



# Does Participation in National Commemorations Increase National Attachment? A Study of Dutch Liberation Festivals

Sabrina de Regt\* and Tanja van der Lippe\*\*  
*Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology*

## Abstract

It is generally assumed that national commemorations have the power to increase national attachment. This is because such ceremonies highlight shared history, communicate core values, and have the potential to decrease conflicts in societies, while celebrating and mourning together enhances attachment to the group. Remarkably, only a limited number of studies have empirically studied the relation between participation in national commemorations and feelings of national attachment. Studies that have addressed this question focused mainly on the intentions of the organizing elite, employed qualitative research designs, or suffered from methodological problems such as causality. In this study, we examined

\* Sabrina de Regt is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and member of the interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS). Her research interests include democratic values, national commemorations, cohesion, and cross-national research. She has previously worked as a post-doctoral researcher on the project 'Freedom and Liberation Day in the Netherlands' in collaboration with the National Committee for 4 and 5 May, and as a fieldwork coordinator for the large-scale Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement (SHARE). Having earned master's degrees in sociology (2006, Tilburg University) and quantitative analysis in social science (*magna cum laude*, 2009, Catholic University of Brussels), she obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Antwerp in 2012.

\*\* Tanja van der Lippe is Professor of Sociology of Households and Employment Relations at the Department of Sociology and Research School (ICS) of Utrecht University, head of the Department of Sociology, and research director ICS Utrecht. Her research interests are in the area of work-family linkages in Dutch and other societies, for which she received a number of large-scale grants from Dutch and European science foundations. She is an elected member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW, 2014), and of the Royal Holland Society of Sciences and Humanities (KHMW, 2013). She has published extensively on work and care of men and women, time use and time pressure in a comparative way, and the position of men and women in the labour market (including supervisory positions) in Western and Eastern European countries.

participation in Dutch liberation festivals by means of survey data. We compared people's feelings of national attachment before they visited the liberation festival with people's feelings of national attachment after they visited the festival, but no evidence was found for the integrative role of national ceremonies. In the concluding section, we discuss potential reasons why the expected positive relation was not found and formulate suggestions for future research.

## Introduction

Every country has national commemorations (Zerubavel 2003). It is frequently argued that such rituals have the power to increase national attachment (e.g. Casey 1987; Durkheim 1982; Schwartz 1991; Winter 2006).<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable, however, that this claim has been made with little or no empirical justification. The claim that participation in national commemorations increases national attachment is not only influential in scientific circles, but also has explicit consequences for society. The old bases of feelings of national sameness are being undermined by economic globalization, transnational political integration, the process of differentiation, migration, and individualism (Durkheim 1982; Olick et al. 2011). Therefore, it is both scientifically and societally important to answer the following question: *Does participation in national commemorations increase national attachment?* This question will be answered in this article by means of self-collected survey data on five Liberation Festivals in the Netherlands.

Claims on the positive relation between national attachment and national commemorations have been often made on a country level, where, in particular, official commemorative narratives have been studied. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) demonstrated with their detailed description of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that such official narratives are not necessarily congruent with citizens' feelings. The official commemorative invocation of Veterans Day, whose central themes were recovery, solidarity, and unity, created feelings of anger and incomprehension among attendees. This shows that it is important to study the consumers of commemorative rituals instead of focusing solely on the intentions of the political elite designing such commemorative rituals (e.g. Farquet 2014; Fox 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Späth 2013).

Furthermore, many studies that empirically examined the relation between national attachment and commemorations used qualitative research designs such as content analysis, discourse analysis of commemorative narratives, participant observation, ethnographical fieldwork, and depth interviews (e.g. Elgenius 2011; Fricke 2013; Lentz 2013). However, we believe that we will only be able to understand the processes behind this research question when we study it from multiple angles and with various methods (see, e.g., Matthews and Ross 2010 for more information regarding the complementation of qualitative and quantitative research designs). In this article, we study the relation between participation in national commemorations and national attachment by means of survey data. Schwartz and Schuman (2005) previously highlighted the value, or rather necessity, of using survey data when studying the link between individual beliefs and

commemorations. In total, we have obtained data on 1,117 visitors to Dutch liberation festivals.

Methodological difficulties are one potential reason why the influential thesis that participation in national commemorations increases national attachment has been studied only sporadically. Problems of causality and self-selection, in particular, make it challenging to study the link between participation in national rituals and national attachment (see Etzioni 2000). Suppose we interview citizens celebrating a national holiday and find that they are particularly strongly connected to the nation. Based upon this observation, we cannot automatically conclude that participation in national commemorations increases national attachment. This is because it is possible, even likely, that people who feel especially connected to the nation are more likely to participate in such commemorative rituals (see Devine-Wright 2001). In this study, we compare data before the ceremonies starts with data collected from people after they have visited the national commemoration. As we only study attendees of the festival and compare the 'pre-festival' and the 'post-festival' groups we can estimate the influence of attending the festival on feelings of national attachment *controlling* for self-selection effects. As a result, we are better able to examine whether something happens during the national commemoration that increases national attachment.

