, Remembrance Day and Liberation Day provide a possibility for citizens with a foreign origin to incorporate their own (personal and collective) memories of oppression and war. Alternative narratives of identity and belonging have been argued to be ambiguously related to feelings of national identification and belonging (Leal 2014). Especially for citizens with a non-native background, it may be easier to connect on such days with the collective narrative of their ethnic group than identify with an event that happened in the Dutch past. In line with this reasoning, people with a non-Western origin were found to more often mourn war victims worldwide on

Remembrance Day than were native Dutch citizens (Verhue and Koenen 2013). It is thus expected that: The positive relationship between participation in Remembrance Day (hypothesis 5a) and Liberation Day (hypothesis 5b) and feelings of national belonging is less strong for citizens with a non-native origin than for citizens with a native Dutch origin.

Method

Data

This study uses data from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). The LISS panel is a representative sample of Dutch individuals who participate in monthly Internet surveys. The panel is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register. Households that could not otherwise participate were provided with a computer and Internet connection. Data on the main variables of interest were collected in the ‘Nationalism and national consumption’ questionnaire in September 2011.

The sample comprised 4,785 respondents aged sixteen years and older, with a non-response rate of 28.8%. In total, 131 respondents (2.7%) were listwise deleted because of missing values on all four items of our dependent variable. In addition, 135 respondents (2.8%) were excluded because their ethnic origin was unknown and fourteen (0.3%) more because of missing values on one of the other independent variables. The final sample consisted of 4,505 respondents. The age distribution of the sample is comparable to that of the Dutch population (Statistics Netherlands 2014b). Respondents with a foreign background (12%) are under-represented compared to the Dutch population (21%) (Statistics Netherlands 2014a).

Measures

Dependent variable

Feelings of national belonging were measured by asking respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following four items: ‘My Dutch identity is an important part of myself’; ‘I feel really connected to other Dutch people’; ‘I am happy to be Dutch’; ‘I am proud to be Dutch’. Answer categories ranged from (1) ‘totally disagree’ to (5) ‘totally agree’. Similar items have been successfully used as (part of) a scale in other studies assessing perceived cohesion and national attachment (Bollen and Hoyle 1990; Miller and Ali 2014). A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, applying maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors to accommodate a specific factor for non-normality. A high error covariance was revealed between the last two items. As both reflect feelings of morale (Bollen and Hoyle 1990), there was sufficient theoretical ground to correlate the two items. This resulted in a satisfactory model fit ($\chi^2(1) = 10.79$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.05; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 0.99).

Independent variables

Participation in national days was measured with respect to three different national days. First, to measure *participation in Liberation Day*, respondents were asked: ‘How often during the past 5 years have you hung the Dutch flag on 5 May, Liberation Day?’ Second, to measure *participation in Remembrance Day*, respondents were asked: ‘How often during the past 5 years have you observed a two-minute silence on Remembrance Day (4 May)?’ Third, *participation in Queen’s Day* was measured by asking respondents: ‘How often during the past 5 years have you watched (a part of) the Queen’s visit on Queen’s Day (April 30), on television or by being present?’ Answer categories ranged from 1 ‘never’ to 6 ‘all five years’. Because the distribution of answers on all three variables was extremely skewed, dummy variables were created for participating ‘sometimes’ (one to three times) and ‘often’ (four to five times). Respondents who never participated acted as the reference category.

Generations were operationalized as birth cohorts and calculated based upon year of birth. In line with earlier research (Becker 1992), a distinction was made between the following four birth cohorts: (1) 1910–45, including the pre-war generation (1910–30) and the ‘silent’ generation (1931–45); (2) 1946–55, also referred to as the ‘protest’ generation; (3) 1956–70, also called ‘generation X’; and (4) 1971–95, comprising the ‘pragmatic’ generation (1971–85) and the ‘boundless’ generation (1986–95).

Ethnic origin was measured using the country of birth of the respondent and his or her parents. A distinction was made between native Dutch, (other) Western and non-Western. Respondents were defined as native Dutch if they and both of their parents were born in the Netherlands. This is a commonly used definition in the Netherlands, based on Statistics Netherlands (www.cbs.nl). Respondents were classified as Western if they or one of their parents was born in Europe (excluding the Netherlands and Turkey), North America, Oceania, Japan or Indonesia.² Non-Western respondents were coded as such if they or one of their parents was born in Turkey, Africa, Asia or Latin America.

