

A photograph of a person kneeling in a field of many lit candles at night. The candles are arranged in rows and are lit, creating a warm glow. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is looking down at the candles. The background shows a building and trees, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Bertine Mitima-Verloop

Together in silence

Commemoration, rituals, and coping
with war experiences and loss

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Dit boek is een uitgave van ARQ Nationaal Psychotrauma Centrum en maakt deel uit van de ARQ boekenreeks.

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Together in silence

Commemoration, rituals, and coping with war experiences and loss

Samen in stilte

Herdenken, rituelen en het omgaan met oorlogservaringen en verlies

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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PREFACE

Commemorations are occasions for reflecting in thought and emotion on the impact of shocking events. Performed in the company of others, such commemorations can give rise to feelings of connectedness. Connectedness is crucial in helping people, and in particular survivors, come out of their isolation. While survivors often lead isolated lives in a literal sense, it is particularly in an emotional sense that they are cut off from others. A commemoration in togetherness creates space, warmth and connectedness, and enables contact with people.

Bertine Mitima-Verloop, a psychologist and researcher at ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre, embarked on a quest to lay bare any scientific underpinnings for general ideas about the supportive nature of collective commemoration. Together with her colleagues, she has shed light on the impact that collective commemorations actually have on the individual in terms of mental health. Thus, her investigation also concerns the interaction between society and individual. Of poignant interest is that she carried out her study in cooperation with the Dutch National Committee for 4 and 5 May, the organiser of the Dutch National Commemoration on Remembrance Day. Her research was thus part of the Committee's interdisciplinary multi-year study into commemorations and remembrance rituals, focusing on the question how rituals could remain meaningful in the future. Mitima's research centred not only on such large-scale collective commemorations as the 4 May Remembrance event, but also on small-scale commemorative gatherings and rituals held after the loss of a loved one. This latter study was conducted in cooperation with the funeral service company Yarden.

In order to answer the question how commemorations could contribute to an individual's coping with loss and war experiences, Mitima and colleagues adopted three different perspectives from which to examine their research subject. Their primary focal point being a psychological one, they investigated the impact that commemorative events have on an individual, thereby also taking context and performance-related aspects into account. With an eye to answering the question how future commemorations could be made optimally meaningful and useful, they specifically focused on children, in other words, the post-war generation, and war-affected immigrants, and their response to the Remembrance Day commemoration.

What the PhD thesis before you convincingly demonstrates is that in order to understand how commemorations could help an individual deal with war experiences and loss, one needs to go beyond a mere measuring of clinical symptoms. Rather, it appears that the experiencing of support, connectedness, recognition and meaning making are of crucial importance in making commemorations valuable and helpful. It is especially the context

and manner of performing the commemoration that are important to create an environment or atmosphere in which these aspects can be experienced. These findings naturally have implications for future scientific research and clinical practice: professionals are called upon to bear in mind the potential stress-inducing weight remembrance days may carry and advised to provide extra support. Yet the outcomes of this research also have implications for those organising commemorations as they are faced with making practical choices to create an environment in which healing could take place.

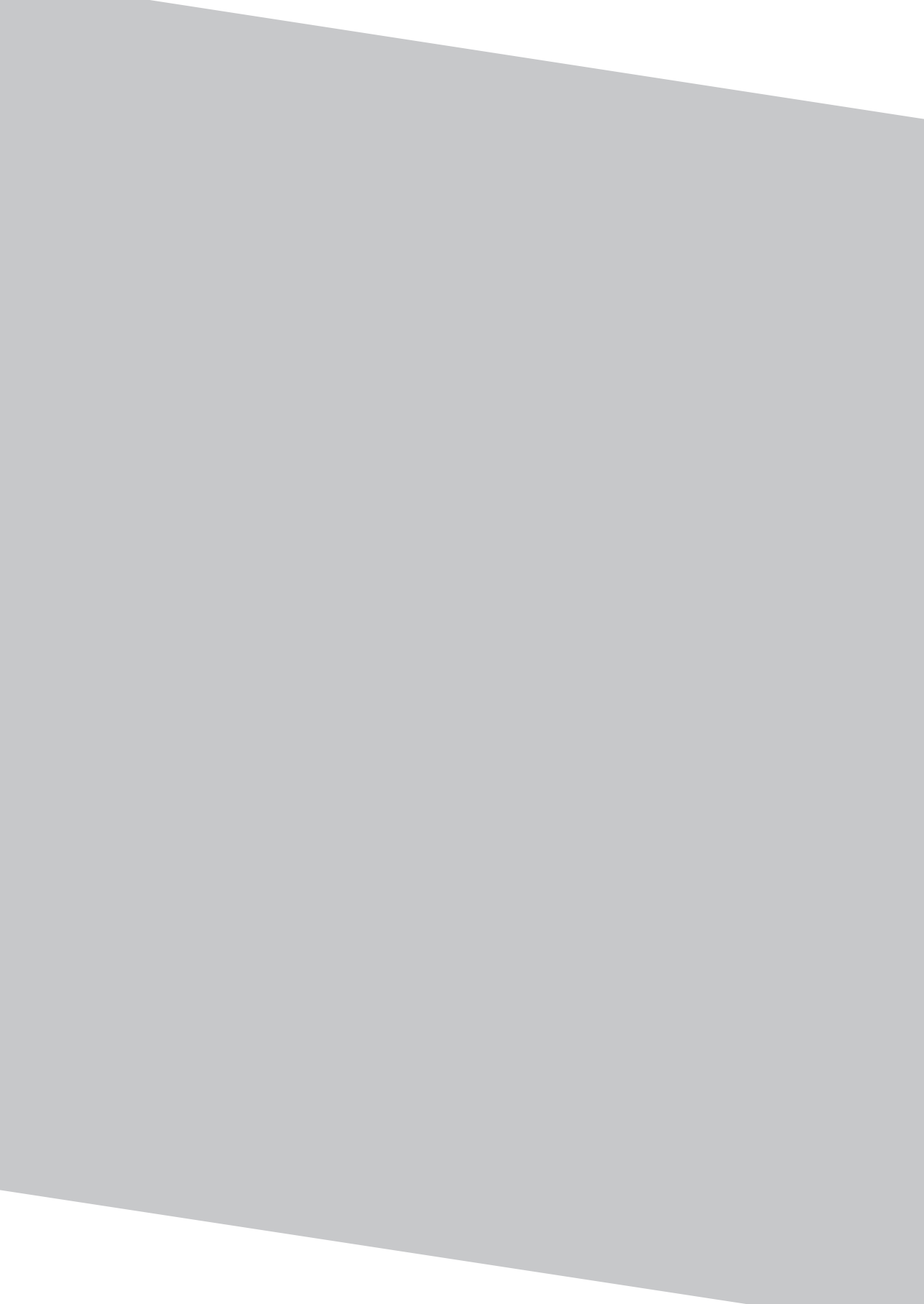
The defence of this thesis takes place in the 50th anniversary year of ARQ Centrum'45, an institute for, among others, survivors who inside themselves did not feel liberated after World War II. As the past continued to dominate their every-day lives, they did not experience the full beneficial effect of commemorations.

It is particularly in this respect that the present research into commemoration constitutes an important contribution to our knowledge. It provides a scientific foundation for the importance of solidarity and intense involvement of people. Only through connectedness can we, together and with each other, continue to work towards a renewed trust in people and in society. It is with great pleasure that we present this study.

drs J-W (Jan-Wilke) Reerds MBA,
Chair Board of Directors ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre

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General introduction



After a talkshow for which I was invited to speak about the impact of collective commemoration, a young lady walked up to me. She introduced herself as Naomi and shared her story with me. Her Jewish grandmother was the only one from her family who survived the Holocaust. During her whole life after Auschwitz, her grandmother never found words to talk about the past. This silence was transmitted to Naomi's father. On the odd occasion, he could tell something about their lost family, but Naomi knew little about her family history. Implicit words from the past were there, teaching her to live without emotions; crying implies weakness and weakness means death. In this context, Naomi tried to find words to describe her past. Collective commemoration, standing next to her father in silence in front of a monument with the names of her family, brought them closer together. In the silence, without words being spoken, she could connect with her father and her family history.

That same evening, I also talked to a Moluccan young man, who pondered about what commemoration within his community could do to help cope with their past, including experiences of colonialism, war, and repatriation. A while before, preparations were made for a commemoration to remember the Moluccans arriving in the Netherlands, 70 years ago. In the run-up to the event, people referred to the commemoration as a potentially traumatic experience, which would make them relive the traumas of the past. Severe threats from within the Moluccan community to the organisers of the commemoration made them call off the event.

Commemorations are often organised on a national level to mark large-scale disruptive events, such as war (Hunt, 2010). In smaller and more personal settings, observances such as funerals are held to commemorate our deceased loved ones. The above described conversations reflect some of the complex and paradoxical nature of commemorating. Why do some describe commemoration as a form of healing and restoration, while it fuels emotions of fear, anger or resentment in others (e.g., Barron et al., 2008; Gishoma et al., 2015)? Literature on posttraumatic stress demonstrates how associations between a situation in the present and a situation in the past are particularly strong for traumatic memories. Moreover, the response to a situation in the present is related to the response to the associated situation in the past (Ehlers & Clark, 2000). In line with this notion, to which extent does a commemoration function as a trigger that rekindles emotions and responses related to past experiences? Does it 'retraumatise' those affected by war, evoking posttraumatic stress responses such as intrusions or nightmares? For whom and in what situations might commemorations or ritual performances help in dealing with traumatic experiences or loss? Can commemorations benefit refugees who experienced war elsewhere, or children without any direct link to war experiences?

These are contemporary questions within the Dutch society that are yet to be answered

and have motivated the topic of this dissertation (Demant & Pans, 2020). In this dissertation, we aim to explore the psychological impact of commemorations and ritual performances on individuals, in relation to coping with large-scale disruptive events and individual losses. Our main focus is collective commemoration in which war, genocide or large-scale violence is remembered. In addition, we study commemorations in smaller gatherings by examining the impact of funeral services and (individual) grief rituals, remembering the loss of a loved one. In this introduction, we elaborate on the concept of commemoration, individual responses to trauma and loss, and the elements in rituals that might contribute to successful coping with loss. Furthermore, we describe the context of collective war commemoration and ritual performances after the loss of a loved one in the Netherlands, where most research included in this dissertation has been conducted. Finally, gaps in literature, research aims and questions, and the general outline of this dissertation are presented.

DEFINING COMMEMORATION

Commemoration can be simply defined as ‘something intended to honour and remember an important person or event’ (Macmillan Dictionary, 2023). Commemorating is an eminently interdisciplinary topic, in which no field can claim authority (Winter & Sivan, 1999). Multiple disciplines have shined their lights on different facets of commemoration, including history, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, art and media studies as well as psychology. With the ‘memory boom’ that gained momentum in the 1980s and spread from humanities to social sciences, memory became an increasing subject of public and scholarly debate. In the late 20th century, the effort was made to join disciplines together within the field of Memory Studies. Memory Studies examine how, what, and why individuals, groups, and societies remember and forget. Because it is a relatively new field of study and interdisciplinary in nature, scholars come with their own academic cultures and traditions. Still many disagreements exist in terms of the proper unit of analysis (individuals, groups or nations), research methods, and vocabularies (Sierp, 2023).

The different disciplines and vocabularies involved in studying commemorations become visible when one tries to define commemoration. We broadly identified three different angles that can be used to study this topic, each with its own definition of commemoration (Holsappel, 2020). The first angle and main focus in this dissertation is the *impact* of commemorations, most often studied from a psychological perspective. Second, historians or sociologists often focus on the *contexts* in which commemorations take place. The last angle is the *performance* of commemorative rituals, often studied by anthropologists. Because the impact of commemorations is highly related to the contexts in which commemorations take place and the performances of commemorative rituals, we incorporated all these angles in our studies.

IMPACT OF COMMEMORATION

Commemorations can be studied by examining their impact. Miller (2012) uses the broader term of collective memorialising for different acts of commemoration, defining it as 'the public processes of grieving and remembrance, marking a profound social event (...) as a part of a universal human desire to acknowledge and remember the dead and to help survivors grieve and recover' (p. 283-284). In his definition, he includes an individual facet of the proposed impact of commemoration, namely memorialising to help survivors grieve and recover. According to Miller (2012), collective memorialising creates spaces for narratives to emerge and brings people together. It can have a transformative impact by stimulating a meaning making process, inviting participants to pause and reflect, which might lead to emotional or cognitive expression. These processes can bring an integration of loss or disruptive experiences in individuals' lives so that people are able to move forward. Frijda (2006) stated that commemoration contributes to an orientation in time, to relate to events in the past and to confirm individual identity by being part of a group with a shared history. This aspect of identity and group belonging through collective gatherings was first proposed by sociologist Durkheim (1912). He wrote how collective gatherings enhanced the sharing of emotions in groups, leading to social cohesion and shared beliefs. More recent research, for example research from Paez et al. (2015), confirmed these premises and showed that collective gatherings enhanced social integration and positive affect. Other authors also reflect on the positive impact of commemoration in terms of healing or coping with disruptive experiences (e.g., Pivnick, 2011; Veil et al., 2011). However, most of these reflections seem to be based on assumptions rather than empirical evidence.

The process of memorialising is not inherently beneficent. It can be an 'empty, repressive vessel of domination' (Miller, 2012, p. 286), depending on who participates and with which goals and intentions commemoration takes place. In societies but also among survivors, often different opinions exist about who should be remembered, in which way, and for how long (Ibreck, 2012; Pivnick & Hennes, 2014; Stanley, 2015). This might fuel stress reactions among those involved. A potentially negative impact of commemoration is represented by other studies as well, for example referring to the increase of traumatic crises among people participating in commemoration ceremonies in Rwanda (Gishoma et al., 2015). Despite the importance of this topic, empirical studies examining the individual impact of commemorations and rituals from a psychological perspective are scarce.

CONTEXT OF COMMEMORATION

The contexts in which commemorations are constructed and take place are especially studied from a historical, social or political point of view. This focus on the context echoes in the definition of Schwartz (2015), who describes how commemoration 'distinguishes events and persons believed to be deserving of celebration from those deserving of being merely remembered' (p. 11). The distinction of who or what is remembered is based on the collective memory. Collective memory is different from historical knowledge and facts.

Historical knowledge is cold, objective, and rational, whereas memory is subjective, warm, and emotional (Winter, 2008). It is also different from a cluster of individual memories put together (Winter & Sivan, 1999). Collective memory is a social and cultural construction, formed by individuals, groups, and people exerting power or authority, who together decide what should be remembered or forgotten (Assmann, 2010; Holsappel, 2020; Winter & Sivan, 1999). Because collective memory is subject to change, commemoration is not static. It is a process that is discussed and under negotiation, representing a mirror of the group or society (Raaijmakers, 2014). Therefore, the intention to commemorate can differ in various settings, for example by focusing on victimhood, sorrow, and sadness, on military pride, or on nationalism, which is connected to the individual impact of commemoration (Krimp & Reiding, 2017; Pollack, 2003; Watkins & Bastian, 2019).

COMMEMORATIVE PERFORMANCE

Commemoration can be studied as ‘the act that arises from an intention to keep the memory of a person or a thing alive’ (Bomba, 2016, p. 7). This act can take many forms, such as commemorative writings, music, icons, monuments, shrines, or observances including anniversary events (Schwartz, 2015). The acts, performances, or rituals of commemoration have in common that they are performed consciously and with a shared understanding of intention and content (Alexander, 2006; Holsappel, 2020). Rituals and ‘acts of commemoration’ are studied in depth within anthropology and the interdisciplinary field of Ritual Studies (Post, 2015). Ritual Studies initially combined religious and liturgical studies, anthropology, and theatre studies. However, this field can also involve other disciplines such as philosophy, cultural history, sociology or psychology, as rituals play a role in these disciplines as well. Grimes (2014), founding father of Ritual Studies, distinguishes in his book *The Craft of Ritual Studies* seven elements of ritual: embodied actions, actors, places, times, objects, languages, and groups. These elements are associated with the impact of commemoration. For example, a study of Watkins et al. (2010) revealed how different features of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial’s design were associated with PTSD recovery. Veterans saw themselves reflected in the memorial while seeing and touching the names of those who died, which helped them in dealing with PTSD symptoms.

In sum, combining these three angles in studying commemorations, namely the impact, context, and performance, may further our knowledge on how commemoration can contribute to coping with war experiences and loss, for whom and in what situations. In this dissertation, we integrated these angles in defining commemoration as ‘*a collective observance, in which persons or events are remembered that are believed to be deserving of remembrance, characterised by actions with a symbolic dimension that evoke responses among those attending*’.

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF RITUALS

As we described in the previous paragraph, commemorations can be studied from the angle of ritual performances. This dissertation not only looks at commemorations in which multiple rituals are collectively performed, but also elaborates on the impact of rituals performed by individuals or in a small-scale setting. Examples are visiting the graveyard after the loss of a loved one or lighting a candle in remembrance of a deceased.

Different elements have been suggested in the literature that may explain the potential impact of rituals in the context of adjustment to disruptive experiences or loss. First, rituals are ways to experience and express emotions (Wojtkowiak, 2021). Scheff (1977) introduced the concept of aesthetic distance to indicate the optimal level of arousal in ritual performances. Rituals emotionally engage participants and provide access to intense emotions. Yet, rituals create distance and containment of emotions through its symbolic nature, channelling emotions into symbolic forms (Johnson et al., 1995; Wojtkowiak, 2018). Second, rituals give structure and control in a chaotic period after loss (Castle & Philips, 2003). They create an imagined reality where people can take control and 'do something' about their grief and loss (Wojtkowiak, 2018). In an experimental setting, Norton and Gino (2014) revealed how feelings of control after mourning rituals mediated the link between performing rituals and reduced grief after loss. Third, performing rituals is often a communal response to loss or disruptive events. They help individuals reconnect with others and experience social support and encouragement (Castle & Philips, 2003; Wojtkowiak, 2018). Last, rituals contribute to the reconstruction of meaning, for example by transforming the experience of shock and denial into acceptance after loss (Castle & Philips, 2003). Moreover, individuals can reconnect with oneself and rearrange one's worldview assumptions (Wojtkowiak, 2018).

Although these underlying elements might be related to a positive individual impact of ritual performances, there is very limited empirical research that proves these relations or links ritual performances to clinical symptoms, such as posttraumatic stress or grief responses (Holsappel & Raaijmakers, 2020). Within the field of Ritual Studies, it is an ongoing debate how to study the impact of rituals. According to Driver (2006), the transformation that rituals can bring about cannot be studied within the logic of cause and effect. Transformation is 'invited but not commanded by ritual performances' (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 13). Rituals have the potential to impact processes of meaning making, identity, psychological states, and social relations, although this is not always achieved (Wojtkowiak, 2018). Despite the challenges of measuring the impact of ritual performances, it is important to substantiate the suggested relations between performing rituals and coming to terms with loss and disruptive experiences with more empirical data. In this dissertation, we aim to enhance knowledge about the circumstances in which rituals do have a transformative impact. Specifically, we aim to gain insight in the relationship between ritual performances and adjustment in terms of reducing posttraumatic stress and grief symptoms. Because of the focus on clinical symptoms in this dissertation, we

further elaborate on the potential impact of disruptive events and loss on individuals from a clinical psychological perspective.

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE EVENTS AND LOSS

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS AND GRIEF RESPONSES

Experiencing war, genocide or large-scale violence can have a long-lasting impact on individuals. During a war, people are often exposed to multiple potential traumatic events. Most people experience distress and anxiety in the direct aftermath of a disruptive event, which will decline within the weeks or months after the event. Some people develop a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is characterised by re-experiencing, avoidance behaviours, negative thoughts or feelings, and trauma-related arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Research within twelve European countries revealed that PTSD prevalence rates were strongly associated with war victim rates (Burri & Maercker, 2014). Even fifty to sixty years after World War II (WWII), relationships were found between war exposure and current psychological adjustment such as posttraumatic stress, anxiety and anger (Bramsen & Van der Ploeg, 1999; Glaesmer et al., 2010). Furthermore, refugees who are often fleeing war, genocide or large-scale violence have high and persistent rates of psychological disorders like PTSD (Blackmore et al., 2020).

The death of a loved one is also a distressing experience for many individuals. People who are confronted with the loss of a loved one differ in terms of the nature and intensity of their grief responses (Bonanno et al., 2002). Research indicates that, after the loss of a loved one due to non-violent death causes, one out of ten individuals develops severe grief responses, or prolonged grief disorder (PGD) (Lundorff et al., 2017). PGD is characterised by grief reactions that are persistent after 12 months post-loss, such as intense yearning or preoccupation, identity disruption, emotional pain, a sense that life is meaningless or numbness (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). After an unnatural death, prevalence rates for PGD are considerably higher compared to non-violent losses (Djelantik et al., 2020). It is important to gain knowledge about factors that facilitate and hinder the grieving process. Although the performance of rituals is frequently linked to more adaptive coping with loss (e.g., Fulton, 1995; Hoy, 2013; Lensing, 2001; Wijngaards-De Meij et al., 2008), there is a scarcity of research systematically examining this relationship.

EMOTIONALLY PROCESSING EXPERIENCES

Most people do not develop symptoms that can be classified as a disorder after experiencing potentially traumatic events or the loss of a loved one (Bonanno, 2004). However, coming to terms with disruptive experiences and loss can be a long and ongoing process. To capture a broad range of people, this dissertation focuses on symptoms of posttraumatic stress and prolonged grief and studies these as continua, in which individuals can have

more or less symptoms.

Coping with disruptive events or loss can be defined as 'efforts to prevent or diminish threat, harm, and loss, or to reduce associated distress' (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010, p. 685). In this dissertation, we will focus on the question of how commemoration and ritual performances may contribute to reducing distress. In this context, Miller (2012) uses the word 'resolution', referring to a 'sufficient integration of losses so that people, communities and societies can move forward in their lives. Not forgetting the past or letting go of profound losses, but being able to live in the present while looking to the future (...) with the disaster being a significant part of that narrative without its becoming the sole prism through which everything else is experienced' (p. 12).

SETTING THE SCENE – COMMEMORATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

Most studies in this dissertation are performed in the Netherlands. Because commemorations can take many forms and are highly related to the context and situation in which they are performed, we will give an overview of the Dutch's main day of commemoration related to war. Furthermore, we will discuss common Dutch commemorative rituals performed after the loss of a loved one.

COMMEMORATION OF WWII

Large-scale and collective commemoration in the Netherlands related to war is mainly linked to Remembrance Day, held every year on the 4th of May since 1946. On this day, all civilians and military personnel are commemorated who, in the Kingdom of the Netherlands or elsewhere, died or were killed since the beginning of WWII, in situations of war or in peacekeeping missions. Even though Remembrance Day is officially broader than WWII commemoration, the deep roots in WWII, the last war in the Netherlands that raged from 1940-1945, are prominently present on this day. Throughout the country, locally organised events of commemoration are held, with the National Commemoration taking place in the capital city Amsterdam. Many state officials, including the king and queen, are attending the National Commemoration, which is broadcasted live on television. A standardised ritual repertoire, with two minutes of silence, laying wreaths, and singing the national anthem, are strongly connected to Remembrance Day. Dutch war remembrance culture has a less militaristic and more civil character compared to most other western European countries. Instead of military parades, the heroic deeds of resistance fighters and later the personal suffering of civilians are central in Dutch commemorations (Raaijmakers, 2014). Support for Remembrance Day is widespread in Dutch society and has been stable over the past twenty years. More than 80% of Dutch citizens appreciate this day as (very) important and adhere to the two-minute silence or follow the commemoration via radio, television or

online broadcast (Oudejans et al., 2022). Remembrance Day is followed by the celebration of freedom on the 5th of May (Liberation Day).

COMMEMORATIVE RITUALS AFTER LOSS

Dutch funerals and grief rituals are shaped by a long history of dominant Protestant and Roman Catholic religion (Mathijssen & Venhorst, 2019). In the past decades, secularisation and individualisation in the Netherlands have led to a degradation of traditional religious rituals, whereas personalisation of rituals has become more popular (Garces-Foley, 2003; Holloway et al., 2013; Venbrux et al., 2008). Nowadays, funerals are often tailor-made and personal, created in view of the lifestyles and wishes of those involved (Mathijssen & Venhorst, 2019). The funeral service is usually organised by the relatives of the deceased and friends of the deceased, assisted by a funeral director. Planning one's own funeral is also becoming more popular in contemporary Dutch society (Wojtkowiak, 2011). Common rituals that are performed after the death of a loved one include visiting the gravesite of the deceased or the place where ash was scattered, creating an altar or space in memory of the deceased or lighting a candle in remembrance of the deceased. The predominantly secularised and individual context in which funeral practices in the Netherlands take place is important to consider while studying the impact of ritual performances and commemorations.

RESEARCH GAPS

Exploring research related to Memory Studies and Ritual Studies revealed a gap within the current literature. Empirical studies investigating commemoration and ritual performances from a psychological perspective are scarce. Despite the widespread and universal nature of commemoration, theories and writings in which the impact of commemoration is mentioned are rarely substantiated with empirical evidence. Literature does not reveal a clear picture for whom or in what way commemorations are meaningful and can potentially contribute to healing processes. Within the discipline of psychology and specifically clinical psychology, commemoration and rituals are not often a topic of study or debate. Studies examining the individual impact of commemoration in relation to mental health outcomes, such as symptoms of posttraumatic stress, prolonged grief, and specific emotional responses are especially limited. This is potentially problematic, as commemorations may have a positive and beneficial impact but also have the potential to increase distress and disrupt individuals.

Furthermore, studies examining the impact of commemoration are often based on theoretical scene-setting, critical commentaries or research methods that are common in humanities (Keightley & Pickering, 2013; Sierp, 2023). These include the examination and comparison of contexts and backgrounds based on text analyses, focusing on a social or collective level. When studying the interdisciplinary topic of commemorations, there is a need for complementary empirical research methods. Empirical research methods

yield knowledge about the strength and direction of proposed relationships between commemoration, ritual performances, and psychological processes. Psychological research methods make use of questionnaires, experiments, and interviews, all with individual voices as a direct source of information. This is necessary to achieve a more evidence-based perspective on the potential impact of commemorations on individuals. Moreover, the use of standardised questionnaires, for example to measure PTSD or PGD in relation to commemorations and ritual performances, is rare to find but an important step to further develop a clinical psychological perspective on the impact of commemorations.

AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With this dissertation, we aim to fill the present literature gap by conducting several empirical studies, based on psychological research methods. These studies will increase our understanding of the individual impact of collective commemorations and ritual performances in terms of clinical symptoms, namely posttraumatic stress symptoms and grief reactions, and emotional responses. Beyond clinical symptom levels, this dissertation will further unravel how commemorations can contribute to coping with war experiences and loss, for whom, and in what situations. Two overarching research questions will be answered:

1. What is the impact of collective commemorations and ritual performances on posttraumatic stress symptoms, prolonged grief, and emotional responses?
2. How can commemorations and rituals contribute to coping with war experiences and loss, for whom and in what situations?

By answering these questions, we aim to provide practical implications and recommendations for future research, for clinicians working with traumatised and bereaved individuals and policymakers and practitioners involved in organising commemorations or funerals.

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation includes a literature review and five empirical studies, in which human participants are the main source for data collection. In our inductive studies, aimed at developing theory, we used the scoping review method to explore existing literature, and qualitative methods including in-depth and group interviews. Furthermore, we applied more deductive study methods to test some of the relations included in our proposed model based on the literature review and other theories. These methods included questionnaires

in a quasi-experimental study design, a cross-sectional and a longitudinal study. Participants with differences in age, cultural background, and war experiences, including patients with PTSD, second generation affected, veterans, and war-affected immigrants, were involved. More details on the various study designs, participants and included measures are presented in the method section of every chapter.

GENERAL OUTLINE

In this dissertation we focus on the act of commemoration through commemorative observances in two different settings, corresponding with the two parts of this dissertation. In part one, we concentrate on collective commemorative gatherings in society that are organised in the aftermath of war, large-scale violence or genocide. **Chapter 2** starts with a scoping literature review, mapping empirical studies that investigated the relationship between collective war commemoration, posttraumatic stress and grief reactions. Based on the findings, various factors are proposed that influence individual responses to commemoration. In **Chapter 3**, these factors are further explored through a quasi-experimental study, investigating individuals' emotional responses to the Dutch National Commemoration, held on the 4th of May in the capital city Amsterdam. The following two chapters also take the setting of Remembrance Day but focus on the perspectives and attitudes of two specific groups. In a mixed-method study, **Chapter 4** explores how children, a post-war generation without direct connection to WWII, relate to commemoration of that war. **Chapter 5** contains a qualitative analysis of the reflections of war-affected immigrants on Remembrance Day.

In section two, the focus is shifted from large-scale gatherings to small commemorative observances, namely funeral services and grief ritual performances to remember the loss of a loved one. **Chapter 6** explores the function of funeral services and rituals in relation to grief reactions through a longitudinal study among bereaved individuals. In the last chapter, **Chapter 7**, a similar exploration is conducted in a cross-sectional study performed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A summary of all findings, cross-cutting issues, and implications of the results are discussed in the final general discussion in **Chapter 8**.

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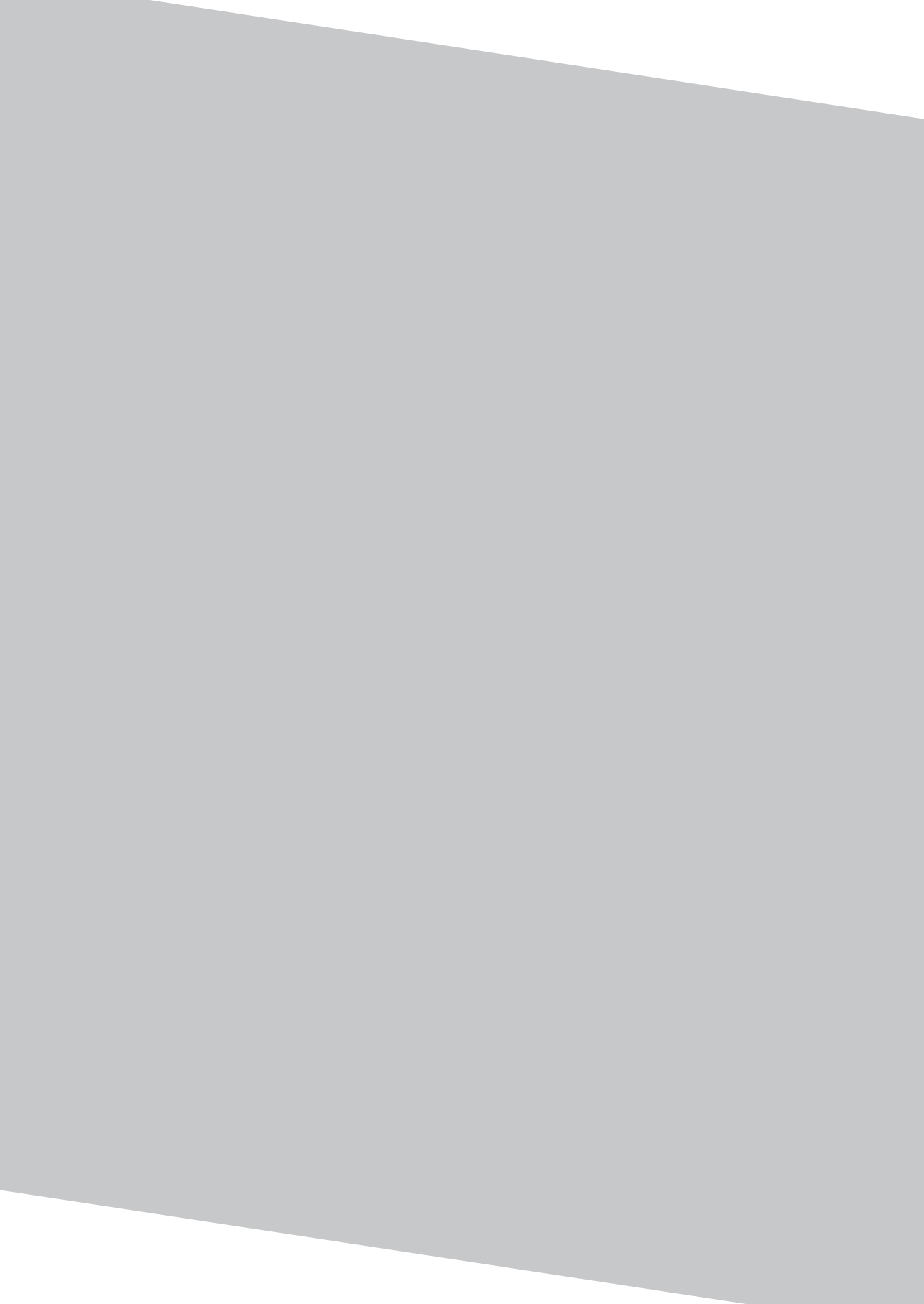
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PART I

**Collective commemoration after war
and large-scale violence**



Commemoration of disruptive events: A scoping review about posttraumatic stress reactions and related factors.