In sum, this study collects innovative survey data from consumers of national celebrations and takes into account the problems of causality and self-selection. In this way, our study sheds new light on the question of whether participation in national commemorations increases feelings of national attachment in the Netherlands.

### **National Attachment and National Ceremonies**

Durkheim (1982) was one of the first researchers to emphasize the importance of commemorative rituals for group attachment. He stated that there can be no society that does not feel the need to uphold and reaffirm at regular intervals the collective sentiments and ideas that underpin its unity. Many other authors also noted that commemorations constitute a shared identity more lasting and significant than would be possible in societies without such ceremonies (e.g. Casey 1987; Winter 2006). It has even been argued that national commemorations are organized because of their potential to increase national attachment (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

It is not surprising that the claim that national commemorations increase national attachment has been made so frequently. There are multiple ways in which participation in such rituals can help to create a feeling of national belonging. One way in which national commemorative rituals can help to increase national attachment is through drawing explicit attention to a shared past. Renan (1990) stated in his famous essay, 'What Is a Nation?', that it is this common history that creates a feeling of belonging together as a nation. Furthermore, Halbwachs (1980) stated that, by considering its own past, a group becomes conscious of its identity. Thus, the mere fact that commemorations highlight significant events from the past creates a feeling of belonging together.<sup>2</sup>

Another reason mentioned frequently in the literature for commemorations' ability to increase national attachment is the fact that a ritual explicitly articulates the most important values of a given society (Hobsbawm 1983). Those basic values unite the members of the society in question.<sup>3</sup> As Zerubavel (1995:8) noted, 'The power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance.'

A further frequently mentioned function of rites is their perceived ability to mediate conflicts in societies. By focusing on what people have in common, national attachment can be increased.<sup>4</sup> Warner (1959), for example, noted in his study of the integrative power of Memorial Day that such ceremonies can help to decrease tensions between groups. He stated that on such days the cemetery and its graves become the object of sacred rituals, which permit opposing organizations to subordinate their customary opposition to the unity of the community as a whole. In particular, ceremonies with a meta-narrative that hold up the acceptance of divergent voices as a democratic ideal and allow for the celebration of multiple conflicting positions have the power to increase national attachment (Steidl 2013).

Finally, crowds gather during commemorative ceremonies, simultaneously communicating the same thought and participating in the same actions. Durkheim (1982) argued that the resulting excitement enhances feelings of group attachment and referred to this phenomenon using the term *collective effervescence*. Pfaff and Yang (2001) also argued that the effect of public demonstrations may be electric as actors begin to realize that their grievances are shared beyond their own private circles. This 'electric shock' effect is expected to result in stronger feelings of attachment to the group.

In sum, there are multiple reasons why national commemorations potentially increase national attachment. There is one important point to note, however. In general, these claims have been made on a group level. Whether or not participation in national commemorations is important for a sense of national belonging at an individual level has been largely ignored in previous literature. In the next section, we will discuss several empirical studies that have addressed this issue at the individual level.

## **Previous Studies on Participation in National Commemorations and Feelings of National Attachment**

### *Qualitative Studies*

In order to gain a true understanding of the extent to which participation in national commemorations increases national attachment, Fox (2006) observed university students at Romanian and Hungarian national commemorations. He concluded that while such commemorations provide suitable platforms for students to express feelings of national belonging, people identified more strongly with the fireworks of the celebrations than with the celebrations' national justification.

Späth (2013) recently concluded that while Madagascar's Independence Day is mainly celebrated in private circles, it still has the power to increase national

identity. One student she interviewed, for example, told her: 'For me, the family is the most important point of reference, not the nation. But everybody is a member of a family, and that's how we build a nation' (ibid.:268). Späth (ibid.) concluded that, in this way, private family celebrations of national days can create a sense of national identity.

Interviewing participants in parades on Saint Patrick's Day in England, Scully (2012) reported mixed results. Some Irish people do believe that the parades have the power to create national attachment. Sam argued, for example, 'Patrick's Day will show you and everyone, who're Irish they'll all appear here in hundreds and thousands of them dressed in their green and white' (ibid.:127). Another participant, Éamonn, was less optimistic. Though he was initially enthusiastic about the parade, he was disappointed by the actual form of the parade. He argued that a parade was an inauthentic way to celebrate Irishness. He concluded, 'I just don't want to be part of it, it is a caricature' (ibid.: 128).

