

Explaining age differences in positive attitudes towards national commemorations: the role of what people commemorate

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Commemorations of shared national history are important to the process of nation-building. Support for such national commemorations is not, however, evenly distributed in societies. Because this could endanger the possible integrative function of commemorative ceremonies, it is important to understand the sources of structural differences in support. In this article, age differences in support for national commemorations in the Netherlands are examined. It is argued that because age cohorts grow up with different ideas on what should be commemorated they also differ in value attached to such commemorations. Data from *the National Freedom Enquiry 2012* show that older persons more often associate national commemorations with the Second World War than younger persons do, and that this is the reason why they are more supportive of the annual celebration of Liberation Day. In the concluding section, it is argued that more (quantitative) studies should be conducted in order to truly understand the mechanisms behind support of national commemorations as this may help us to better comprehend the processes construing feelings of national belonging.

KEYWORDS: age cohorts, cultural trauma, mediation analysis, support national commemorations

Introduction

Every society conducts national commemorations. By distinguishing socially marked events from relatively unmarked stretches of history, ritual commemorations help to articulate what groups collectively consider important (Zerubavel 2003). Common examples of commemorative rituals include celebrations of independence, commemorations of war victims, construction of the state, reunification and celebrations of constitutions (e.g. Elgenius 2011; Fricke 2013; Lentz 2013; Späth 2013). In the Netherlands, all citizens who have died in wars or peacekeeping missions since the outbreak of the Second World War are commemorated every year on 4 May (Remembrance

Day). On 5 May (Liberation Day), Dutch people celebrate the end of the period of occupation by Nazi Germany between 1940 and 1945, in addition to expressing appreciation for freedom and democracy throughout the world. As key contexts in which the national bonds are affirmed and reaffirmed (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008), national commemorations play an important role in the process of nation-building (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In order to make positive contributions to a sense of national identity and belonging, national commemorations should be supported by all groups in society. Nevertheless, it is known that older people in the Netherlands are more positive toward commemorative rituals and ceremonies than younger people are (Verhue et al. 2012). It is important to understand the source of such differences, as structural (e.g. age-related) differences in support for national commemorations might have a negative impact on the bonding function involved in such ceremonies (see Schiefer et al. 2012 on the meaning and importance of cohesion). Furthermore, evidence of a gradual decline in support for national commemorations (Verhue and Koenen 2013) makes the study of age differences in attitudes towards commemorative services particularly interesting.

In this article, we examine why older people in the Netherlands tend to have a more positive attitude towards national commemorations, as compared with younger people. We investigate the extent to which such age differences could be attributed to differences in the socialisation of successive age cohorts with regard to ideas concerning exactly what should be commemorated. It is known that the content of commemorations is dynamic. What is commemorated, and how this is done is constantly influenced by societal developments (Schwartz 1982; Schwartz 1996). In the Netherlands, the national commemorations on 4 and 5 May have traditionally been linked largely to the Second World War. Over time, however, the Dutch have also begun to commemorate and celebrate the end of other wars and peacekeeping missions (Van de Reijt 2010). Mannheim (1952) argued that people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environments that they experience during their formative years (from around 17 to 25 years of age), and that these formative years determine their attitudes for a lifetime. Following Mannheim's idea on the formative years, it can be expected that the age cohorts born immediately after the Second World War should be more likely to associate commemorative observances with the Second World War, while later age cohorts will do this less often. In this article, we examine whether such differences in association can be related to support for such national commemorations. More specifically, we draw upon the theory of cultural trauma (Alexander et al. 2004) to argue that thinking about the Second World War during the two national commemorations days enhances support for these national commemorations in the Netherlands. The primary research question in this article is as follows: *Do differences between age cohorts in what they commemorate explain differences in general support for national commemorations?*

This study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of national commemorations in several ways. First, it is known that in many countries the content of national commemorations is dynamic and continuously adapted to changing societal conditions (Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2014; Hermoni 2013; Olick 1999; Schwartz 1991; Schwartz 1996; Vom Hau 2013). As a result, different age cohorts are socialized with different ideas on what is important to commemorate. Until now, it has not been empirically examined what the consequences of such shifts are. This study combines historical information on shifts in what is commemorated with broader insights from sociology in order to develop a deeper understanding of national commemorations. More specifically, it will be demonstrated that such shifts in what is important to commemorate can explain the observed age differences in positive attitudes towards national commemorations. Second, many studies have tended to adopt a one-dimensional, top-down view of rituals, focusing primarily on the intentions of political organisers and public policies, while neglecting the thoughts, emotions and actions of the participating population (Fricke 2013). It is important to note that elite beliefs can differ widely from popular beliefs (Schuman et al. 2005). In order to really understand how individuals perceive national commemorations, it is therefore important to also study these individuals. Third, most studies that have examined the feelings of citizens during commemorative moments are based on qualitative methods, including content analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviewing (e.g. Kaftan 2013; Späth 2013). In this article, we use quantitative data to investigate how citizens interpret national commemorations. By employing quantitative methods techniques, we provide additional insight into the mechanisms underlying attitudes towards national commemorations.