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ABSTRACT

Collective commemoration in response to war or disaster is widespread across time and cultures. It is assumed to support those affected by the disruptive event to cope with their experiences. However, the actual relationship between commemoration and mental health outcomes is complicated and evidence of healing effects remains elusive. By applying a scoping review approach, this article maps empirical studies that focus on commemoration from a psychological perspective. Within five electronic databases, 415 unique articles were identified, of which 26 met the predetermined inclusion criteria, i.e. presenting empirical data on the subject of war or large-scale violence and commemoration in relation to posttraumatic stress (PTS) and grief reactions. The data were extracted and analysed according to the five steps of a systematic scoping review. Results varied, with both negative and positive effects of commemoration on PTS and grief reactions being reported. Based on these findings we propose an evidence-informed model that distinguishes different aspects influencing the linkage between commemoration and PTS and grief reactions. The following aspects are distinguished: contextual factors, including political and cultural context, individual characteristics and facilitating mechanism, including expression, recognition, support, meaning making and personal memories. The proposed model needs to be tested and validated by further quantitative research. This will allow social workers and policy makers to make well-informed decisions about commemorative events that may benefit fractured communities as well as individuals.

KEYWORDS

Commemoration, War, Posttraumatic stress, Grief, Meaning making, Recognition, Support, Expression, Personal memories

INTRODUCTION

War, genocide, and armed conflicts are a reality in this contemporary world. The emotional impact of such tragedies can be huge and long-lasting (Harlow, 2005). Commemorations are frequently organised in response to such events, among other reasons, to remember those who died (Hunt, 2010). Commemoration involves an action that arises from an 'intention to keep the memory of a person or a thing alive' (Bomba, 2016, p. 7). Although this can be performed both in private and in public, this article will focus on public types of commemoration. Recently, growing attention for commemoration has been observed in the Western World (Winter, 2007). Even though the Second World War (WWII) ended over seventy years ago, the number of memorials and commemoration ceremonies of WWII is still growing in the Netherlands (Walsum, 2015).

One critical aim of commemoration is to assist survivors and society as a whole in working through experiences of trauma and loss. Achieving this aim is often taken for granted. Many authors mention the importance of commemoration in coping with disruptive experiences for people directly or indirectly affected by war, genocide or disaster (Hunt, 2010; Miller, 2012; Pivnick, 2011; Veil et al., 2011). Miller (2012) describes various ways in which commemoration can assist those affected, namely through possibilities of expression, gaining acknowledgement, and receiving social support. In psychoanalytic writings, it has been postulated that commemorations bring emotions to the surface, which enables someone to mourn and work through the experience of loss (Fogelman & Bass-Wichelhaus, 2002; Ornstein, 2010). Likewise, memorials are assumed to help families work through their traumatic memories and losses (IJzendoorn et al., 2003). However, commemorating is a complicated and paradoxical issue. In societies, different opinions exist about goals of commemorations, what or who should be remembered, in which way, and for how long (Frijda, 2006; Stanley, 2015). Even those directly affected by the event, such as survivors, veterans, or citizens, often have different needs and ideas about the public commemorations for their lost loved ones (Ibreck, 2012; Pivnick & Hennes, 2014). Furthermore, while memorials intend to honour and provide space to mourn the deaths, it may also create a barrier to healing. Because of the static element of a memorial, the growth and transformation of a community cannot be represented. This may petrify the trauma narrative and therefore threaten the process of healing (Metz, 2016).

Surprisingly, empirical studies investigating the individual impact of commemoration on emotional functioning and psychosocial wellbeing is scarce and evidence remains elusive. To the authors' knowledge, no review on this topic exists and existing research varies widely in terms of method, target group, kind of commemoration, and is conflicting in results. Through a review of the literature, the present study provides an overview in terms of volume, design, and main findings of empirical studies, concentrating on the individual impact of commemoration on posttraumatic stress (PTS) and grief reactions. The results of the included studies are synthesised and form the basis of an evidence-

informed model to explain different responses towards commemoration. Insight into the impact of commemoration can guide institutions in charge of organising and implementing commemorations after war or disaster. In addition, it can advise psychologists and social workers in their clinical practice with those affected by large-scale violence. This might benefit individuals as well as communities that have been struck by violence and upheaval.

METHODS

Since the field of commemoration has hardly been studied within clinical psychology, this article is structured as a scoping review. This kind of review allows for including a wide variety of study designs as it aims at mapping key concepts and types of evidence and gaps rather than merging results into one outcome (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). In this study, the five stages of a scoping review described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and the PRISMA-ScR checklist (Tricco et al., 2018) were used to systematically review the data.

STAGE 1. IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question is how collective commemoration after war, genocide or large-scale violence is related to the experience of PTS and grief reactions. In addition, we examine aspects that might influence (i.e. strengthen or weaken) this relationship, as presented by the reviewed studies.

STAGE 2. IDENTIFYING RELEVANT STUDIES

The search was conducted on 2 May 2019 in five different electronic databases: PsycInfo, Medline, Evidence Based Medicine Reviews (EBMR), Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) and Web of Science (WoS). The search strategy (using thesaurus terms and Boolean operators) is described in Table 1. No time frame was specified in the search strategy.

Table 1. Search terms used

Theme	Search terms
Event	war OR wars OR genocide* OR holocaust* OR massacre* OR mass violence OR armed conflict
Commemoration	memorial* OR monument* OR commemorat* OR memorialisat* OR memorat*
Grief and trauma reactions	anniversary reaction* OR anniversary event* OR bereave* OR grief OR griev* OR mourn* OR sorrow* OR loss OR ptsd OR posttraumatic OR psychological trauma OR emotional trauma OR traumatic OR troubl* memor*

STAGE 3. STUDY SELECTION

Through these electronic databases, we identified 415 potentially relevant articles (see Figure 1), of which 338 articles remained after duplicates were removed (Bramer et al., 2016). Titles and abstracts of the included articles were scanned using the inclusion criteria (Table 2). The initial 97 articles (authors with surname A-D) were scanned by two of the authors (HM & TM). Agreement about including articles was reached for 90% of these articles. Differences in decisions between the reviewers were discussed until consensus was reached. One author (HM) scanned the remaining 241 articles. Reference lists of included articles were checked, based on which two additional articles were included in the review. After finishing the selection process, 26 articles were identified for review.

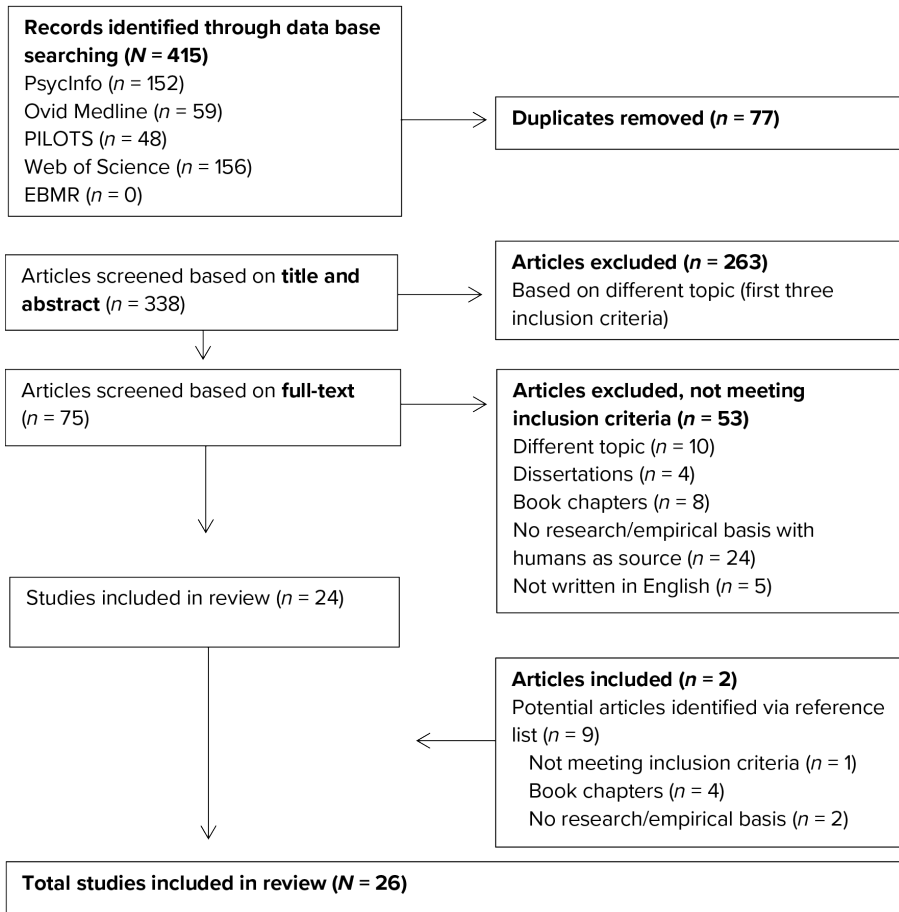


Figure 1. Flow chart

Table 2. Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	
-	Examining public commemoration (including visits to public memorials and specific rituals as part of collective commemorations)
-	Commemoration related to war, genocide, or mass violence
-	Reflecting on posttraumatic stress or grief reactions (and/or associated emotions)
-	Written in English
-	Empirical basis (case study, qualitative or quantitative design)
-	Humans were used as the source of information
-	Published in a peer reviewed journal (to ensure quality)

STAGE 4. CHARTING THE DATA

As proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), a data charting form was used to extract data from the included articles. Data were charted regarding the studied population, study design, type of commemoration, effect on PTS or grief reactions and factors that influenced this reaction. This facilitated the analysis and identification of overarching key variables in the studied relationship. Table 3 summarises the included studies.

STAGE 5. COLLATING, SUMMARISING AND REPORTING RESULTS

A synthesis of the key variables identified in stage four resulted in an evidence- informed model. The factors in this model are discussed in detail in the Results-section.

Table 3. Summary of articles included in the review

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Commemoration of war and genocide – Related to WWII						
Barron et al. (2008)	Social integration, a sense of belonging and the Cenotaph Service: Old soldiers reminisce about Remembrance	Veterans who fought in WWII and/or Korean war (directly affected)	Qualitative design, 10 focus groups (n = 45) Cross-sectional	Collective commemoration (Cenotaph Service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic (gender) - Support (comradeship, integration in society & sense of belonging as well as feeling of isolation) - Expression (trigger to talk) - Recognition (being forgotten) - Personal memories (reminisce safely) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of emotional distress - Bitterness - Reignite trauma - Relieve of trauma - Distinction between now and then
Bilewicz and Wojcik (2018)	Visiting Auschwitz: Evidence of secondary traumatisation among high school students	Polish high school students (indirectly affected)	Quantitative design, survey study (n = 341) Longitudinal (3 assessments; 1 month before, directly after and 1 month follow up). Measures: Inclusion of victims in the self, PANAS, Short PTSD Inventory	School trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition (compassion/empathy, inclusion of others into the self) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No significant changes in affect 1 month after trip - 13.2% of the students classified with secondary trauma after one month: 60% intrusion-related symptoms, 28.5% avoidance symptoms, 13.2% hypervigilance symptoms

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Burnell et al. (2010)	Coping with traumatic memories: Second World War veterans' experiences of social support in relation to the narrative coherence of war memories	WWII veterans (directly affected)	Qualitative design, semi-structured interview study (n = 10) Cross-sectional	Collective commemoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior experiences (trauma narrative as coherent, reconciled or incoherent) - Support (societal support) - Recognition (feeling appreciated and underscores feeling misunderstood) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Veterans with coherent narrative: Commemoration is very important - Veterans with reconciled narrative: Come to terms with experiences - Veterans with incoherent narrative: Negative perceived
Harvey et al. (1995)	Fifty years of grief: Accounts and reported psychological reactions of Normandy invasion veterans.	American veterans who fought in Normandy (directly affected)	Qualitative design, interview study (n = 43) Cross-sectional	Collective commemoration of 50 th anniversary date of Normandy invasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior experiences (trauma avoidance and long-term denial) - Support (presence of other veterans) - Expression (open up, telling stories) - Personal memories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grief symptoms triggered by anniversary date
Hilton (1997)	Media triggers of post-traumatic stress disorder 50 years after the Second World War	British veterans who fought in WWII (directly affected)	Qualitative design, case study (n = 2) Clinical therapy report	Watching commemoration ceremony (50 th anniversary of WWII) report on television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior experiences (trauma avoidance and suppression, other psychiatric distortions) - Personal memories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of panic and restlessness at night (resolved after 2 months) - Recurrent intrusive wartime memories and flashbacks - Loss of interest in activities - Impaired concentrating - Escalating distress

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Jacobs (2014)	Sites of terror and the role of memory in shaping identity among first generation descendants of the Holocaust	Children of Holocaust survivors (general community)	Qualitative design, participant observation and interview study (n = 50) Cross-sectional	Visit of Nazi death camps or labour camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic (gender) - Expression (sharing traumatic experiences) - Support (deepening bond & enhancing empathy) - Meaning making (family narratives are given new meaning) - Personal memories (reliving atrocity narratives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience of emotions as sadness, fear and anxiety - Transmission of grief and trauma to next generation - Intensification of feelings of familial loss
Mimouni-Bloch et al. (2013)	The mental health consequences of student "Holocaust memorial journeys"	Israeli adolescents (general community)	Quantitative design, experiment with control group, study among psychiatrists (n = 50) Cross-sectional Measures: Diagnoses	8-day 'Holocaust memorial journey' in Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior experiences (previous psychiatric crisis, family crisis or social difficulties) - Other (traumatic event during memorial visit) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher rate of mental health problems following memorial journey (including one case of PTSD) compared to control group - Minimal negative effect (such as secondary traumatisation)
Musaph (1990)	Anniversary reaction as a symptom of grief in traumatised persons	Jewish WWII survivor (directly affected)	Qualitative design, case study (n = 1) Clinical therapy report	Collective commemoration day in the Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior experiences (repressed grief) - Personal memories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anniversary reaction, physical (flu-like) symptoms of sickness (usually last for few days) - Beginning of the process of mourning.

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Silverman et al. (1999)	Psychological distress and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder in Jewish adolescents following a brief exposure to concentration camps	American Jewish high school students (15-19) (general community)	Quantitative design, survey study (n = 87) Longitudinal (4 assessments; before, follow up 1, 6 and 12 months) Measures: SCL-90-R, Mississippi Scale for PTSD, IES	Polish concentration camps visit and Holocaust memorial service in Israel		- Increase in PTSD symptoms and general psychopathology symptoms after 6 months - No long-term effects (12 months), decrease of symptoms to baseline
Commemoration of war and genocide – Vietnam						
Amen (1985)	Post-Vietnam stress disorder: A metaphor for current and past life events	Vietnam veterans with PTSD (directly affected)	Qualitative design, case study (n = 1) Clinical therapy report	Memorial Day (not attending a commemoration ceremony) with memorial visit	- Prior experiences (other stressful life events going on) - Personal memories	- Increase in frequency of nightmares (around Memorial Day) - Mental breakdown and flashbacks - Delayed PTSD
Faltus et al. (1986)	Exacerbations of post-traumatic stress disorder in Vietnam veterans	Vietnam veterans (directly affected)	Qualitative design, case study (n = 3) Clinical therapy report	Collective commemoration, dedication of Vietnam war memorial	- Prior experiences (unresolved trauma)	- Increase in PTSD symptoms - Treatment outcome more favourable, new aspects that were previously inaccessible were discussed
Paivson et al. (1988)	A survey of the effect of the Vietnam Memorial dedication on psychiatric symptoms in Vietnam veterans	Vietnam veterans (directly affected)	Quantitative design, experiment, 50 participants, 44 in control group (n = 94) Cross-sectional Measures: VESI	Collective commemoration, dedication of Vietnam war memorial	- Prior experiences (receiving treatment or not)	- Increase in PTSD symptoms - Decrease in PTSD symptoms for non-attenders - In some cases, increase in symptoms step towards therapeutic intervention with favourable outcome

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Watkins et al. (2010)	The war memorial as healing environment: The psychological effect of the Vietnam veterans memorial on Vietnam war combat veterans' posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms	Vietnam veterans with PTSD (directly affected)	Quantitative design, experiment, 32 participants, 30 in control group (n = 62) Longitudinal (3 assessments; before, follow up 1 week and 1 month) Measures: IES-R, EVVMS	Vietnam memorial visit	- Prior experiences (number of visits) - Ritual/design (memorial design leads to deep emotions) - Expression (memorial as catalyst to allow expression)	- Increase in PTSD symptoms after one visit (hyperarousal and intrusion) - Decrease in PTSD symptoms after two visits or more
Watson et al. (1995)	Effects of a Vietnam war memorial pilgrimage on veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder	Vietnam veterans with PTSD (directly affected)	Quantitative design, experiment, no control group (n = 31) Longitudinal (3 assessments; before, follow up 2 days and 6 months) Measures: Mississippi Scale for Combat-Related PTSD	Vietnam memorial visit with commemoration ceremony		- Minor short-term improvements on some PTSD symptoms - No long-term effects - For some participants positive effects, for others counterproductive
Commemoration of war and genocide – Other						
Magierowski (2016)	(A)symmetry of (Non-) memory: The missed opportunity to work through the traumatic memory of the Polish-Ukrainian ethnic conflict in Pawlokoma	Ukrainian and Poles next generations (general community)	Qualitative design, 37 in-depth interviews and 13 short interviews (n = 50) Cross-sectional	Collective one-off anniversary commemoration ceremony	- Political involvement (e.g. conflicting ideas about who is victim and who is perpetrator) - Support (no space for social bonding) - Personal memories (family/community narrative)	- No space to work through traumatic memories - Negative traumatic memories contaminate next generation

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Beristain et al. (2000)	Rituals, social sharing, silence, emotions and collective memory claims in the case of the Guatemalan genocide	Victims of Guatemalan genocide (1981-1986) (directly affected)	Qualitative design, structured interview study (n = 3424) Cross-sectional	Diverse forms of commemoration (including cultural rituals and funeral rituals)	- Cultural context (e.g. influences the degree in which individuals get angry, or are driven to know the truth) - Expression (ability/inability to talk) - Meaning making (consolidate memories) - Support (reconstruction of social support)	- Reinforce feelings of loss, anger, sense of injustice among Spanish. - Decrease in anger, sense of injustice among Mayans - Unrelated to emotional recovery from trauma - Reinforcing intense grief (in past) - Decrease of helplessness
Gasparre et al. (2010)	Cognitive and social consequences of participation in social rites: Collective coping, social support, and post-traumatic growth in the victims of Guatemala genocide	Victims of Guatemalan genocide (1960-1996) (directly affected)	Quantitative design, survey study (n = 59) Cross-sectional Measures: DES, IES, Way of Coping Scale, PTGI, MSPSS	Diverse forms of commemoration (including secular ceremonies, truth and reparation commissions and religious rituals)	- Cultural context - Ritual/design (type of ritual) - Expression (social sharing about traumatic event)	- Increase in intrusions - Less avoidant thoughts related to traumatic event - PTG
Olij (2005)	Trauma awareness, healing, and group counselling in secondary schools	Rwandan youth (directly affected)	Qualitative design, interviews and observation (n = not indicated) Longitudinal	Collective ceremonies	- Previous experiences (intervention on trauma awareness and counselling)	- Dramatic period with huge outbreaks of crisis - No crisis outbreaks during April ceremonies among students after intervention - Able to mourn together in dignity

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Ibreck (2010)	The politics of mourning: Survivor contributions to memorials in post-genocide Rwanda	Rwandan survivor organisations (directly affected)	Qualitative design, interviews and participant observation (n = not indicated) Longitudinal (ethnographic)	Collective commemoration ceremonies and memorial visits	- Expression (able to mourn together) - Support (commitment through one another) - Recognition (for loss and suffering) - Meaning making (acceptance of the loss)	- Reawaken sorrow, anguish and trauma - Traumatic crisis - Expression of grief and sense of relief through grief and mourning
Gishoma et al. (2015)	Remembering and re-experiencing trauma during genocide commemorations	Rwandans who experienced traumatic crisis (directly affected)	Quantitative design, experiment, 16 participants, 32 waiting list (n = 48) Longitudinal (3 assessments; before, during and after intervention) Measures: DES, UCLA Loneliness Scale, CES-D, IES-R, RS	Collective commemorations	- Prior experiences (intervention of supportive-expressive group therapy)	- Increase in traumatic crises with contagious effect
Kabakambira et al. (2018)	Burden of post-traumatic stress disorder acute exacerbations (PAE) during the commemorations of the genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda: A cross-sectional study	Rwandans with PTSD diagnoses (directly affected)	Quantitative design, retrospective survey study (n = 383) Cross-sectional Measures: PAE duration, presenting signs	Collective commemoration week	- Prior experiences (history of PAE, loss of partner) - Personal memories	- Severe PAE (of more than 30 minutes) among 33.2% of the patients

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Pollack (2003)	Intentions of burial: Mourning, politics, and memorials following the massacre at Srebrenica	Survivors and advocacy groups of the Bosnia war (directly affected and general community)	Qualitative design, interview study with 37 survivors and 30 key-informants (n = 67) Cross-sectional	Collective re-burial of victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political involvement (different goals with re-burial) - Meaning making (acceptance and closure) - Support (opportunity to talk, grief together) - Recognition (for loss and suffering) - Personal memories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start process of mourning after reburial of the body - Hard to see so many graves together, prefer body buried individually
Possick et al. (2007)	Reconstructing the loss: Hantzacha commemoration following the death of a spouse in a terror attack	Israeli widows (who lost their husband in a terror attack) (directly affected)	Qualitative design, interviews (n = 8) Cross-sectional	Collective commemoration, as well as individual, with or without a memorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ritual/design (type of ritual) - Meaning making (collective meaning of death as heroic and worthwhile sacrifice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not as important for individual mourning as private commemoration in daily life
Zembylas and Bekerman (2011)	The work of mourning in the bilingual schools of Israel: Ambivalent emotions and the risks of seeking mutual respect and understanding	Palestinian and Jewish youth (general community)	Qualitative design, interview and observation study, 16 Palestinian, 15 Jewish and one foreign student(s) (n = 32) Longitudinal (ethnographic)	Memorial Day and Holocaust Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic (identification with the victims) - Political involvement (state who decides who will be grieved) - Meaning making (struggle to understand present-day suffering of Palestinian community) - Recognition (recognition of the other communities trauma) - Personal memories (family narratives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ambivalence in work of mourning - Expressing emotions of solidarity and empathy

Table 3. Continued

Author (year)	Title	Studied population	Study design and data collection method (n)	Type of commemoration	Correlates	Effect on posttraumatic stress, grief, and related emotions
Bensimon et al. (2017)	The emotional impact of national music on young and older adults differing in posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms	Young and old Israelites (general community)	Quantitative design, experiment, questionnaires, 144 young and 132 old participants (n = 276) Cross-sectional Measures: PCL-5, SPANE	Specific ritual, listening to sad or happy national songs (related to Memorial Day or Independence Day)	- Demographic (age) - Prior experiences (severity of PTSD)	- Sad song increase negative affect - For those with low level of PTSD symptoms: Young adults more emotionally reactive than older adults - For those with high level of PTSD symptoms: Older adults more emotionally reactive than young adults
Oushakine (2006)	The politics of pity: Domesticating the loss in a Russian province	Mothers of fallen Russian soldiers (directly affected)	Qualitative design, interview and observation study (n = not indicated) Longitudinal (ethnographic)	Different kinds of commemoration, i.e. creating memorials, collective ceremonies	- Support (binding together) - Meaning making (community of loss, resisting closure, loss is localised and contained, taking control over situation) - Recognition (highlights indifference and neglect of society, individual pain becomes collective memory) - Personal memories (continuing bonds with the deceased)	- Diminishing of individual pain - No rehabilitation or letting go. Traumatic experience stitches their narrative together

Note. CES-D = The Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Short Depression Scale. DES = The Izard's Differential Emotions Scale. EWMS = Experiencing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Survey. IES-R = The Impact of Event Scale (Revised). MSPSS = The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. PAE = PTSD Acute Exacerbations. PANAS = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. PCL-5 = Posttraumatic checklist. PTG = posttraumatic growth. PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory. PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder. RS = Wagnitid and Young's resilience scale. SCL-90-R = Symptom Checklist 90 Items Revised. SPANE = Schedule of Positive and Negative Experience. UCLA Loneliness Scale = The University of California, Los Angeles Loneliness Scale. VESI = Vietnam Era Stress Inventory. WWII = Second World War.

RESULTS

The results are structured according to the key variables that emerged while charting the data. Firstly, characteristics of the reviewed studies are described in more detail. Secondly, we elaborate on the relationship between commemoration, PTS, and grief reactions as emerging in these studies. Lastly, several correlates are presented which can be considered to influence the studied relationship. For details of the reviewed studies concerning study design and target group, we refer to Table 3.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REVIEWED STUDIES

Studied populations

The 26 studies included in the review were published between 1985 and 2018. Eighteen studies involved people who were directly affected by war and eight articles concentrated on the general community or second and third generation affected. Most articles focused on commemoration of WWII ($n = 9$). Other articles concerned commemoration of the Vietnam war ($n = 5$), Ukrainian-Polish conflict ($n = 1$), Guatemalan genocide ($n = 2$), Rwandan genocide ($n = 4$), Israeli-Palestinian conflict ($n = 3$), Russian wars ($n = 1$), and Bosnian war ($n = 1$).

Study design

Sixteen studies had a qualitative design, employing interviews ($n = 11$, of which 4 longitudinal/ethnographic), case studies ($n = 4$), and focus groups ($n = 1$). Ten studies reported a quantitative design, varying between an experimental design ($n = 6$, of which 3 longitudinal), and survey studies ($n = 4$, of which 2 longitudinal).

Type of commemoration

Eighteen studies examined collective commemoration events and seven studies focused specifically on a memorial visit, often accompanied by a remembrance ceremony. One article concentrated on a specific ritual, namely listening to national songs linked to Memorial Day (Bensimon et al., 2017).

Responses to commemoration

Most studies focus on PTS reactions in relation to commemoration. Grief reactions are studied to a lesser extent. There are salient differences in results between studies, pointing to an increase as well as decrease in PTS reactions.

PTS reactions

Five studies, all qualitative designs including interviews and case studies, among WWII and Vietnam veterans described clinical cases in which commemoration was linked to anniversary reactions, PTS reactions, and the onset of delayed posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Amen, 1985; Barron et al., 2008; Faltus et al., 1986; Hilton, 1997; Musaph, 1990).

Examples of PTS reactions reported in these studies include nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, and impaired concentration. Concurrently, WWII veterans in two qualitative studies highlight a relieve of trauma distress through commemoration, a distinction between now and then and a way to come to terms with experiences (Barron et al., 2008; Burnell et al., 2010). A quantitative cross-sectional study among Guatemalan genocide survivors revealed that participating in commemoration was associated with more intrusions, and less avoidant thoughts (Gasparre et al., 2010). Four studies concerning commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda, with both quantitative and qualitative designs, all reported that participants of annual remembrances endured traumatic crises during and after the ceremonies (Gishoma et al., 2015; Ibreck, 2010; Kabakambira et al., 2018; Olij, 2005). Other studies ($n = 3$) conducted quantitative longitudinal research on the effect of visits of Vietnam veterans to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) (Parsons et al., 1988; Watkins et al., 2010; Watson et al., 1995). PTSD symptoms increased for veterans attending the dedication of the VVM, whereas a decrease in symptoms was found for veterans who did not attend the ceremony (Parsons et al., 1988). No (long-term) effects on PTSD symptoms were revealed in the other studies (Watkins et al., 2010; Watson et al., 1995), with only minor short-term improvements on some stress symptoms (Watson et al., 1995). For some participants, the trip had positive effects while the visit was counterproductive to others. Lastly, three quantitative longitudinal and experimental studies explored the impact of a Holocaust memorial visit for Polish, American Jewish and Israeli students. They revealed an initial increase of distress and PTSD symptoms (Bilewicz & Wojcik, 2018; Mimouni-Bloch et al., 2013; Silverman et al., 1999), but symptoms diminished to base line after twelve months (Silverman et al., 1999). Looking at emotions that are connected to PTS reactions, qualitative interview studies reveal that public commemoration nourished feelings of personal injustice, of being forgotten or misunderstood, which was linked to anger, bitterness, and resentment (Barron et al., 2008; Beristain et al., 2000; Burnell et al., 2010; Magierowski, 2016; Oushakine, 2006). The quantitative experimental study of Bensimon et al. (2017) revealed that listening to sad national songs, mainly broadcasted during Memorial Day in Israel, increased negative affect in Israeli people.

Grief reactions

Six qualitative interview studies investigated the relationship between commemoration and grief reactions. Increased feelings of grief were reported by WWII veterans from the US during the 50th anniversary commemoration ceremony (Harvey et al., 1995), and by children of Holocaust survivors, visiting Nazi death camps (Jacobs, 2014). Guatemalan genocide survivors only referred to feelings of loss and intense grief as result of commemoration in the past (during the period 1981–1985) (Beristain et al., 2000). Possick et al. (2007) studied diverse, both individual and collective, commemorative activities, and interviewed Israeli widows who lost their husband in a terroristic attack. They concluded that there is only a perceived link between individual (but not collective) commemoration and mourning

and grief work, whereas public commemoration serves other purposes, such as collective meaning making. Two qualitative studies, conducting interviews among Bosnian and Rwandan genocide survivors, underline the importance of reburial to (start) the process of mourning (Ibreck, 2010; Pollack, 2003). With regard to both PTS and grief reactions, qualitative studies revealed that commemoration (re)awakened emotions of sadness, sorrow, confusion, fear, anguish, and anxiety (Ibreck, 2010; Jacobs, 2014; Musaph, 1990; Olij, 2005; Pollack, 2003; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011).

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF COMMEMORATION

From the overview of studies, several aspects emerged that may influence how a commemoration is perceived by individuals, and therefore may influence PTS and grief reactions. These aspects can be categorised into three factors, namely facilitating mechanisms (expression, meaning making, recognition, support, and personal memories), individual characteristics (prior experiences and demographics) and contextual factors (rituals/design, political and cultural context).

Expression

Several studies, with both qualitative and quantitative designs, showed that commemoration and visiting a memorial is linked to expression of emotions concerning the traumatic events, both through talking and non-verbal expression of feelings (Barron et al., 2008; Gasparre et al., 2010; Harvey et al., 1995; Jacobs, 2014; Watkins et al., 2010). This expression and/or sharing of emotions yielded a sense of relief (Ibreck, 2010), as well as an increase in emotions of fear, sadness, and anger (Beristain et al., 2000).

Meaning making

Individual acceptance and meaning making are regularly mentioned as consequences of commemoration. Qualitative studies indicated that performing rituals may foster acceptance of the loss of a loved one and closure in the process of healing (Ibreck, 2010; Pollack, 2003). Furthermore, collective remembrance is linked to attributing meaning to the loss, regaining control over life, and decreased feelings of helplessness (Beristain et al., 2000; Oushakine, 2006). From a more collective perspective, commemoration can give new meaning to family narratives (Jacobs, 2014), or advance collective memory making, in which loss and trauma can be framed as heroic and worthwhile (Beristain et al., 2000; Possick et al., 2007). Evidently, where positive meaning is made, commemoration can nourish the attribution of negative meaning as well. It can be a reminder to hold on to painful stories and victimisation (Oushakine, 2006), or incomprehension about present-day sufferings (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011).

Recognition

Related to individual acceptance, commemoration also helped people to feel acknowledged

for their loss and suffering by others (Ibreck, 2010; Pollack, 2003) and to experience recognition of ones' traumas (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). A side effect of this recognition, which is closely related to compassion and empathy, was illustrated by the quantitative study of Bilewicz and Wojcik (2018). They revealed an increased change of secondary traumatisation among high school students with more compassion for victims, after a trip to Auschwitz. On the contrary, a group of veterans in the interview studies of Barron et al. (2008) and Burnell et al. (2010) perceived the annual commemoration in the United Kingdom as a reminder of the lack of societal recognition for their efforts. Likewise, for Russian mothers in the study of Oushakine (2006), the collective ceremonies emphasised the indifference and neglect of society.