Studies like the ones described above are very valuable, informative, and insightful. In order to obtain a reliable understanding of the relation between commemorations and national identification, however, it is important to complement these studies with quantitative methods centred on the individual (Sorek 2011). Qualitative and quantitative methods both have their strengths and weaknesses (Matthews and Ross 2010). If only one method is employed, this might result in an incomplete and suboptimal – at worst, biased – picture of the relation between commemorations and national belonging. Remarkably, only a limited number of quantitative studies have been conducted on participation in national commemorations. In the next section, several of these innovative studies are discussed.

### *Quantitative*

One of the first studies to examine the relation between national rituals and group attachment by means of survey data was that by Devine-Wright (2001), who studied participation in Orange Parades in Northern Ireland. He found that Protestants who participated in these parades were more likely to identify closely with the group as a whole than were Protestants who did not participate in these commemorative parades. Furthermore, participating Protestants were more likely to see the past as an important aspect of their identity.

Recently, Meuleman and Lubbers (2013) reported that, in general, nationalist attitudes are positively related to participation in national commemorations. They found that feelings of national pride, in particular, were related to participation in national commemorations and celebrations. Interestingly, feelings of national superiority were not related to whether or not people participated in national commemorations and celebrations.

In another study, Lubbers and Meuleman (2012) examined the relation between nationalist attitudes and national commemorations in more depth. Their study did not include a general measure of participation in national commemorations and celebrations, but addressed the effect of nationalist attitudes on participation in 4 May (Dutch Remembrance Day) and 5 May (Dutch Liberation Day) separately. This study showed that patriotism was positively related to observing two

minutes' silence on Remembrance Day. Nationalist attitudes were not related to flying the flag on Liberation Day.

When asked which collective actions (e.g. national elections, royal weddings, charity shows on television, and political demonstrations) made people feel connected to other Dutch citizens, the answer given most frequently was: during commemorations of the Second World War (Bernts et al. 2007). This conclusion is in line with more recent data from the Dutch National Freedom Survey (Verhue et al. 2014). Here too, it was demonstrated that on the two Dutch commemoration days, people experienced strong emotions such as solidarity and unity.

In other words, piecemeal information suggests that national commemorations and feelings of national belonging are positively related. The fact that participation in national commemorations and national attachment are correlated does not necessarily mean that participation in commemorative ceremonies does enhance feelings of national attachment. It is possible that people who are more attached to the nation are more likely to visit the national ceremony. In other words, the direction of the relation is not clear (causality). What we wish to determine in this study is whether or not something happens during these rituals that enhances feelings of national attachment? This question will be examined by means of a case study of Dutch liberation festivals.

### **How Visiting a Liberation Festival in the Netherlands Can Increase Feelings of National Belonging**

On 5 May (Liberation Day), Dutch people annually celebrate the end of the occupation period by Nazi Germany (1940–1945) and cherish freedom and democracy worldwide. Large liberation festivals are annually organized to celebrate the liberation and freedom.<sup>5</sup> Approximately one million Dutch visit these festivals (the Netherlands counts about seventeen million citizens). A recent study shows that the majority of the Dutch population (about 80%) believes that liberation festivals are a (very) appealing way to celebrate Liberation Day (Koenen et al. 2015). In fact, liberation festivals are considered to be more appealing than other activities that are organized on Liberation Day (ibid.). In other countries, similar festivals are organized in order to commemorate key events in national history (see, e.g., Lentz 2013). In the theory section above, we outlined four general reasons why participation in national commemorations may increase national attachment: (1) such ceremonies evoke a shared history; (2) they are organized around several core values; (3) they have the power to mediate conflicts in society; and (4) attending such a ceremony produces an 'electric shock' effect. In the paragraphs that follow, we describe how these four general characteristics also apply to liberation festivals in the Netherlands.

There are several ways in which the attention of visitors to Dutch liberation festivals is drawn to the shared national history. First of all, the name, liberation festival, directly refers to the end of the Second World War. At the festival itself, there are also multiple ways in which visitors are informed about this shared history. Every festival has a 'Square of Freedom': a place where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations provide information to visitors on

a range of topics. One example of an organization that was present at several festivals in 2014 was the Netherlands Veterans Institute. It was possible for visitors to the festivals to 'date a veteran'. During such dates, the veterans told the visitors about their experiences during wars or peacekeeping missions, and visitors were able to ask questions. On stage, too, attention is drawn to national history. In 2014, for example the theme song of the festivals was *Dance, the War is Over*, by Handsome Poets. Finally, the Fire of Liberation burns at all festivals. This fire is the national symbol of the end of the Second World War. Every year on Liberation Day the fire is lighted in Wageningen, where the German capitulation was signed, and subsequently distributed to all festivals by means of relay runners.