Control variables

Previous studies have found education, religious attendance and gender to be significant predictors of participation in national days (Meuleman and Lubbers 2013), as well as related to national identification and belonging (Sorek 2011). These were therefore included as control variables. *Educational level* consisted of seven categories and was operationalized as a continuous variable: (0) not yet started any education; (1) primary school (or: not yet completed any education); (2) intermediate secondary school; (3) higher secondary education; (4) intermediate vocational education; (5) higher vocational education; and (6) university. *Religious attendance* was measured with the item: ‘Aside from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious gatherings nowadays?’ As answer categories ranged from (1) ‘every day’ to (7) ‘never’, the variable was recoded so that higher values corresponded with a higher frequency of attendance. A dummy variable for *male* was included. Finally, we included a dummy variable

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables ($N = 4,505$).

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	SD
National belonging				
My Dutch identity is an important part of myself	1	5	3.63	0.96
I feel connected to other Dutch people	1	5	3.41	0.91
I am happy to be Dutch	1	5	3.91	0.81
I am proud to be Dutch	1	5	3.70	0.92
Remembrance Day				
Never	0	1	0.12	
Sometimes	0	1	0.14	
Often	0	1	0.74	
Liberation Day				
Never	0	1	0.14	
Sometimes	0	1	0.11	
Often	0	1	0.28	
Queen's Day				
Never	0	1	0.19	
Sometimes	0	1	0.38	
Often	0	1	0.43	
Ethnic origin				
Non-Western	0	1	0.04	
Western	0	1	0.07	
Native Dutch	0	1	0.89	
Generations				
1910–45	0	1	0.22	
1945–55	0	1	0.23	
1955–70	0	1	0.27	
1970–95	0	1	0.28	
Education	1	9	3.50	1.52
Religious attendance	1	5	2.04	1.51
Male	0	1	0.46	
No flag	0	1	0.47	

Note: Descriptive statistics are based on the raw data.

for those who did not own a Dutch flag. Descriptive statistics of the variables can be found in [Table 1](#).

Analytic strategy

As our dependent variable consisted of a latent variable, structural equation modelling was applied using Mplus, version 7 (Muthén and Muthén 2012–1998). Moreover, as we are dealing with clustered data (4,785 individuals within 3,232 households), non-independence of observations was taken into account by computing standard errors using a sandwich estimator (Asparouhov and Muthén 2006). Multiple group analyses were conducted to compare the models across birth cohorts and ethnic groups. We tested for configural and metric invariance to examine whether the groups employ a similar conceptual framework and whether the latent variables have similar meanings across groups (Van de Schoot, Lugtig, and Hox 2012). Although only *partially* metric

invariance was established across both birth cohorts³ and ethnic groups,⁴ valid inferences can still be made as long as there are at least two loadings and intercepts that are constrained equal across groups (Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén 1989).

Results

National days and feelings of national belonging

Table 2 displays the results for feelings of national belonging. In model I, the parameters of participation in national days are shown for the total sample, while controlling for generation and ethnic origin (as well as for level of education, religious attendance, gender and owning a flag). A satisfactory model fit was indicated ($\chi^2(46) = 319.05, p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.04; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96). In line with expectations, respondents that more often participated in Remembrance Day, Liberation Day and Queen's Day reported higher levels of national belonging than respondents that never participated. These findings support hypothesis 1: participation in national days is positively related to feelings of national belonging.

In terms of effect sizes, the effects for Remembrance Day and Liberation Day were relatively weak, whereas Queen's Day had a relatively strong effect on feelings of national belonging. Wald tests of parameter constraints confirmed that participating often in Queen's Day was related significantly more strongly with national belonging than participating often in Remembrance Day and Liberation Day. The difference in effect size between Remembrance Day and Liberation Day proved not significant. Similar results were found when comparing those who never participated versus those who sometimes participated. These findings are in line with hypothesis 3: participation in Queen's Day is related more strongly to feelings of national belonging than participation in Remembrance Day (3a) and Liberation Day (3b). As participation in Remembrance Day was *not* related more strongly to feelings of national belonging than participation in Liberation Day (2a) and Queen's Day (2b), hypothesis 2 had to be rejected.

A comparison across generations

Models II–V (Table 2) show the results of the multiple group analysis conducted across generations. Model fit measures indicated a good fit ($\chi^2(155) = 338.93, p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.03; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97). The relationship between participation in Remembrance Day and feelings of national belonging significantly differed between generations. While for those born in the periods 1910–45, 1955–70 and 1970–95 no significant connection was observed, for those born between 1945 and 1955 a positive, moderately strong relationship was found among those often participating. Wald tests further specified that this association was significantly stronger than for the 1910–45 and 1970–95 cohorts. The difference with the 1955–70 cohort proved not significant. Similar results were found for those sometimes participating. These findings are partially in line with hypothesis 4a. While the two younger age cohorts indeed show less strong relationships between participation in Remembrance Day and national belonging, it is the 1945–55 cohort that displays the strongest connection.