Social support

Various qualitative studies demonstrated that commemoration had the potential to bring people together, feel united, reconstruct social support, and reduce disengagement and isolation (Barron et al., 2008; Beristain et al., 2000; Burnell et al., 2010; Harvey et al., 1995; Ibreck, 2010; Jacobs, 2014; Oushakine, 2006; Pollack, 2003). Other qualitative studies presented an opposite effect of commemoration, that is the potential to underline the absence of (societal) support or social bonding between groups (Barron et al., 2008; Magierowski, 2016).

Personal memories

The last important aspect that was derived from the reviewed studies is the emergence of personal memories through commemoration. In most articles, both quantitative and qualitative, these personal memories are described as intrusions (Amen, 1985; Harvey et al., 1995; Hilton, 1997; Kabakambira et al., 2018; Musaph, 1990; Pollack, 2003), or reliving the atrocities of family narratives for next generations (Jacobs, 2014; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). At the same time, personal memories may also be associated with more positive experiences. Veterans in the interview study of Barron et al. (2008) describe how commemoration can foster reminiscing of adverse events in a safe context. Further, triggered memories can assist in continuing a bond with the deceased (Oushakine, 2006). Watkins et al. (2010) hypothesised that commemoration leads to a traumatic reminder which, because of the canalised and limited form, promotes reconciliation with past experiences.

Individual characteristics

Prior experiences, especially mental health status, were most frequently reported to influence the PTS reactions in response to the commemoration. Participants from various studies, for whom commemoration yielded an increase in stress-related symptoms or negative emotions, had a history of mental health problems or PTSD (e.g., Bensimon et al., 2017). Years of active avoidance and suppression of emotions related to the traumatic experience preceded the commemoration in many participants (Amen, 1985; Faltus et

al., 1986; Harvey et al., 1995; Hilton, 1997; Mimouni-Bloch et al., 2013; Musaph, 1990; Parsons et al., 1988). Two qualitative studies revealed that resolving and integrating traumatic experiences, were related to a more positive experience of the commemoration (Burnell et al., 2010; Olij, 2005), although this finding was not supported by others (Gishoma et al., 2015). Personal characteristics, such as age (connected to the proximity of war and identification with victims) (Bensimon et al., 2017; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011) or gender (Barron et al., 2008; Jacobs, 2014) are likely to influence the impact of a commemoration ceremony as well.

Contextual factors

Several qualitative studies reflect on the involvement of politics in commemorations (Magierowski, 2016; Pollack, 2003; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). When the state, for example, defines who is a 'grievable person' and who needs to be commemorated, tension may arise about the goal of commemoration as mourning or to meet political needs. Secondly, when exploring aspects that might influence the response towards commemoration, the contribution of cultural background is important to recognise as well. Specific cultural rites are indispensable in certain communities and cultures to come to terms with the loss (Ibreck, 2010; Pollack, 2003). Furthermore, culturally accepted behaviours and ways of expressing emotions may differ across cultures. As an illustration of this, Beristain et al. (2000) studied funerary rites in Mayan speaking and Spanish speaking individuals and found that these rites decreased anger and sense of injustice among the former but not the latter group (Beristain et al., 2000). The study of Gasparre et al. (2010) confirms these results; the more participants identified themselves with Mayan culture, the more they participated in rituals and experienced positive emotions. Lastly, the design of the memorial or rituals performed during the commemoration has an impact on how individuals will respond in terms of PTS or grief reactions (Gasparre et al., 2010; Possick et al., 2007; Watkins et al., 2010). Surprisingly, we identified just three studies tapping this aspect.

Structuring all findings described above resulted in a model, presented in Figure 2. The model depicts the linkage between commemoration and the increase as well as decrease of PTS and grief reactions. These responses are, in turn, affected by the described facilitating mechanisms, individual characteristics and contextual factors.

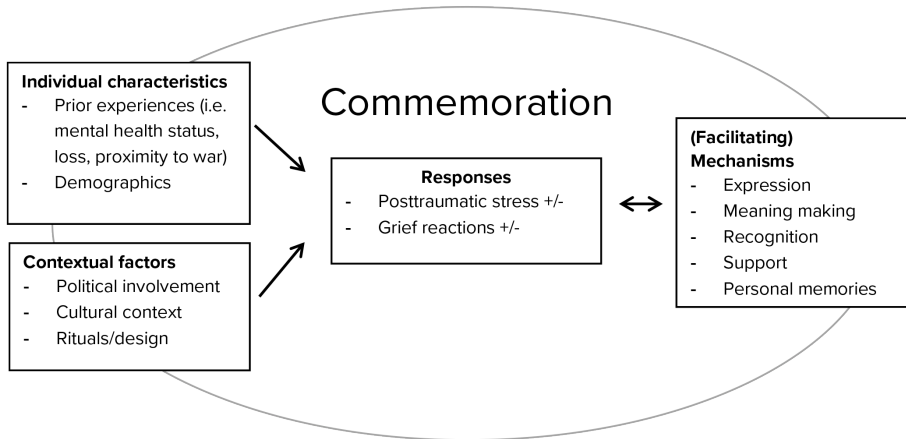


Figure 2. Evidence-informed model of predictors of posttraumatic stress and grief reactions after commemoration.

DISCUSSION

Collective commemorations are assumed to support individuals in coping with disruptive events. We conducted a scoping review to gain more insight in the existing empirical evidence of the relationship between collective commemoration after large-scale violence and PTSD and grief reactions, as well as factors that might influence this relationship. Twenty-six empirical studies were included, on the basis of which we formulated an evidence-informed model with facilitating mechanisms, individual characteristics and contextual factors affecting responses (Figure 2). The review indicated that PTSD and grief reactions often increase during and after commemoration. Individual characteristics, such as prior experiences, and contextual factors, such as the cultural and political environment, seemed to be associated with the emotional consequences of commemoration. Five other mechanisms were identified to affect individual responses, namely the degree in which people, through their involvement in commemorations, can experience support and recognition, can make meaning, express themselves, and relive personal memories.

An increase in PTSD reactions through commemoration was primarily seen among directly affected individuals who suffered from PTSD or other psychiatric disorders prior to the commemoration. Considering the fact that the maintenance of PTSD is related to exposure to (nontraumatic) stressors (Schnurr et al., 2004), commemoration might be perceived as a stressful event and, as such, contribute to the maintenance of PTSD. It is important to note as well that the rise in stress reactions cannot be interpreted automatically as a negative outcome of commemoration. This experience can uncover suppressed emotions, start a process of mourning (Musaph, 1990), and result in a positive treatment outcome (Faltus

et al., 1986; Parsons et al., 1988). Scant evidence for a decline in PTSD symptoms after commemoration was provided by the reviewed studies. Only three studies showed minor short-term improvements on some stress symptoms, such as avoidant thoughts (Watkins et al., 2010; Watson et al., 1995; Gasparre et al., 2010), but at the same time an increase of intrusions was found (Gasparre et al., 2010). Feelings of grief mainly increased during times of commemoration (Harvey et al., 1995) or did not change (Beristain et al., 2000; Possick et al., 2007). From a broader emotional perspective, several primarily qualitative studies, referred to negative emotions and feelings as result of commemoration, such as sadness, anger, bitterness, and resentment (Barron et al., 2008; Beristain et al., 2000; Burnell et al., 2010; Ibreck, 2010; Jacobs, 2014; Pollack, 2003). Empathy and feelings of solidarity were mentioned as positive consequences of commemoration (Jacobs, 2014; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). Similar to the previous results, these findings need to be carefully interpreted: the experience and/or expression of negative emotions can have both negative and positive consequences for recovery from loss and trauma (Bonanno et al., 2004).

The variation in individual responses to commemoration is remarkable. It highlights the importance of exploring aspects that might influence these individual reactions. The reviewed studies revealed several aspects that might elucidate the relationship between commemoration and PTSD and grief reactions. Firstly, commemoration often leads to the expression of emotions and feelings that are difficult to access in regular circumstances (Watkins et al., 2010). Prior research indicates that emotional expression tends to provide a healthy form of release (Pennebaker et al., 2001), whereas others argue that silence can be adaptive at certain stages as well (Comas-Diaz et al., 1998). Secondly, the reviewed studies revealed the importance of a process of meaning making, and gaining recognition and social support through commemoration. Positive meaning making (Feder et al., 2013; Southwick & Charney, 2018; Taylor et al., 2000), public recognition (Summerfield, 2000), and a supportive social network (Brewin et al., 2000) are known to support healthy recovery and protect from developing long-lasting problems after distressing events. However, commemoration can underscore a lack of recognition or societal support as well, for instance when the names of a specific group of victims are not mentioned during a commemoration. This might yield negative appraisals and meaning making, strengthening identification with victimhood or isolation (Barron et al., 2008; Oushakine, 2006). Thirdly, a strong connection was observed between commemoration and personal reminders of the original traumatic experience, although the experimental studies did not reveal direct indicators to perceive commemoration as an effective exposure intervention (Watkins et al., 2010). Fourthly, individual characteristics, such as age, gender, and prior mental health status, are important to consider when studying the impact of commemoration. These aspects correspond to the outcomes of meta-analyses regarding risk indicators for PTSD (Brewin et al., 2000; Ozer et al., 2003). It is possible that commemorations can have a greater impact on people who are at higher risk to develop PTSD. Lastly, the context, including the political as well as cultural environment in which the commemoration takes place, plays a

role in the individual responses to commemoration. In general, commemorative events and memorials have cultural, social, and/or political meanings and functions attached to them. The degree to which individuals agree and connect to these meanings and functions will influence how they perceive the commemoration and their emotional responses. Conflicting goals might fuel stress reactions among those involved (Magierowski, 2016). Although the studies indicate that it is important to take into account the cultural context of the studied population, no comparisons could be made in this review between the studies based on the different cohorts. The variety in backgrounds of the studied populations and the broad range of questions and methods within the studies did not allow for such a comparison.

As part of the contextual factors, the present study revealed a notable gap in the literature. Only three studies elaborated on the design of a memorial or the performed rituals as part of the commemoration. This is deemed relevant, as some rituals can be personal and open for one's own interpretation, whereas other rituals may have a more cultural or political significance (Daines, 2000). Veil et al. (2011), adopting an artistic perspective, proposed that specific features of a memorial can shape the feelings of visitors and lead to more or less possibility to mourn. Moreover, certain rituals might effectuate individual processing, whereas others add to a process of collective recovery (Possick et al., 2007).

All the aforementioned factors demonstrate the need for a comprehensive approach that reaches beyond describing PTS and grief reactions, to be able to answer the question to whom and how commemoration can be beneficial. Commemoration gives a venue to experience several facilitators towards coping, but can emphasise the absence of these aspects as well.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

We employed an established method (see e.g. Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) for reviewing a broad scope of qualitative as well as quantitative studies. In accordance with the goal of this scoping review, the broad range of included studies provides a clear overview of the studies available in the intersection between (clinical) psychology and memory studies. This is an important first step to fill in the gap of knowledge in this field and clarify the existing empirical evidence. Including a wide variety of studies is a limitation as well. Due to the diversity in research designs and methods, a scoping review approach precludes the option to include study quality indicators, although study designs were described in Table 3 and taken into consideration throughout this review. Furthermore, the selection of studied groups, disruptive events, countries, and types of commemoration make it challenging to draw general conclusions. This emphasises the importance of further research in this area and the need to test the proposed evidence-informed model.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this review might assist mental health care professionals, working with those affected by war or large-scale violence. Moreover, policy makers do well to be

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aware of possible negative consequences of commemoration, especially when political interest are highly involved. Further empirical data on the psychological consequences of commemoration are urgently needed to secure commemoration from a mental health perspective. As mentioned before, this could start by testing the proposed model in various contexts. A focus on specific rituals might result in a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of commemoration. The current study implies a need for a multifactorial approach when examining the impact of commemoration on mental health. This will deepen our understanding of the circumstances in which commemoration can be beneficial for individuals as well as communities that have been struck by violence and upheaval.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B. Mitima-Verloop: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

P.A. Boelen: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, supervision

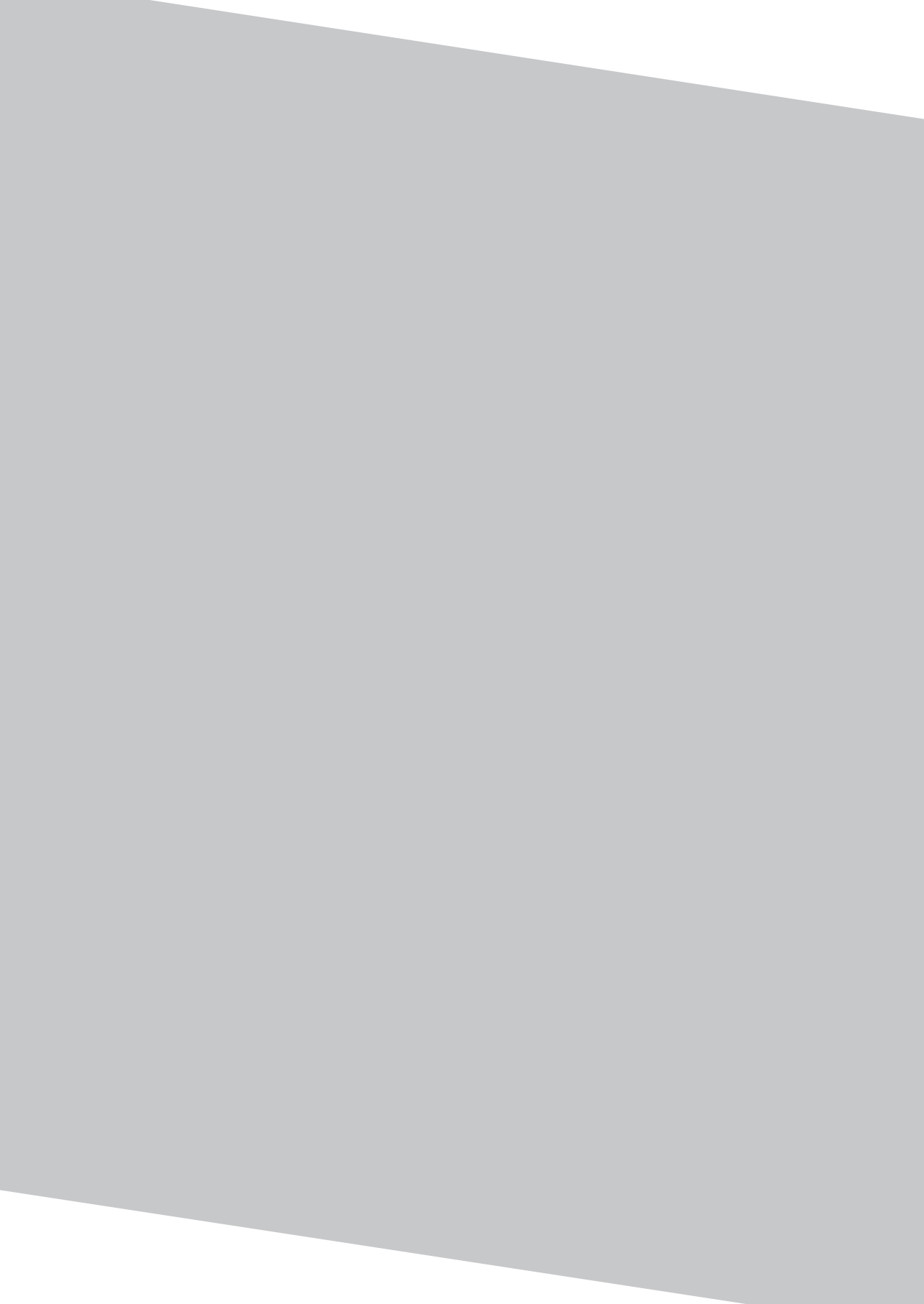
T.T.M. Mooren: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition

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Kindled emotions: Commemoration and the importance of meaning making, support and recognition

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ABSTRACT

Commemorative events, organised in the aftermath of war or large-scale violence, can have an emotional impact on those who are attending. We examined several characteristics that might influence this impact. In a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test study, participants ($n = 307$) watched footage of the broadcast of the Dutch National Commemoration, in which World War II is remembered. A control group of 48 participants watched the commemoration broadcast live on Remembrance Day. They were matched for age, gender, war experience and migration background with 48 participants from the study group who watched the footage, to conduct a comparability check. We found some evidence that watching the footage was comparable to watching the commemoration live on Remembrance Day in terms of emotional response and experience of psychosocial factors. Participants in the footage sample ($n = 307$) responded with an increase of negative and decrease of positive emotions. Individual characteristics were limitedly related to the emotional response; posttraumatic stress symptom severity predicted increased negative emotions. Experiencing meaning making, support and, to a lesser extent, recognition through commemorating was related to experiencing more positive emotions. The findings indicate these psychosocial factors may buffer the emotional distress elicited by commemoration and contribute to important cognitive and social benefits. Practical implications are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Emotion, Commemoration, War, Posttraumatic stress, Support, Meaning making

INTRODUCTION

National days of remembrance, organised in the aftermath of war or large-scale violence, are held in many countries and are often attended by many people. Such commemorative events may have a direct impact on the thoughts, memories, and emotions of participants. Various studies, in different countries and contexts, reported positive emotional responses as a result of commemoration, such as pride, gratitude, feelings of empathy and solidarity (Jacobs, 2014; Watkins & Bastian, 2019; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). Other studies documented primarily negative emotional responses, such as sadness, anxiety, anger, bitterness, and resentment (e.g., Barron et al., 2008; Beristain et al., 2000; Magierowski, 2016). A recent scoping review revealed that engaging in war commemoration may yield an increase in posttraumatic stress (PTS) and grief reactions (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020). The present study was designed to enhance knowledge about people's emotional responses to collective war commemoration and factors associated with these responses. This knowledge may ultimately extend our understanding of how and for whom commemoration can be beneficial, contributing to valuable remembrance events.

To date, clinical psychological research on the individual emotional impact of collective commemoration is limited. Mitima-Verloop and colleagues (2020) reviewed existing studies and extracted individual characteristics as well as psychosocial factors that might influence the nature and intensity of emotional responses to commemoration. In various studies, female gender (e.g., Jacobs, 2014), older age, and war experiences (e.g., Bensimon et al., 2017) were related to more intense emotional responses. Cultural backgrounds are also related to individual responses (e.g., Gasparre et al., 2010), for example because cultural differences may exist about appropriate ways of expressing emotions, especially in public events (Beristain et al., 2000). Furthermore, the mental health status of people attending commemorations is important. People for whom commemoration yielded an increase in PTS, grief reactions or negative emotions often had a history of mental health problems, mostly related to their own war experiences (e.g., Burnell et al., 2010; Parsons et al., 1988). Even decades after a war, mental health issues can still exist among people who lived through war, prevailing at old age (Bramsen & Van der Ploeg, 1999; Glaesmer et al., 2010). Also children of those affected can have mental health issues related to the war experiences of their parents (further called second generation affected) (Dashorst et al., 2019).

Besides individual characteristics, psychosocial factors might influence individual emotional responses to commemoration (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020). More than a century ago, Durkheim (1912) wrote about the emotional and psychosocial consequences of participating in collective rituals on groups, by focusing on shared emotional expression. Durkheim stated that rituals are expected to reactivate emotions associated with the commemorated event. In addition, the emotions expressed by those who had actually experienced the commemorated event could elicit similar feelings in people around them. Durkheim's (1912) main premise implied that collective gatherings, regardless of the positive or negative valence of the event,

enhance sharing and expressing of emotions, increasing social cohesion, shared beliefs, and positive affect. More recent studies of Paez et al. (2015) confirmed this premise from a social psychological perspective, focusing more on individual responses. Their results showed that collective gatherings more strongly reinforced positive affect than that they reduced negative affect among participants. Concurrently, research indicates that the reactivation and spread of negative emotions could install a negative emotional climate among those who are attending (Rimé et al., 2011). Beristain et al. (2000) revealed how emotional expression increased fear, sadness, and anger in participants commemorating the Guatemalan genocide. Thus, studies examining the impact of emotional expression yielded different results, with both positive and negative emotional responses having been reported.

Besides emotional expression, perceived support is another important psychosocial factor to consider when studying the emotional impact of commemoration. Commemorations have the potential to bring people together, to build social support, and to reduce disengagement and isolation (e.g., Ibreck, 2010). Yet, the lack of perceived support during commemorations can also nourish feelings of bitterness (Barron et al., 2008).

A further factor related to commemoration is recognition or acknowledgement. Collective memorialising fosters acknowledgement of losses, suffering, and the shared public impact of the event that is remembered (Miller, 2012). Moreover, recognition often reflects societies' desire to account for what has happened and provide justice for those who died (Oushakine, 2006). However, how acknowledgement or recognition is perceived by those involved in commemorations might differ and has an impact on the emotional response. For example, the lack of recognition felt by a veteran during VJ Day (Victory over Japan) in the United Kingdom who believed that the British public was ashamed of Far East veterans, made him angry (Burnell et al., 2010). Furthermore, commemoration and the performance of rituals are related to the construction of meaning (Miller, 2012). Watkins and Bastian (2019) revealed how war commemoration in the United States led individuals to construct meaning by perceiving those who died as costly sacrifices, evoking responses of pride and admiration among citizens.

Lastly, from a clinical psychological perspective, emotional responses after commemoration might be strongly related to personal memories as well. Literature reveals that commemoration can induce intrusions of prior traumatic experiences during war, which are mainly linked to negative emotions such as anxiety (e.g., Kabakambira et al., 2018).

PRESENT STUDY

In the present study, we examined the linkage between engagement in commemoration and emotional responses. In so doing, we considered both positive and negative emotions as orthogonal concepts (Watson & Clark, 1984). Using these terms can lead to oversimplifications and misinterpretations because people often assign a connotative meaning to 'positive' and 'negative' such as good and bad, thinking of them as opposites (Solomon & Stone, 2002). In the context of commemoration, experiencing negative emotions does not necessarily mean

that the commemoration has a negative impact. For example, Barron et al. (2008) described how veterans could (re)experience mentally and physically reminders of the war during commemoration in a safe environment with the support of comrades. Veterans became initially emotionally distressed but also described this as therapeutic. Understanding the context and related factors is essential to interpret the valence of the emotional responses.

This study builds on the review of Mitima-Verloop and colleagues (2020), by examining how various individual and psychosocial factors influence emotions after a commemorative event. There is a need to substantiate our knowledge about the potential individual mental impact of commemoration. This is imperative given that commemoration is a widespread practice around the world and is often assumed to assist survivors and society as a whole in coping with disruptive events (Hunt, 2010). In addition, outcomes may guide institutions responsible for organising commemorative events practically in such a way that it will benefit all individuals.

In this study, a heterogeneous group of participants watched footage of the broadcast of the Dutch National Commemoration, in which World War II (WWII) is remembered. Emotions were measured before and after watching the footage. This design allowed us to study various aspects of commemoration in a heterogeneous group of people, while minimising the differences that are present in a more natural setting, such as what people see or hear based on their physical position during the event.

Our first aim was to investigate if changes in positive and negative emotions could be observed, and which emotions changed mostly while watching the commemoration. The occurrence of emotional changes would confirm our assumption that watching a commemoration has an emotional impact on people, as previous literature has shown for (physically) attending commemorative events (e.g., Beristain et al., 2000).

Our second aim was to identify individual characteristics associated with emotional responses after commemoration. We considered four demographic variables, namely age, gender, war experience, and cultural background (operationalised as migration background), and two indicators of mental health symptoms, namely PTS symptoms and grief reactions (all assessed prior to watching the footage). Based on previous literature, emotional responses were expected to be relatively stronger among women, individuals with war experiences, and older participants (because of their proximity to WWII), and among individuals with more intense PTS symptoms or grief reactions related to their war experience. Furthermore, we expected participants with a migration background to respond in a less emotional way compared to those without migration background.

Our third aim was to explore to what extent participants reported having experienced emotional expression, support, recognition, meaning making, and personal memories after watching the commemoration. Moreover, we studied the associations of these factors with emotional responses. We expected that the presence of these factors (and the absence in case of personal memories) would predict increased positive and decreased negative emotions after watching the commemoration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

SETTING AND STUDY DESIGN

The study used a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design, inspired by research using the trauma film paradigm (James et al., 2016). That paradigm allows to study exposure and responses to psychological trauma, such as negative mood and affect (e.g., Schartau et al., 2009). Through presenting footage of potentially distressing and emotional events (e.g., commemoration), analogue emotional response to such events can be studied. In the present study, we used this paradigm to study emotional responses to the Dutch National Commemoration. The Dutch national day of commemoration, Remembrance Day, is held every year on 4 May. Besides locally organised events, the National Commemoration takes place in the capital city Amsterdam and is broadcasted live on national television. According to the official memorandum, all civilians and military personnel are commemorated who, in the Kingdom of the Netherlands or elsewhere, died or were killed since the beginning of WWII, in situations of war or in peacekeeping missions. The support for Remembrance Day among Dutch citizens is high and has remained stable over the last twenty years (Demant et al., 2020).

A fragment of 16:43 minutes of the original television broadcast of the National Commemoration on 4 May 2018 was used. This fragment shows several important rituals, such as the royal family laying the first wreath, the trumpet-signal, singing of the national anthem, two minutes of silence, and those affected by WWII giving their testimony and laying wreaths at the monument. Before (Time 0; T0) and after (Time 1; T1) the film, questionnaires, including questions about emotions, were administered to participants on paper or via an online application. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University (FETC18/102).

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 358 people participated in the study. Inclusion criteria were residing in the Netherlands, having a sufficient level of Dutch language to understand the questions and film, and minimum age of 18 years. Participants who reported not having watched the film with audio ($n = 26$) or who did not complete the questionnaires concerning emotions before and after the film ($n = 25$) were excluded from the analyses. Eventually, 307 participants, of which 118 were male (38.4%) and 189 were female (61.6%), were included in the analyses. The age of the participants varied from 18 to 95 years ($M = 41.10$, $SD = 22.57$ years). Additional characteristics of participants are presented in the Results section below.

PROCEDURE

We conducted a pilot study among 13 participants with different backgrounds (in age, gender, war experience or country of origin) to test the procedure, comprehensibility and feasibility of the questionnaires. Based on the remarks by participants, minor refinements

were made in some questions. The data of these participants were included in the main analyses. The study was carried out between November 2018 and November 2019 (with the exception of days around 4 May). We purposely included participants with different war experiences (i.e., elderly people who experienced WWII, veterans, refugees from conflict-zones who resettled in the Netherlands, second generation WWII affected, or people with other war-related experiences such as being a reporter in a war zone or being the partner of a traumatised veteran). This enabled us to make comparisons based on war experience, war-related PTS symptoms, and grief symptoms. Participants with war experience were recruited through elderly homes and home-care organisations, Dutch veteran societies, the Dutch Council for Refugees, counsellors from ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre, and the personal network of researchers. Several participants were in treatment for trauma-related problems while participating in the study. People without war experience were recruited via the researchers' own networks, social media, and an online platform of Utrecht University that allowed its students to participate in studies in return for course credits. No other rewards were granted for participation in the study. All participants received an information letter and offered written informed consent prior to the study. Most participants received an e-mail link to participate in the study via a secured online environment. For ethical reasons, most elderly participants, patients in treatment, and refugees participated while in the presence of a researcher, to be able to receive technical or emotional support when needed.

COMPARABILITY CHECK

The emotional response after the film was expected to be comparable to the emotional responses after watching the live broadcast of the National Commemoration on Remembrance Day. The majority of the Dutch population (76%) commemorates on Remembrance Day by following the National Commemoration via (online) television or radio (Demant et al., 2020), and thus views similar footage as the study group. Comparability was measured with two items in the questionnaire (administered to all participants watching the footage) and through a control-study during the National Commemoration on 4 May 2019. Participants who took part in the control study were recruited via the personal network of the researchers. They were instructed to watch the commemoration via the national broadcast at least between 7:50PM and 8:10PM and fill in a questionnaire directly before and after watching the commemoration. This part of the ceremony covers the same rituals as presented in the footage. One hour before the start of the commemoration, participants received a link to the first part of the online questionnaire via email. Then, at 8:15PM, after the instructed time of watching, a link was sent to the second part of the questionnaire. The sample for this control-study included 48 participants who all confirmed that they had watched the commemoration at least between 7:50PM and 8:10PM. To compare this control group ($n = 48$) with participants who watched the commemoration footage at a random day in the year, we extracted 48 participants from the footage sample ($n = 307$) matched for

age, gender, war experience and migration background. Characteristics of both groups are presented in the Results section.

MEASURES

Demographic variables included (i) gender, (ii) age in years, (iii) level of education (dichotomised as 0 = other than college/university and 1 = college/university), (iv) place of birth and parents' place of birth (dichotomised as 0 = no migration background and 1 = migration background [i.e. at least one parent or oneself born outside of the Netherlands]) and (v) war experience. For war experiences, five categories were included in the questionnaire, namely (a) experienced WWII, (b) experienced war as military personnel, (c) experienced war in country of origin (refugee), (d) other war experiences (including second generation WWII affected), and (e) no war experience. Answers were collapsed into two categories: 0 = war experience and 1 = no war experience.

Positive and negative emotions were measured at T0 and T1 using ten items from the expanded version of the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994). Five positive (i.e. inspired, happy, proud, concentrating, calm) and five negative (i.e. sad, downhearted, angry, afraid, ashamed) items were chosen, that were expected to represent important emotional responses to commemoration. Participants indicated on a visual analogue scale (VAS; ranging from 0 = not at all to 100 = a lot) how much they felt each emotion at that particular moment. A VAS scale is of most value when examining changes within individuals and can detect even small changes in emotions (Wewers & Lowe, 1990). Emotions were analysed both as separate items and total scores, calculated by summing the negative and positive items separately. Cronbach's alpha for positive (T0: $\alpha = .74$; T1: $\alpha = .66$) and negative emotions (T0: $\alpha = .86$; T1: $\alpha = .81$) were satisfactory (Nunnally, 1978).

Posttraumatic stress symptoms related to war experiences were measured at T0 using the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (PCL-5; Weathers et al., 2013; Dutch translation by Boeschoten et al., 2014). The questionnaire consists of 20 items. Participants indicated how much they had been bothered by these symptoms associated with their own war experience, or the war experience of a close relative, in the past month (e.g., 'Repeated, disturbing dreams of the stressful experience?'). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = not at all to 4 = extremely). Participants without war experience, or without problems related to the war experience of a close relative, did not fill in the questionnaire. Their total score was entered as 0. A cut-off score of ≥ 31 indicates probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Blevins et al., 2015). Research has shown good psychometric properties of the scale in veteran samples (Bovin et al., 2016). Cronbach's alpha in the present study was good, $\alpha = .96$ (Nunnally, 1978).

Grief reactions related to war-related losses were measured at T0 using the Traumatic Grief Inventory Self-Report (TGI-SR; Boelen & Smid, 2017). The questionnaire consists of 18 items, of which participants indicated how much they had been bothered by these symptoms associated with the death of a loved one during war, in the past month (e.g., 'I

had trouble to accept the loss'). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). A cut-off score of ≥ 61 indicates probable prolonged grief disorder (PGD; Boelen et al., 2019). Participants who did not have a war-related loss did not fill in this questionnaire, their total score was entered as 18. Research has shown good psychometric properties of the scale (Boelen et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .93.

Psychosocial factors (i.e. recognition, meaning making, support, expression, and personal memories) were measured at T1 with a self-constructed questionnaire based on previous literature [see 7] and expert consultation. The questionnaire consists of two items per factor, with a total of 10 items. On a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally not to 5 = extremely) participants scored how much all statements applied to them in response to watching the television broadcast. (I) Recognition was operationalised with two broad statements, to make the items applicable to participants with and without war experiences: 'I experience recognition for (indirect) victims of war' and 'I experience recognition for injustice in the Dutch society'. The inter-item correlation was .35, which falls in the recommended range of .15 - .50 for a reliable scale (Clark & Watson, 1995). (II) Support was operationalised as feelings of social support and feelings of connectedness. The two items representing this factor were 'I feel connected to people around me' and 'I feel supported by people around me'. The inter-item correlation was .59, which is slightly above the recommended range (Clark & Watson, 1995). (III) Meaning making was measured with two items that correspond closely to the items other researchers (e.g., Holland et al., 2006) have used to measure meaning in a quantitative manner. The first item deals with sense-making ('I can make sense of, or give meaning to, war experiences'), the second question taps on benefit-finding ('Despite the horrors of war, I have been able to find any benefit from what happened in the war'). The inter-item correlation was .31. (IV) Expression was measured through the items 'I experience safety and space to allow my emotions and feelings related to war' and 'I can express emotions that I cannot express in everyday situations'. The inter-item correlation was .35. (V) Personal memories were measured with the items 'Personal memories related to war emerge' and 'I have to think about the tragedies that I or my loved ones have experienced during war'. The inter-item correlation was .50.