In the following section, we describe how Dutch national commemorations have been adapted to changing societal discussions over time. We then provide a brief overview of sociological studies explaining how the socio-political contexts within which people are socialised determines their attitudes. This is followed by the formulation of specific hypotheses on the ways in which such shifts in the content of national commemorations can explain the tendency of older people in the Netherlands to be more positive towards such events. Before testing our hypotheses, we provide information on how the two national commemoration days are organised in the Netherlands.

Shifts in content of Remembrance Day and Liberation Day in the Netherlands

While the objects of commemorations are usually found in the past, the issues motivating their selection and shaping are rooted in the concerns of the present (Schwartz 1982). This continual re-invention of commemorative rituals is crucial for nations wishing to keep the ceremonies alive throughout successive

generations (Zuev and Virchow 2014).¹ In the Netherlands, societal conditions and developments have also shaped ideas concerning who exactly should be commemorated and what the most important lessons of commemorative activities are (Van de Reijt 2010). In the years immediately following the Second World War, the commemoration focused exclusively on the victims fallen during this war, with a strong emphasis on people who had served in the Dutch resistance. The history of the Second World War was characterised by a 'Myth of Resistance': a belief that Dutch people were strongly opposed to the German occupation and, subsequently, that they actively and massively participated in acts of resistance and sabotage. In reality, only approximately five per cent of the population were actively involved in resistant movements (Swinkels and Verhue 2007). In the first 20 years following the Second World War, however, the commemoration focused exclusively on people who had died during this war. At that time, the general notion was that these people should be commemorated because of their struggles for their homeland, and because they died in order to ensure that future generations could enjoy their freedom.

Shortly after the Second World War, the Netherlands became involved in another war: the Indonesian War of Independence. This occasionally bloody armed conflict took place between 1945, when Indonesia declared its independence, and 1949, when the country's independence was recognised by the Netherlands. The veterans of this war argued that, because they had also fought for their country, they (and their colleagues) also deserved official commemoration on Remembrance Day. The commemoration of these veterans was controversial however, as memories of this war of decolonisation later came to be coloured with shame by a significant part of the Dutch population. Although this discussion started only a few years after the Second World War, it was not until 1961 that the Dutch victims of the Indonesian war were officially included in the commemorations during Remembrance Day. The same was true for Dutch veterans of the Korean War. In 1961, it was decided that, instead of limiting the commemoration to victims of the Second World War, 'all people – soldiers and citizens alike – who had died since 10 May 1940 in the name of the Netherlands' would be commemorated.

The Netherlands celebrates the day after Remembrance Day as Liberation Day. Liberation Day takes place on 5 May, as the agreement on the capitulation of German forces in the Netherlands was reached on 5 May 1945. On Liberation Day, attention is focused on the lessons that should be drawn from the past. In the years after the Second World War, these lessons were obviously closely related to this war. For example, the experiences of the Second World War underscored the vital importance of national sovereignty and the superiority of democracy as a political system, despite any defects it might have. In 1946, the celebration of Liberation Day took the form of the *Play of the*

¹ Such re-inventions can nevertheless fail completely (see e.g. Erözden 2013).

Liberation, as performed in the Olympic Stadium of Amsterdam. This play dramatised important events and paid special attention to the rebuilding of the nation after the war.

In later years, the focus of the Liberation Day celebrations extended beyond the Liberation of the Netherlands in 1945 to include freedom in general. Attention turned to such basic human rights as anti-discrimination, the focus extended to include other wars, as well as the lack of freedom in some countries. For example, celebrations have addressed the consequences of the Cold War, including the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 (an influential massive protest that was brutally ended by Soviet forces). Other examples of wars and conflicts that have received broad attention on Liberation Day include the genocide in Rwanda and the war in Yugoslavia. Areas highlighted during the most recent Liberation Day celebration included the lack of freedom of speech in Turkey and freedom of the press in Ethiopia. Although each of the two days (4 and 5 May) is unique, having its own *contingency path*, the attention on both of these days has shifted over time, deviating from the Second World War to address other conflicts and wars (see Keesom (2012) for more information on the historical development of both 4 and 5 May).

Sociological insight for studying the meaning of national commemorations

One central finding in the field of sociology is that the feelings, attitudes, thoughts and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the contexts within which they live (de Regt et al. 2012; Verbakel and Jaspers 2010). Age cohorts could thus be expected to differ according to their outlook on life, as they have been socialised under different social, political and economic circumstances. Mannheim (1952) introduced the concept of formative years into the realm of sociological thought. The main thesis of this influential theory was that people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environments that they experience during their formative years (from around 17 to 25 years of age), and that these formative years determine their values for a lifetime. According to Mannheim, the initial impressions obtained during adolescence are the most decisive, with all later experiences tending to receive their meaning from this original set of experiences. In several ways, subsequent studies have provided empirical support for the operation of this mechanism of socialisation. For example, people are disproportionately likely to recall national events occurring during their adolescence or young adulthood (Schuman and Corning 2012). In addition, several studies have provided evidence that historical conditions during the formative years can have persistent effects on a number of societal indicators, including voter turnout (Firebaugh and Chen 1995).