At Liberation Festivals, the spotlight is also shone on several core values of Dutch society: freedom, democracy, and tolerance. Several organizations located in the 'Square of Freedom' attempt to raise visitors' awareness about the lack of freedom in the Netherlands and in other countries. In 2014, for example, Amnesty International campaigned for freedom of speech in Turkey, and NGOs such as War Child, Terres des Hommes, and the Red Cross also informed visitors about the lack of freedom in other countries. Another way in which the attention of visitors is drawn to these core values is by means of the 'Ambassadors of Freedom'. These are popular Dutch singers who perform at several liberation festivals. They not only sing their popular songs but also try to raise visitors' awareness of the vulnerability and centrality of freedom. The fact that these Ambassadors of Freedom fly from festival to festival by helicopter makes an even greater impression on visitors.

Third, it can be argued that the narrative of Liberation Day has the power to decrease conflict in societies. Vinitzky-Seroussi (2002) distinguished two kinds of commemoration: *fragmented commemorations* and *multivocal commemorations*. Fragmented commemorations are characterized by distinct commemorations at different times, in different locations, and with different audiences. Though the same historical event or person is commemorated or celebrated, each group does this in its own way. Such commemorative services may be seen to increase conflict between different groups in society. During multivocal commemorations, on the other hand, symbols are used that carry diverse meanings and therefore incorporate multiple, potentially conflicting, interpretations. Such ceremonies have potential to build social solidarity by bridging conflicting points of view. Liberation Day can be seen as an example of the latter type of commemoration, as its meta-narrative explicitly focuses on tolerance, democracy and solidarity. It could be argued that the broad narrative attempts to appeal to all Dutch citizens.

Finally, visiting a liberation festival may increase feelings of national belonging because this liberation is being celebrated with many other Dutch people simultaneously. As noted above, approximately one million people visit a liberation festival every year. The festivals also organize the '5-to-5 moment', which is celebrated by all festivals simultaneously at 4:55 p.m. During these five minutes, the visitors of all festivals simultaneously dance to the same song and attention is paid to the main message of Liberation Day across all festivals in the Netherlands. The idea is that visitors feel connected to the other people celebrating at their festival, but also realize that this is a national day on which the Netherlands as a whole

celebrates the same thing at the same moment. It can be expected that, because the same thing is celebrated at the same time in the same way across all festivals in the Netherlands, a feeling of collective effervescence is created (Durkheim 1982).

It is not only the official narrative that is important as a mechanism for increasing national attachment: The format and style of commemorative ceremonies are also contributing factors (Elgenius 2011). National celebrations need to use several elements of popular culture in order to be able to bring many people together (Lentz 2013). As outlined above, dance, music, and performances by popular artists play a central role in Dutch liberation festivals. It has been argued that such popular and festive elements are powerful ingredients in national celebrations. Fricke (2013) referred in this context to ‘party patriotism’. Some scholars have highlighted the role that arts and literature can play in creating national identity (see, e.g., Bucciantini 2012; De Cesari 2012). Besides music and dance, art projects are also part of the programme of Dutch liberation festivals (e.g. exhibitions, poetry competitions, and photography contests). Finally, all of the festivals are decorated in the national colours: red, white, and blue.

In conclusion, there are several reasons to expect that participation in liberation festivals increases feelings of national belonging. To what extent this is indeed the case will be tested in the remainder of this article.

### **Data**

Data were collected on 5 May 2014 at five liberation festivals (Amsterdam, Assen, Utrecht, Wageningen, and Zoetermeer).<sup>6</sup> In total fourteen liberation festivals take place in the Netherlands. When choosing which festivals to study, we ensured that all regions were represented (studies demonstrated that in the Netherlands regional factors influence individual attitudes – see, e.g., Savelkoul et al. 2011). All festivals were visited by two or three interviewers (from the start of the festival at 1:00 p.m. until the end of the festival at 11:00 p.m.). These interviewers received clear instructions about the goal of the study. All interviewers wore clothes branded with the symbols of the university and received an interviewer identification card bearing the logo of the university. The questionnaires were also printed on official university paper. This ensured that the respondents could identify the interviewers as representatives of an official institution. The respondents filled out the questionnaires themselves, as it is known that self-administration lowers the chances of respondents adhering to socially desirable answering patterns (see, e.g., Tourangeau and Smith 1996). In general, the level of cooperation was high, and we received feedback that both the interviewers and the respondents enjoyed participating in this study. It took about ten minutes to complete each questionnaire. In total, 1,117 respondents filled out the questionnaire. Of these, fifty-six respondents did not have Dutch nationality or did not report their nationality and were excluded. As a result, 1,061 respondents were included in the analyses.