Comparability was measured with two items. The first item, 'Does your emotional response to the television footage you watched match your reaction to commemoration on May 4?', was scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = much less intense to 5 = much more intense, including the option of not applicable because of no experience with commemoration. The second item, 'During the two-minute silence in the television fragment, did you commemorate the same way as you would during commemoration on May 4?', was scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = to a very high degree, including 'not applicable' and a comment section to explain the answer.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 27.0 (IBM Corp., 2020). Missing values of

one participant with one missing value on the TGI-SR and another participant with one missing value on the PCL-5, were replaced using person mean imputation (Enders, 2003). Questionnaires with more than 15% missing values were removed from the analyses. A sensitivity power analysis in G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) for a linear multiple regression with one dependent and six independent variables, an alpha of .05 and a power of 0.80, indicated that our sample of $n = 307$ (after listwise deletion $n = 281$) was sufficient to detect a small effect size of $f^2 = 0.05$ (Cohen, 1988). Smaller effect sizes were deemed irrelevant for this study.

To perform the comparability check, differences between the footage subsample ($n = 48$) and the control group ($n = 48$) for age, positive and negative emotions, and psychosocial factors were analysed with mixed ANOVA models and two-tailed independent samples t -tests. Outcomes of the two comparability items of the total footage sample ($n = 307$) were reported based on descriptive statistics.

Prior to addressing the aims of the study, a principal axis factor analysis was carried out to investigate whether negative and positive emotions were indeed two separate factors in our dataset. Furthermore, Pearson correlations were reported for relationships between all studied variables, i.e., individual characteristics, mental health symptoms, psychosocial factors, and emotions.

To address our first aim, we used descriptive statistics and two-tailed paired-sample t -tests to examine the change in positive and negative emotions. To correct for multiple testing, a significance level of .01 was applied. The assumption of normality was met. Regarding our second and third aim, we conducted linear hierarchical regression analyses based on the residualised change method. A significance level of .05 was applied. Assumptions for normality, linearity, multicollinearity, independent errors, and homoscedasticity were met. Negative emotions at T1 were entered as dependent variable and negative emotions at T0 were added in the first block as control variable. In three separate hierarchical regressions, the second block consisted of individual characteristics, mental health symptoms, and psychosocial factors, respectively. In the fourth regression, all variables that were significant independent variables in the prior models were entered simultaneously. A similar series of four hierarchical regressions was conducted with positive emotions at T1 as dependent variable and positive emotions at T0 as control variable.

RESULTS

SAMPLE

Characteristics of participants in the total footage sample ($n = 307$), the paired subsample watching the footage ($n = 48$) and the control group watching the commemoration live on Remembrance Day ($n = 48$) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants in subsamples

Characteristics		Total footage sample (<i>n</i> = 307)		Footage sub-sample (<i>n</i> = 48)		Control group (<i>n</i> = 48)	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Sex	Male	118	38.4	11	22.9	11	22.9
	Female	189	61.6	37	77.1	37	77.1
Education	Other than college/university	185	60.3	42	87.5	28	58.3
	College/university	122	39.7	6	12.5	20	41.7
Background	Migration background ¹	84	27.4	48	100	48	100
	No migration background	223	72.6	0	0	0	0
War experience	Yes	121	39.4	44	91.7	44	91.7
	No	185	60.3	4	8.3	4	8.3

¹Self or (one of the) parent(s) born in a country other than the Netherlands.

COMPARABILITY CHECK

On average, participants of the control group (*n* = 48), who watched the commemoration live on Remembrance Day, watched for 39 minutes (*SD* = 11.55). This is longer compared to the footage group who saw a film of 16:43 minutes. No significant difference in age was found between the footage subsample (*n* = 48, *M* = 27.71, *SD* = 14.26 years) and the control group (*M* = 29.69, *SD* = 14.65 years), $t(94) = 0.67, p = .50$. A mixed ANOVA with negative emotions as within subject variable (measured at T0 vs. T1) and group as between subject variable (control group vs. footage subsample) revealed no significant (group by time) interaction, $F(1, 93) = 2.11, p = .15$. Thus, the change in negative emotions was not different between the footage subsample and the control group. A mixed ANOVA with positive emotions as within subject variable and group as between subject variable (control group vs. footage subsample) revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 92) = 6.13, p = .02$. Positive emotions decreased after watching the film in the footage subsample, whereas positive emotions increased after watching the live broadcast of the National Commemoration in the control group, although these changes were not significant ($t(47) = 1.69, p = .10$ and $t(45) = -1.89, p = .07$ for the footage subsample and control group, respectively).

Concerning the psychosocial factors, independent samples *t*-tests showed no significant difference between the groups in expression ($t(94) = 0.99, p = .32$), meaning making ($t(94) = 0.98, p = .33$), recognition ($t(94) = 0.07, p = .95$), or personal memories ($t(94) = 0.27, p = .79$). This indicates that these factors are experienced in the same way after watching the film of the National Commemoration on a random day in the year, compared to watching the live broadcast of the National commemoration on Remembrance Day. A significant difference was found in support. The footage subsample experienced less support compared to the control group (*M* = 6.10, *SD* = 1.57 vs. *M* = 6.81, *SD* = 1.45, $t(94) = 2.29, p = .02$).

In the total footage group (*n* = 307), participants rated their emotional response on average as comparable to their reaction on Remembrance Day (*M* = 2.74, *SD* = 0.85 on a scale with anchors 1 = much less intense and 5 = much more intense). Eleven participants

had no experience with commemoration and 23 participants did not fill in the question. On average, participants commemorated during the two-minute silence in the same way as they would on Remembrance Day ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.05$ on a scale with anchors 1 = not at all and 5 = to a very high degree). Eleven participants had no experience with commemoration and 24 participants did not fill in the question.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

The full principal axis factor analysis is presented in the supporting information (S1 Appendix). Results indicate that positive and negative emotions represented two separate factors in our dataset. Table 2 presents all Pearson correlations between the predictors and outcome variables that are included in the regression analyses. On average, participants experienced few PTS symptoms related to war experiences ($M = 6.72$, $SD = 14.28$, min. = 0, max. = 76), 9.8% of the participants scored above the cut-off score indicating possible PTSD. Grief reactions were very low, $M = 20.74$, $SD = 7.56$, min. = 18, max. = 60. No participant scored above the cut-off score indicating possible PGD.

EMOTIONAL CHANGE

Table 3 shows all mean scores for negative and positive emotions at T0 and T1, including the significance of change. Overall, negative emotions significantly increased after watching the commemoration with a large effect size, $t(301) = -15.41$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.83$. Sadness increased with a large effect size, whereas the emotions downhearted and angry increased moderate and ashamed and afraid increased to a small extent. With an average score of 166.27 ($SD = 101.68$) at T1, this score was still relatively low, considering a maximum score of 500. Positive emotions significantly decreased over time with a small effect size, $t(287) = 4.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.28$, but remained higher compared to the negative emotions at T1 ($M = 284.65$, $SD = 80.40$). Overall, happiness decreased with a large effect size and calmness decreased moderately, concentration did not change significantly, and the emotions inspired and proud increased with a small effect size after the commemoration.

Table 2. Pearson correlations between outcome variables (positive and negative emotions T1) and predictor variables ($n = 272$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 T0 positive emotions	1.00														
2 T1 positive emotions	.55***	1.00													
3 T0 negative emotions	-.24***	-.16**	1.00												
4 T1 negative emotions	-.14*	-.13*	.57***	1.00											
5 Personal memories	.02	.09	.28***	.26***	1.00										
6 Support	.23***	.36***	-.01	.09	.28***	1.00									
7 Recognition	.14*	.30***	-.17**	-.02	.13*	.45***	1.00								
8 Meaning making	.26***	.38***	-.08	-.04	.21***	.45***	.42***	1.00							
9 Expression	.08	.17*	.15*	.32***	.47***	.49***	.39***	.43***	1.00						
10 PTS symptoms	-.21***	-.14*	.54***	.41***	.46***	-.12	-.22***	-.08	.13*	1.00					
11 Grief reactions	.02	-.02	.28***	.17**	.32***	.09	-.05	.07	.20***	.45***	1.00				
12 Age	.07	-.01	.16**	.09	.45***	.04	-.17**	-.08	.14*	.34***	.25***	1.00			
13 Gender (f=female)	-.21***	-.19**	-.13*	.04	-.11	.02	.10	-.15*	-.10	-.23***	-.17**	-.38***	1.00		
14 Migration (f=yes)	.05	.04	.21***	.09	.12	-.07	-.16**	-.03	.02	.18**	.20**	.05	-.01	1.00	
15 War experience (f=no)	-.02	.06	-.36***	-.13*	-.51***	-.08	.21***	-.04	-.20***	-.59***	-.45***	-.71***	.36***	-.25***	1.00

Note. Listwise deletion. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Negative and positive emotions before and after watching the National Commemoration, and significance of the change

Emotion	M (SD) T0	M (SD) T1	Mchange	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Sad	19.43 (23.38)	49.50 (28.66)	+ 33.47	-17.40	304	.001	1.15
Downhearted	20.61 (33.33)	39.80 (27.25)	+ 19.19	-11.94	304	.001	0.63
Angry	14.70 (22.42)	30.13 (28.22)	+ 15.43	-10.09	306	.001	0.61
Afraid	17.63 (23.65)	23.01 (23.82)	+ 5.38	-4.67	305	.001	0.23
Ashamed	15.41 (21.75)	24.79 (26.67)	+ 12.40	-6.12	306	.001	0.39
Total negative emotions	86.59 (90.50)	166.27 (101.68)	+ 79.68	-15.41	301	.001	0.83
Inspired	51.97 (27.06)	59.37 (25.04)	+ 7.40	-4.27	290	.001	0.28
Happy	62.30 (22.08)	41.63 (24.91)	- 20.68	13.47	304	.001	0.89
Proud	54.27 (28.67)	59.18 (26.97)	+ 4.91	-2.93	304	.004	0.18
Concentrating	67.52 (22.67)	64.49 (22.38)	- 3.03	2.27	304	.024	0.13
Calm	72.57 (22.41)	59.86 (25.57)	- 12.72	15.54	305	.001	0.53
Total positive emotions	308.08 (85.16)	284.65 (80.40)	- 23.43	4.90	287	.001	0.28

Associations of individual characteristics with emotions post-commemoration

To achieve our second aim, four linear hierarchical regressions (regression 1-4) were run with positive and negative emotions at T1 consecutively treated as dependent variables. In all analyses, emotions at T0 were entered in block 1 as a control variable.

Independent variables in regression 1 and 2 were four individual characteristics, namely age, gender, migration background and war experience. Negative emotions at T0 explained 32% of the variance in negative emotions at T1; A higher age, female gender and having no war experience predicted more negative emotions at T1 and together explained an additional 2%. Positive emotions at T0 explained 27% of the variance in positive emotions at T1; Male gender and having no war experience predicted more positive emotions at T1 and together explained an additional 2%.

Associations of mental health symptoms with emotions post-commemoration

Independent variables in regression 3 and 4 were two mental health predictors, namely PTS symptoms and grief reactions. Negative emotions at T0 explained 33% of the variance in negative emotions at T1; PTS symptoms predicted more negative emotions at T1 and explained an additional 1%. Positive emotions at T0 explained 28% of the variance in positive emotions at T1; PTS symptoms or grief reactions did not explain unique variance.

Associations of psychosocial factors with emotions post-commemoration

Table 4 shows mean scores for psychosocial factors that participants experienced while watching the commemoration. Almost half of the participants experienced recognition 'a lot' to 'extremely' through the commemoration. One third of the participants experienced support 'a lot' to 'extremely'. Meaning making, expression and personal memories were on average experienced moderately.

Table 4. Mechanisms that are experienced during the commemoration

Experience	min, max	M	SD	<i>n</i>	% of score > 8 (= a lot / extremely)
Recognition	2, 10	7.01	1.80	300	43.9
Support	2, 10	6.20	2.07	300	29.3
Meaning making	2, 10	5.39	1.97	299	16.0
Expression	2, 10	5.41	1.81	300	13.7
Personal memories	2, 10	5.14	2.26	301	18.9

To test our third aim, two linear hierarchical regressions (regression 5-6) were run with positive and negative emotions at T1 consecutively treated as dependent variables. Emotions at T0 were entered in block 1 as a control variable. Independent variables in regression 5 and 6 were five psychosocial predictors, namely recognition, support, meaning making, expression, and personal memories. Negative emotions at T0 explained 32% of the variance in negative emotions at T1; Expression predicted more negative emotions at T1 and explained an additional 6%. Positive emotions at T0 explained 30% of the variance in positive emotions at T1; Recognition, support and meaning making predicted more positive emotions at T1 and together explained an additional 9%.

In the final regression models (7 and 8), all significant variables from the individual characteristics, mental health symptoms and psychosocial factors were included in the equations. Negative emotions at T0, a higher age, female gender, having no war experience, more PTS symptoms and more expression predicted negative emotions at T1. Together these factors explained 44% of the variance in negative emotions at T1, of which 12% was added by the predictors in block 2.

Positive emotions at T0, male gender, having no war experience, more support and more meaning making predicted positive emotions at T1. Together, these factors explained 41% of the variance in positive emotions at T1, of which 11% was added by the predictors in block 2. Outcomes of all regression analyses are summarised in Table 5. Full results of the regression analyses, including estimated regression coefficients, their standard error, p-values, and confidence intervals can be found in the supporting information (S2 Appendix).

Table 5. Summary of linear hierarchical regression analyses predicting negative and positive emotions at T1

	1 Individual characteristics		2 Mental health symptoms		3 Psychosocial factors		4 Significant variables	
	Negative emotions (n = 301), β	Positive emotions (n = 287), β	Negative emotions (n = 296), β	Positive emotions (n = 282), β	Negative emotions (n = 293), β	Positive emotions (n = 279), β	Negative emotions (n = 293), β	Positive emotions (n = 278), β
Block 1: Emotions								
T0 negative emotions	.57***		.57***		.57***		.56***	
T0 positive emotions		.52***		.53***		.55***		.55***
Adjusted R ²	.32***	.27***	.33***	.28***	.32***	.30***	.32***	.30***
Block 2: Predictors								
T0 negative emotions	.60***		.48***		.51***		.48***	
T0 positive emotions		.50***		.52***		.46***		.43***
Age	.17*	.01					.18**	
Gender (f=female)	.13*	-.14*					.12*	-.14**
Migration (f=yes)	.03	-.01						
War (f=no)	.15*	.16*					.33***	.12*
PTS symptoms			.18**	-.04			.28***	
Grief reactions			-.03	.00				
Recognition						.13*		.10
Support						-.01		.17**
Meaning making						-.10		.14*
Expression						.30***		.27***
Personal memories					.01	.02		
Δ Adjusted R ²	.02*	.02*	.01*	.00	.06***	.09***	.12***	.11***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Commemorative events, organised in the aftermath of war or large-scale violence, potentially have an emotional impact on those who are attending. Positive as well as negative emotions can be kindled by these collective events of remembrance. Building on a recent review of Mitima-Verloop et al. (2020), we studied several individual characteristics and psychosocial factors that might influence these individual emotional responses. Participants in our study watched a part of the broadcast of the Dutch National Commemoration and filled in a survey before and after the film.

Concerning our first aim, a change in emotions after the commemoration was observed, as expected. This confirmed our assumption that, at least at short-term, watching a commemoration has an emotional impact on people, as previous literature has shown for (physically) attending commemorative events (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020). Negative emotions, especially sadness, increased after watching the commemoration and positive emotions, especially happiness, decreased. Two positive emotions however, namely inspiration and pride, increased after watching the commemoration. This corresponds well with the research of Watkins and Bastian (2019) among participants of Memorial Day in the United States. Inconsistent with Durkheim's theory (1912) and Paez et al. (2015), we did not find an overall increase in positive emotions after watching the commemoration. This can possibly be explained by the more individual experience of participants, watching the commemoration alone, or the nonsynchronous experience, watching the commemoration on a random day and not at the same time as others during Remembrance Day. The control group of participants on Remembrance Day did experience increased positive emotions and more support compared to the group watching the footage on a random day. This could be interpreted as a support of Durkheim's theory about the linkage between participation in collective gatherings, enhancement of social identity and reinforcement of positive affect.

Findings in relation to our second aim revealed that only some of the individual characteristics were related to the emotional response after watching the commemoration. As expected, older age and female gender were predictive of more negative emotions. Female gender was also predictive of less positive emotions. Partially contrary to our expectations, having no war experience was related to more negative emotions and more positive emotions after watching the commemoration, while taking initial emotions into account. Moreover, we did not find a relationship between migration background and emotions. These findings indicate that commemorations have the potential to evoke emotions among different attendees, regardless of (cultural) background. It suggests that commemorations rekindle emotions of war affected, but may also have contagious effects by eliciting emotions among those who listen and observe (Rimé et al., 2011). Notably, and in line with prior studies (e.g., Burnell et al., 2010), PTS symptoms related to war experiences did predict increased negative emotions after watching, signifying the emotional and possible distressing impact of commemorations for those struggling to cope with their

past experiences. Taken together, the studied individual characteristics and mental health symptoms explained only a very small degree of positive and negative emotions after watching, while controlling for initial emotions.

In regard to the third aim, we studied five psychosocial factors, namely recognition, meaning making, support, expression and personal memories, and their relationship with emotional responses after commemoration. On average, all factors were endorsed 'moderately' to 'a lot', indicating that these factors are experienced to a certain degree by most participants while commemorating. The experience of personal memories related to war was not related to positive nor negative emotions. This is in line with our finding that war experience does not lead to increased emotions while commemorating. Frijda (1997) stated that, in the context of WWII remembrance, memories are experienced as vivid and do not need a commemoration to come to the fore even 50 years after war. Experiencing more recognition, support and meaning making was associated with more positive emotions after the commemoration, and unrelated to the increase of negative emotions. This suggests that these kind of supporting factors do not reduce emotions such as sadness or downheartedness but can moderate the impact of these feelings. Solomon and Stone (2002) describe the phenomenon of mixed feelings, meaning not only experiencing more than one emotion at the same time, but also experiencing emotions that are mixed in itself with both positive and negative connotations. Our results indicate that the degree in which participants experience support and connectedness, recognition for war victims in specific or injustice in general, or can make meaning through commemoration contributes to a positive and valuable commemoration despite feelings of distress.

Inconsistent with Durkheim's theory (1912), expression or sharing of emotions was not associated with positive emotions. Only negative emotions were related to expression; participants who felt more openness to express their feelings and thoughts also experienced more negative emotions. An important difference between the present study and Durkheim's work is the collective nature of his theory, explaining the enhancement of common feelings and shared beliefs in contrast to individual emotions. Rimé et al. (2011) concluded that sharing an emotional experience may not reduce the emotional upset, but may lead to important cognitive and social benefits. Temporary reactivation of emotions is instrumental in eliciting emotional fusion among participants, which brings them closer together. The resulting empathic process and social integration has emotional, social, and cognitive consequences that seem to buffer the destabilising effects of emotional events. In addition to social integration, our research suggests that other processes, like support, meaning making and recognition, also buffer the possible distressing effect of commemoration.

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the individual characteristics, psychosocial factors that develop within social and societal contexts were more strongly associated with emotional responses. Social support, recognition and also meaning making are not intra-personal happenings, but social processes (Wojtkowiak, 2018). These results underline

the importance of looking at the societal context when studying the impact of collective commemoration on individual responses. Social theories of trauma highlight how memories are formed within a collective context (Halbwachs, 1968) and argue that trauma is a socially mediated attribution, constructed by social groups and national societies (Alexander, 2004). From a clinical psychological perspective, it is relevant to look at individual emotions. However, individual emotions are formed in a broad social context (Wojtkowiak, 2018) and especially the societal context needs more attention when studying war-related trauma and recovery processes in the field of psychotraumatology (Ajdukovic, 2013; Maercker & Hecker, 2016; Olf et al., 2019).

LIMITATIONS, STRENGTHS, AND FURTHER STUDIES

Several limitations of this study should be taken into account. First, participants who did not watch the film, for example out of disinterest or overwhelming emotions, were excluded from the analyses. This may have limited the variety in emotional responses. Second, the emotional response was only evaluated directly after watching the commemoration and did not reveal anything about the impact in the hours or days after the commemoration. Third, the results should be interpreted and generalised to more natural settings of commemorations with caution. Participants in the control study differed from the footage study in terms of war experiences. No participants with war experiences were included in the control study. Especially the emotional response of people with severe mental health symptoms related to their war experiences could be different in reality compared to the study setting. The comparability check provided some evidence that watching the film was comparable to watching the commemoration broadcast live on Remembrance Day in terms of emotional response and experience of psychosocial factors. However, watching live on Remembrance Day was experienced as slightly more supporting and elicited more positive emotions. Mimicking a collective gathering merely by watching video footage is limited, especially because the social circumstances are often different from more natural settings (Paez et al., 2015).

Despite these limitations, the quasi-experimental design of the study is unique in the context of commemoration and the comparability check showed promising results to continue studying the impact of such events in an experimental setting. Another strength of the present study is the use of a comprehensive approach, exploring both negative and positive emotions in relation to various individual and psychosocial factors. This provided deeper insights in the associations and importance of these aspects in relation to each other.

Future research should further examine the potential emotional, cognitive and social benefits of commemoration, including social integration, support, meaning making and recognition. A more qualitative in-depth study of these concepts is needed, for example focusing on what recognition means to those who experienced war, and those who did not. Or how participants describe the meaning they attribute to experiences of war. As our study

did not diversify in war experiences and did not find a relation between emotional response and cultural background, further studies might elaborate more on how commemorations are experienced among participants with different war experiences and backgrounds. Furthermore, it is necessary to repeat this study in commemorations with different (political) contexts, such as in Bosnia where history is contested (Pollack, 2003), or in Rwanda where some feel forced to commemorate (Ibreck, 2012), to compare emotional responses and influencing aspects.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present research gives deeper insights in what might influence an individual's emotional response to commemoration. It revealed an increase of negative emotions and decrease of positive emotions in the immediate response to commemoration. Individual characteristics seem to contribute to a limited extent to the emotional response, although we should be aware of the possible distress for people with severe war-related stress symptoms. Especially clinical practitioners working with war affected patients do well to give attention to the possible stress, but also the supporting aspects, that might be evoked around important dates of commemoration. Although more research is needed, commemoration might be a form of guided exposure, to bring back memories and emotions in a canalised and secure setting and as such be a part of trauma focused treatments.

The experience of meaning making, support and recognition in commemorating may not reduce negative emotions, but buffer emotional distress and contribute to important cognitive and social benefits. These factors develop within a societal context, which should gain more attention in the field of psychotraumatology. Those involved in organising commemorative events should aim to create such a setting in which these psychosocial factors can be maximised and thereby contribute to a valuable commemoration.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B. Mitima-Verloop: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

T.T.M. Mooren: Conceptualisation, writing – review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition

P.A. Boelen: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, supervision

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

S1 Data

S2 Data Comparability Check

All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files, published online at <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0284763#sec021>

S1 Appendix. Factor analysis

A principal axis factor analysis was conducted on the 10 items with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .82 ('meritorious' according to Hutcheson & Sofroniou (1999)), and all KMO values for individual items were greater than .70, which is well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2013). An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each factor in the data. Two factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 49.10% of the variance. Table A1 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same factor suggest that factor 1 represents negative emotions and factor 2 represents positive emotions.

S1 Table. Summary of exploratory factor analysis results for emotions ($n = 290$)

Item	Rotated factor loadings	
	Negative emotions	Positive emotions
Sad	.75	-.01
Downhearted	.76	-.02
Angry	.78	-.05
Afraid	.73	-.04
Ashamed	.64	.14
Inspired	.15	.59
Happy	-.29	.71
Proud	.14	.61
Concentrating	-.12	.60
Calm	-.40	.47
Eigenvalues	3.37	1.54
% of variance	33.71	15.38
α	.86	.74

Note. Factor loadings > .40 appear in bold.

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S2 Appendix. Regression analyses

S2.1 Table. Regression 1; Individual characteristics predicting negative emotions at T1 ($n = 301$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.32***						
T0 negative emotions		0.64	0.05	.57	<.001	0.53	0.74
Model 2	0.34***						
T0 negative emotions		0.68	0.06	.60	<.001	0.57	0.79
Age		0.75	0.31	.17	.02	0.14	1.36
Gender (1=female)		26.18	10.72	.13	.02	5.08	47.29
Migration background (1=yes)		6.72	11.63	.03	.56	-16.16	29.60
War experience (1=no)		32.08	15.62	.15	.04	1.33	62.83

*** $p < .001$.

S2.2 Table. Regression 2; Individual characteristics predicting positive emotions at T1 ($n = 287$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.27***						
T0 positive emotions		0.49	0.05	.52	<.001	0.40	0.59
Model 2	0.29***						
T0 positive emotions		0.47	0.05	.50	<.001	0.37	0.56
Age		0.02	0.26	.01	.94	-0.50	0.53
Gender (1=female)		-22.92	9.21	-.14	.01	-41.05	-4.79
Migration background (1=yes)		-1.20	9.80	-.01	.90	-20.49	18.09
War experience (1=no)		26.83	12.63	.16	.03	1.98	51.69

*** $p < .001$.

S2.3 Table. Regression 3; Mental health symptoms predicting negative emotions at T1 ($n = 296$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.33***						
T0 negative emotions		0.64	0.05	.57	<.001	0.53	0.74
Model 2	0.34***						
T0 negative emotions		0.54	0.06	.48	<.001	0.42	0.66
PTS symptoms		1.31	0.44	.18	.003	0.45	2.18
Grief reactions		-0.40	0.76	-.03	.60	-1.90	1.10

*** $p < .001$.

S2.4 Table. Regression 4; Mental health symptoms predicting positive emotions at T1 ($n = 282$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.28***						
T0 positive emotions		0.50	0.05	.53	<.001	0.41	0.59
Model 2	0.27***						
T0 positive emotions		0.49	0.05	.52	<.001	0.40	0.59
PTS symptoms		-0.20	0.33	-.04	.55	-0.86	0.45
Grief reactions		-0.04	0.63	.00	.95	-1.29	1.20

*** $p < .001$.**S2.5 Table.** Regression 5; Psychosocial factors predicting negative emotions at T1 ($n = 293$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.32***						
T0 negative emotions		0.63	0.05	.57	<.001	0.52	0.73
Model 2							
T0 negative emotions	0.38***	0.57	0.06	.51	<.001	0.46	0.68
Recognition		-0.45	3.08	-.01	.88	-6.51	5.61
Support		-0.68	2.75	-.01	.81	-6.09	4.73
Meaning making		-5.10	2.80	-.10	.07	-10.61	0.41
Expression		16.33	3.38	.30	<.001	9.68	22.98
Personal memories		0.42	2.40	.01	.86	-4.31	5.14

*** $p < .001$.**S2.6 Table.** Regression 6; Psychosocial factors predicting positive emotions at T1 ($n = 279$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.30***						
T0 positive emotions		0.52	0.05	.55	<.001	0.43	0.61
Model 2							
T0 positive emotions	0.39***	0.43	0.05	.46	<.001	0.34	0.52
Recognition		5.66	2.41	.13	.02	0.91	10.41
Support		5.82	2.26	.15	.01	1.37	10.27
Meaning making		7.14	2.30	.18	.002	2.60	11.67
Expression		-3.33	2.67	-.08	.21	-8.59	1.93
Personal memories		0.71	1.90	.02	.71	-3.03	4.45

*** $p < .001$.

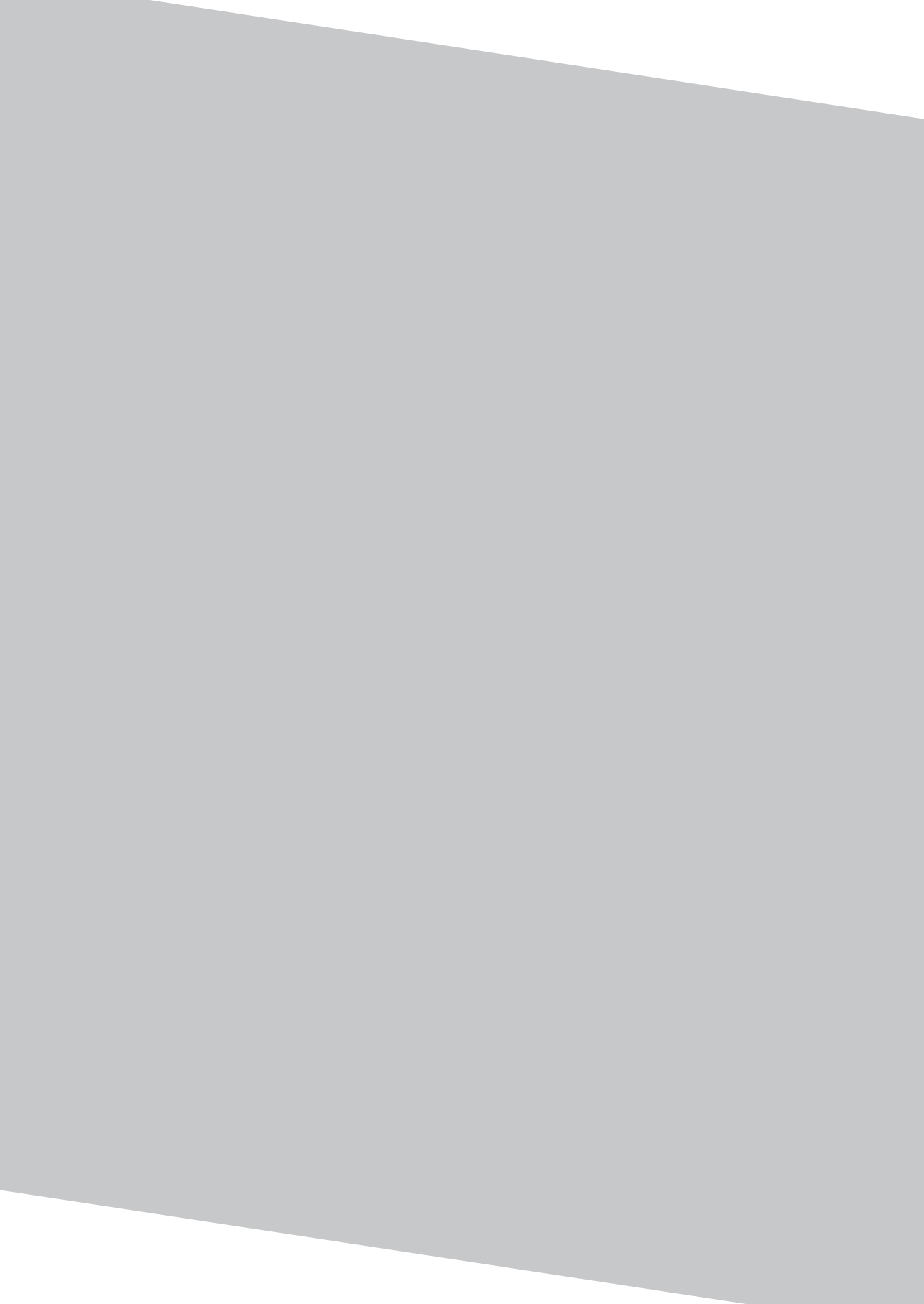
S2.7 Table. Regression 7; Significant variables from the individual characteristics, mental health symptoms and psychosocial factors predicting negative emotions at T1 ($n = 293$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.32***						
T0 negative emotions		0.63	0.05	.56	<.001	0.52	0.73
Model 2	0.44***						
T0 negative emotions		0.53	0.06	.48	<.001	0.42	0.65
Age		0.80	0.28	.18	.005	0.25	1.36
Gender (1=female)		25.62	9.88	.12	.01	6.17	45.07
War experience (1=no)		69.04	15.28	.33	<.001	38.96	99.12
PTS symptoms		2.01	0.44	.28	<.001	1.15	2.87
Expression		14.87	2.47	.27	<.001	10.00	19.74

*** $p < .001$.**S2.8 Table.** Regression 8; Significant variables from the individual characteristics, mental health symptoms and psychosocial factors predicting positive emotions at T1 ($n = 278$)

Predictor	R^2_{adj}	B	SE	β	p	95% CI	
						LL	UL
Model 1	0.30***						
T0 positive emotions		0.52	0.05	.55	<.001	0.43	0.61
Model 2	0.41***						
T0 positive emotions		0.41	0.05	.43	<.001	0.32	0.50
Gender (1=female)		-22.42	8.48	-.14	.01	-39.11	-5.73
War experience (1=no)		20.45	8.57	.12	.02	3.57	37.33
Recognition		4.26	2.47	.10	.09	-0.60	9.13
Support		6.44	2.16	.17	.003	2.18	10.70
Meaning making		5.79	2.25	.14	.01	1.36	10.23

*** $p < .001$.



The post-war generation remembers: A mixed-method study exploring children's attitudes towards World War II commemoration

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how children, a post-war generation without direct connection to war, relate to the commemoration of World War II (WWII). Seven group interviews were held among pupils in the Netherlands, aged 9 to 18 ($n = 55$) and, subsequently, questionnaires were administered to other pupils ($n = 374$). Results revealed that children are affected by the collective narrative of WWII, and connect to commemoration on a social and emotional level. Comprehension, tangibility, inclusiveness and a right atmosphere are key elements to appreciate a commemoration. Insights from this study may help societies practice more appealing remembrances with post-war generations.