Mannheim's (1952) theory on formative years can also be employed when studying age differences in what people commemorate at national commemorations. As illustrated by the brief outline of the history of national commemorations in the Netherlands presented above, commemorations in the years

immediately following the Second World War focused solely on this war. Over time, the Dutch started to commemorate other war victims, including veterans who had served in other wars, in addition to expanding the focus of their celebration to include not only the liberation, but also freedom in general. Based upon the socialisation mechanism, we could expect that older people are more likely than younger people are to limit their commemorations and celebrations explicitly to the Second World War (and its end).

Hypothesis 1

Older people are more likely than younger people to associate Remembrance Day and Liberation Day exclusively with the Second World War.

Drawing upon the theory of cultural trauma (Alexander et al. 2004), thinking about the Second World War on 4 and 5 May would seem likely to enhance a positive attitude towards national commemorations. A cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that has left indelible marks on their group consciousness, colouring their memories forever and altering their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (Alexander 2004a). Many societies and groups have experienced one or more cultural traumas. Examples include slavery for African Americans (Eyerman 2004) and 9/11 for the United States as a whole (Smelser 2004). The Second World War is obviously a cultural trauma for many societies (see e.g. Giesen (2004) on the role of this war on German identity, and Alexander (2004b) on the impact of the Holocaust on American society), including the Netherlands. The Second World War is the most recent war during which the country was occupied, and its people experienced massive poverty and destruction during the course of the war. Approximately 225,000 citizens lost their lives during the German occupation (Withuis and Mooij 2010). In the Netherlands, this war is often referred to simply as 'The War' (Blom 2007). As evidenced by the large number of documentaries, films, books and theatrical pieces on this topic, the Second World War remains one of the moral benchmarks in the culture of the Netherlands (van Lierop-Debrauwer and Mooren 2005). The numerous monuments and museums on the Second World War further demonstrate the importance of this war to Dutch society (see e.g. Ribbens and Captain 2011). Not all horrible events become cultural traumas for societies (Debs 2013). Cultural traumas occur only when the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged (Alexander 2004a). We may therefore argue that the Second World War does indeed constitute a cultural trauma for the Dutch, while the relationship between other conflicts (e.g. the Korean War), and issues of collective Dutch identity are less clear. National commemorations that stress national identity and belonging should therefore be of greater importance to people who recall the horrors of the Second World War during these observances than they are to those who

commemorate other conflicts (which are less directly related to Dutch identity).

Hypothesis 2

People who think about the Second World War on Remembrance Day and Liberation Day are more positive towards these national commemorations than are those who think about this war less explicitly.

In this study, we argue that age differences in attitudes towards national commemorations exist as a result of differences between age cohorts with regard to what is commemorated and celebrated. If the first two hypotheses are true, they might be able to explain age differences in support for national commemorations. If older people are more likely to associate national commemorations with the Second World War (Hypothesis 1), and people whose views of commemorative ceremonies are more explicitly linked to the Second World War are more supportive of such rituals (Hypothesis 2); the well-known tendency of older people to be more positive towards national commemorations is likely to be explained by the fact that older people more often think about the Second World War at national commemorations than younger persons do. In other words, we expect that thinking about the Second World War at national commemorations mediates the relationship between age and positive attitudes towards national commemorations.

Hypothesis 3

Focusing on the Second World War on Remembrance Day and Liberation Day mediates the relationship between age and positive attitudes towards national commemorations.

The theoretical model that is outlined above and tested in the remainder of this paper is presented in Figure 1.

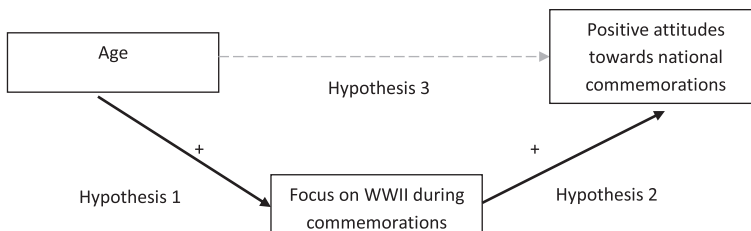


Figure 1. Conceptual model

How are Remembrance Day and Liberation Day celebrated in the Netherlands?