### **Operationalization**

*National attachment:* In this study, we employed the *Perceived Cohesion Scale* of Bollen and Hoyle (1990) to measure national attachment. Respondents were asked

to what extent they agreed or disagreed (1 = *totally disagree* – 5 = *totally agree*) with the following six statements: (1) I feel a sense of belonging to the Netherlands; (2) I feel that I am a member of the Dutch community; (3) I see myself as part of the Dutch community; (4) I am enthusiastic about the Netherlands; (5) I am happy to live in the Netherlands; and (6) the Netherlands is one of the best countries in the world. Answers to these items were summed in order to measure a general feeling of national attachment ( $\alpha = .86$ ). This scale has been used successfully in other studies (e.g. Chin et al. 1999; Hansen et al. 2002; Paxton and Moody 2003).<sup>7</sup>

*Participation in the Liberation Festival:* A dummy variable was used to distinguish visitors who were yet to enter the festival (= 0) from visitors who were returning home after visiting the festival (= 1). All persons in our sample were attendees of a liberation festival. The only difference between the two groups is that the ‘pre-festival’ group did not experience anything at the festival yet, while the ‘post-festival’ group already visited the festival. In other words, they were already exposed to the different activities on the festivals. By comparing the ‘pre-festival’ group with the ‘post-festival’ group, we can estimate to what extent something happens *during* the festival that enhances feelings of national attachment (controlling for self-selection effects as we only study attendees of such festivals). In our data, 66% of respondents had already visited the festival while 34% were yet to enter.

### *Equivalence of ‘Pre-festival’ and ‘Post-festival’ Groups*

In this study, we used static group comparison (Neuman 2012) to examine whether or not visiting a liberation festival enhances feelings of national belonging. Because this research design lacks random assignments as well as a pretest, existing group differences related to national attachment might lead to biased conclusions. We therefore first examined whether the two groups (the ‘pre-visit’ and ‘post-visit’ groups) differed regarding several key variables.

As shown in Table 1, the pre-visit group does not differ from the post-visit group regarding age, gender, and general support for Liberation Day. Small educational differences do appear, and it was found that educational level is positively related to national attachment. We therefore controlled for educational level during our analysis. Table 1 also displays several general characteristics of the visitors to Liberation Festivals. It was found that, on average, the people visiting these festivals were approximately thirty years old, and people stayed at the festival for about four hours on average. Furthermore, we see in Table 1 that the visitors were generally enthusiastic about the festivals. The festivals received an average score of 7.8 (on a ten-point scale where 0 = *very negative evaluation* and 10 = *very positive evaluation*). Last, we asked our respondents whether they believe that liberation festivals are a good way to celebrate Liberation Day. An overwhelming majority of the visitors (95%) indicated that they believe that such festivals are a good way to celebrate freedom/the liberation.

**Table 1. Differences between the ‘pre-visit’ and ‘post-visit’ groups on several background variables<sup>8</sup> and their correlation with perceived cohesion**

	Pre-visit	Post-visit	<i>r</i>
Age in years <i>mean</i>	29.00	30.27	.176***
Female	64.2%	58.4%	-.033
Education <i>mean</i>	5.13	5.38*	.093**
Time of interview <i>mean</i>	16.23	19.10***	.018
Previous visits to Liberation Festivals <i>mean</i>	2.52	2.94***	.023
Support for Liberation Day <i>mean</i>	12.83	13.09	.274***
Festival good way to celebrate	96.1	94.4	.081**
Liberation Day %			
Length of stay in hours <i>mean</i>	-	4.12	-.007
Evaluation of festival <i>mean</i>	-	7.82	.136***

Source: Own analysis of Liberation Festivals Study 2014, \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$  and \* $p < .05$ .

## Results

### *Does Participation in Liberation Festivals Increase National Attachment?*

Table 2 displays the results from the regression analysis on the relation between participation in liberation festivals and feelings of national belonging.