KEYWORDS

Children, Commemoration, Comprehension, Learning lessons, World War II

INTRODUCTION

Up to the present day, 76 years after its ending, World War II (WWII) is still vividly remembered in many European countries. New monuments are still being built and the number of people attending commemoration ceremonies to remember WWII is even growing in the Netherlands (Claus, 2021; Holsappel et al., 2018). At the same time, national and local parties involved in the organisation of WWII remembrance are concerned about the continuation by next generations. They aim to involve more children, for example through school projects and by creating alternative forms of remembrance (Holsappel et al., 2018). But what does it mean to this third and even fourth generation since WWII to remember a war, that, sometimes not even their grandparents experienced? Why and how would they prefer to remember and commemorate this period in history? In this study, it is explored how children in the age of 9 to 18, a post-war generation without a direct connection to war, relate to WWII commemoration. Insights gained can help to understand what meaningful commemorations constitute for young, post-war generations.

REASONS TO COMMEMORATE

Commemoration refers to an action that arises from an 'intention to keep the memory of a person or a thing alive' (Bomba, 2016, p. 7). It involves rituals; symbolic activities that are performed to achieve a desired outcome (Norton & Gino, 2014). Winter and Sivan (1999) argue that the subject of remembrance is so vast that no discipline can claim absolute authority in this field and Kansteiner (2002) advocates to enlarge understanding of the reception of memories. Therefore, we take an individual psychological approach, focusing on the thoughts, motivations and attitudes of children towards commemoration.

Most of the current young people in western European societies, do not have a direct connection to WWII. Even among families with specific family stories of WWII, memories are mostly decreasing between the second and third generation (Cordonnier et al., 2020). According to the theory of Assmann (2010), we live in an era in which communicative memory, based on daily conversations about memories that are still 'alive', turns into cultural memory, in which history is transferred by monuments and rituals. This transition raises concerns in society about the continuation of remembrance of WWII by next generations, who are often perceived as those who 'bear the responsibility of carrying memory forward' (Pennell, 2018, p. 84). In many western European societies, WWII functions as a moral compass; in educational settings, museums, but also in commemorations, the current narrative about WWII is aimed at developing empathy, identification and moralisation through personal stories and emotional experiences (Hondius, 2010; Ribbens & Captain, 2011; Savenije, 2014; Somers, 2014). Furthermore, remembrance of both World Wars among children is often connected to citizenship education; remembering to learn the lessons from the past (Pennell, 2016), and citizenship values such as tolerance (Cowan & Maitles, 2007), democracy and equality (Starratt et al., 2017). Several scholars have raised concerns about

the way the World Wars are portrayed in education and remembrance culture, engaging children emotionally with the past, but limiting critical questioning about diversities and complexities connected to war (e.g. Danilova & Dolan, 2020; Pennell, 2018; Sheehan & Davison, 2017). Pennell and Sheehan (2020) argue that children are socialised with a particular way of remembering and are often passive recipients of memory, with limited agency in how to participate in rituals of remembrance. Several studies reveal that the majority of young people highly supports remembrance activities, but they cannot clearly articulate why this is so (Imber & Fraser, 2011; Pennell, 2018).

RESHAPING COMMEMORATION?

These critical notes stress the importance to further study the reasons for children to engage in commemoration, but also how they would prefer to do this when given the opportunity to think 'out of the box'. Children not only passively adopt adults' views but are able to participate in the construction of memory (Habashi, 2013), and engage in a critical and nuanced way in national remembrance when given the opportunity (Sheehan & Davison, 2017). However, as noted, children have a distance to WWII in terms of time, experiences and family stories. Moreover, they have different perceptions, understanding and interests compared to adults. Therefore, it could be expected that children have a different opinion on how they want to remember WWII.

WWII COMMEMORATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch remembrance culture differs from most other western European countries due to the fact that the Netherlands were not involved in the First World War (WWI). Therefore, a collective remembrance culture to remember war victims started only after WWII. Compared to WWI, more civilians lost their lives in WWII. This is reflected in Dutch commemorations, which have a less militaristic and more civil character. Besides, the quick military defeat in 1940 and the liberation by foreign armies in 1944–1945 did not leave Dutch citizens with much pride for their army during WWII. Instead of military parades, the heroic deeds of resistance fighters and later the personal suffering of civilians are central in commemorations (Raaijmakers, 2014). There are numerous days in which WWII is commemorated in the Netherlands. One of the oldest days in which most people participate is Remembrance Day, held every year on the 4th of May since 1946. Throughout the country, events of commemoration are locally organised. Traditional rituals are connected to these events, including two minutes of silence at 8pm, laying wreaths, singing the national anthem, and a military trumpet call. Several ceremonies are broadcasted live on television. Remembrance Day is followed by the celebration of freedom on the 5th of May (Liberation Day). The National Committee for 4 and 5 May, a state-led organisation, has the task to give direction to commemoration and keep the memory of WWII alive. According to their official memorandum, all civilians and military personnel are commemorated who, in the Kingdom of the Netherlands or elsewhere, died or were killed since the beginning of WWII, in situations of war or in peacekeeping

missions. Even though Remembrance Day is broader than only commemoration of WWII victims, in practice the focus of this day is remembrance of WWII. In this article, we study perceptions towards various WWII commemorations, including Remembrance Day.

In Dutch society, the support for Remembrance Day is widespread and has been stable over the past twenty years. More than 80% of Dutch citizens appreciate this day as (very) important and adhere to the two-minute silence. Many children support Remembrance Day as well, although slightly less than adults do, referring to the commemoration more often as 'important' rather than 'very important' (De Regt, 2019). One of the main objectives of the National Committee is to introduce children to the traditions of commemoration and celebration. In the Dutch society, various attempts have been made to involve children in the activities of commemoration. Organisers of local commemorations add new rituals to the ceremony, such as dance or drama performances, in order to attract children and teenagers (Heemelaar, 2020). Also, children are reached through school projects, such as the programme 'Adopt a monument', in which pupils learn about and/or organise a commemoration at a local WWII monument (De Groot -Reuvekamp & Wilschut, 2019).

AIM OF THE STUDY

The current study was motivated by questions of Dutch national and local parties involved in the organisation of WWII remembrances on how to attract and involve children in commemorations. Therefore, we examined considerations and motivations of children to engage in WWII commemoration. We employed an open and explorative approach, putting children's voices in the centre. Four research questions were formulated:

1. What experiences do children have with WWII commemoration and how important is it for them to commemorate? In line with prior research (Coopmans et al., 2016, 2017; De Regt, 2019), we expected that children had experience with WWII commemoration, associated with family involvement and prior lessons about commemoration at school, and rate the commemoration as important.
2. What reasons do children give to engage in, or disengage from commemoration? Literature gives insights in possible reasons to commemorate but, to the authors' knowledge, no research has investigated the reasons from a child's point of view in the Dutch context.
3. Which forms of commemoration, for example which specific rituals or elements, are valued by children?
4. Do the elements that children appreciate contribute to a positive evaluation of a commemoration? It was expected that the elements from the third question would predict the overall appreciation of the commemoration children were involved in.

We followed a mixed method design with both qualitative and quantitative measures to answer the various types of questions, to guide development of a questionnaire and enhance the credibility of our findings (Bryman, 2006). An exploratory sequential and

convergent design was applied that unfolded in two studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The first study consisted of group interviews to explore question one, two and three. In the second study, we constructed a questionnaire partially based on the outcomes of the first study. The questionnaire was administered to a larger group of children who participated in a commemoration, to answer question one and four.

METHODS

STUDY 1

Procedures and participants

Seven group interviews were conducted at schools for primary, secondary, and vocational education, located in three different provinces in the Netherlands, between December 2017 and February 2018. Schools were selected based on their location and because they either participated in the programme 'Adopt a monument' (three schools) or did not participate in any form of commemoration (four schools) to enlarge the diversity of responses. A total of 55 children in the age of 10 to 18 years participated in these interviews. Participants were invited by their teachers to voluntarily join the group interview. All children, and parents of children under 13, received an information letter and offered informed consent. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University (FETC17-115).

Measures

Interviews were semi-structured, with a topic list guiding the conversations. The two main topics included (I) general attitude towards commemoration (i.e., associations with, meaning of, and involvement in commemoration), and (II) the evaluation of specific rituals and preferred ways of commemorating. To introduce the topic of commemoration, all group interviews were preceded by a short video of a television broadcast for children about Remembrance Day in the Netherlands. To discuss the second topic, images, or short videos of the performance of different commemoration rituals (see Appendix 1) were presented, including both traditional rituals (e.g. laying wreaths) and modern rituals (e.g. dance performance). Children expressed their evaluation of the rituals, what attracted them and if it was a way in which they would like to remember WWII. Each interview was recorded and lasted for approximately 1 hour.

Analyses

All group interviews were transcribed and analysed using the program MAXQDA (VERBISoftware, 2010). We followed the analyses method as described by Boeije (2014). The first step contained open coding. In a triangulation session, three researchers (TM, HM, and an additional coder) coded two different interviews individually and discussed the coding

until consensus was reached. The remaining interviews were open coded by the first author (HM). In the second step, axial coding was applied to all coded segments and integration into overarching categories took place. The overarching themes were discussed by two researchers (HM and TM). The last step included selective coding, in which a connection was made between the codes and the aims of the study.

STUDY 2

Procedure

We randomly selected nine schools for primary and secondary education, located in three different provinces in the Netherlands. All schools participated in the programme 'Adopt a monument' (De Groot-Reuvekamp & Wilschut, 2019). Five schools organised their own commemoration and four schools joined the locally organised ceremony on Remembrance Day. Questionnaires were administered from March 2018 to May 2018. Questions about prior experience and attitudes towards commemoration were asked before the commemoration they attended. After the commemoration, questions about the evaluation of the commemoration were administered. All children signed an informed consent form. Passive consent was obtained from parents or guardians by distributing an information letter with the opportunity to retract permission. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University (FETC18-033).

Participants

A total of 374 children completed the questionnaire before the commemoration. Participants who did not provide informed consent ($n = 11$) were excluded from the analyses. 250 Children (66.8%) participated in a commemoration and completed the questionnaire after the commemoration. The modest response rate may be because Remembrance Day fell on a school holiday, making attendance at the commemoration voluntary at several schools. The age of the children varied between 9 and 18 years. Additional demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants in Study 2 (Before: $N = 374$; After: $N = 250$)

Characteristic		Before <i>M (SD)</i>	After <i>M (SD)</i>
Age		12.44 (1.70)	12.16 (1.42)
		<i>N (%)</i>	<i>N (%)</i>
Gender	Male	167 (44.7)	113 (45.2)
	Female	207 (55.4)	137 (54.8)
Education	Primary Education	239 (63.9)	169 (67.6)
	Secondary Education	135 (36.1)	81 (32.4)

Measures

Socio-demographics (administered before commemoration). Several individual characteristics of the participants were included, namely age and level of education (0 = primary, 1 = secondary).

Prior experiences (administered before commemoration). Four questions were included to measure the children's prior experience with WWII commemoration, including physical attendance, participation via television or radio, through school, and participation of parents (e.g. 'How often did you attend a commemoration of WWII?', with answer options 0 = never, 1 = one time before, 2 = two or three times before, 3 = more than three times and 99 = I do not know).

Attitude towards commemoration (administered before commemoration). With three questions, we evaluated the significance children attach to commemoration of WWII, Dutch victims in wars after WWII and continuation of commemoration for next generations (e.g. 'How important is it for you to commemorate WWII?'). Questions were scored on a scale ranging from 0 = not at all important to 10 = very important. A total score was calculated with the sum of the three items; Cronbach's alpha was .83.

Evaluation of commemoration (administered after commemoration). Five questions were included to evaluate the perception of the commemoration, children participated in (see Appendix 2 for the complete questionnaire). Comprehension of the meaning of the rituals performed during the event was evaluated for every ritual, ranging from 1 = totally not [understood] to 3 = very well (e.g. 'Which rituals were performed at the commemoration you attended? [List of 12 different rituals] If yes, did you understand the meaning of this ritual?').

A total score for 'comprehensibility' was calculated by the mean score of all performed rituals. Other questions measured the presence of an eyewitness account of war (coded 0 = no, 1 = yes), involvement in (preparations for) the commemoration (coded 0 = no role, 1 = role) and the experienced feelings of sadness (from 1 = not at all to 10 = very much). Overall appreciation of the commemoration was measured with the item 'How do you evaluate the commemoration?', scored on a scale ranging from 0 = totally not appreciated to 10 = very much appreciated.

Statistical analyses

The data were analysed using SPSS version 23.0 (IBM Corp., 2016). The children's experiences with, and their attitudes towards commemoration, were explored using descriptive statistics. The associations between children's participation in commemoration, participation of parents, lessons at school, and attitudes towards commemoration were examined using Pearson correlations and independent-samples *t*-tests. Descriptive statistics were calculated to explore four aspects of commemoration, namely comprehension of the rituals, presence of an eyewitness account, involvement, and feelings of sadness during the commemoration. Lastly, Pearson correlations and a linear multiple regression analysis were conducted to examine whether these elements explained variance in the evaluation of the commemoration.

FINDINGS

QUESTION 1: WHAT EXPERIENCES DO CHILDREN HAVE WITH WWII COMMEMORATION AND HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR THEM?

Almost all children participating in the group interviews had been involved in Remembrance Day in the Netherlands. They observed the two-minute silence, followed the national ceremony via television or radio, or joined a local commemoration. Other WWII commemorations were barely mentioned. Most children in the second study had followed a WWII commemoration at least once via television or radio (71.2%), and 39.1% had visited a local commemoration at least once.

Following the commemoration via television or radio was correlated to the participation of the parents in commemoration ($r = .60, p < .01$), but not to lessons in school ($r = .07, p = .23$). Correlations between visiting a local commemoration and both the participation of parents ($r = .27, p < .01$) and lessons at school ($r = .20, p < .01$) were statistically significant but small.

Children scored the importance to commemorate WWII on average with 7.59 ($SD = 2.14$) and the importance to commemorate Dutch victims of other wars after WWII slightly lower ($M = 6.96, SD = 2.11$). Children's scores on the item about the significance of continuing the commemoration for next generations were on average 8.27 ($SD = 2.21$), reflecting a high average level of agreement. The total score of attitudes towards commemoration ($M = 22.83, SD = 5.56$) was moderately related to the participation of parents in commemoration ($r = .36, p < .01$) and slightly related to lessons in school about commemoration ($r = .14, p < .01$).

QUESTION 2: WHAT REASONS DO CHILDREN GIVE TO ENGAGE IN OR DISENGAGE FROM COMMEMORATION?

Children gave different reasons for their involvement in WWII commemoration. Segments representing reasons to commemorate could be divided into three categories, namely (i) tradition, (ii) social effects and (iii) learning lessons.

Tradition

Children often mentioned that commemoration was a custom for them, a part of Dutch culture. One child with an Italian background described her participation in commemoration as 'adjusting to how things are going here'. Moreover, commemoration deals with a shared history of which all citizens 'should know', according to participants. It is a way to pass this history and culture to next generations. As a reason not to commemorate, children noted that WWII is too long ago and a family connection with this history is absent.

"The war is too far from me. Me and nobody in my family has experienced something during that time." (Boy, 14 years)

Social effects

The second category of reasons to commemorate regards social effects during the commemoration. This was first and foremost related to the intention to support, respect and honour first-generation survivors and their relatives through commemoration. Furthermore, commemoration contributed to a general sense of support and connectedness in the community. One participant worded this as follows:

“The commemoration became more important for me in the last two years, with all the terrorist attacks and so on. (...) I think you have to come together in difficult times, because together you are stronger. Then you can help each other, support each other, and prevent this from happening ever again.” (Girl, 16 years)

In contrast, a minority of children gave reasons for not participating in a commemoration, based on their experience of the event as ‘uninteresting’, ‘tedious’ or ‘without significance for me’.

Learning lessons

Most reasons to commemorate or not, could be categorised into this third category. Children who attributed much importance to commemoration considered WWII as a period that should never be forgotten; the destruction and dehumanisation in WWII cannot be compared to other wars, it provides deeper insight in the freedom we have nowadays, and it is a lesson for the future, to not repeat the past.

“We should never forget what happened in the past. When you forget the past, you are doomed to repeat it.” (Girl, 18 years)

On the other hand, children argued that commemorations should not be necessary to think about the casualties of WWII: ‘If it really interests you, you’ll keep on thinking about them’. Furthermore, present-day sufferings, conflicts and wars, and the way in which society deals with this were reasons not to participate in commemorations for some children.

“There were thousands of deaths, millions, during the WWII. There are thousands of people who are dying now as well. Just at the time we talk now, people are dying through hunger and war. But what do we do? Media can communicate about it, but what do we really do?” (Boy, 18 years)

“Talking, talking, talking, but no actions.” (Boy, 17 years)

“The funny thing is, that people who died long ago are so important, but people who are dying now are not important. But they are all human beings.” (Boy, 18 years)

QUESTION 3: WHICH FORMS OF COMMEMORATION ARE VALUED BY CHILDREN?

By analysing the group discussions around a broad range of rituals, we derived four key elements representing meaningful commemoration. A commemoration needs to be (i) comprehensible, (ii) tangible, (iii) inclusive and (iv) creating the right atmosphere.

Comprehensible

The importance of understanding the rationale of a commemoration involved two different aspects. Firstly, it is crucial to be able to attribute meaning to the rituals performed. Children often expressed their agreement or discontent with a ritual based on their comprehension of the meaning. In general, more traditional rituals were clearer to the children. For example, nearly all participants said that they understood why two-minute silence is part of the commemoration, although the meanings attributed to this ritual differed among the children. Some saw this silence merely as time for reflection, others as a mean to show respect for victims. Despite these different interpretations, this ritual was valued as a core aspect of commemoration. When a ritual was not well-known in the context of WWII commemoration, such as a dance act or lighting candles, children often responded with terms such as 'nonsense' or 'useless'. Moreover, in the interaction within the group interviews, the importance of understanding rituals became very clear. When the meaning of an unknown ritual was explained by another child or the interviewer, the responses of the other children became more neutral or even positive. An example, talking about the relevance of a Jewish ritual of placing stones at a memorial site:

"[Laughing] Never heard about this." (Girl, 15 years)

"Never heard about it either." (Girl, 17 years)

"When I was in Paris, we saw a coffin behind bars in a corridor. Behind the black coffin was a light, which represented the sun. There was just one coffin, but in the coffin were two million stones, for every deceased one". (Girl, 16 years)

"Then it may be beautiful. Not that I would like to see the tomb of Hannie Schaft [*a resistance fighter who has been buried in the city of the participant*] full of stones. But especially for the Jews, when this has more value to them than a flower that perishes, then there is some beauty to it." (Girl, 15 years)

Secondly, it is crucial that children understand the context of who and/or what is commemorated. This became particularly clear when discussing the value of testimonies as part of commemoration. Children emphasised that a testimony contributes to gaining more knowledge and deeper comprehension of the actual events someone lived through during WWII. Moreover, a testimony can provide a context in which other rituals are better understood. In the words of one of the participants:

"When I first hear a story about the war, and then, I have to be two minutes silent, I think

more about the war.” (Boy, 14 years)

However, it seemed important by whom the testimony was given: a poem or story of a peer was received with ambiguity.

“A child who reads a story doesn’t know how it was then either. So why would I listen to that story? They don’t know how it was either. Just as little as I do.” (Boy, 14 years)

“*[about a child who reads a poem]* It is cute, but the real content is lacking.” (Girl, 18 years)

Tangible

The group interviews revealed that war is a very abstract concept for most of the children. They expressed a strong need to imagine or visualise what it is like to experience wartime, to be able to put oneself in such a situation. This became clear through the positive responses to eyewitness accounts of WWII survivors, which helped participants to understand the context of war as well as to visualise certain situations and empathise with those affected. The same applied for most children to testimonies given by (young) refugees from war affected countries. Furthermore, rituals and activities in which various senses, such as seeing, hearing or touching are involved were positively evaluated. In particular, the presence of veterans during the commemoration spoke to the minds of young boys:

“I think it is good that soldiers are present. Some are very old, and some are even injured. If you see that, you can imagine even more what they did for us.” (Boy, 11 years)

“They also have medals. You start thinking: Why are these people there?” (Boy, 10 years)

“Imagine that you were a soldier and that you had to try to liberate everyone. And that you just had such a thing [a weapon]. That really intrigues me.” (Boy, 12 years)

The aspect of making war tangible seemed chiefly important to the younger aged children. Telling examples were given by two participants, in response to the question what they would like to add in a commemoration:

“I would like fireworks during the commemoration. That gives a bang and then you can feel how it was to live in war.” (Boy, 11 years)

“Maybe they can give virtual reality headsets to the children during a commemoration, with which you can see how it was in war, for example in a camp. Then you can maybe empathise even more, instead of only hearing stories.” (Girl, 11 years)

Inclusive

The third element contributing to a meaningful commemoration is summarised as

inclusiveness. Two specific aspects of inclusiveness came up during the group interviews, namely inclusion and participation of various age groups in the ceremony and inclusiveness in remembering victims of conflict after WWII. First, most children appreciated a commemoration which is appealing to both children and adults. The event might contain specific rituals that focus on children, but most children did not prefer a commemoration especially designed for children. Furthermore, opinions differed with respect to the value of including children in performing rituals. In general, as illustrated by the following example, younger children (aged 10–12) were more positive about active participation:

“For me it is important [*to lay a flower at a monument*], because then you can also put something yourself. Like a wreath. It feels like you can do something back.” (Girl, 10 years)

“I am already actively participating when I am two minutes silent during the commemoration.” (Boy, 14 years)

The second aspect of inclusiveness, remembering more recent victims of war, came mainly up in the group interviews with children in the age range of 14 to 18 and among pupils with a migration background. The discussions revealed that Remembrance Day is primarily perceived by the pupils as a commemoration of WWII. Some children referred to the exceptional number of deaths in WWII through genocide, and the importance of WWII in the history of the Netherlands, to stress the importance of remembering this war. According to others, current conflicts in different parts of the world are more urgent and should receive more attention on Remembrance Day. In multiple group interviews, interactions between participants arose in which possibilities were suggested to acknowledge both WWII and current wars and conflicts:

“It is also important what happens at this moment, when we are commemorating. Of course, the past has been very tragic. Many people died in a way that should never have happened. But we should also not be quiet about what is happening at this moment. So, I think it is important that we give stage to people living in war these days. Yes, the Remembrance Day is about the WWII, but you can also think about something else, it is not only intended for the past. We make the Remembrance Day a bit broader instead of hiding something.” (Girl, 18 years)

“For example, we can make a specific section at Dam Square [*place of the main ceremony on Remembrance Day*] for people, let’s say who came here from Syria, so we do something for them as well. That is what I would like.” (Boy, 17 years)

Right atmosphere

Fourth, children generally portrayed a clear idea of the atmosphere commemorations ought to have. Popular or childish elements, such as a dance performance in a cinema, were not

considered suitable by most of the children. Furthermore, a commemoration should not be cheerful; sadness was reviewed as part of the right atmosphere. Other associations were 'seriousness' and 'filled with respect', but at the same time not too long or boring. Traditional rituals were unanimously rated as positive, contributing to an appropriate ambiance.

"Sadness is one of the words that commemoration is associated with most. The atmosphere needs to be suitable, which means not too cheerful." (Girl, 13 years)

"Just do it as it ought to be. So not inventing so many things, but just as it has always been." (Girl, 14 years)

However, not everyone agreed with what exactly is the most adequate way to commemorate. Participants revealed different opinions about what is appropriate during commemoration.

"The commemoration became a bit boring and tedious at some point. It could be nice if you make the commemoration more appealing to youth with dance, theatre, or poetry. (...) But a commemoration should not be in a cinema, as if you go for a nice outing. That wouldn't give me the feeling of a true commemoration." (Girl, 16 years)

QUESTION 4: DO THE ELEMENTS APPRECIATED BY CHILDREN CONTRIBUTE TO A POSITIVE EVALUATION OF A COMMEMORATION?

The qualitative study revealed four key elements contributing to a meaningful commemoration, namely (i) comprehensibility, (ii) tangibility, (iii) inclusiveness and (iv) a right atmosphere. To operationalise these elements in the quantitative study, four aspects were chosen: (i) the degree to which children comprehend the performed rituals, (ii) the presence of an eyewitness account of war during the commemoration, (iii) involvement of children in the ceremony and lastly, (iv) feelings of sadness during the commemoration (see Appendix 2 for a detailed description of these measures). On average, children understood the meaning of the performed rituals well ($M = 2.59$ [min. = 1, max. = 3], $SD = 0.39$). In 45.1% of the commemorations attended by the children, an eyewitness account of war was given during the ceremony. In most other commemorations (50.8%), a story about war was told by someone who did not experience war himself/herself. Only in 4.1% of the commemorations, no story of war was told. More than half of the children (55.6%) had an active role before or during the commemoration. Children scored their feelings of sadness during the commemoration on average with 4.54 ($SD = 2.63$; min. = 1, max. = 10). The overall evaluation of the commemoration was positive among children: on average, they rated the commemoration they attended with 7.96 ($SD = 1.65$; min. = 0, max. = 10). Three of the four studied aspects, namely the comprehension of rituals, presence of an eyewitness account and feelings of sadness, were positively correlated with the evaluation of the commemoration (see Table 2). To examine the value of the studied aspects in relation to the evaluation of the commemoration, we performed a linear multiple regression analysis.

Comprehension ($\beta = .40, p < .01$), involvement ($\beta = .21, p < .01$) and feelings of sadness ($\beta = .20, p < .01$), but not eyewitness account ($\beta = .13, p = .05$) significantly predicted the evaluation of the commemoration. The four studied aspects also explained a significant proportion of variance in evaluation of the commemoration, $R^2 = .26, F(4, 204) = 17.46, p < .01$. See Table 3 for further details of the analysis.

Table 2. Pearson correlations between elements of the commemoration and the evaluation of the event ($n = 209^*$)

	1	2	3	4	5
1. General evaluation	1.00				
2. Comprehension	.411**	1.00			
3. Involvement	.105	-.056	1.00		
4. Feelings of sadness	.221**	.051	-.229**	1.00	
5. Eyewitness account	.200**	.127	-.252**	.363**	1.00

* The sample was smaller than the $N = 250$ included in the full sample, because of occasional missing values.

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Table 3. Summary of the linear multiple regression analysis for elements of the commemoration predicting evaluation ($n = 207$)

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Comprehension	1.65	0.25	.40*
Involvement	0.67	0.21	.21*
Feelings of sadness	0.12	0.04	.20*
Eyewitness account	0.42	0.22	.13

* $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Most children in Dutch society have no experience with war and no personal connection to WWII. They are recipients of memory, affected by the collective narratives of WWII. But they are also able to construct and participate in national discourse (Habashi, 2013), and play a crucial part in the process of transmitting the memory of the war (Pennell, 2016). Motivated by questions from society about how to involve children in commemoration, we took an explorative approach, investigating children's attitudes towards WWII commemoration.

Most children participating in this study, aged between nine and 18, engaged in WWII commemoration and rated it as (very) important to commemorate. This matches findings of Imber and Fraser (2011) and Pennell (2018), about the importance children attribute to commemoration. In congruence with prior research, we found that participation of children and the importance they attribute to it was positively related to participation of

parents (Coopmans et al., 2016, 2017). Besides family involvement, lessons in school about commemoration were associated with more participation and a more positive attitude among children as well.

MORE THAN LESSONS FROM THE PAST

The most frequent incentive to continue with commemoration, mentioned by children, was to learn lessons from the past. This connects with the current narrative about WWII, aimed at developing moral understanding and citizenship values (Cowan & Maitles, 2009; Pennell, 2016; Savenije, 2014). This narrative is actively and apparently successfully transmitted to younger generations. Yet further studies are needed to gain more insights in the actual lessons children learn from participation in commemoration. Besides the aspect of learning lessons, our study revealed two other reasons for children to commemorate. Remembrance Day is seen as a part of Dutch culture by children, and many of them participated in WWII commemoration out of habit or tradition. This can be explained by the priorly described theory of Assmann (2010). The importance of family involvement mentioned before, indicates that communicative memory still plays a role. Yet, the motive to commemorate based on cultural tradition suggests that cultural memory is becoming increasingly dominant over time. Lastly, children engage in commemoration for social reasons, to show their support and respect to those directly affected and to connect with others. Based on a scoping review, Mitima-Verloop et al. (2020) distinguished different aspects that are significant in understanding the impact of commemoration. Among others, the experience of social support and recognition (for one's own experiences and other people's suffering) are mentioned to facilitate a more positive experience of the commemoration. Both aspects are presented by children in the present study as well. It points out that the current WWII commemoration affects children without personal connection to the subject of remembrance not only on a cognitive level, but also socially and emotionally.

Although the positive responses and reasons to commemorate outnumber the arguments to distance from commemoration, it is informative to investigate the counter arguments as well. Most of these reasons are not against WWII commemoration per se but are more related to the way remembrance events are carried out. Some children describe the commemoration as important for others, but for themselves as 'uninteresting', 'tedious', 'far-off', and 'not connected to present day suffering'. The key elements described in the following section, fit seamlessly with these arguments.

MEANINGFUL COMMEMORATION

The preferred form of commemoration appeared to be based on underlying elements that contribute to a meaningful commemoration, rather than specific rituals that children like to perform. We identified four key elements. First, children want to comprehend the commemoration, that is to say they want to be able to attribute meaning to the performed rituals, and receive information about the context of who and what is commemorated. This

does not mean that all children attribute the same meaning to a certain ritual, as the study of Imber and Fraser (2011) also reveals by studying the thoughts of children during a two-minute silence ritual. Children in our study who rated the rituals as understandable (i.e. were able to attribute meaning to the rituals) evaluated the commemoration they attended more positive. Besides comprehension, children have a need to make the concept of war tangible, to be able to imagine or visualise what it is like to experience wartime, for example through listening to eyewitness accounts. Our quantitative study indicated that the presence of eyewitness testimonies was indeed related to a more positive evaluation of commemorations. As we argued before, personification of the war is a current trend in (educational) settings (Savenije, 2014), but there is a risk of too much emphasis on individual stories which limits our understanding of war in its full scope (De Bruijn, 2015; Pennell, 2016). Inclusiveness was a third major element contributing to meaningful commemorations, both in terms of who participates and who is commemorated. Inclusiveness for different generations is highly valued, although opinions about the importance of active involvement of children are mixed. Furthermore, inclusiveness is related to the criticism of WWII commemoration, as focus on the past and not recognising present day wars and sufferings. A discrepancy appeared between the commemoration as it is 'officially' intended and how it is perceived by the children. Most children connect Remembrance Day solely to commemoration of WWII, while it is officially broader. However, research reveals as well that most Dutch people commemorate all victims of all wars in the two minutes of silence on Remembrance Day (Schalker & Koenen, 2019). The conflicting views on inclusiveness were also observed in the study of Imber and Fraser (2011). Their conclusion was in line with our findings, namely that attempts to broaden or generalise remembrance to include contemporary warfare, are only partially accepted. However, our findings also underline that dialogue about inclusiveness in commemoration is needed, in which children can inspire in how to achieve that. Lastly, most children had strong opinions about how a commemoration 'ought to be'. This outcome can be further understood by the importance of socialisation processes, such as parental exemplar behaviour, in the transmission of commemorative behaviours (Coopmans et al., 2017; Pennell & Sheehan, 2020). The 'right atmosphere' was linked to feelings of sadness, dignity, and respect. Children who felt more sad during the commemoration they attended, perceived the event indeed more positive. Danilova and Dolan (2020) define this sadness as a 'sanctioned affective engagement' (p. 505) and argue that keeping silence while looking sad is a passive form of learning in which asking critical questions is considered disruptive and disrespectful. Notably, many new rituals of commemoration, with an initial attempt to attract children, were not understood or appreciated. Traditional rituals on the other hand, were highly appreciated.