Table 2. Models for national belonging for the total sample and across generations.

	(I) Total <i>B</i> (SE)	(II) 1910–1945 <i>B</i> (SE)	(III) 1945–1955 <i>B</i> (SE)	(IV) 1955–1970 <i>B</i> (SE)	(V) 1970–1995 <i>B</i> (SE)
Remembrance Day					
Never (ref.)					
Sometimes	0.04 (0.05) ^a	−0.15 (0.11) ⁱ	0.19 (0.11) ^{*ii}	0.12 (0.09) ^{ii,iii}	−0.03 (0.09) ^{i,iii}
Often	0.09 (0.04) ^{***a}	−0.06 (0.09) ⁱ	0.23 (0.10) ^{***ii}	0.13 (0.08) ^{ii,iii}	0.04 (0.08) ^{i,iii}
Liberation Day					
Never (ref.)					
Sometimes	0.13 (0.04) ^{***a,b}	−0.03 (0.09) ⁱ	0.03 (0.09) ⁱ	0.26 (0.07) ^{***ii}	0.20 (0.09) ^{**ii}
Often	0.07 (0.04) ^{*a}	−0.01 (0.07) ⁱ	0.09 (0.08) ^{i,ii}	0.14 (0.07) ^{*ii}	0.07 (0.07) ^{i,ii}
Queen's Day					
Never (ref.)					
Sometimes	0.18 (0.03) ^{***b}	0.18 (0.09) ^{**i}	0.17 (0.08) ^{**i}	0.21 (0.06) ^{***i}	0.18 (0.06) ^{***i}
Often	0.35 (0.04) ^{***b}	0.40 (0.09) ^{***i}	0.36 (0.09) ^{***i}	0.32 (0.07) ^{***i}	0.35 (0.06) ^{***i}
Generations					
1910–45 (ref.)					
1945–55	−0.10 (0.03) ^{***}				
1955–70	−0.23 (0.03) ^{***}				
1970–95	−0.22 (0.03) ^{***}				
Ethnic origin					
Native (ref.)					
Non-Western	−0.22 (0.07) ^{***}	−0.07 (0.27)	−0.18 (0.19)	−0.31 (0.12) ^{***}	−0.15 (0.09) [*]
Western	−0.31 (0.05) ^{***}	−0.42 (0.11) ^{***}	−0.13 (0.09)	−0.22 (0.10) ^{**}	−0.48 (0.10) ^{***}
Controls					
Education	−0.04 (0.01) ^{***}	−0.08 (0.02) ^{***}	−0.08 (0.02) ^{***}	−0.03 (0.02) ^{**}	0.02 (0.02)
Religious attendance	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Male	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.10 (0.05) ^{**}	0.06 (0.05)	0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
No flag	−0.09 (0.03) ^{***}	−0.20 (0.08) ^{***}	−0.12 (0.08)	−0.03 (0.06)	−0.10 (0.06)

Note: Effects with different superscripts differ significantly from each other (p one-sided).

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

The relationship between participation in Liberation Day and national belonging also differed between generations. Here, moderately strong, positive associations were found only for the 1955–70 and 1970–95 cohorts. Wald tests displayed particularly strong differences between those sometimes participating. The 1955–70 and 1970–95 cohorts differed significantly from the 1910–45 and 1945–55 cohorts. Overall, these findings contradict hypothesis 4b, as the relationship between participation in Liberation Day and feelings of national belonging was stronger for younger than for older generations. As expected, no generational differences were found in the connection between participation in Queen's Day and feelings of national belonging.

A comparison across ethnic groups

Table 3 displays the results of the multiple group analysis across ethnic groups. A satisfactory model fit was indicated ($\chi^2(125) = 390.54, p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.04; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96). For all three national days, the relationship with feelings of national belonging differed between ethnic groups. For Remembrance Day, only non-Western respondents who often participated had a significantly higher level of national belonging than those never participating. In terms of effect size, this relationship was considered strong. For respondents with a native Dutch or other Western origin, the effect sizes were considerably smaller. However, Wald tests indicated that the difference in effect size was only significant between respondents

Table 3. Models for national belonging across ethnic groups.