As shown above, people who had already visited the liberation festival did not differ in their feelings of national attachment from people who had not yet visited the festival (Beta = -.009,  $p > .05$ ). Our hypothesis that visiting a liberation festivals enhances feelings of national attachment is therefore not supported by our analyses. Controlling for educational level did not alter this conclusion (Beta = .014,  $p > .05$ ).<sup>9</sup>

It could be possible that some festivals are more successful than others in triggering visitors’ sense of national identity. We therefore repeated the analyses

**Table 2. Summary of regression analysis of perceived cohesion**

	Model 1	Model 2
Visited the festival	-.009	.014
Educational level		.091**

Source: Own analysis of Liberation Festivals Study 2014, \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$  and \*  $p < .05$ .

for the five festivals separately. Again, no evidence was found for a positive relation between feelings of national belonging and visiting a liberation festival.<sup>10</sup>

### **Possible Reasons Why Participation in Liberation Festivals Does Not Increase National Attachment**

Unexpectedly, participation in Liberation Day celebrations does not increase feelings of national belonging in the Netherlands. In what follows, we outline several possible reasons for this unexpected finding. We also formulate potential paths for future studies on this topic.

#### ***Why Do People Visit Liberation Festivals?***

The first reason for our surprising results might be that visitors do not participate with the aim of celebrating the liberation of the Netherlands specifically or freedom in general. By means of an open-ended question, we asked visitors to list their most important reasons for visiting the liberation festival. Many visitors saw the festivals as a chance to hang out with friends and listen to music. Only a minority of visitors (24%) indicated that they visited the liberation festival for reasons such as celebrating the liberation specifically or freedom in general, or mentioned aspects such as solidarity and unity. Fox (2006) also found that many people attend national ceremonies just to have fun. Naturally, it is important that such festivals are fun to visit, as this is an important reason that many people gather to celebrate national days (Lentz 2013). It demonstrates, however, that the intentions of the organizing elites are not necessarily congruent with the intentions consumers of such commemorations have (see Kong and Yeoh 1997). Though national commemorations might be organized with the intention of enhancing group attachment, communicating national core values, and transmitting national history, consumers of these days do not always experience it in this way. This might be a main reason why such celebrations, notwithstanding the intentions of the organizing elites, do not have the power to substantially increase feelings of national belonging. This shows that it is important, also for future studies, to examine the participants of such national days instead of focusing (only) on the intentions of the organizing elites.

At all liberation festivals, as outlined in the theoretical section of this article, activities are organized in order to inform visitors about the official meaning of Liberation Day. Naturally, if visitors to the liberation festivals do not participate in these specific activities, they cannot be affected by them. Or, as Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008:548) put it, 'Unseen, unheard and unnoticed, symbols do not and cannot generate national attachments.' We therefore asked our respondents whether they had seen (a) the Square of Freedom, (b) the 5-to-5 moment, (c) the Ambassadors of Freedom, or (d) the Fire of Liberation. In fact, only a minority of visitors had seen these activities: 27% visited the information market, 21.5% saw the 5-to-5 moment, 31.2% saw the Ambassadors of Freedom performing, and 41.3% saw the Fire of Liberation burning. This is in line with previous results, which show that most visitors come to the festival to listen to the music and to have a good time with friends and family. Additional analysis

showed that visiting the activities mentioned above was not related to feelings of national attachment.

### ***Different Holidays, Different People, Different Consequences***

Etzioni (2000) remarked that not all holidays are integrative to the same extent. It has been argued that mourning rituals unite more than joyful occasions do (Bellah et al. 1985; Renan 1990). As a result, we might expect that participation in liberation festivals does not increase national attachment due to the festive nature of this day, but that rituals on Remembrance Day do have the power to increase feelings of national belonging. Another aspect of commemorations that could be considered in future studies is the extent to which they leave space for controversy. Rigney (2008) argued that a certain level of conflict or controversy is necessary in order to keep the memory and commemoration alive, and that consensus leads to invisibility and inertia. There has been little debate recently about the narrative of Liberation Day, and this could be a reason why participation in Dutch liberation festivals does not significantly enhance feelings of national belonging. More quantitative studies should examine the influence of the content of commemorative narratives on feelings of national belonging.

While we found that participation in national celebrations and feelings of national belonging are not related in the Netherlands, it is possible that this relation does exist in other countries. The extent to which citizens feel attached to their nation-state varies substantially between countries. Though Dutch people do identify with the nation-state, this is not accompanied by particularly high levels of national pride (see Arts and Halman 2006). This can be explained by the anti-nationalist character of the Dutch national narrative: The recognition and appreciation of public diversity is an integral part of the Dutch identity (Van Reekum 2012). With regard to national commemorations, too, it has been argued that these are less closely interwoven with a powerful narrative of national belonging in the Netherlands than, for example, in the United States (Kennedy 2012). Similar studies should be conducted in other countries in order to find out whether national rituals in other countries have the power to increase feelings of national attachment.