As anticipated, the four studied aspects (i.e., comprehension of rituals, the presence of an eyewitness account, active involvement of children, and feelings of sadness) together, contributed to a positive evaluation of the commemoration. The level in which children comprehend the meaning of the rituals and the context of war was most crucial. The

presence of an eyewitness account no longer affected the evaluation of commemorations when analysing this aspect together with the other elements. This might indicate that listening to an eyewitness account is more connected to the element of comprehension, by providing a clearer understanding of the context of commemoration, than that it leads to tangibility or imagination of war. Visual contributions, such as the presence of veterans, videos or virtual reality, might be more relevant in this matter. Still, we must be modest in our conclusion; the studied aspects only partly explain the evaluation. A more extensive quantitative study is needed to fully comprehend what makes certain commemorations more appreciated than others.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting our findings. The selection of children by teachers and their voluntarily participation in the group interviews, could have introduced a selection bias. Furthermore, the operationalisations of the key elements for a meaningful commemoration in the second study are limited compared to the broadness of responses that each element represents. For the present investigation, we used a relatively brief questionnaire to limit response burden; we do recognise that a broader set of questions, and different operationalisations per element, could have given us more insight in the evaluation of the attended commemoration. The element 'inclusiveness', for example, not only concerns the involvement of children in the commemoration, but also who are present and who are commemorated. Lastly, we have to consider that responses of children can be prompted by uncritical thinking and social acceptance, because of how youth are socialised into established protocols and expectations of respect and empathy (Pennell & Sheehan, 2020). However, in line with the conclusion of Pennell and Sheehan (2020), applying group interviews allowed for a greater degree of reflection. The study has strengths as well. It takes a unique point of view, by questioning children directly about their thoughts, motivations and behaviours related to present day commemoration. Furthermore, we applied a methodologically strong design with mixed-methods. Results of the quantitative study confirmed and validated the findings of the qualitative study and demonstrated that they can be generalised to a big group of pupils.

The qualitative analyses provided several indications that there are differences in opinions based on age, which should be explored further by future studies. The present study was conducted in the context of WWII commemoration in the Netherlands. However, insights from this study are relevant for a broader international audience, where children grow up without personal connection to WWII as well. International comparisons of the findings would be pivotal and would deepen our understanding of contextual elements of commemoration that are connected to meaningful commemoration.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our study offers in-depth insights in the attitudes of children towards

commemoration. Results reveal that children are affected by the collective narrative of WWII. Yet they also connect to commemoration on a social and emotional level, and often have a desire to continue with this tradition. This does not imply that commemorations should not change. War is an abstract concept for many children, and eyewitnesses of WWII are less and less available to share their experiences. Openness towards critical perspectives should be stimulated, so children can decide, well-informed, how they continue and carry the memory of WWII forward. Results from the present and further studies may elevate discussions and bring societies a step closer in worthwhile remembering with post-war generations.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B. Mitima-Verloop: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

P.A. Boelen: Conceptualisation, writing – review & editing, supervision

T.T.M. Mooren: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, writing – review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition

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APPENDIX 1

Introduction clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tunBEYzPAFQ>

Rituals that were discussed during the group interviews in varying order, accompanied by a picture or video of the ritual. Depending on the time available, a random selection of the rituals was discussed.

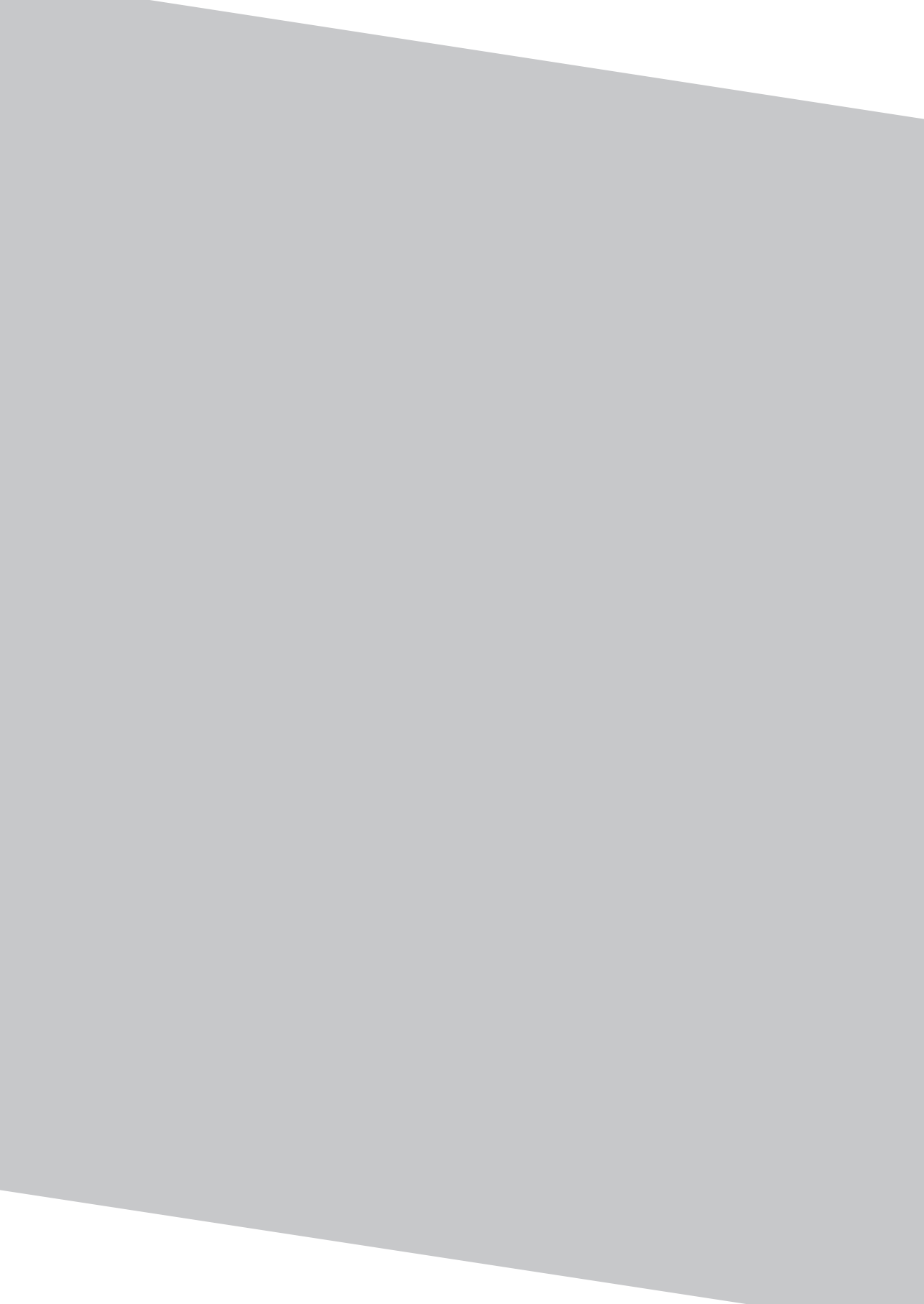
1. Two-minute silence
2. Reading a poem / story by a child
3. Laying flowers
4. Flags at half mast
5. Personal story / eye witness account of WWII survivor or refugee
6. Laying stones at a monument
7. Laying wreaths
8. Presence of military personnel
9. Smart Phone Orchestra / ritual with mobile phones: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4qB71hULRI>
10. Wearing white clothes
11. Trumpet signal / Last Post
12. Writing cards with wishes
13. Lightning candles
14. Release balloons: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-QIAz8qT2g>
15. Reading names of those who died / were murdered
16. Play / drama / dance performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvYqQ5Y4ahg>
17. Laying cuddly toys at a monument
18. Making a nameplate of someone who died / was murdered: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKBvLf5a1r8>
19. Ringing bells
20. Carrying a pin with a torch on clothes

APPENDIX 2

Theme	Question	Optional answers
<i>Socio-demographics</i>	What is your age?	___ Years
	Which type of education do you follow?	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary education <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary education
<i>Prior Experiences</i>	How often did you go to a commemoration of WWII?	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> One time before <input type="checkbox"/> Two or three times before <input type="checkbox"/> More than three times before <input type="checkbox"/> I do not know
	How often did you follow a commemoration of WWII via television or radio?	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> One time before <input type="checkbox"/> Two or three times before <input type="checkbox"/> More than three times before <input type="checkbox"/> I do not know
	Did you do something with commemoration of WWII <u>in a former year</u> in school?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Are your parents going to a commemoration of WWII, or do they follow via television or radio?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, (almost) every year <input type="checkbox"/> Some years <input type="checkbox"/> No, (almost) never
<i>Attitude towards commemoration</i>	How important is it for you to commemorate WWII?	0 = not important at all to 10 = very important
	How important is it for you to commemorate Dutch victims of <u>other wars</u> , after WWII?	0 = not important at all to 10 = very important
	Do you think we have to continue commemoration of WWII, when all who survived have passed away?	0 = not important at all to 10 = very important
<i>Evaluation of the commemoration</i>	Which rituals were performed at the commemoration you attended?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	- Two minutes silence	
	- Laying flowers/wreaths	
	- Reading poems	
	- Half-raised flag	
	- Singing national anthem	
	- Official speech	
	- Trumpet sound	
	- Dance performance	
	- Lightning candles	
- Prayers		
- Singer performance		
- Other, namely ...		
	If yes, did you understand the meaning of the ritual?	1 = No, totally not 2 = A bit 3 = Yes, very well
	Did you do something yourself during the commemoration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I had a specific role <input type="checkbox"/> I only watched and listened
	During the commemoration, I felt sad	1 = not at all 10 = very much

CONTINUED

Theme	Question	Optional answers
	During the commemoration, was a story told about war?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, about WWII <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, about another war <input type="checkbox"/> No
	If yes: By whom was the story told?	<input type="checkbox"/> By someone who experienced WWII <input type="checkbox"/> By someone who experienced another war <input type="checkbox"/> By someone who did not experience war <input type="checkbox"/> I do not know
	How do you evaluate the commemoration?	0 = totally not appreciated to 10 = very much appreciated



Unified in remembrance: Reflections on collective war commemoration by war-affected immigrants in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

Decades after World War II, major commemorations are still organised to collectively remember this war. Aiming for inclusive societies, the perspectives of immigrants with different war experiences are important to be heard in relation to these commemorations. Research reveals that commemorations can kindle difficult emotions such as sadness and bring distressing memories to the fore. Concurrently, psychosocial factors such as societal support and meaning making may buffer the emotional distress and contribute to a beneficial impact. It is not well known how this applies to immigrants. The present study explores how war-affected immigrants in the Netherlands relate to the Dutch Remembrance Day. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 war-affected immigrants from 8 different countries (including countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America). Qualitative analyses revealed that participants experienced multiple and mixed emotions during the Dutch Remembrance Day, including sadness, longing, and gratitude. Memories about own war experiences and losses often arose, of which the impact varied from distress to relief. The context of war in participants' countries of origin, such as ongoing conflict or a contested history, often hindered commemoration of these wars. Through the Dutch commemoration, most war-affected immigrants experienced social connectedness and openness for (emotional) expression which contributed to dealing with their past experiences. Insights from this study may guide counsellors working with war-affected immigrants and help societies to organise optimally appealing commemorations within an inclusive society.

KEYWORDS

Refugee, Immigrant, Ritual, Commemoration, War, Context, Impact, Performance, Inclusive society

INTRODUCTION

Commemorations can be viewed as society's moral memory, 'distinguishing events and persons believed to be deserving of celebration from those deserving of being merely remembered' (Schwartz, 2015, p. 11). In the Netherlands, World War II (WWII) is a period that is considered significant for remembrance. Since 1946, commemorative events are organised throughout the country on the 4th of May, also called Remembrance Day. On this day, all civilians and military personnel are commemorated who died or were killed since the beginning of WWII, in situations of war or in peacekeeping missions. With more than 80 percent of Dutch citizens adhering to the two-minute silence at 8.00 pm, Remembrance Day is a major annual event (Oudejans et al., 2022). In the past decades, multiple new war-affected groups have become part of the Dutch society. Aiming for inclusive societies, the perspectives of these immigrants are important to be heard in relation to commemoration. To this end, we examined how war-affected immigrants in the Netherlands relate to Remembrance Day.

Commemorations are organised with the intent to assist survivors and society as a whole in coping with trauma and loss (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020). Within the field of Memory Studies, there is ample research concerning the meaning of commemoration, and how or why societies remember and forget. However, there appears a gap between the rich but abstract theories around the meaning of commemoration and empirical research testing these theories. How well commemorations assist individuals in dealing with past experiences, and how this process takes place from an individual psychological perspective is not well-studied. Some research reveals that commemorations can kindle difficult emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and anger, and bring distressing memories to the fore. Concurrently, psychosocial factors such as meaning making, social and societal support and acknowledgement may buffer the emotional distress and contribute to a beneficial impact (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2023). However, it is largely unknown to whom this applies and under which conditions. Although WWII was the last war in the Netherlands, other citizens subsequently experienced war elsewhere. Since WWII, multiple refugee groups have fled their countries because of war or large-scale violence and resettled in the Netherlands. Among them were Hungarians, Vietnamese, people from former Yugoslavia, Armenian, Iraqis, Afghani, Chileans, Yemenis, Somali, Rwandese, Congolese and recently Syrians and Ukrainians (Van der Plicht, 2016). These people, henceforth referred to as 'war-affected immigrants', have integrated in Dutch society but still carry their experiences of war and violence with them. Research studying the attendance of immigrants during Remembrance Day in the Netherlands revealed that immigrants engage less in commemoration (Coopmans et al., 2015). Having a personal connection to WWII (either directly or indirectly via family members) did not affect the likelihood for immigrants to participate in commemoration. Attendance was mostly determined by previous familiarity with commemoration in the country of origin (Coopmans et al., 2016).

The present study investigated how war-affected immigrants relate to the Dutch Remembrance Day. We studied the impact it has on war-affected immigrants and whether it is meaningful for them in dealing with past experiences. Insight in the responses of these immigrants will help us understand more fundamentally the psychosocial function of commemoration and the impact it has on different groups of people. This might benefit counsellors who work with war-affected immigrants, for example by guiding them to participate in commemoration and rituals. Furthermore, it will be relevant for policymakers to take well-informed decisions about involving war-affected immigrants and recent refugees in national collective war commemorations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Commemorations and rituals are studied by various disciplines from multiple perspectives. Holsappel (2020) identified three angles to study commemorations, namely by focusing on the *impact* of commemorations, the *context* in which commemorations take place and the ritual *performances*. The impact of commemorations on emotions, thoughts and coping with loss and trauma is mainly examined from a psychological perspective (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020). Commemorations can kindle difficult emotions such as sadness or elicit posttraumatic stress reactions including nightmares, flashbacks and intrusions (Barron et al., 2008; Gishoma et al., 2015). Concurrently, positive qualities of commemorations may contribute to better coping with the past, such as support (e.g., Ibreck, 2010), recognition and acknowledgement (e.g., Pollack, 2003), meaning making (e.g., Beristain et al., 2000) and expression (e.g., Jacobs, 2014). Prior studies mostly included individuals who participated in a commemoration that was directly related to their own war experiences. It is largely unknown if people who are involved in a commemoration of war other than the war they experienced themselves would be affected similarly.

Performance

To date, commemorative rituals have been mainly examined from an anthropological, cultural-scientific or religious perspective (e.g., Grimes, 2014). Grimes distinguishes seven (tangible) elements, namely actions, actors, place, time, object, language and groups that together constitute a ritual. It is worth studying separate commemorative rituals, as ritual elements each may have a different impact (Wojtkowiak, 2018). For example, the study of Gasparre et al. (2010) revealed that future oriented rituals, which allowed people to express their suffering or ask for reparation, were more strongly associated with positive outcomes compared to past oriented rituals. According to Driver (2006), one of the most important functions of rituals is to transform. To be able to transform, people should be able to understand and experience the ritual naturally (Alexander, 2006). However, rituals are culture specific and understanding rituals in another culture can be difficult (Wojtkowiak, 2018). This can imply that certain rituals connected to Remembrance Day are less meaningful to immigrants, because they might be unfamiliar with the ritual repertoire.

Context

Commemorative rituals always take place in a social and political context, which is mainly studied by historians or sociologists. Historian Raaijmakers (2014) states that, more than creating a picture of WWII, Remembrance Day provides a cultural-historical reflection of post-war Netherlands. Commemoration offers a mirror of society and reflects how society at that moment deals with a specific past. This can be very different in countries, for example by focusing on victimhood, sorrow and sadness, or on military pride and nationalism during commemoration (Krimp & Reiding, 2017; Watkins & Bastian, 2019). Also, political involvement in commemoration varies, which has a major impact on how commemoration is perceived by the general public (Magierowski, 2016; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). The context of commemoration in the Netherlands might influence how war-affected immigrants experience Remembrance Day.

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Seldomly, the three angles of impact, performance, and context are studied together and integrated. In the review of Mitima-Verloop et al. (2020) it is argued that the ritual performances as well as the context in which the commemoration takes place influence the impact of commemoration. An integration of all three angles may help to understand when, how, and for whom rituals of commemoration are meaningful (Holsappel, 2020). Therefore, we will study the reflections of both western and non-western war-affected immigrants, resettled in the Netherlands, on the impact, context, and ritual performances of Remembrance Day. We aim to get more insight in how these three aspects are connected and ultimately what factors facilitate valuable commemoration in an inclusive society. Three research questions guide this study: (I) What is the individual impact of Remembrance Day on war-affected immigrants? (II) How do immigrants reflect on the context of commemoration on Remembrance Day, in relation to commemoration in their country of origin? (III) How do immigrants reflect on the form and performance of rituals during Remembrance Day?

METHODS

RECRUITMENT, PARTICIPANTS, AND DATA COLLECTION

Two sets of interviews were analysed in this study. The first set (S1) consisted of 16 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019 by SM, primarily for a research project of Foundation for the Promotion of Social Participation (Stichting BMP) and National Committee for 4 and 5 May. Participants were recruited from the networks of the foundation and the researchers connected to the project. Participants were from Bosnian or Iraqi origin and had fled to the Netherlands between 1990 and 2000. During recruitment, specific attention was given to the spread of residency throughout the Netherlands. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, video-recorded and lasted between 50 to 120 minutes, of which around 15 to

30 minutes about the topic of commemoration. More details about the S1 interviews are published in the report of Moerbeek and Von Meijenfeldt (2020).

The second set (S2) consisted of nine semi-structured interviews and were primarily conducted as part of the present study by the first author (HM) in 2019. Participants were recruited via the researchers personal and work-related networks, with specific attention for diversity in country of origin and a broad range of time since arrival in the Netherlands. Inclusion criterium was a minimal understanding of the Dutch language, as the interview was conducted in Dutch. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted 30 to 60 minutes. Characteristics of all participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

Participant	Country or origin	Gender	Year of birth (age)	Arrival in the Netherlands (time in years)	Type of interview
B1	Bosnia Herzegovina	M	1960 (59)	1992 (27)	S1
B2	Bosnia Herzegovina	F	1970 (49)	1993 (26)	S1
I3	Iraq	F	1967 (51)	1993 (26)	S1
B4	Bosnia Herzegovina	F	1982 (37)	1994 (25)	S1
B5	Bosnia Herzegovina	F	1976 (43)	1993 (26)	S1
I6	Iraq	F	1988 (31)	1999 (20)	S1
I7	Iraq	M	1962 (57)	1997 (22)	S1
I8	Iraq	M	1967 (51)	1993 (26)	S1
B9	Bosnia Herzegovina	M	1966 (53)	1996 (23)	S1
I10	Iraq	M	1964 (55)	Unknown	S1
B11	Bosnia Herzegovina	M	1971 (48)	1993 (26)	S1
B12	Bosnia Herzegovina	M	1969 (50)	1999 (20)	S1
B13	Bosnia Herzegovina	F	1964 (55)	1992 (27)	S1
I14	Iraq	M	1955 (64)	1993 (26)	S1
I15	Iraq	F	1958 (61)	1997 (22)	S1
I16	Iraq	F	1974 (45)	1998 (21)	S1
B17	Bosnia Herzegovina	F	1976 (43)	1994 (25)	S2
I18	Iraq	M	1974 (45)	1999 (20)	S2
D19	D.R. Congo	F	1988 (31)	2009 (10)	S2
V20	Vietnam	M	1951 (68)	1980 (39)	S2
S21	Syria	F	1883 (36)	2017 (2)	S2
C22	Chile	M	1958 (61)	1979 (40)	S2
K23	Kosovo	F	1978 (41)	1999 (20)	S2
Y24	Yemen	M	1963 (56)	2014 (5)	S2
V25	Vietnam	F	1964 (55)	1980 (39)	S2

STUDY DESIGN AND SCOPE

Because of ethical and practical reasons, we decided to perform secondary analyses on data that was collected for other purposes, to complement the interviews conducted for

the purpose of this study. The topics of the existing S1 interviews were highly relevant for our study. Reusing data maximises the value of investment in data collection, and it reduces the burden on participants. By including the S1 interviewer as author, we addressed the concern of losing the interactional context between researcher and participant when reusing qualitative data (Irwin, 2013). Based on our prior research and literature review (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020; 2023), research questions for the present study were formed and questions for S2 semi-structured interviews were formulated. Subsequently, videos of the S1 interviews were watched by the first author and the research questions were refined so they could be answered based on both sets of interviews.

INSTRUMENTS

The primary purpose of the S1 interviews was to explore the experiences of (lack of) freedom and involvement in commemoration among two specific immigrant groups, namely Bosnian and Iraqi refugees who fled their country in the 1990s. Only the parts of the interview in which the topic of commemoration was discussed were included for secondary analyses in the present study. A topic list with questions guided the original interviews. Questions concerning commemoration were related to experiences of commemoration in the country of origin, experiences with war commemoration in the Netherlands, familiarity with the Dutch Remembrance Day and general reflections on this day of commemoration. See for further details on the topic list Supplementary Information 1.

All S2 interviews started with watching 16 minutes of the broadcast of the National Commemoration on Remembrance Day. Thereafter participants were asked to reflect on topics derived from prior research by the authors (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020, 2023). The topic list included questions related to familiarity with Remembrance Day and ritual performances on this day, experience with commemoration in country of origin, personal memories that were triggered by Remembrance Day and the extent to which participants experienced acknowledgement, support, meaning making and expression through commemoration on Remembrance Day. The full topic list for these interviews is included in Supplementary Information 2.

DATA ANALYSES

All interviews were transcribed and analysed using the program MAXQDA version 10 (VERBIsoftware, 2010). The inductive qualitative analyses method described by Boeije and Bleijenbergh (2019) was used to analyse the data. Initially, all S1 interviews were coded using three steps of coding. In the first step, open codes and memos were applied by HM. During this process, four interviews were double coded and discussed by HM, IT and a third researcher. Based on these discussions, short summaries were made of each participant's general view on commemoration, to preserve the connection between the coded segments and the specific participant. Furthermore, consensus was reached about the level of coding (with open as well as thematic codes) and additional codes were added to the remaining

interviews where necessary. The second step contained axial coding, in which all coded segments were integrated into overarching themes. In the last step of selective coding, a connection was made between the research questions and the overarching themes, codes, and memos. The outcomes were discussed by HM, TM, and PB.

Subsequently, the first step of open coding was applied by HM to all S2 interviews, blind to the outcomes of the S1 analyses. In the second step of axial coding, the coded segments were categorised under the overarching themes based on the analyses of S1. New themes and restructuring of themes were applied where necessary. During the third step of selective coding, the outcomes of the S1 analyses were expanded with the outcomes based on S2 and results were written, including analyses of the similarities and differences in outcomes between the two sets. Results were discussed with all authors and final refinements were made.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND INFORMED CONSENT

Ethical approval for the S2 interviews was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University (FETC18-102). All participants of S1 gave their consent for online publication of the video-taped interviews and use for research purposes. All S2 participants received an information letter and provided written informed consent prior to the interview for recording and participation.

RESULTS

THEMES AND SET COMPARISONS

All but one of the interviewees had at least one time participated in a commemoration on Remembrance Day. Participants attended the commemoration in their hometown, in the capital city Amsterdam, former transit camp Westerbork, or via the live television broadcast. Identified themes were divided into (a) impact-related, (b) context-related and (c) performance-related reflections. All identified themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Main themes derived from S1 and S2 interviews

Impact	Context	Performance
Emotions	Complicated war	Transformative rituals
Social connectedness	Complex commemoration	Universal rituals
Expression	Unity	Individual rituals
Meaning		
Acknowledgement		
Personal memories		

No major differences were found between the themes that were derived from S1 and S2. The S2 interviews contained more in-depth information about the impact of commemoration. For example, the researcher in the S1 interviews did not question participants who expressed emotions connected to commemoration whereas in S2, participants were asked to elaborate more on emotions such as sadness or thankfulness. Only the topic of acknowledgement did not come up in S1.

IMPACT-RELATED REFLECTIONS

Emotions

Participants experienced multiple *emotions* during Remembrance Day. Sadness was most often mentioned. This was partly related to personal memories, individual losses and the long-term impact of war that changed the life course of participants. But it was also related to sadness about the tragedies surrounding war in general. Feelings of downheartedness, powerlessness and anger were named as well, mostly related to the scale and continuation of war worldwide. Positive emotions were also experienced. Gratitude was most frequently mentioned, related to living in a free and safe country, having survived war and gratefulness for those who gave their life for freedom. Other positive emotions mentioned were relief, pride in belonging to a country that pays respect to its war victims, and calmness, because of the organised and calm nature of the commemoration, without emotional outbursts. Furthermore, participants experienced desire, longing and hope for a better future in the country of origin.

“Will there ever be a commemoration like this in Iraq? Does war ever end?” (Participant I3)

“The commemoration gives me hope, this is what I envision for Vietnam, where people who suffered will be recognised and where next generations can see that.” (Participant V25)

Some participants expressed neutral feelings towards Remembrance Day. They felt distant because of the differences between WWII and their own war experiences. One participant also expressed neutral feelings because of habituation, seeing the commemoration as a country's obligation after war, referring to his own experiences as a soldier burying his comrades.

“It is part of life. I have seen it a thousand times in my life, every time a soldier or colleague was killed. We always had the same ritual. In a war, you should always commemorate the dead.” (Participant V20)

Commemoration related to the war in participant's countries of origin was mostly related to negative emotions and feelings, such as pain, sadness, and exclusion. Two participants mentioned how commemoration in their country of origin is more emotional and dramatic,

compared to the emotions that are expressed during Remembrance Day. One participant mentioned experiencing mixed feelings of sadness and happiness, while visiting places of remembrance with his wife and children. Another participant described how she avoids Bosnian war commemorations as these “would be emotionally too impactful” (participant B17).

Social connectedness

Almost all participants experienced *social connectedness* and togetherness, specifically with other war victims, but also with people in general during Remembrance Day. Realising that Dutch people also experienced war made participants feel less alone; because of their own experiences they could recognise and understand the feelings of other war victims. Furthermore, participants felt empowered and connected with other people who commemorated by sharing important human values, such as respecting the dead.

“I don’t see the difference, whether it is about the Dutch East Indies or World War II, about my war or another war. You feel the suffering of the one who experienced it. And that is a form of togetherness, a moment in which you realise that you are not the only one.” (Participant B17)

Feeling connected with other war-affected could be experienced simultaneously with feeling distant to the commemoration and the performed rituals. A participant describes both feelings in the same interview.

“There is a clear connection because war is one. Of course, there are differences in time and country, but it is all horrible. (...) In Iraq, I did not experience something like commemoration. There were so many shocking events. A boy was murdered because he was against the regime and the police came to the house of his parents and asked money for the bullet with which they had killed him. The parents needed to pay for his death. Those are my experiences. Not nicely laying flowers at a monument. There is no connection.” (Participant I18)

Despite experiencing social connectedness, several participants also expressed the wish for more diversity in Dutch commemoration, both with regard to the attendees as well as related to what is commemorated. These participants did not want their specific war to be mentioned, but they expressed the desire for a more abstract and broad focus on war victims in general and present time conflicts.

Expression

Several participants mentioned that they experienced the freedom and openness to *express* emotions and feelings during Remembrance Day. Furthermore, they could share

their stories with family members or others around them. These forms of non-verbal and verbal expression helped participants to open up and break through avoidance, to process the past, and further integrate their experiences in their life stories.

"In a mild way and for a moment, you are remembered who you are and where you are from, the present and the past. And on that moment, those few minutes, you can cry and no one will be surprised because of that." (Participant B17)

"You suppress those painful memories, but during the commemoration I remember it. For example, how forty babies died in one night because of the cold when we were between the borders of Serbia and Macedonia. Then when I hear the music, I feel relieved, the freedom. I'm so thankful." (Participant K23)

Meaning

Participants also reflected on the different *meanings* that commemoration may have. Meanings that they assigned were mainly future oriented, namely to reflect on the value of freedom, learn lessons from the past, and show the consequences of war from different perspectives to young generations, with the goal of preventing new wars. Specifically related to war commemorations from their country of origin, some participants referred to the importance of remembering the ethnical heritage and passing this on to the next generation. Most participants did not link commemoration to making sense or finding 'benefit' in their own war experiences. Rather, some participants referred to the powerlessness that they experienced while commemorating, being reminded of the extensiveness of war throughout the world. Moreover, the public respect for the deeds of resistance heroes reminded two participants of the lack of resistance and support that they experienced in their own situation.

Acknowledgement

When explicitly asked (in S2 interviews), several participants stated that they experienced a form of *acknowledgement* for war victims in general or specific victim groups. Concurrently, participants said that they did not seek or experience acknowledgement for their individual experiences through commemoration.

Personal memories

About two-third of the participants thought about *personal memories* of war during Remembrance Day. Some referred to very specific memories or circumstances, for example surrounding the loss of a family member, friend, or neighbour. The impact of these memories was described in various ways, such as distressing, relieving or causing distance.

"It throws me back in the time of war. I see the windows with black cloths, on which the names are written of those who are murdered. I hear a mother screaming and crying

for her son.” (Participant I8)

“When I realised it was a monument to commemorate Jewish children who are murdered in Auschwitz, it touched my wound directly. The past feels more and more as an open wound, without end. It has more impact every time I remember it.” (Participant B11)

“If I think about the war in Iraq and the way my father died, I have only bad memories that I do not want to remember. If you think about Remembrance Day, and all the monuments in which the dead are mentioned by name and are honoured, I can only think about all the graves without any name in Iraq. The moment that I lay a wreath in the Netherlands is so distant from these memories.” (Participant I6)

CONTEXT-RELATED REFLECTIONS

Complicated war

Participants often referred to a *complicated war* in their country of origin, to explain the (lack of) commemoration of their own war. The war that participants experienced was often very different from WWII in the Netherlands. Most participants experienced a civil war, in countries formed by different groups, ethnicities, nationalities, languages or political views. Furthermore, there were often multiple wars or conflicts in their country. Moreover, some of the wars or conflicts are still ongoing, for example in Syria, Yemen, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Although there is sometimes formal peace, such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq, division persists, and no real freedom is being experienced. Within families, stories of hatred or revenge are sometimes passed on to next generations and there is limited or no dialogue about past events or reconciliation between opposing groups. In addition, participants often referred to the contested history within their country of origin. For example, they mentioned how perpetrators are called heroes, war atrocities are denied, and no acknowledgement is given to those affected within society.