In many countries, the content of national commemorations was traditionally closely linked with the Second World War but has shifted over time, and currently other wars and peacekeeping missions are commemorated as well (see Krimp et al. (2014) on the tradition and development of national commemorations in many countries). We will test our hypotheses in the Netherlands as representative, reliable and valid Dutch data exists on both positive attitudes towards national commemorations as well as on the extent to which people associate these commemorations with the Second World War. The authors know no other country where representative data is available on both attitudes towards national commemorations and what people commemorate. As the Netherlands is used as a case study, we will, in the following sections, provide a brief overview of the most prominent commemorative activities in this country. On 4 May (Remembrance Day), the Dutch flag is hung at half mast at 6 p.m. A service of commemoration is held in *De Nieuwe Kerk*, a church in the national capital, Amsterdam.² Those attending this service include the head of state and various representatives of both the Council of Ministers and the Parliament, along with members of the first generations to be affected by the Second World War and representatives of more than eighty organisations representing survivors and war victims. A ceremony of remembrance is held immediately afterwards by the National Monument. In this ceremony, the king and queen place a wreath at the monument just before 8 p.m. Directly thereafter, two minutes of silence are observed in order to commemorate Dutch war victims. Following these two minutes of silence the national anthem is played. This ceremony is attended by about 20,000 people, with the live broadcast reaching about five million viewers (the total population of the Netherlands is about seventeen million). This central national commemoration in the national capital is held simultaneously with local commemoration ceremonies in nearly every town and community in the Netherlands (Verhue and van Kalmthout 2013). On 4 May, all shops are required by law to close for the day at 7 p.m., and public transportation and road traffic essentially come to a standstill throughout the country during the two minutes of silence observed at 8 p.m.

Following the commemorative ceremonies on the evening of 4 May (Remembrance Day), the morning of 5 May (Liberation Day) forms a bridge to the celebration of freedom. Each year, a person of national or international prominence is invited to deliver the 5 May Lecture, which is a moment of reflection on the vulnerability of freedom. In 1995 (the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War), this address was delivered by Queen Beatrix. Other speakers have included the former NATO Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the former Prime Ministers Ruud Lubbers

² Although the parliament and the government are situated in The Hague, Amsterdam, is the capital of the Netherlands according to the Dutch constitution.

and Wim Kok and the President of Germany Joachim Gauck. In the afternoon, multiple Liberation Festivals (with free admission) are held to celebrate freedom. In addition to performances by bands and singers, various NGOs (e.g. Amnesty International) attend the festivals to provide visitors with information about the importance and vulnerability of freedom. The festivals are attended by about one million people each year (see de Regt and van der Lippe (2015) on recent Liberation Festivals). The celebration comes to a festive conclusion with the 5 May Concert on the Amstel River in Amsterdam. The audience for this light classical music concert has always included the members of the Royal Family, along with representatives from both the Parliament and the Council of Ministers. This concert is free to the public, and it is broadcast live on Dutch television (reaching about one million viewers).

Data

To determine whether the relationship between age and positive attitudes towards national commemorations is mediated by a focus on the Second World War we use data from the *National Freedom Enquiry*. This survey has been conducted annually since 1990. Each year, it includes questions intended to monitor the feelings of the Dutch with regard to 4 and 5 May. We use data from the *National Freedom Enquiry 2012*, as they were the most recent publicly available data at the time of writing. A representative sample of 1,350 citizens aged 13 years and older was drawn, and 896 respondents completed an online questionnaire during the period from 1–12 February 2012. The response rate for this survey was sixty-six per cent, which exceeds the acceptability threshold of sixty per cent (Johnson and Wislar 2012; for additional information on this survey, see Verhue et al. 2012).

Operationalisation

Positive attitudes towards Remembrance Day

People who are positive towards national commemorations regard them as important and relevant. In general, it is difficult to measure broad, deeply rooted attitudes. It is known that multiple items generally provide more reliable and valid measurements of complex factors, as compared with single-item measures (Nunnally 1978). In this study, we assess attitudes towards Remembrance Day by means of the following four questions: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree to the following statements? The annual commemoration of the dead: 1) Means nothing to me; 2) Remains relevant as long as war and suppression exist; 3) Has less and less meaning as the Second World War recedes into the past; and 4) Should continue in the future'. Respondents answered to every question along a five-point scale (1 = *completely agree* – 5 = *completely disagree*). The answers were coded (or re-coded) such that a higher score indicates a more positive attitude towards Remembrance Day.

The Cronbach's (1951) alpha score, which indicates how closely related a set of items are as a group, was calculated in order to examine the extent to which these four questions measure the same construct. The Cronbach's alpha score of 0.77 indicates that combining the scores on these questions results in a reliable scale. The regression method (Harman 1976) was employed in order to calculate factor scores for support for 4 May based on these four questions. In this way, we have obtained one reliable measurement that reflects to what extent people are positive towards Remembrance Day.