It has been argued that national commemorations and celebrations do not necessarily unify society as a whole, and that the ceremonies only work to integrate certain groups (Etzioni 2000). It is possible, for example, that the national holiday has a particularly integrative effect among more highly educated people, because they are more able to process all of the information about the shared past and common core value that is communicated during such ceremonies. Similarly, the liberation festival may have a more integrative effect among young people, as the format might reflect their interests better (e.g. the performances of popular bands and artists). We did examine the extent to which the effect of visiting a liberation festival is dependent upon age, educational level, and gender. Again, no evidence was found for the integrative role of visiting a liberation festival.

### ***Physical Participation versus Non-physical Participation***

In this study, we have examined to what extent participation in national commemorations increases feelings of national attachment. Some authors argued that it is essential to study participation in such rituals when trying to formulate an answer to such a question (Casey 1987). Others argued that in these days physical participation is not necessary anymore. It is argued that home viewers have more omniscient views and the benefits of close-ups and multiple cameras, resulting in more specific and clear experiences (Kuever 2012). Also, other studies pointed to the importance of media during national commemorations (e.g. Peri 1999). On Dutch television, in multiple ways attention is paid to Liberation Day (and Remembrance Day one day earlier). By means of official advertisements, movies, documentaries, reports, and interviews, people staying at home can also get a clear picture of the (idea behind) Liberation Day (see Gutter and van Kalmthout 2015). In this study, we have examined the effect of actually visiting a liberation festival. It would be interesting for future studies to examine the effect of watching such national commemorations and celebrations at home (and compare the effects with physical participation in such rituals).

### ***Research Design: Self-selection Effects, Delayed Effects, and Longitudinal Studies***

We do not have data on people who chose not to visit liberation festivals, and as a result we do not know whether the self-selection process occurred (i.e. whether mostly nationalistic individuals attend the festivals). By comparing the mean perceived cohesion scores of our sample with the averages found in other samples we did not find evidence of remarkably high scores in our sample.<sup>11</sup> In order to ascertain whether more nationalistic individuals participate in liberation festivals, future studies are required. Whether such a selection effect exists, the data produced by our study indicate that nothing happens *during* the festival to substantially increase visitors' feelings of national belonging. All persons in our sample are attendees of liberation festivals. As a result, possible self-selection effects do not affect our conclusions on the effect of participating in a Dutch liberation festival and feelings of national attachment.

We have compared the levels of national attachment of visitors before they have entered the festival field with levels of national attachment from visitors who returned home after visiting the liberation festival. We did not conduct a follow-up study. In other words, we did not (re)contact the visitors a few days or a few weeks later in order to examine whether feelings of national attachment increased. It is possible that visiting a Dutch liberation festival did not immediately affect levels of national attachment, but that a few days (or weeks) later the levels of national attachment did increase as a result of visiting the liberation festival. Naturally, such a follow-up study would have disadvantages as well. Suppose you will observe significantly higher levels of national attachments among respondents who you have contacted a few days or weeks later. This increase in national attachment might have different sources. It is possible that visiting the liberation festival increased the feelings of national attachment, but it is also

possible that, for example, media coverage or contacts with friends and family increased feelings of national attachment. Still, it would be interesting for future studies to complement the results of our study by examining levels of national attachment immediately after respondents visited the national commemoration as well as a few days or weeks after the national ceremony.

Finally, our research question could also be studied by means of a *one-group pretest-posttest design* (instead of static group comparison). This involves questioning the same individuals before and after they visit the festival (Neuman 2012). An advantage of this design is its ability to estimate the extent to which changes within individuals are due to visiting the festival. One main disadvantage of such a design is testing. It is possible that filling out the first questions on national attachment leads people to become more sensitive to activities that trigger their national consciousness. In this way, higher scores in the second questionnaire could be caused by answering questions on national identity rather than the visit to the festival. All research designs have strengths and weaknesses, and future studies could employ the *one-group pretest-posttest design* in order to examine to what extent our results can be replicated.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the Netherlands, the liberation and freedom in general are annually celebrated on Liberation Day (5 May). One of the main activities on this day are the liberation festivals. These festivals are considered to be the most appealing way to celebrate Liberation Day (Koenen et al. 2015). Annually, about one million people visit these liberation festivals. As shown in this article, these liberation festivals are in general positively evaluated, and an overwhelming majority of the visitors (95%) believed that such festivals are a good way to celebrate freedom/the liberation. In this regard, the liberation festivals can be seen as a successful way to celebrate Liberation Day.