Complex commemoration

Because of the complicated war context, participants referred to *complex commemorations* in their country of origin. In most countries where participants come from, there are multiple days of commemoration, both related to previous wars such as WWII and more recent wars. These commemorations are often selective in who commemorates and who is commemorated, for example based on a political party, religious group, or ethnic background. Sometimes, attending a commemoration is forced by political parties or they are set up to make a political statement.

“I think the most attended commemoration in Bosnia Herzegovina is in Srebrenica. The people who are murdered here absolutely deserve a significant commemoration. But it hurts so much, it is so sad. I don’t mean that commemorations should be joyful, but they have a function. My classmate was murdered, but I can’t commemorate her. The way of

commemoration [in Srebrenica] creates so much distance for me. I feel that the reason for the commemoration is so different than what is said publicly.” (Participant B4)

Most participants did not attend a collective commemoration of their war for reasons related to the previously described complicated context of war, such as too many events to remember, disagreements about who should be remembered, ongoing conflict or provocative political involvement.

Several participants did commemorate events from their country or origin in the Netherlands. Typically, these commemorations were performed with like-minded people, for example by Kurdish people from Iraq. Confrontation with contested history was avoided.

Unity on Remembrance Day

When reflecting on Remembrance Day, participants often made comparisons between the context of war and commemoration in their country of origin and in the Netherlands. In this light, participants described the context of the Dutch commemoration as *united*, with a relatively cohesive narrative about WWII and a unified view on history and on who or what should be remembered. WWII is no longer an ongoing conflict. According to participants, Remembrance Day has a clear motive and intention, without hidden agenda or forced political ideologies. The focus on individual stories of war victims was associated with openness for reflections and thoughts, about personal memories or humanity in general.

PERFORMANCE-RELATED REFLECTIONS

Transformative rituals

The first theme derived from the performance-related reflections was *transformative rituals*. A wide variety of rituals performed on Remembrance Day was mentioned as being appealing, such as silence, music, laying wreaths, presence of the king, and young people sharing a poem or testimonial from a grandparent. Each ritual had a different impact on individuals. They evoked memories, feelings and emotions that were sometimes suppressed and avoided in daily life. Silence and music, and the contrast between these two, were mentioned most often as appealing rituals. The silence helped participants to stop and reflect and provided room to individual thoughts and feelings. Music often triggered memories and managed to elicit hidden feelings and emotions.

“By seeing the church and hearing the piano playing, I remembered the church choir in which I sang when I was still in Congo.” (Participant D19)

Laying wreaths and the presence of state officials was mentioned in connection to feelings of acknowledgement and respect. Involvement of younger generations, for example by reading a poem or retelling the story of their grandparents, was connected to the meaning and value of commemoration. Nationalistic rituals, such as the anthem or flag at half mast,

were connected to feelings of hope and longing for the future of one's country of origin.

"Lying wreaths is beautiful because of the acknowledgement. Everyone is looking to the suffering, somehow, and it gets a place, also literally a physical place. And the flowers are beautiful to look at." (Participant V25)

The diversity in commemorative rituals on Remembrance Day created space for participants to be involved in commemoration in their own preferred way. Different physical monuments were mentioned as important, for example related to the family history or residency. Also, a specific ritualised and personal type of commemoration was mentioned as meaningful, while other participants preferred to follow the television broadcasts or have an open conversation with friends as part of commemoration.

"It is not only on Dam Square [National Commemoration in the capital city Amsterdam]. You can be outside in your home town, there are monuments, radio, television. It is everywhere." (Participant I7)

Universal rituals

A second performance-related theme that was mentioned was *universal rituals*. Most participants were familiar with the rituals performed on Remembrance Day, such as laying flowers at a monument, a moment of silence, official speeches, poems, lighting candles, and prayers. Participants also referred to visiting monuments or historical places of importance as part of commemoration.

Some different rituals compared to rituals related to Remembrance Day were mentioned as well. For example, a Vietnamese participant described using incense on a small altar to commemorate. Other participants described commemorations in their country of origin more as festivals, with parades and marches, in which heroes are celebrated. Commemorations held in the Netherlands but related to the war or conflict in the country of origin often have a social reunion character. One participant from Chili described the annual commemoration in Amsterdam, of the coup in Chili on 11 September 1973, as follows:

"There are poems, music, speeches, but also food and snacks. For the Chilean community in the Netherlands, it is a kind of social moment full of emotion, in which we try to not forget anyone." (Participant C22)

Individual rituals

Participants often mentioned performing *individual rituals* to commemorate their personal past. The difference between commemoration and remembering was a thin line for participants, which differed from person to person. Participants often talked about triggers in daily life that reminded them about the past and made them remember and commemorate,

for example through looking at a photo of a lost loved one, lighting a candle and being fully focused for some moment on the past. Furthermore, participants explained how they commemorated by helping others, for example people who are struggling because of the war. Also, artistic expressions, such as in paintings or poems, were ways of commemoration for participants. Last, participants shared how commemoration is often closely connected to sharing stories about the past within the family. Participants described how these individual ways of commemoration especially helped them to cope with and process their past.

“Helping those people, especially that family, is a kind of commemoration for me. A way of commemorating and processing the past for myself.” (Participant I3)

Also more general days, such as Vietnamese New Year, which is a cultural day to remember the dead, were used to individually commemorate loved ones who died in the war.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated how 25 war-affected immigrants, resettled in the Netherlands, related to Remembrance Day, the Dutch national day in which WWII is commemorated. Most participants actively commemorated on Remembrance Day. Our results first revealed the individual impact of commemoration on war-affected immigrants in terms of emotions and other psychosocial factors, such as feelings of connectedness and expression. Second, results gave insights in how participants related their experiences with commemoration in the Netherlands to the context of war and commemoration in their country of origin. Last, the study revealed how rituals of Remembrance Day were perceived as transformative and universal, and highlighted the importance of individual rituals. Overall, results demonstrated the strong connection between the performed rituals, the context in which commemoration takes place and the individual impact of commemoration.

During Remembrance Day, many participants actively thought about *personal memories* and losses related to war. For some, this was distressing, while it had a healing effect for others, such as breaking through avoidance within a safe environment. However, most participants did focus more on commemoration of war victims and humanity in general. The *meaning* and purpose of commemoration was mainly related to learning lessons from the past, especially with a focus on next generations. The commemorative rituals on Remembrance Day appeared to be *transformative* and *universal*, being able to evoke personal memories and emotions among immigrants with different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Especially two minutes silence and the music contributed to remembering the past. Coping with personal events and losses was primarily linked to the performance of *individual commemorative rituals*.

Social connectedness was a major theme that arose while discussing the impact of

Remembrance Day. Participants often shared how they could relate to other war victims because of their own war experiences and how they felt connected with them during the commemoration. Further, they felt connected with others who commemorate by sharing similar values and beliefs through the act of commemoration. A bit different from our prior review (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020), which mainly focused on social and societal support through commemoration, participants in the present study expressed more often the importance of connectedness and belonging. Although the concepts of social support and social connectedness are closely related, the latter is more linked to aspects of group belonging, community and social identity (Schultz et al., 2016). The experience of social connectedness through commemoration is also in line with the impact of collective gatherings described by Durkheim (1912) and studies of Paez et al. (2015) and Rimé et al. (2011). They showed how collective gatherings lead to social integration, sharing of social beliefs, social cohesion and positive affect. Through ritual performance, usual social structures do not apply and those involved in the ritual hold equal status (Turner, 1969). This might especially apply to war-affected immigrants, experiencing inequality in daily life due to ethnic or religious differences, which fades into the background during commemoration.

Another important theme related to the impact of commemoration was *expression*, both non-verbally expression of emotions and verbally, expressing and sharing war-related stories. A range of *emotions* were experienced and expressed, with sadness most often mentioned. However, commemorations also led to strong feelings of gratitude for the present life, longing and hope. Different rituals had a different emotional effect on people. For example, nationalistic symbols and rituals, such as singing the anthem or raising the Dutch flag, contributed to feelings of longing and desire for a better future in the country of origin for some participants. Commemorative rituals create a certain space in which emotions can be felt in a distanced way, in which the person can be more in control of his emotions (Scheff, 1977). The experience through the ritual performance is close enough to feel the emotions and yet distant enough to not be overwhelmed by reliving the actual experience. Furthermore, collective rituals provide an opportunity to share experiences with others (Wojtkowiak, 2018).

Concerning context-related aspects of commemoration, participants often reflected on the *complicated war* context in their country of origin, and therefore *complex commemorations*. Although participants came from different countries, they often experienced civil war or multiple wars. Moreover, conflicts were still ongoing in some countries and participants referred to contested narratives about history in their country of origin. This complicated context of war was often related to a lack of collective commemorations, or complex commemorations for example through provocative political involvement. The difficulty of remembrance in a context with contested memories, ongoing violence and imposed (political) intentions is echoed by various scholars. For example, Ashton (2023) described the multiple and conflicting memorialisation practices in Kosovo. Alonso and Nienass (2021) referred to the difficulties to commemorate the hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who have been killed or disappeared in Mexico's ongoing war on drugs. Furthermore, research

of Ben-Asher et al. (2021) revealed how Israeli women faked emotional expressions, because of expectations during commemoration to support 'the glory of the military'.

In light of the context of war and commemoration in their country of origin, most participants experience a context of *unity* related to Remembrance Day. Research reveals that Remembrance Day is one of the days in which Dutch people feel most connected to each other (De Regt, 2019). Yet, this unity is not always reflected on societal level. Raaijmakers (2017) describes the multiple discussions that have accompanied Remembrance Day throughout the past decades about what we commemorate, who we commemorate and how we should do this. The experience of unity by war-affected immigrants might reflect the need and desire for a safe and unified context. On an individual level, disorganisation of memory and impaired integration of the trauma narrative is associated with the development of posttraumatic stress disorder and disturbed grief (Peri et al., 2016). Reconstruction of the trauma narrative is an important aspect in trauma and grief therapies. The same might be applicable to collective memory in the societal context; a unified collective memory may provide openness for individual grief and trauma processes and healing.

In their research, Maercker and Hecker (2016) consistently tried to incorporate the social-interpersonal context in the current perspective of psychotrauma and posttraumatic stress disorder. Both the traumatic event and the process of recovery take place in the interaction with families, communities and society. They and other authors stress the importance of social and societal *acknowledgement* of trauma and victimhood for individual recovery (Ajdukovic, 2013; Goldsmith et al., 2004; Maercker & Horn, 2013). 'Healing' of the socio-political context is necessary for healing in individuals and families after large-scale violence, war or genocide. Through commemoration, victim's equality of value and dignity can be re-established and unification with society can take place by acknowledgement of victimhood (Danieli, 2009). In our study, acknowledgement did not seem to play a major role for participants. They experienced some feelings of acknowledgement for victims in general, but none of the participants expressed experiencing recognition for their own sufferings through Remembrance Day. In contrast to the focus on a unified collective memory including societal acknowledgement of victimhood, Anyaduba and Maiangwa (2020) argued that memory practices should not be viewed as a remedy for past atrocities in countries with a contested war narrative. Studying the aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafra war, they conclude that commemoration and acknowledgement of victim's memories of suffering is not enough. It papers over the real core of the violence, namely the present political structure. Our research also indicates that valuable commemorations and memory practices include more than just the acknowledgement for victims' suffering. A right balance is needed between the performed rituals and the context in which the commemoration takes place (including the political context) to achieve the intended impact of healing and restoration.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

Several limitations need to be considered. First, the group of war-affected immigrants included in this study is very diverse. Therefore, we could not make conclusions based on country of origin, age, gender, or time since arrival in the Netherlands. Moreover, because of the diverse and limited number of participants, this sample is not representative for all war-affected immigrants in the Netherlands. However, based on our comparisons between the two interview sets, no major differences are expected between individuals from different countries on the discussed themes. Another limitation concerns the partially indistinctness of participants' own experiences during Remembrance Day, or their hopes regarding commemoration. When it was not clear if participants were referring to actual experiences, descriptions were not included as reflections on Remembrance Day. Last, the high percentage of participants attending Remembrance Day might be related to their interest in participating in an interview, because the topic of the interview was known by participants before deciding to participate. This might have contributed to the high number of positive reflections about Remembrance Day in the present study. Despite these limitations, the diversity of interviews allowed us to present a broad range of reflections on commemoration and made it possible to derive overarching aspects that give us deeper insight in the function of commemoration. It is one of the first studies to examine the perspectives of war-affected immigrants to commemoration in a structural and systematic way.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study may have implications for future commemorations. First, involving war-affected immigrants within commemorative events is significant in an inclusive society. For example, this can be done through actively inviting them to war commemorations and giving them a voice in the organisation of these events. Policymakers, organisers of commemorative events or other professionals working with war-affected immigrants do well to keep in mind that commemorations can kindle painful emotions, including sadness or anxieties related to specific war memories. However, this possibility should not be a reason to shy away from reaching out to war-affected immigrants or refugees. Commemorations can be of great benefit to them through the experience of social connectedness and openings for expression of emotions and personal stories. Commemorations might be valuable for more recent refugee groups as well, such as from Ukraine or Afghanistan. While the conflict in their countries are still ongoing, they might find hope, belonging, and comfort through a unified commemoration. Second, mentioning circumstances and implications of a specific war, such as WWII in the Netherlands, can help war-affected immigrants to relate their own story and connect with other war victims. Yet, it is important that a perspective on the present and the future accompanies these stories, for example by providing openings for dialogues about other war-related experiences. Third, the experience of a unified commemoration by war-affected immigrants in this study does not reflect the complexity of

war. Minority groups, such as children of collaborators in the Netherlands, often still struggle to gain societal acknowledgement for the impact of their war experiences. Those involved in the organisation of commemorations should carefully consider the underlying messages that are communicated through various rituals during the commemoration. Last, asking questions about the societal context of war or conflict within individual treatment is important for counsellors working with war-affected immigrants (Maercker & Horn, 2013). This might include questions about contested collective narratives, feelings of acknowledgement or commemorative performances.

Future research should focus more on the diversity within the group of war-affected migrants, as part of the diversity of responses might be related to cultural background, type of war experiences or other demographic characteristics. Furthermore, international comparisons would be interesting to examine if war-affected immigrants or refugees would be impacted differently in other settings of commemoration, such as a the more open rituals during the Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom, remembering the Unknown Warrior.

CONCLUSION

The impact of commemoration is highly intertwined with the form and meaning of the performed rituals and the context in which these ritual performances take place. Even when the main subject of a commemoration is not directly related to individual war experiences, commemorative rituals can be performed in such a way that these are open for multiple interpretations, experiences and feelings. Within a united atmosphere of remembrance, commemoration can lead to social connectedness and encourage expression of emotions and stories that might contribute to individual processes of healing.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B. Mitima-Verloop: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

P.A. Boelen: Conceptualisation, writing – review & editing, supervision

S. Moerbeek: Investigation, writing – review & editing

I. Tames: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing

T.T.M. Mooren: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, supervision

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION 1

TOPIC LIST INTERVIEWS SET 1

- Were there specific days or moments of commemoration in your country of origin? Which ones?
- Are there commemorations in the Netherlands in which events from your country of origin are remembered? How?
- Are you familiar with Remembrance Day on May 4th, and do you watch it or participate in it? Why?
- What do you think about during Remembrance Day?
- Do you have further suggestions for the future of May 4th?

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION 2

TOPIC LIST INTERVIEWS SET 2

Start: Watching 16 minute video of live broadcast of the National Commemoration on Dam Square.

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. Familiarity with Remembrance Day

How familiar are you with Remembrance Day? What do you know about it? What is your experience with it?

If participant attended before: What do you think of Remembrance Day?

If participant did not attend before: What do you think of the commemoration after watching the broadcast?
2. Experience with commemoration in country of origin

Are there commemorations of conflicts or war in your country of origin?

What is commemorated and in which way? Were you attending those events?

Are there fixed moments or ways in which you commemorate the conflict or war you experienced in the past, and in which you commemorate the people who died? Individually or collective, with others? How do you do this?
3. Personal memories

What thoughts come to the fore during the commemoration on Remembrance Day?

Do personal memories of your own experiences with war/violence/oppression or persecution come to the fore during Remembrance Day? If yes, which memories and how do you experience this?

How is this during other commemorations that you are involved in?
4. Recognition and acknowledgement

Do you recognise yourself in Remembrance Day (feeling included or excluded; identification with the Netherlands/WWII)

Is Remembrance Day connected to a feeling of acknowledgement or being recognised for you. If yes, in what sense do you feel acknowledged and by who?

How is this during other commemorations that you are involved in?
5. Support

Do you feel supported during Remembrance Day? If yes, by who and how do you experience this?

Do you talk about the commemoration with others? What does this mean to you?

How is this during other commemorations that you are involved in?

6. Meaning making

What does Remembrance Day mean to you?

Does Remembrance Day help you to see your experiences with war and violence in another light / from another angle or perspective? If yes, how?

How is this during other commemorations that you are involved in?

7. Expression

What emotions did you experience during Remembrance Day?

Did you express the emotions or feelings that you experienced during the commemoration? What did this mean to you?

How is this during other commemorations that you are involved in?

8. Rituals

Was there a ritual or element of the commemoration that especially contributed to how you experienced the commemoration?

9. Final thoughts

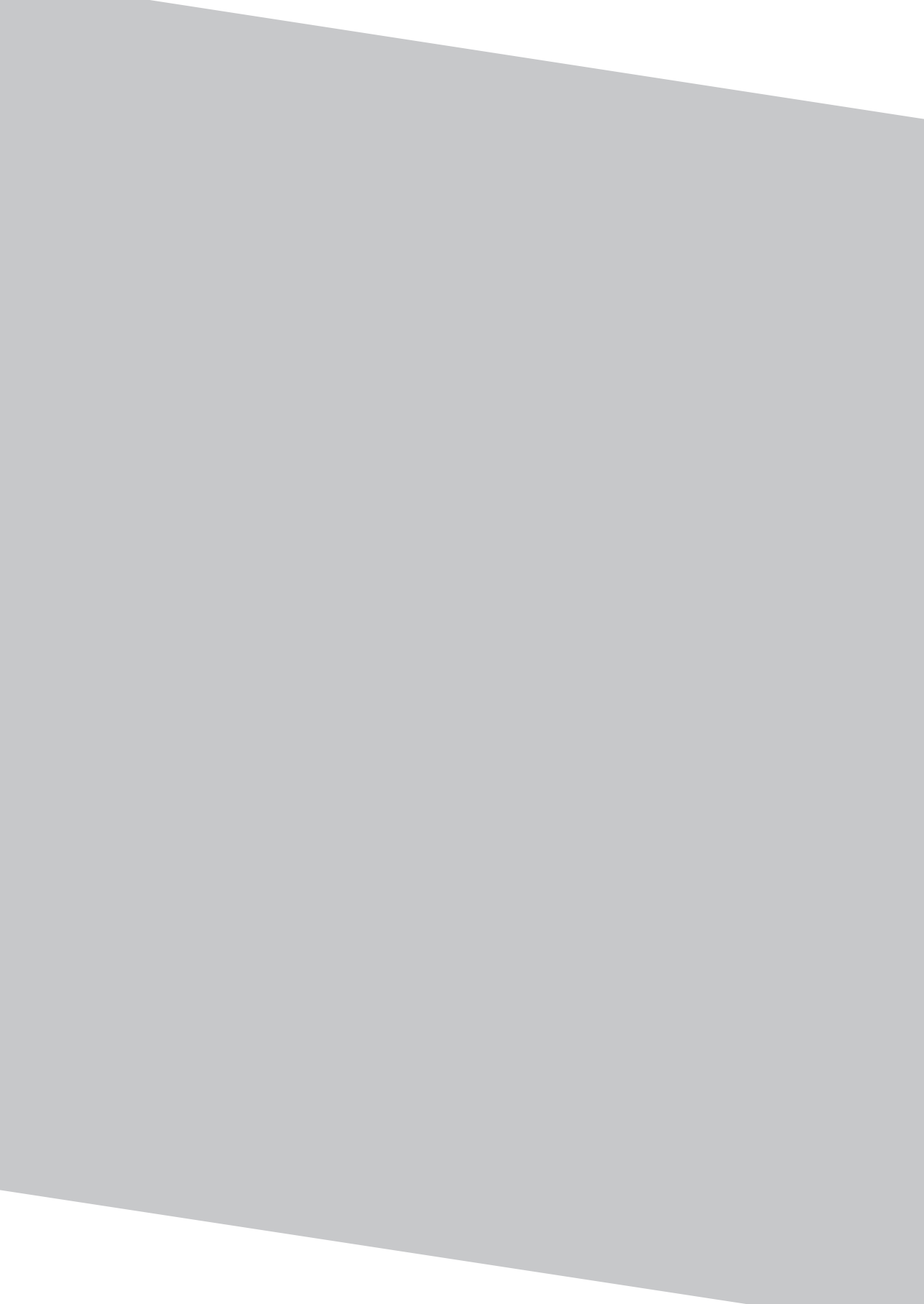
While reflecting on commemoration, is there something that is important for you that we did not ask yet?





PART II

**Funeral services and grief rituals after
the loss of a loved one**



Facilitating grief: An exploration of the function of funerals and rituals in relation to grief reactions

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ABSTRACT

The loss of a loved one through death is usually followed by a funeral and engagement in various grief rituals. We examined the association between the evaluation of the funeral, the use of grief rituals and grief reactions. Bereaved individuals from the Netherlands completed questionnaires, six months and three years post-loss ($n = 552/289$). Although the funeral and rituals were considered helpful, no significant association between evaluation of the funeral and usage of grief rituals and grief reactions was found. More insight in the engagement in rituals will ultimately serve bereaved individuals to cope with loss.

KEYWORDS

Funeral, Grief, Ritual, Mental health

INTRODUCTION

The loss of a loved one is an inevitable experience for human beings. People who are confronted with the death of a loved one differ in terms of the nature and intensity of their reactions (Bonanno et al., 2002). To help those people suffering from the loss of their loved one, it is important to gain knowledge about factors and mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the grieving process. A large body of research focuses on intra- and interpersonal variables, such as attachment bonds and perceived social support (Lobb et al., 2010). Characteristics of the loss itself, such as the cause of death, have been studied extensively as well (Stroebe et al., 2007; Van der Houwen et al., 2010). Relatively little research has been conducted on the use of rituals after bereavement. This is surprising given that the performance of rituals is frequently linked to coping with loss (Fulton, 1995; Hoy, 2013; Lensing, 2001; Wijngaards-De Meij et al., 2008).

FUNERAL RITUALS

Irrespective of culture, religion or value system, death is usually followed by a funeral service (O'Rourke et al., 2011). The practice and purpose of a funeral and other death rituals, however, vary widely across cultures and religions (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Walter, 2005). The present study is exclusively focused on funeral practices in Western modern societies. In the past decades, secularisation and individualisation in the Netherlands have led to a degradation of traditional religious rituals, whereas personalisation of rituals has become more popular (Garces-Foley, 2003; Holloway et al., 2013; Venbrux et al., 2008). In the Netherlands, a funeral is usually organised by the relatives of the deceased and a funeral director. In the year 2017, around one-third of the deceased in the Netherlands was buried, whereas two-third was cremated (Landelijke Vereniging van Crematoria, 2018).

Among other factors, a funeral offers a venue for the culturally accepted expression of loss-related emotions (Fulton, 1995) and marks a transition in which the irreversibility of the death is emphasised (e.g., Irion, 1991; Rando, 1988). Simultaneously, it provides a starting point for recovery and renewal (Kastenbaum, 2004). Romanoff and Terenzio (1998) described how rituals can become vehicles in the processes of transformation, transition, and continuity—processes forming the basis of adjustment and recovery following bereavement.

Intuitively, it makes sense to assume that a good farewell of a loved one helps in coming to terms with the loss (Lensing, 2001). Importantly, however, very few studies have so far examined this assumption. Moreover, existing studies vary widely in terms of methods used and samples investigated. For instance, in an early study of Doka (1985) among 50 US citizens, participants reported that they felt that planning funeral rituals supported their process of adjustment. However, a significant relationship between the level of participation in a funeral and an objective index of grief adjustment was not found (Bolton & Camp, 1987; Doka, 1985). Several other studies, with participants from various cultural backgrounds (i.e.,

Rwandan, Mayan, and Latin American), focused on the loss of a loved one as a result of genocide and compared the well-being of people who participated in funeral activities with those who did not. These studies did not find a difference between groups in terms of grief severity (e.g., Beristain et al., 2000; Schaal et al., 2010).

As most individuals attend a funeral service, another way to investigate the association between funerals and grief reactions is to examine the evaluation of the funeral service. This is of prime importance, as the perception or experience of the funeral contains potentially changeable aspects. To the authors' knowledge, only one study has yet included this aspect. Gamino et al. (2000) studied a group of 74 US citizens and indicated that the occurrence of adverse events during the funeral services, such as family conflicts or problems with the funeral director, was related to more intense grief reactions. In light of the limited research in this area, there is still a need to further our knowledge on the extent to which the perception of the funeral is associated with bereavement outcomes.

POST-FUNERAL RITUALS

Following the funeral, individuals may use a wide range of grief rituals to come to terms with the loss, such as lighting a candle or creating a place or object in memory of the deceased. The use of grief rituals across cultures has been extensively documented by anthropologists (Souza, 2017). However, from a psychological perspective, very few empirical studies have examined the impact of performing rituals on recovery from the loss of a loved one (Castle & Phillips, 2003). Many bereaved individuals experience the most intense emotions between three and 24 months post-loss, long after the funeral or memorial service took place. In these months, when social support decreases, rituals may be helpful in coping with the loss (Castle & Phillips, 2003).

Different elements underlying the potential benefit of rituals in supporting grief adjustment have been suggested in the literature. Performing rituals might lead to externalisation of feelings and foster the expression of emotions (Rando, 1985; Vale-Taylor, 2009), might help to maintain a meaningful bond with the deceased (Mroz & Bluck, 2018; Possick et al., 2007; Vale-Taylor, 2009), and might help gaining control over the changes and uncertainties brought about by the loss (Norton & Gino, 2014). Bolton and Camp (1987) studied a group of 50 widowed individuals from the US and reported a moderate relationship between certain post-funeral rituals (e.g., sorting personal effects) and aspects of grief adjustment. Castle and Phillips (2003) explored the use of various post-funeral rituals among 50 bereaved individuals in the US. Participants in their study evaluated the performed activities, such as visiting a gravesite or listening to music of the deceased, as moderately to very helpful. Based on these findings, the authors conclude that grief rituals facilitate adjustment to bereavement. However, the cross-sectional design did not allow examining to what extent the use of rituals preceded alleviation of grief reactions. In fact, to our knowledge, no longitudinal studies have yet been conducted examining the association of post-funeral rituals with changes in grief reactions over time.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Taken together, there is a considerable gap in the literature concerning the association between the evaluation of the funeral, the use of grief rituals, and grief reactions. Studying these issues was deemed relevant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was considered important to provide empirical evidence for commonly accepted assumptions about the positive impact of rituals surrounding the death of a loved one in coming to terms with the loss. Secondly, advanced knowledge about how different aspects of a funeral and grief rituals are perceived by bereaved individuals can inform funeral directors to advise their clients in making well-considered decisions about the use of funeral and post-funeral rituals. Lastly, knowledge on the impact of different rituals was deemed to be of potential benefit for counsellors and psychologists supporting bereaved individuals.

Accordingly, in the current study, we explored the relationship between bereaved individuals' perceptions of the funeral of their loved one, the use of post-funeral rituals, and bereavement outcomes, using a longitudinal study design. Specifically, in a large group of recently bereaved individuals, we gathered data about the perception of different aspects of the funeral, together with different indices of grief and psychological functioning (at Time 1 [T1]). Three years later (at Time 2 [T2]), people were again invited to complete measures of grief and functioning together with questions about the use of rituals in the past three years. Four aims were addressed. The first aim was to explore people's perception of the funeral. Specifically, we explored how different aspects of the funeral were perceived at T1, either negative or positive. At T2 we explored how these same aspects were perceived in retrospect, three years later, to learn about the stability of the perception of the funeral.

The second aim was to explore the associations between the evaluation of different aspects of the funeral, and grief reactions and mental health at T1 and T2. Based on previous research and theorising, we expected that a positive perception of the funeral would be related to less intense grief reactions and increased positive mental health outcomes assessed concurrently as well as three years later.

Our third aim was to examine what type of grief rituals and help-seeking activities people had engaged in during their grieving process (until T2) and their evaluation of the degree to which these rituals and activities were considered as helpful.

Finally, our fourth aim was to examine how the use of rituals was associated with changes in grief reactions over time. We expected that the use of grief rituals would assist in the process of coming to terms with the loss and, accordingly, that people who engaged in more rituals would report a stronger decline in grief reactions over time.

METHODS

PROCEDURES

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty

of Social Sciences of Utrecht University (FETC-17/067). Participants were invited via the routinely administered customer satisfaction survey of a funeral service company in the Netherlands between April 2014 and February 2015 (T1). In total, 1307 individuals gave permission for being approached for the current research. They all received an email with a link to the online survey and the option to receive the questionnaire by post; 558 (42.7%) participants completed the questionnaire and signed the informed consent.

Between September and December 2017, 461 individuals, who gave permission to be approached for participation in follow-up research, were invited by email to participate in the second survey (T2). A total of 316 participants completed this questionnaire (response rate of 68.5%). (For another study based on this research project, see Boelen et al., 2019).

PARTICIPANTS

Participants bereaved more than 6 months ago at T1 were excluded from the analyses, and people with unknown time since loss were included'. Furthermore, participants who did not fill in the second questionnaire about the same deceased as at T1 were excluded from the T2 analyses. Eventually, 552 participants with complete data at T1 and 289 with T2 data were included in the analyses. The age of the participants at T1 varied from 23 to 88 years ($M = 58.93$, $SD = 11.47$) and at T2 from 27 to 89 ($M = 61.58$, $SD = 11.72$). The number of days between the death of the loved one and completion of the T1 questionnaires varied between 3 and 175 days ($M = 94.30$, $SD = 28.58$). Additional demographic characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants ($n = 552$ [T1]; $n = 289$ [T2])

		T1 [<i>n</i> (%)]	T2 [<i>n</i> (%)]
Sex	Male	229 (41.5)	120 (41.5)
	Female	323 (58.5)	169 (58.5)
Education	Lower than college/university	291 (52.6)	141 (48.7)
	College/university	261 (47.3)	148 (51.2)
Deceased	Partner	163 (29.5)	98 (33.9)
	Child	24 (4.3)	10 (3.5)
	Parent	297 (53.8)	156 (54.0)
	Brother/sister	11 (2.0)	6 (2.1)
	Other relative/friend	57 (10.3)	19 (6.6)
Cause of death	Illness	226 (40.9)	133 (46.2)
	Natural death	168 (30.4)	75 (26.0)
	Accident	10 (1.8)	5 (1.7)
	Suicide	9 (1.6)	6 (2.1)
	Medical complications	107 (19.4)	53 (18.4)
	Euthanasia	27 (4.9)	13 (4.5)
	Other	5 (0.9)	3 (1.0)
Nationality	Dutch (without migration background)	Na	282 (97.6)

Table 1. Continued

		T1 [n (%)]	T2 [n (%)]
Religion	Other	Na	7 (2.4)
	Christian	Na	85 (29.6)
	Spiritual	Na	48 (16.7)
	No religion	Na	144 (50.2)
	Other	Na	10 (3.5)

Note. Na = not assessed.

DROPOUT ANALYSES

Bereaved individuals who dropped out at T2 ($N = 263$) were compared to those who continued participating ($N = 289$). Differences between dropouts and participants were found in terms of the level of education and relationship to the deceased as registered at T1. More people with low compared to high education dropped out ($\chi^2 [1, n = 552] = 10.91, p < .001$) and more people who lost a partner compared to a parent dropped out ($\chi^2 [4, n = 552] = 12.32, p = .015$). These differences were not deemed problematic, because education and relationship to the deceased were not the central focus of our study. No differences between other sociodemographic variables, characteristics of the loss or grief reactions as assessed at T1 were found.

MEASURES

Socio-demographic variables included (i) gender, (ii) age in years, (iii) level of education (dichotomised as 0 = lower than college/university and 1 = college/university), (iv) nationality and (v) religious affiliation. Furthermore, characteristics of the loss were included, namely (vi) cause of death, (vii) relationship to the deceased and (viii) time since the loss.