Positive attitudes towards Liberation Day

This variable is operationalised in a manner similar to that used to measure attitudes towards Remembrance Day: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree to the following statements? The annual celebration of the liberation on 5 May: 1) Means nothing to me; 2) Remains relevant as long as war and suppression exist; 3) Has less and less meaning as the Second World War recedes into the past; and 4) Should continue in the future'. Respondents answered these questions along a five-point scale (1 = *completely agree* – 5 = *completely disagree*). The answers were coded (or re-coded) such that a higher score indicates a more positive attitude towards Liberation Day. In this case as well, the regression method (Harman 1976) was employed in order to calculate factor scores for support for 5 May based on these four questions, and the Cronbach's alpha score indicated that these questions are sufficiently correlated to justify combining them into a single scale ($\alpha = .76$).

Associating Remembrance Day with the Second World War

The following question was used to examine the extent to which people focus exclusively on the Second World War on Remembrance Day. 'What does the commemoration of the dead on 4 May mean to you? To me, it is the commemoration of 1) All war victims throughout the world who have fallen during any war; 2) All Dutch victims of the Second World War and the wars thereafter; 3) Only the victims of the Second World War who have died anywhere in the world; 4) Only the Dutch victims of the Second World War'. A dummy variable was created to assign a value of 1 to respondents who commemorate only victims of the Second World War and a value of 0 to those who also commemorate victims from other wars. Of all respondents, thirty-three per cent reported that they exclusively commemorate victims of the Second World War on Remembrance Day.³

³ It was technically possible for the respondents to provide multiple answers to this question. It is therefore possible that some respondents might have provided inconsistent responses (e.g. by indicating that they commemorate only national victims of the Second World War while also indicating that they commemorate all international war victims). Of all respondents, 6.5 per cent indicated that they commemorate victims of the Second World War exclusively, while also indicating that they commemorate victims from other wars on Remembrance Day. Respondents providing such inconsistent answers were coded as 0 on this variable.

Associating Liberation Day with the Second World War

The extent to which the Second World War is the focus of commemoration on Liberation Day is examined according to the respondents' agreement with the following item: 'To me, the annual celebration of the liberation on 5 May is a day to pay attention to the Second World War'. Respondents answered along a five-point scale (1 = *completely agree* – 5 = *completely disagree*). The answers were re-coded such that a high score indicates that the respondent does think about the Second World War on Liberation Day (mean = 3.70, sd. = 1.16).

Age

As outlined in the introductory section, the discussion concerning whether to commemorate victims fallen during other wars began almost immediately upon the conclusion of the Second World War (in response to the Indonesian War of Independence). Since that time, this discussion has been held more or less continuously within Dutch society. Although victims of other wars were officially added to the commemoration in 1961, this year should not be regarded as a turning point in Dutch commemorations, for several reasons. First, this official adjustment was the result of previous societal discussions. Second, such changes in the official memorandum were not necessarily accompanied by immediate changes in what the masses actually were commemorating. As the commemoration of other war victims constitutes a relatively continuous trend, it is more accurate to include age as a continuous variable instead of creating arbitrary age cohorts (min. = 13, max. = 91, mean = 44.42, sd. = 18.01).

Control variables

In Hypothesis 3, we formulate the expectation that older people are more positive towards national commemorations because they are more likely to commemorate the Second World War. People who experienced the Second World War directly should logically be more likely to commemorate this war on 4 and 5 May. We therefore controlled for war experience when testing our hypotheses. The number of people currently living who directly experienced the Second World War is small. Only twenty of the respondents in our sample were 5 years of age or older during the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴ We further distinguish between people having indirect experience with

⁴ Although a representative sample of Dutch citizens aged 13 years or older was approached for this study, we must conclude that older people are slightly under-represented in this study. In the Dutch population as a whole, people aged 77 years or older account for about 3.43 per cent of all people aged 13 years or older (<http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/default.aspx?DM=SLNL&PA=7461BEV&D1=0&D2=1-2&D3=a&D4=0> per cent2c10 per cent2c20 per cent2c30 per cent2c40 per cent2c50 per cent2cl&HDR=T per cent2cG3&STB=G1 per cent2cG2&VW=T). In our sample, only two per cent of the respondents were 77 years of age or older. One explanation for this discrepancy could be that the data for this study were collected by means of an internet survey. It is known that older people tend to be under-represented in internet surveys (see e.g. Trocchia and Janda, 2000).

the Second World War and those having no experience at all during or with the Second World War. About seventy-eight per cent of all Dutch people know someone who experienced the Second World War (indirect experience), and about nineteen per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not know anyone who had experienced this war. We further controlled for several background variables. Immigrant status was assessed according to two dummy variables: immigrants from Western countries and immigrants from non-Western countries (accounting for nine per cent and ten per cent of the sample, respectively). Natives are used as the reference category (constituting eighty-one per cent of the sample). In our sample, forty-nine per cent of the respondents were male (coded as 1), and fifty-one per cent were female (coded as 0). Finally, we controlled for educational level, also according to two dummy variables moderate level of education (forty per cent of the sample) and higher educational level (twenty-seven per cent of the sample), with lower educational level as the reference category (thirty-three per cent of the sample). By including these control variables, we are sure that the relations we are interested in (the relations between age, association of national commemorations with the Second World War and positive attitudes towards national commemorations) are not the result of these variables.