The literature outlines several reasons why it can be expected that participation in national commemorations increases feelings of national attachment. In this article, it is demonstrated that these mechanisms can also be applied to Dutch liberation festivals. At the festivals attention is paid to national history, core values are communicated, the festivals can be seen as multivocal commemorations, and it can be expected that a feeling of collective effervescence is created. We therefore expected that participation in liberation festivals would increase feelings of national attachment. The results of this study showed, however, that such national commemorations do not necessarily increase national attachment. This does not mean, of course, that the claim that such national ceremonies increase national attachment is not valid. It is essential, however, to obtain deeper insight into the specific conditions under which commemorative rituals can increase national attachment (see, e.g., Farquet 2014; Uzelac 2010). The ‘one size fits all’ argument is no longer tenable. The Durkheimian theory on the integrative role of rituals needs to be refined and updated (see Etzioni 2000). We need to obtain more information on which commemorations, under which conditions, and in which contexts have the power to increase national attachment. This article provides a

number of suggestions for future studies in this regard. To what extent are mourning rituals more integrative than national celebrations? To what extent is the relation between national rituals and national attachment dependent on the national context? To what extent does a selection effect exist regarding participation in national commemorations? Only when we obtain adequate answers to all of these questions will we be a step closer to gaining a true understanding of the role rituals may play in the process of nation-building. This study – using innovative survey data of participants and taking problems of causality and self-selection into account – is a significant step forward by showing that national commemorations do not automatically and uniformly increase national attachment.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> We use the following definition of national attachment in this study: an individual's sense of belonging to the nation and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership of this group (see Bollen and Hoyle 1990). In this article, we define national commemoration as a state-supported service, celebration, or day in memory of an important national person or event, period, national narrative, or founding myth.

<sup>2</sup> For an exception, see Fricke (2013), who described the independence jubilee in Gabon. She showed that historical narratives played only a minor role in this celebration.

<sup>3</sup> See Lukes (1975) for a more critical view of the relation between national attachment, shared values, commitment, and rituals.

<sup>4</sup> Naturally commemorations can also enhance levels of conflict in society. For less optimistic views and descriptions of how national commemorations can increase conflict in society, see, e.g., Blehr (1999).

<sup>5</sup> Other activities on Liberation Day include the 5 May Lecture and the 5 May Concert (see, e.g., de Regt et al. 2017 for more information).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://easy.dans.knaw.nl/ui/datasets/id/easy-dataset:58957/tab/1;jsessionid=94649231A157D0DE4419FF5AC65769A6>.

<sup>7</sup> In this study, we chose to operationalize national attachment by means of the Perceived Cohesion Scale of Bollen and Hoyle (1990). Naturally many alternatives are available in order to measure feelings of national attachment (e.g. Doosje et al. 1995; Postmes et al. 2013; Verkuyten 2005). The items in these scales are to a large extent comparable to the items we have used in this scale. We therefore have no reason to expect that different results would have been obtained when using another scale to measure national identification. We chose to use the Perceived Cohesion Scale, as this scale most closely measures what we intended to measure (see note 1). This scale furthermore proved to be a reliable way to measure feelings of national attachment ( $\alpha = .86$ ). In this study, we have chosen to ask to what extent people agree or disagree with the item, 'I feel a sense of belonging to *the Netherlands*', to examine national attachment. It would have been possible to ask to what extent people agree with the item, 'I feel a sense of belonging to *this country*', or 'I feel a sense of belonging to *this society*'. We believe, however, that asking about belonging to the Netherlands is the most valid way to examine feelings of national attachment in the Netherlands. It would be possible, for example, that persons with a non-Dutch background interpreted the items, 'I feel a sense of belonging to *this country*', or 'I feel a sense of belonging to *this society*', as feeling attachment to their homeland.

<sup>8</sup> Educational level was measured on an eight-point scale (0 = *no formal education completed* – 7 = *university*). Previous visits to liberation festivals in the last five years (0 = *zero* – 5 = *every year*). Support for Liberation Day was assessed by means of five items, such as

'The annual celebration of the liberation should continue in the future' (1 = totally agree – 5 = totally disagree). Evaluation of the festival: 0 is a negative evaluation and 10 is positive. The operationalization of the other variables is self-evident.

<sup>9</sup> In this study, we examined the general level of national attachment. It has been argued that when studying the relation between national ceremonies and national attachment, a distinction should be made between chauvinism and patriotism and between national superiority and national pride (Lubbers and Meuleman 2012; Meuleman and Lubbers 2013). The perceived cohesion scale we employed in this study (Bollen and Hoyle 1990) also aims to measure two distinct dimensions of national attachment: sense of belonging and feelings of morale. Conducting analyses with these two variables did not alter our conclusions on the relation between visiting a liberation festival and national attachment. Both sense of belonging and feelings of morale were not related to having visited the liberation festival ( $r = -.038, p > .05$  and  $r = -.007, p > .05$ , respectively).

<sup>10</sup> Analysis available from the authors upon request.

<sup>11</sup> Analysis available from the authors upon request.

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