	(I) Non-Western <i>B</i> (SE)	(II) Western <i>B</i> (SE)	(III) Native <i>B</i> (SE)
Remembrance Day			
Never (ref.)			
Sometimes	0.04 (0.19) ^a	0.10 (0.19) ^a	0.02 (0.05) ^a
Often	0.43 (0.17) ^{***a}	0.13 (0.17) ^{a,b}	0.06 (0.05) ^b
Liberation Day			
Never (ref.)			
Sometimes	0.66 (0.21) ^{***a}	-0.08 (0.18) ^b	0.13 (0.04) ^{***b}
Often	0.44 (0.27) ^a	0.06 (0.16) ^{a,b}	0.07 (0.04) ^{**b}
Queen's Day			
Never (ref.)			
Sometimes	0.49 (0.16) ^{***a}	0.18 (0.14) ^b	0.16 (0.04) ^{***b}
Often	0.66 (0.15) ^{***a}	0.41 (0.15) ^{***a,b}	0.32 (0.04) ^{***b}
Generations			
1910–45 (ref.)			
1945–55	-0.07 (0.20)	0.20 (0.15)	-0.13 (0.03) ^{***}
1955–70	-0.31 (0.18)	0.01 (0.15)	-0.24 (0.03) ^{***}
1970–95	-0.15 (0.17)	-0.23 (0.16)	-0.23 (0.04) ^{***}
Controls			
Education	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.03) ^{**}	-0.04 (0.01) ^{***}
Religious attendance	-0.02 (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.01) [*]
Male	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.02)
No flag	-0.12 (0.18)	-0.29 (0.13) ^{**}	-0.07 (0.04) ^{**}

Note: Effects with different superscripts differ significantly from each other (p one-sided).

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

with a non-Western origin and those with a native Dutch background. These findings contradict hypothesis 5a, as participation in Remembrance Day was related more strongly to feelings of national belonging for citizens with a non-native origin than for citizens with a native Dutch origin.

For Liberation Day, both respondents with a non-Western origin and native Dutch respondents who often participated reported higher feelings of national belonging than those who never participated. However, the effect sizes for the native Dutch were substantially smaller than for the non-Western respondents. Wald tests confirmed that the relationship between Liberation Day and national belonging was significantly stronger for respondents with a non-Western background than for those with a Western or native Dutch origin. Hypothesis 5b was therefore rejected. Although participation in national days was positively related to national belonging among natives, this relationship was even *stronger* among people with a non-Western origin. Similar results were found for Queen's Day. Additional analyses showed that the differences between natives and non-natives were mainly evident for citizens who were born in a non-Western country (i.e. first-generation immigrants), whereas the results of those born in the Netherlands, but with one or two parents born abroad (i.e. second-generation immigrants), were comparable to native Dutch citizens.⁵

Discussion

This study examined to what extent different national days are related to feelings of national belonging, and to what degree this is comparable across generations and ethnic groups. While an increasing number of authors have called for more systematic research into the assumed relationship between national days and individual feelings of national belonging (Elgenius 2011a; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Geisler 2009; Uzelac 2010), the current study is one of the first to quantitatively examine this relationship while taking into account that a nation is not comprised of a homogeneous population.

For all three national days in the Netherlands (Remembrance Day, Liberation Day and Queen's Day), the results indicate that the more frequently people participate, the stronger feelings of national belonging. These findings suggest that the integrative role of rituals also holds in modern societies, regardless of whether people are physically present or participate at home (Woods and Tsang 2014). Yet, as the current results are based on cross-sectional data, we must be careful with drawing conclusions that suggest causality. Experimental or longitudinal data are therefore needed to be able to make more firm conclusions regarding the direction of the relationship between national day participation and feelings of national belonging. Moreover, whereas a relatively strong association with national belonging was found for Queen's Day, for Remembrance Day and Liberation Day this relationship was considerably weaker. Our findings therefore do not support earlier claims that commemorations have a stronger unifying function than celebrations (Renan [1882] 1990; Smith 2014). Instead, the strength of the relationship between national days and national belonging seemed to depend more upon the extent to which the nation was the focus of attention on that particular day.

A possible explanation for this finding relates to the *visibility* of national symbols. Geisler (2009) argued that as long as national symbols (e.g. flags, anthem, parades) are not omnipresent during national days, national days are weak and unstable signifiers of national belonging. While Queen's Day is characterized by Dutch flags, orange clothing (the Dutch national colour) and a royal tour, on Remembrance Day and Liberation Day national symbols play a much smaller role. Another explanation is provided by Elgenius (2011a). She states that successful national days are as a rule public holidays, on which official and private celebrations are integrated or follow each other. While this is true for Queen's Day, this is not the case for Remembrance Day or Liberation Day (which is only an official public holiday once every five years). Cross-national comparisons are needed to examine whether these results also hold in countries where national symbols are more visible on days of national commemoration and celebration, such as the USA.