Results

We predicted that older people would be more likely to focus on the Second World War on Remembrance Day than younger people would be (*Hypothesis 1*). As indicated in Table 1, older people were more likely than young people were to restrict their commemorations of Remembrance Day exclusively to victims of the Second World War ($B = .03, p < .001$). Older people were also significantly more likely to associate Liberation Day with the Second World War ($B = .01, p < .001$). The results of these analyses confirm the first hypothesis that older persons would be more likely to focus on the Second World War during national commemorations than would be the case with younger people.

Consistent with previous findings (Verhue et al. 2012), the results reported in Table 2 indicate that older people tend to be more positive towards both Remembrance Day and Liberation Day (Model 1: $B = .01, p < .05$ for Remembrance Day and $B = .01, p < .001$ for Liberation Day). We predicted that older people would be more positive towards Remembrance Day and Liberation Day, because they are more likely to associate these days with the Second World War (or its end). It has been argued that people who consider the horrors of the Second World War are likely to be more positive towards national commemorations (*Hypothesis 2*).

As demonstrated in Table 2, the exclusive commemoration of victims of the Second World War is not significantly related to support for Remembrance

Table 1. Logistic regression⁵ of the influence of age on commemorating victims of the Second World War on Remembrance Day, and OLS regression of the influence of age on thinking about the Second World War on Liberation Day⁶

	<i>Remembrance Day</i>	<i>Liberation Day</i>
	<i>B(s.e.)</i>	<i>B(s.e.)</i>
Constant	-2.23(.51)***	2.95(.20)***
Age	.03(.01)***	.01(.002)***
Experience with WWII		
No experience (reference category)		
Direct/personal experience	-1.52(.74)*	.58(.30)
Indirect experience	-.62(.24)*	.31(.10)**
Gender		
Female (reference category)		
Male	.05(.20)	.06(.08)
Education		
Lower education (reference category)		
Middle education	-.38(.23)	.04(.09)
Higher education	-.49(.26)	-.43(.10)***
Immigrant status		
Natives (reference category)		
Western immigrant	-.72(.40)	-.06(.14)
Non-Western immigrant	-.74(.46)	-.07(.14)

Source: Own calculations based on data from the *National Freedom Enquiry 2012*;

*** $p < .001$,

** $p < .01$,

* $p < .05$.

Day (Model 2 for Remembrance Day: $B = -.11$, $p > .05$).⁷ People who limit their commemorations exclusively to victims of the Second World are not more positive towards Remembrance Day than are those who also

⁵ In order to estimate, the influence of age on thinking about the Second World War on Remembrance Day logistic regression is used. This, while thinking about the Second World War on Remembrance Day, is a dichotomous variable. For a variable with the values 'yes' or 'no', logistic regression is the most appropriate method.

⁶ Tests for multicollinearity were conducted in order to determine whether age and war experience were too highly correlated to be included in one model. The collinearity statistics reveal no evidence of such problems with multicollinearity (Tolerance $> .733$ and VIF < 1.364).

⁷ Our measurement for assessing whether respondents focus on the Second World War on Remembrance Day is strongly related to the issue of whether people have a national or international focus during this national commemoration. A focus on Dutch victims of the Second World War could arguably be regarded as a more suitable operationalisation according to the theory of cultural trauma. Additional analysis (available from the authors upon request) revealed that, after controlling for inconsistent responses, 14.8 per cent of all respondents indicated that they commemorate only Dutch victims of the Second World. Such restricted commemoration is not related to attitudes towards Remembrance Day (Beta = $-.014$, $p = .690$).

Table 2. *B's from OLS regression of the influence of association with the Second World War on support for national commemorations*

	<i>Remembrance Day</i>		<i>Liberation Day</i>	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Constant	-.46(.16)**	-.45(.16)**	-.73(.16)***	-2.07(.15)***
Age	.01(.002)*	.01(.002)**	.01(.002)***	.002(.002)
Association with WWII		-.11(.09)		.47(.02)***
Experience with WWII				
No experience (reference category)				
Direct/personal experience	.14(.24)	.12(.24)	.19(.25)	-.02(.20)
Indirect experience	.30(.08)***	.29(.08)***	.18(.08)*	.05(.07)
Gender				
Female (reference category)				
Male	.01(.06)	.02(.06)	.15(.06)*	.11(.05)*
Education				
Lower education (reference category)				
Middle education	.002(.07)	-.01(.07)	.15(.07)*	.13(.06)*
Higher education	.10(.08)	.09(.08)	-.04(.08)	.13(.07)
Immigrant status				
Natives (reference category)				
Western immigrant	.002(.11)	-.01(.11)	-.14(.11)	-.11(.09)
Non-Western immigrant	-.53(.11)***	-.54(.11)***	-.22(.11)	-.23(.09)*

Source: Own calculations based on data from the *National Freedom Enquiry 2012*;

*** $p < .001$,

** $p < .01$,

* $p < .05$.

The standard errors are given between brackets.

commemorate victims of other wars. In contrast, people who celebrate the end of the Second World War are more positive towards Liberation Day than are those who focus less on the Second World War (Model 2 for Liberation Day: $B = .47, p < .001$).⁸ Hypothesis 2 is therefore confirmed for Liberation Day, but must be rejected with regard to support for Remembrance Day.

⁸ The measurement of attitude towards Remembrance Day and Liberation includes the item 'has less and less meaning as the Second World War recedes into the past'. This is arguably a suboptimal test of our hypothesis, as the operationalisation of both the dependent (attitude towards national commemorations), and the independent variable (meaning assigned to national commemorations) contain references to the Second World War. We therefore re-conducted our analysis without this item in the dependent variable ($\alpha = .75$). This did not alter the conclusions (Beta = .596, $p < .001$).

As indicated by the analysis presented above, older people are more likely to celebrate the end of the Second World War, and people who explicitly celebrate the end of this war on Liberation Day are more positive towards this particular annual celebration. Based on these results, we now examine the extent to which celebrating the end of the Second World War mediates the relationship between age and support for Liberation Day (*Hypothesis 3*). In light of the finding that explicit commemoration of the Second World War is not significantly associated with support for Remembrance Day, we did not conduct such a mediation analysis for Remembrance Day (in order to qualify as a potential mediator, a mediating variable – in this case, commemorating victims of the Second World War – must be significantly related to the dependent variable – in this case, support for Remembrance Day, see e.g. Baron and Kenny 1986; Preacher and Hayes 2004 on mediation analysis). As indicated by these results, the effect of age on support for Liberation Day disappears entirely when controlling for the extent to which people think about the end of the Second World War on Liberation Day (Table 2, Model 2 for Liberation Day: $B = .002, p > .05$). The finding that older people are more positive towards Liberation Day thus appears to be entirely due to the tendency of older people to regard Liberation Day explicitly as a celebration of the end of the Second World War.⁹ Hypothesis 3 is therefore confirmed for Liberation Day.

Discussion

Remarkably little quantitative sociological research has been devoted to identifying those who regard national commemorations as important, those who participate in such activities and why they do so (Meuleman and Lubbers 2013). Consistent with Schwartz and Schuman (2005), however, we are convinced that the study of individuals is important, as individuals are both the creators and the recipients of commemorations, and they ascribe meaning to historical and commemorative objects. In this article, we demonstrate that older people in the Netherlands are significantly more likely to link national commemorations and celebrations to the Second World War (or its end). This is consistent with the mechanism of socialisation during the formative years, as outlined by Mannheim (1952). This finding cannot be explained by the fact that older people are more likely to have had personal (or indirect) experience with this war. Even controlled for experience with the Second World War, the

⁹ As outlined in the operationalisation section, age was included in the analyses as a continuous variable. It could be argued that it would have been more accurate to study age cohorts. For this reason, we re-conducted the analyses using a dichotomous variable for age: people who had been socialised before 1961 (the year in which it was officially decided to commemorate all war victims instead of focusing exclusively on victims of the Second World War), and those who had been socialised after 1961. This did not alter the conclusions reported in this article. In this case as well, age is positively and significantly related to support for Liberation Day (Beta = .109, $p < .01$). This age effect disappears when controlling for celebrating the end of the Second World War (Beta = .029, $p > .05$).

older respondents addressed in this study were more likely to commemorate the victims of the Second World War on Remembrance Day and to celebrate the end of this war on Liberation Day a day later. Based on the cultural trauma theory (Alexander et al. 2004), we also predicted that explicitly linking national commemorations to the Second World War would be associated with a more positive attitude towards national commemorations. As indicated by our findings, celebrating the end of the Second World War on Liberation Day does indeed result in a more positive attitude towards the annual celebration of Liberation Day. Nevertheless, our expectations were not confirmed with regard to attitudes towards Remembrance Day. People who explicitly commemorate victims of the Second World War on Remembrance Day are no more positive towards this commemoration than are those who also commemorate victims from other wars and conflicts. Finally, we assessed whether explicit attention paid to the Second World War mediates the relationship between age and positive attitudes towards Liberation Day. Our results indicate that this is indeed the case. The tendency of older people to be more positive towards Liberation Day can be explained entirely by their tendency to link Liberation Day explicitly to the Second World War.