The relationship between national days and national belonging was also found to differ between generations, as well as between ethnic groups. Contrary to expectations, more frequent participation in Remembrance Day was associated with stronger feelings of national belonging for the 1945–55 cohort only. This finding is best explained by a socialization mechanism. Those born between 1945 and 1955 were raised with a version of Remembrance Day that focused on rebuilding the nation and boosting national identity (Vermolen 1995). Younger generations have instead been socialized with a more globalized content. Furthermore, even though earlier research found pre-war cohorts to rate the Second World War as more important than did younger cohorts (Schuman and Corning 2011; Schuman and Scott 1989), for those who have personally experienced the war it may not be 'national' feelings that resurface when participating in national commemorations, but emotions connected to a more personal trauma. This explanation is in line with findings of a qualitative analysis by Ester, Vink, and Diepstraten (2002), in which they showed that whereas older generations consider the Second World War to be a drastic turning point in their personal lives, younger generations more often underline its political value.

For Liberation Day, only those born after 1955 showed heightened levels of national belonging with more frequent participation. These findings support Elgenius (2011b) in her claim that national days can be perceived as meaningful and inclusive by generations that are distant from the events that initially produced them. At the same time, our results show that the story is slightly more complex. While for younger generations Liberation Day appears more important in terms of national belonging than Remembrance Day, for older generations it is the other way around. Again, a socialization explanation is in place. As Liberation Day was officially introduced only in 1954 (Vermolen 1995), older generations may not associate this day with a national past. In line with Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008), national days thus seem to be multivalent: they have different meanings for different people. An interesting avenue for further research would therefore be to learn more about ways in which people are socialized into participating in different national days (e.g. media, school, friends).

For citizens with a non-Western origin, more frequent participation in national days was more strongly related to a sense of national belonging than it was for citizens with a native Dutch or other Western background. This difference was most evident

among first-generation immigrants. A possible explanation is provided by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008), who argues that for most citizens national commemorations that have taken place decade after decade have become ‘ordinary’ ceremonies. In contrast, for (first-generation) immigrants these days may still be *extraordinary*, and therefore strongly connected to feelings of national identification and belonging. For immigrants with powerful integrative aspirations, national days are also an opportunity to reaffirm (for them and for their environment) their Dutch national identity. These findings highlight the importance of national commemorations and celebrations for immigrants’ sense of belonging, and are in line with previous research in the USA (Corning and Schuman 2013).

Of course we also have to pay attention to alternative explanations of the current findings due to limitations of our measurements. While our measurement of Liberation Day included a condition in which we distinguished between those who did and did not own a flag, and as such selected only those people who actually chose to participate, keeping silent on Remembrance Day is so omnipresent (particularly in the media) that *not* participating is far more difficult. As such, we have to be careful with our conclusions regarding the comparisons between the different national days. Moreover, we relied on a rather narrow measurement of belonging. It may not necessarily be *national* belonging that is bolstered on Remembrance Day and Liberation Day, but perhaps a more general sense of connectedness or solidarity. Future research would benefit from a more elaborate examination of different types of connectedness, as well as different types of activities related to national commemorations and celebrations, for instance between more active forms of participation (i.e. actual attendance) and more passive forms (e.g. via media).

All in all, this study highlights that more attention should be paid to potential group differences in the relationship between national days and national belonging. As argued earlier, heightened feelings of belonging for only a selective group of people could reinforce societal stratification by including some while excluding others (Collins 2004). It is therefore important to realize the association between national day participation and feelings of national belonging differs between generations, as well as between ethnic groups.

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Notes

1. As of 2014, this day is named King’s Day (*Koningsdag*), referring to the birthday of King Willem Alexander who succeeded Queen Beatrix to the throne in 2013. As the data collection of the current article took place in 2011, this day is still labelled Queen’s Day.

2. Persons with a Japanese and Indonesian background are classified as Western on the basis of their social and economic position in Dutch society.
3. After freeing the factor loading of the items 'I am happy to be Dutch' for the oldest generation and 'My Dutch identity is an important part of myself' for the youngest generation, the difference with the unconstrained model proved no longer significant ($\Delta\chi^2(10) = 13.31$, $p = .21$).
4. After freeing the factor loading of the item 'I feel connected to other Dutch citizens' for the native Dutch group, the difference with the unconstrained model proved no longer significant ($\Delta\chi^2(7) = 9.57$, $p = .21$).
5. More detailed results are available upon request.

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