In this article, we demonstrate that association with the Second World War is related to positive attitudes towards Liberation Day but not to positive attitudes towards Remembrance Day. Results from another study indicate that objective knowledge about the Second World War is related to support for Remembrance Day but not to positive attitudes towards Liberation Day (de Regt et al. 2013). There are several possible reasons why detailed objective knowledge about the cultural trauma does increase support for Remembrance Day, but not for Liberation Day. First, the rituals of Liberation Day have not been institutionalised to the same extent as those associated with Remembrance Day. Exactly what should be celebrated on Liberation Day, and how this should be done has been less stable and straightforward throughout the years, as compared with Remembrance Day (Kennedy 2012). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that perceptions appear to be more important for a less institutionalised day (Liberation Day), and that objective knowledge appears to be more important for a more traditional and established day (Remembrance Day). Liberation Day is furthermore less focused and more comprehensive than Remembrance Day is. While only war victims are commemorated on Remembrance Day, Liberation Day is a day for celebrating both the country's liberation and for paying attention to freedom (or the lack thereof) around the world, as well as to a broad array of aspects, including democracy, war, human rights, tolerance, responsibility, laws, discrimination and justice. Knowledge about specific cultural traumas might therefore be less important with regard to such broad commemorations. The finding that the determinants of attitudes towards Liberation Day differ from the sources of attitudes towards Remembrance Day underscores the essential importance of studying a broad range of different national commemorations in order to gain a thorough understanding of the processes underlying attitudes towards such commemorative services (see also Etzioni 2000).

In this article, we aim to explain why older people tend to be more positive towards national commemorations than younger people are. It is important to acknowledge that such differences between older and younger people could be due to two different types of effects. First, the finding that older people are more positive towards national commemorations might reflect an age effect. This would mean that, as people age, they become more positive towards national commemorations. A competing reason for the observed differences between older and younger people involves cohort (generational) effects. It is assumed that different age cohorts are socialised in different contexts, thus resulting in attitudinal differences.¹⁰ The findings reported in this article suggest that the cohort interpretation is more plausible. Our results indicate that the Second World War plays a central role in explaining why older people are more positive towards Liberation Day than younger people are. It seems unlikely that the current (i.e. youngest) generation will feel the same way about the role of the Second World War in national commemorations when they are as old as the oldest generation is now. If it is indeed a generational effect, this could have consequences for future support for the national commemorations in the Netherlands. The generation that attaches the greatest value to Liberation Day, due to their focus on the Second World War, will eventually pass away. As reported by Verhue and Koenen (2013), support for Liberation Day in the Netherlands is already declining. In 2002, forty-three per cent of the population considered the annual celebration of the liberation very important. In 2013, this figure had fallen to only twenty-nine per cent.

Many studies have pointed to birth cohort differences in collective memory (Schuman and Scott 1989; Schuman and Corning 2012; Scott and Zac 1993). Age differences in the value attached to national commemorations have been studied less often. Nevertheless, evidence from other countries has been reported with regard to age differences in attitudes towards national commemorations. For example, in a study of participation in events including Romania's most important national holiday, Fox (2006) observes that older men tend to predominate at the official, sombre ceremony held in the morning, while many students tend to be present for the national celebrations held in the evening. Fox notes that many students identify more with the fireworks on that evening than they do with the celebration's national justification. These findings indicate that the issues that we outline in this paper are not limited to the Dutch context. Age differences in positive attitudes towards national commemorative rituals are not the only differences to be observed in other countries. Similar historical shifts have been reported with regard to the content of national war commemorations in other countries. For example, in Norway, Liberation Day has been celebrated since 1945. In 2011, it was decided to broaden the focus of this day. The name of the celebration was changed to Veterans Day, and the focus of the commemoration was extended to include all soldiers

¹⁰ In addition to age and cohort effects, period effects can occur. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to disentangle these effects. Interested readers are referred to Glenn (1976).

who have served Norway since the Second World War (Krimp et al. 2014). Future studies should examine the extent to which the results of this study are generalisable to other countries and test whether age differences in attitudes towards national commemorations in other countries could also be explained by the fact that different age cohorts commemorate different things.

Many inspiring studies on national commemorations have employed qualitative research designs (e.g. Kaftan 2013; Späth 2013). We strongly believe that data triangulation involving a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods is essential to arriving at a thorough explanation of the mechanisms underlying attitudes towards national commemorations (see e.g. Jick (1979) on data triangulation). As noted at the beginning of this article, it is striking that only a limited number of quantitative sociological studies on attitudes towards national commemorations have been conducted and published in international journals. As demonstrated by Zerubavel (2003) in a cross-national assessment of national commemorations, many similarities exist with regard to the ways in which various nations commemorate. Awareness of both the similarities and the differences between countries could significantly enhance our understanding of national commemorations. A thorough understanding of such national holidays is important, as it could tell us more about the processes underlying cohesion and feelings of national belonging within societies (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

In this article, we demonstrate the fruitfulness of linking historical shifts in the content of national commemorations to attitudes towards such observances. We also reveal that different associations resulting from such historical shifts can help to explain structural age differences in attitudes towards national commemorations. We hope that the analyses reported in this article will encourage other social scientists to complete the sociological picture of national commemorations, including through quantitative analysis.

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