Grief reactions were measured at T1 and T2 using the Traumatic Grief Inventory self-report version (TGI-SR; Boelen & Smid, 2017). The original questionnaire consists of 18 items (e.g., 'I had trouble to accept the loss'), scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). For ethical reasons, two questions concerning suicide and intrusive thoughts were not included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, because of the recentness of the loss, items at T1 were reformulated in the present tense (e.g., 'I have trouble to accept the loss') and the response scale was changed to 1 = not at all to 5 = very much. At T2, the original 18-item questionnaire was administered. Analyses were performed based on total scores, calculated with the sum of the 16 items included at T1 and T2. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .93 both at T1 and T2.

Positive and negative feelings were measured at T1 using items from the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988; Dutch translation by Engelen et al., 2006). The constructed questionnaire used in this study included 18 items (e.g., strong and afraid), scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally not to 5 = very much). A total of nine positive and nine negative items were chosen, including 14 items derived from the original PANAS scale and four additional items (i.e., relieved, calm, sad, and depressive). We added

these four items because they were deemed to represent important emotional responses to loss. In congruence with the PANAS, we computed two scores, representing positive and negative affect, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for both the positive and negative affect items was .88.

The Work and Social Adjustment Scale (WSAS; Mundt et al., 2002) was used to measure impairment in functioning at T2. The scale consists of 5 items (e.g., 'Because of the loss, my ability to work is impaired'), scored on a 9-point Likert scale (0 = totally not to 8 = very severe). The psychometric properties of the instrument are satisfactory (Mundt et al., 2002). Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Perception of the funeral was measured at T1 and T2 with the Funeral Evaluation Questionnaire (FEQ), a self-constructed questionnaire based on previous literature and expert consultation. The FEQ was specifically designed for this study to evaluate the general evaluation of the funeral ceremony and the guidance of the funeral director². The general evaluation of the funeral was assessed with four items (e.g., 'I have been able to say good-bye to my loved one in the best way that was possible'). The evaluation of the guidance of the funeral director was assessed using five items (e.g., 'My funeral director was professionally and personally engaged'). Participants rated the extent to which statements applied to them on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally not to 5 = very much). We calculated a 'general evaluation' and 'director evaluation' score by summing the items. Cronbach's alpha for both scales were satisfactory: for general evaluation, $\alpha = .78$ (T1), $\alpha = .79$ (T2) and for director evaluation, $\alpha = .94$ (T1), $\alpha = .93$ (T2).

Grief rituals were measured at T2 using 11 items, derived from the Bereavement Activities Questionnaire (BAQ; Castle & Phillips, 2003). The original scale consists of 23 items, including help-seeking activities. Considering our specific research question, we chose to include the items describing activities with a ritualistic character. Furthermore, we combined several items of the BAQ which were considered as serving the same purpose (e.g., 'creating an altar for the deceased' and 'displaying a photo of the deceased'), to reduce the length of the questionnaire. Similar to the original scale, items were scored twice. First, participants rated whether they had engaged in each ritual (scored as 0 = no, 1 = yes). Secondly, for each ritual endorsed, participants rated the degree to which engagement in the ritual was deemed helpful to cope with the loss, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very unhelpful to 5 = extremely helpful). Three items tapped into collective rituals (e.g., 'I attended a memorial service, other than the funeral') and 8 items represented individual rituals (e.g., 'I carry something with me, which reminds me of the deceased'). Analyses were conducted using the total number of rituals or activities from each category.

Help-seeking activities were based on the BAQ (Castle & Phillips, 2003) as well, including 5 items (e.g., 'I attended a bereavement support group'). These items were measured at T2 and scored in the same way as the aforementioned grief rituals.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 24.0 (IBM Corp., 2016). Missing values were replaced using person mean imputation (Enders, 2003). Questionnaires with more than 15% missing values were removed from the analyses. To address our first aim, we used descriptive statistics and paired sample *t*-tests to explore funeral perception (FEQ scores) and its stability over time. Furthermore, we explored (group) differences in funeral perception using ANOVA statistics and Pearson correlations. To address our second aim, we evaluated changes in grief reactions from T1 to T2, using paired sample *t*-tests. Correlations were calculated to examine the associations between funeral perception on the one hand, and grief reactions (TGI-SR), emotional affect (modified PANAS), and functioning at T1 and T2 (WSAS) on the other hand. Furthermore, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine whether funeral perception explained variance in grief reactions at T2, while controlling for grief at T1. Regarding our third aim, descriptive statistics were used to describe the type of rituals participants had engaged in (as reported at T2) and the perceived helpfulness of these rituals. Group differences in the number of rituals participants engaged in were examined with independent-sample *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs. Pearson correlations were calculated to evaluate associations between the number of rituals people performed and the intensity of grief reactions. Lastly, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine if the total number of grief rituals and help-seeking activities explained variance in grief reactions at T2 while controlling for grief reactions at T1.

RESULTS

FUNERAL PERCEPTION AND STABILITY OVER TIME

In general, participants had a very positive perception of the funeral of their loved one. On both subscales of the FEQ, that is, the general evaluation ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.75$) and the director evaluation ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.81$), the mean scores were close to the maximum score of 5.0. Furthermore, we explored if the general evaluation of the funeral and the evaluation of the funeral director differed as a function of age, gender, level of education, time since the loss, and relationship to the deceased. Apart from women scoring slightly but significantly higher on the general evaluation subscale, $t(536) = -2.15$, $p = .032$, none of these variables were associated with FEQ subscale scores.

The perception of the funeral remained fairly stable over time. On average, scores on the items tapping general evaluation differed between T1 ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.73$) and T2 ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(278) = 4.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.22$. Scores on items tapping director evaluation at T1 ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.78$) differed as well, compared to T2 ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.89$), $t(273) = 7.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.36$. However, both differences represented a small effect and mean scores at T2 were still high (> 4.0).

One item of the FEQ concerned whether participants perceived the funeral as

contributing to processing their loss ('The way in which the period around the funeral was organised, was important in processing the loss'). In general, most participants agreed with this statement 'a lot' to 'very much' (75.9% on T1 and 70.2% at T2), yielding a high mean item score ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.07$ at T1 and $M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.11$ at T2).

FUNERAL PERCEPTION AND MENTAL HEALTH OVER TIME

Grief reactions diminished significantly between T1 ($M = 30.79$, $SD = 11.83$) and T2 ($M = 27.39$, $SD = 10.40$), $t(286) = 6.53$, $p < .001$. The effect size of the decrease was small ($d = 0.31$) which may be due to the low mean score on grief reactions at T1. Table 2 shows correlations between both FEQ scales (the general evaluation of the funeral and of the director's role), and grief, emotional affect (at T1), and functioning (at T2). No significant associations were found, with the exception of a small positive association between the general evaluation of the funeral and positive affect ($r = .21$, $p < .001$), and the director evaluation and positive affect ($r = .13$, $p = .003$). We conducted a hierarchical regression analysis with grief at T1 and the general evaluation and director evaluation scores from the FEQ at T1 predicting grief scores at T2. The model was significant $F(1, 268) = 248.84$, $p < .001$. However, grief at T1 ($\beta = .696$, $p < .001$) but not the variables general evaluation ($\beta = .03$, $p = .596$) and director evaluation ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .283$) explained a unique proportion of variance in grief at T2.

Table 2. Person correlations between perception of the funeral and mental health outcomes at T1 ($n = 515$) and T2 ($n = 255$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. General Evaluation	1.00						
2. Director Evaluation	.523*	1.00					
3. Grief reactions (T1)	.007	.047	1.00				
4. Negative affect (T1)	-.023	.013	.806*	1.00			
5. Positive affect (T1)	.210*	.130*	-.451*	-.463*	1.00		
6. Grief reactions (T2)	.014	.036	.684*	.530*	-.223*	1.00	
7. Functioning Impairment (T2)	-.041	-.016	.480*	.406*	-.216*	.594*	1.00

* $p < .01$.

GRIEF RITUALS AND HELP-SEEKING ACTIVITIES

Table 3 demonstrates the number of people engaging in different rituals and the evaluation of the helpfulness of these rituals. Many participants engaged in grief rituals; 51.9% of the participants performed collective grief rituals apart from the funeral service, such as organising a remembrance ceremony with family or sharing stories about the deceased with others. Individual rituals (e.g., creating an altar or space in memory of the deceased, visiting the gravesite or lighting a candle) were performed by most participants (85.3%). Furthermore, 34.7% of the participants were involved in at least one activity to seek (professional) help to cope with the loss, varying from reading information about mourning

to receiving individual grief counselling. Collective and individual rituals were both rated as equally (i.e., moderately to very) helpful ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.19$; $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.15$). Help-seeking activities were rated as less helpful compared to the grief rituals (not very to moderately helpful) ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.07$).

Table 3. Number of grief rituals and assistance related activities and rating of helpfulness ($n = 285$)

	Number of participants (n)	%	Level of helpfulness (M)
<i>Grief rituals - collective</i>			
1 Participating in a memorial service, organised by Yarden in memory of the deceased	35	12.3	2.9
2 Participating in a memorial service (other than the funeral) in memory of the deceased (e.g. with family)	85	29.8	3.7
3 Sharing stories about the deceased with others	78	27.4	4.0
<i>Grief rituals - individual</i>			
4 Creating something (book, poem, drawing or painting) to express feelings of grief	30	10.5	3.8
5 Visiting the gravesite of deceased or the place where ash was scattered	132	46.3	3.5
6 Performing a personal ritual to express feelings of grief	40	14.0	3.7
7 Listening to music or watching a movie that is a reminder of the deceased	75	26.3	3.7
8 Creating an altar or space (e.g. displaying a photo) in memory of deceased	174	61.1	3.8
9 Lighting a candle in remembrance of deceased	111	38.9	3.6
10 Carrying or wearing something that is a reminder of the deceased	88	30.9	4.0
11 Visiting a place that was special to the deceased	49	17.2	4.0
12 Other activity (please describe briefly)	13	4.6	4.1
<i>Help seeking activities</i>			
13 Attending a bereavement support group	10	3.5	2.1
14 Reading about grief and coping with loss (on internet, in a book or leaflet)	67	23.5	2.6
15 Conversation(s) with a grief counsellor	13	4.6	3.0
16 Conversation(s) with a psychologist, psychiatrist or general practitioner concerning loss and grief	49	17.2	3.3
17 Participating in informative meetings about grief	3	1.1	3.3
<i>No activity</i>	25	8.8	-

Note. Participants rated the degree to which engagement in the activities was deemed helpful on 5-point scales (1 = very unhelpful to 5 = extremely helpful).

Furthermore, we explored if the number of grief rituals ($min. = 0$, $max. = 10$, $M = 3.12$, $SD = 2.22$) and the number of help-seeking activities ($min. = 0$, $max. = 5$, $M = 0.50$, $SD = 0.82$) participants had engaged in differed as function of (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) level of education, (iv) religious affiliation, (v) relationship to the deceased, and (vi) cause of death. A summary of the results of these analyses is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of group differences in amount of different performed rituals

Ritual/activity	Cause of death	Relationship	Religion	Gender	Age
Collective rituals	No difference	No difference	No difference	Women > men	Younger > older
Individual rituals	Sickness > Natural death	Partner/child > Parent/other	Spiritual/Christian > Non-religious	Women > men	No difference
Help seeking activities	Sickness > Natural death	Partner > Parent/other	No difference	Women > men	Younger > older

(i) On average, women performed significantly more rituals compared to men for all three categories of activities (i.e., collective rituals, $t(283) = 2.55, p = .011, d = 0.31$; individual rituals, $t(283) = 2.16, p = .032, d = 0.26$, and help-seeking activities, $t(283) = 2.24, p = .026, d = 0.25$). All effect sizes indicated that effects were small. (ii) Age was significantly associated with the number of collective rituals ($r = -.13, p = .023$) and help-seeking activities ($r = -.13, p = .025$) participants engaged in, indicating that younger people are slightly more engaged in these rituals and activities. (iii) No differences in the number of performed rituals were found between participants with college/university level education and the other participants, with lower education. (iv) Significant differences in the number of individual rituals used were found between people with different religious affiliations, $F(4, 278) = 3.44, p = .009, r = .22$, representing a small effect. Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants who were non-religious engaged in fewer individual rituals compared to those who qualified themselves as spiritual. (v) The use of rituals differed depending on the relationship to the deceased. Significant differences were found for individual rituals, $F(4, 280) = 9.00, p < .001, r = .34$, and help-seeking activities, $F(4, 280) = 6.74, p < .001, r = .30$. Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons indicated that participants who lost a partner or child used these rituals and activities more than those who lost a parent or other loved one. (vi) The use of individual rituals and help-seeking activities also differed according to the cause of death, $F(3, 281) = 7.96, p < .001, r = .28$; $F(3, 281) = 4.92, p = .002, r = .22$. Games-Howell post-hoc test indicated that individuals who lost their loved one through sickness engaged more in individual rituals and help-seeking activities than individuals confronted with a loss caused by natural death (e.g., old age).

GRIEF RITUALS IN RELATION TO GRIEF REACTIONS OVER TIME

The intensity of grief reactions at T1 was significantly associated with the number of individual grief rituals ($r = .45, p < .001$) and help-seeking activities ($r = .45, p < .001$) people engaged in, but not with the number of collective rituals ($r = .09, p = .112$). To examine if the use of grief rituals and help-seeking activities was associated with changes in grief reactions from T1 to T2, we performed a hierarchical regression analysis predicting grief at T2, in which grief scores at T1 were entered in the first block of the equation and the numbers of individual, collective, and help-seeking activities were entered in the second block³. Block 1 yielded a significant model ($F(1, 281) = 260.44, p < .001$). Adding the numbers of individual,

collective, and help-seeking activities in Block 2 yielded a significant improvement of the model ($F_{change}(3, 278) = 2.84, p < .05$). In the final model, grief at T1 ($\beta = .62, p < .001$), as well as the number of help-seeking activities ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), but not the number of collective rituals ($\beta = -.04, p = .404$) and individual rituals ($\beta = .05, p = .318$) explained unique variance in grief scores at T2. The full regression table is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting grief reactions at T2 ($n = 283$)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Grief T1	0.61	0.04	.69**	0.54	0.04	.62**
Collective rituals				-0.55	0.66	-.04
Individual rituals				0.30	0.30	.05
Help seeking activities				1.55	0.61	.12*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

The loss of a loved one through death is usually followed by a funeral. In the months or years succeeding the funeral, bereaved individuals generally use a wide variety of grief rituals to cope with the loss. Intuitively, we assume that these rituals contribute to grief adjustment. However, scientific studies surrounding this topic are scarce. The present study examined the importance of the evaluation of the funeral and the use of grief rituals in relation to grief reactions over time.

EVALUATING THE FUNERAL

Both shortly after the loss of a loved one and three years later, bereaved individuals had a very positive perception of different aspects of the funeral. Apparently, people do not only respond positively due to emotional experiences in the first months after a loss but continue to look back on the funeral with positive thoughts, even after years. The vast majority of participants reported that the organisation of the period surrounding the funeral was important to process their loss. That is, the single item 'The way in which the period around the funeral was organised, was important in processing the loss' from the FEQ, was strongly endorsed. In contrast, this positive perspective on the helpfulness of the funeral was not reflected by the results from our analyses based on the change in grief reactions. The study revealed a small but positive relationship between the evaluation of the funeral and positive effect shortly after the loss. However, the (positive) perception of the funeral was not statistically significantly associated with grief reactions, negative affect, and general functioning. This finding is in contrast with the study of Gamino et al. (2000), who stated that evaluating the funeral as comforting was related to fewer difficulties in

grief adjustment. The difference could be explained by the fact that Gamino et al. (2000) used qualitative measurements, focusing on affective aspects of the funeral, whereas we, in our study, focused on cognitive appraisals reflecting the evaluation of the funeral. The difference could also be due to the fact that participants in our study evaluated the funeral very positively and had low to moderate grief reactions. This caused little variation, and therefore, small relationships between funeral perception and mental health could not be detected.

The results of this study suggest that a positive perception of the funeral is related to positive affect in the first months after the loss but has no significant linkage with the intensity of grief reactions. Thus, the general perception of people that the funeral aids them in coming to terms with their loss reflects a broader emotional experience than the mere intensity and decline of grief reactions. Accordingly, Castle and Phillips (2003) argue that performing rituals surrounding the loss of a loved one is primarily beneficial to evaluate priorities in life, to accept the loss, and to feel more control over grief.

PERFORMING GRIEF RITUALS

In the three years after the loss of their loved one, around 85% of the participants performed individual rituals, such as lighting a candle or visiting the grave-site. More than 50% engaged in collective rituals, such as a remembrance ceremony. Both types of grief rituals were rated as moderately to very helpful. In the specific cultural context of the Netherlands, where the use of religious traditional rituals is fading (Venbrux et al., 2008), this study underlines that the need to engage in rituals, especially individual rituals, is still highly present. Help-seeking activities, carried out by one-third of the participants, were perceived as less helpful compared to grief rituals. This corresponds to the findings of Castle and Phillips (2003), who found that professional counselling was rated less helpful compared to sharing stories about the deceased with others.

We also examined associations between the intensity of initial grief reactions and the number of rituals and help-seeking activities people subsequently engaged in. This examination revealed that performing individual rituals and help-seeking activities was highly related to initial grief reactions. This finding is not unexpected and may reflect that for people with high initial grief, the loss plays a more central role in their everyday lives, fuelling the tendency to engage in activities to streamline and curb one's feelings (Vale-Taylor, 2009). Especially individuals who lost a partner or child through a non-natural death were prone to use rituals and activities to cope with their loss. These aspects of the death of a loved one are known as risk factors for developing severe grief reactions (Lobb et al., 2010). Further, losing someone through natural death, such as old age, is potentially easier to make sense of, compared to other causes of the loss, and therefore associated with fewer rituals (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). On the contrary, carrying out collective rituals was not related to grief reactions. This suggests that conducting collective rituals serves a different purpose than performing individual rituals. Possick et al. (2007) describe the differences

between private and public rituals of remembering, arguing that emotional catharsis is the main focus of private commemoration. Public rituals, on the other hand, serve a function of public meaning making, in which losses are defined in collective terms. As such, these rituals seem to be less strongly related to individual grief reactions.

Despite the subjective rating of grief rituals as moderately to very helpful to cope with loss, using individual and collective rituals did not predict later grief reactions when controlling for initial grief in the present study. This may be due to the restricted range of grief intensity of the overall sample, as mentioned before. At the same time, the use of individual rituals does not seem to have a negative effect, suggesting that engaging in such rituals is not a sign of lingering in grief.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

Some limitations of the present study need to be addressed. Firstly, in the absence of a validated construct to measure the perception of a funeral, we designed a questionnaire ourselves. More research is needed to evaluate the reliability and validity of this questionnaire. Secondly, the number of rituals people engaged in was operationalised as the amount of diverse rituals participants used. The number of times they performed a certain ritual was not taken into consideration. This might give an underestimation of the rituals used, as participants who, for example, visited the gravesite daily but did not perform other rituals, are rated as using fewer rituals compared to individuals who visited the gravesite once and were lighting a candle there. Thirdly, the ratings of grief reactions in the follow-up questionnaire might be confounded by grief connected with newly experienced bereavements. Indeed, several participants indicated that it was difficult for them to anchor their grief reactions with one specific loss. Fourthly, participation in this research was based on a customer satisfaction survey of a funeral provider. This could result in an overrepresentation of participants with a favourable perception of the research topics, compared to a more independently recruited sample. There are, however, also indications that customer satisfaction surveys are relatively more completed by people with a more negative view of the services provided (Coldwell, 2001). Lastly, data were derived from a sample that was homogeneous in terms of their Western cultural background; hence, our findings do not necessarily generalise to other cultural groups. Despite these limitations, the longitudinal design and a large number of participants make the results of this study important and solid. Furthermore, this study provides a major contribution to the literature dominated by nonempirical studies and small-scale qualitative research.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We have to be cautious when talking about the importance of a funeral or post-funeral grief rituals in facilitating grief adjustment. This study only addressed limited number of aspects of funerals. Hence, more work is needed to explore other, non-assessed, aspects. Nevertheless, results indicate the importance of these rituals in a subjective perception

of helpfulness to cope with the loss. Furthermore, it highlights the different purposes that individual and collective rituals may serve. These findings may inform funeral services in their aftercare activities, and the advice that they could give to bereaved people about the usefulness of collective ceremonies and the creation of meaningful individual rituals. Likewise, findings may be important for others involved in bereavement care, such as counsellors and grief therapists, who are often in a position to positively guide and influence both collective and individual rituals at a later stage. Most participants in the present study evaluated the funeral positively and it would be interesting to further examine the impact of explicitly negative experiences surrounding the funeral. To gain more insight in the importance of individual grief rituals for grief adjustment, and given the strong relationship between grief reactions and the use of rituals in the present study, further research should be conducted among a more homogeneous group, including people with more severe grief reactions. In addition, it could be relevant to examine if the association between engagement in individual rituals and grief reactions differs for distinct subgroups. Building on the findings of the present study, specific attention could be given to the subjectively experienced degree of closeness to the deceased in addition to the formal relationship. More insight into these factors, that can hinder or facilitate grief, will ultimately serve bereaved individuals in their process of coming to terms with their loss.

NOTES

¹ Time since loss was unknown for 42 participants at T1 and 3 participants at T2. Considering the method to recruit the participants it was expected that all participants were recently bereaved. Notably, outcomes of all analyses reported in this paper were similar when this group of 42 participants was excluded from the analyses.

² Originally, 11 items were constructed for the FEQ. Based on a reliability analysis and factor analysis, 2 items with low item-total correlations were removed and a two-factor solution was retained. More detailed outcomes are shown in Table A1.

³ We conducted additional analyses also considering the degree to which performed rituals and activities were rated as helpful. Because ratings of helpfulness were only available for rituals and activities that were endorsed, we were unable to include the number of rituals and activities plus helpfulness ratings in one single regression analyses. Instead, we examined whether helpfulness scores were associated with grief at T2 (controlling grief at T1); this was not the case. Moreover, we found that the number of help seeking activities continued to predict grief at T2, while controlling for the degree to which these activities were deemed helpful. Thus, ratings of helpfulness did not affect our results.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B. Mitima-Verloop: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

T.T.M. Mooren: Conceptualisation, writing – review & editing, supervision

P.A. Boelen: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, writing – review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition

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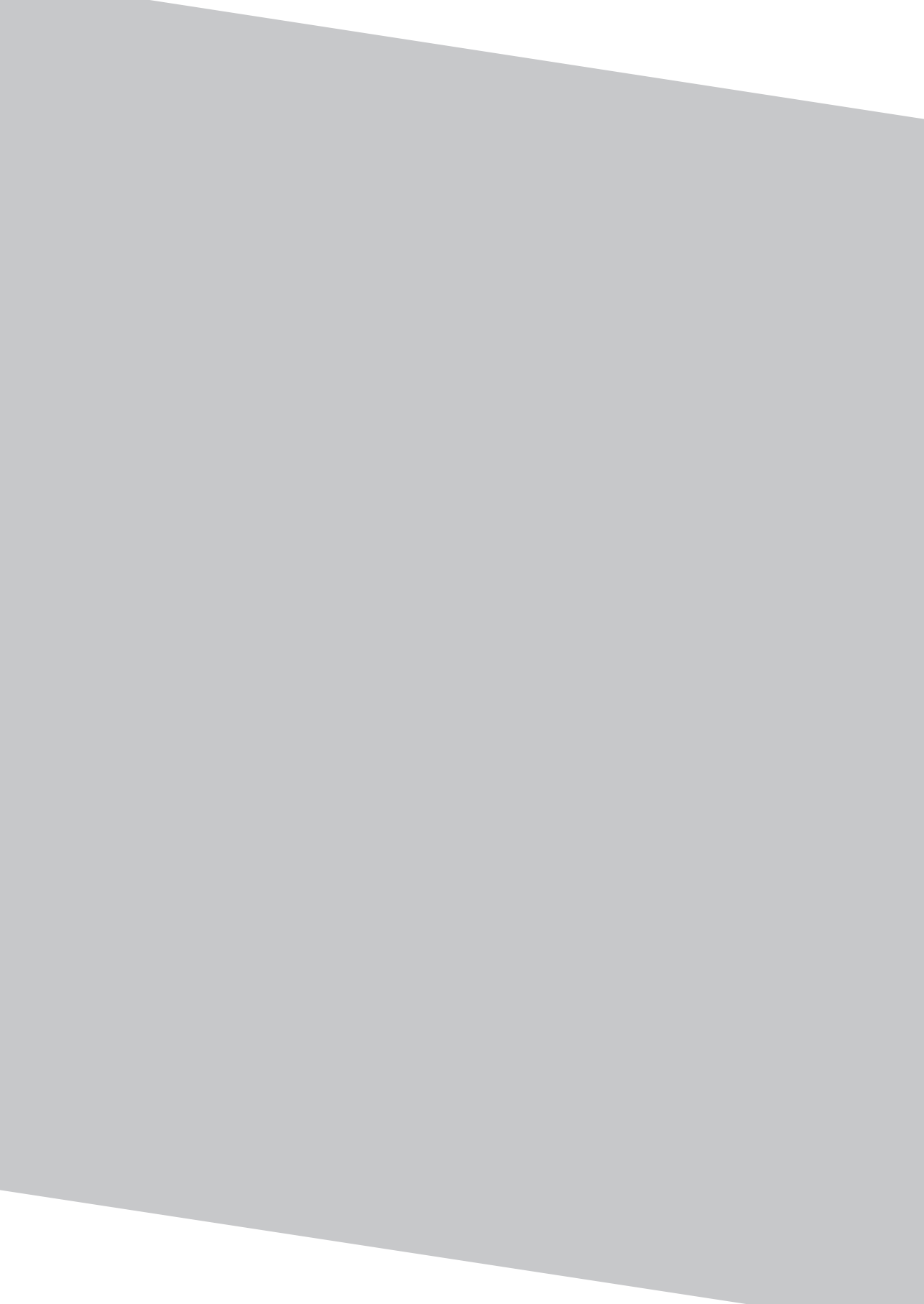
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APPENDIX

Table A1. Factor Analyses of the Funeral Evaluation Questionnaire (FEQ)

Item	Factor Loading	
	1	2
<i>Factor 1: Director Evaluation ($\alpha = .94$)</i>		
1 My funeral director was professionally and personally engaged.	.858	-.327
2 I had the feeling that my funeral director was available during the days before and after the funeral	.863	-.304
3 My funeral director was decisive and energetic	.883	-.305
4 My funeral director was respectful	.845	-.231
5 My funeral director was inspiring	.836	-.241
<i>Factor 2: General Evaluation ($\alpha = .78$)</i>		
6 I have been able to say good-bye to my loved one in the best way that was possible	.667	.516
7 The way in which the period around the funeral was organised, was important in processing the loss	.630	.503
9 I experienced the funeral as sad but positive	.540	.518
11 The good-bye went exactly as I imagined it	.551	.485

Note. Scale: 1 = Not at all, 2 = A little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Quite much, 5 = Very much.



Restricted Mourning: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on funeral services, grief rituals, and prolonged grief symptoms

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has put various restrictions on grief rituals. Literature suggests that the restrictions on funerals and grief rituals may increase the chance of developing symptoms of prolonged grief (PG). In this study, we explored the possible impact of the pandemic on aspects of the funeral and grief rituals and examined their relationship with PG symptoms. Bereaved individuals from different countries, who lost a loved one in the year prior to the pandemic ($n = 50$) or during the pandemic ($n = 182$), filled in an online questionnaire, including a rating of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, five aspects of the funeral service, five aspects of grief rituals, and a measurement for PG symptoms. Participants bereaved during the pandemic rated the impact of the restrictions on the experience of the funeral and grief rituals as negative. Nevertheless, no differences were found in attendance and evaluation of the funeral and grief rituals for people bereaved prior to vs. during the pandemic. Attendance and evaluation of the funeral services were related to levels of PG symptoms, whereas the performance and helpfulness of grief rituals were not related to these symptoms. Although not related to PG symptoms, half of the participants used helpful alternative rituals to cope with their loss. Our study suggests that bereaved people respond resiliently to the COVID-19 pandemic, for example by creating alternative rituals to cope with their loss. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of looking beyond symptom levels when studying the importance of funeral and grief rituals.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Bereavement, Funeral, Rituals, Prolonged Grief, Pandemic, Death

INTRODUCTION

Varying across countries and time, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has put various restrictions on engagement in grief rituals, such as not being able to perform religious rites at the bedside, online meetings with the funeral director, limited or no attendees during the funeral service, distance and no physical contact or not being allowed to visit the graveyard or come together for prayers (Lowe et al., 2020). A bereaved individual described the death of a loved one during the pandemic as ‘a naked death to our culture’, because of the absence of grief rituals (Menichetti Delor et al., 2021).

Funeral directors have expressed concerns that the absence of rituals could hold ‘frightening’ mental health consequences for bereaved (Lowe et al., 2020). Some bereavement scholars have also raised concerns about the effect that restricted or even absent funerals and grief rituals may have, such as a negative impact on the grieving process and adaptation, and increased chance of developing symptoms of prolonged grief (PG) (Eisma et al., 2020; Goncalves Junior et al., 2020; Goveas & Shear, 2020; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). PG symptoms include intense reactions of grief that differ from the social, cultural, and religious norms and persist for a period longer than 6 months after the loss, causing impairment in functioning (World Health Organization, 2019). The time criterion needs to be considered carefully to avoid pathologizing all bereaved individuals. Nevertheless, there are indications that increased PG symptoms early after the loss can predict higher levels of PG 6 months later, which is important to take into account (Boelen et al., 2019b).

Empirical findings obtained prior to the pandemic are inconsistent about the relationship between funerals, grief rituals, and grieving reactions. A recent systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies conducted prior to the pandemic, revealed that most quantitative studies did not find a relationship between funeral practices, such as attendance of the funeral or evaluation of the funeral and grieving reactions (Burrell & Selman, 2022). Some studies indicated effects for specific aspects of the funeral, such as experiencing the funeral as comforting, or being involved in planning of the funeral, being related to better grief adjustment. And occurrence of adverse events during the funeral being associated with severe grief (Gamino et al., 2000). Two quantitative studies conducted after this review, but prior to the pandemic, did not find a relationship between satisfaction with cremation arrangements or funerals and grief responses either (Becker et al., 2022; Birrell et al., 2020). Mitima-Verloop et al. (2021) studied the impact of grief rituals performed after the funeral service longitudinally and concluded that the number of grief rituals that people engaged in was not associated with changes in PG symptoms over time. Based on the qualitative studies in their review, Burrell and Selman (2022) conclude that the benefit of rituals after bereavement depends on the ability of bereaved people to shape rituals in meaningful ways. Thus, they argue that COVID-19 pandemic restrictions do not necessarily affect grieving processes negatively.

A recurring issue in studies that are conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic is the

limited variety in the nature, attendance, and evaluation of rituals; most people do attend a funeral or engage in grief rituals and evaluate these positively (Becker, 2020; Mitima-Verloop et al., 2021). Moreover, these studies all had participants who made a voluntary decision about participating in a funeral or grief rituals, and were not restricted by circumstances or legislations by governments, such as during a pandemic.

The restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic offer a new situation to study the importance of grief rituals among bereaved with probably greater diversity in nature, attendance, and evaluation of experiences. Previous studies provide some indications that particular restrictions can negatively impact grief responses (Mayland et al., 2020). For example, a restricted number of people allowed at a funeral service potentially increases family conflict which may lead to adverse events during the funeral, a risk factor for intense grief reactions (Birrell et al., 2020; Gamino et al., 2000; Lowe et al., 2020). Thus far, little consideration has been given to possible positive aspects of the COVID-19 restrictions (Stroebe & Schut, 2021).

To date, a few studies have been conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic investigating the association between characteristics of the funeral, grief rituals and grief responses. Menichetti Delor et al. (2021) performed qualitative analyses of phone calls with 246 families bereaved due to COVID-19; they reported that mourners expressed a need to perform grief rituals, to find meaning and symbolic ways to say the last goodbye, and to express emotions to cope with the loss. In another qualitative study, based on digital media reports in Brazil, the restrictions on funeral rituals were considered to be a 'traumatic experience' causing feelings of disbelief and indignation (Oliveira Cardoso et al., 2020). Hamid and Jahangir (2022) concluded, based on 17 interviews with Muslims from Kashmir, that the inability to perform rituals added a layer to the grief, thus affecting the grieving process and overall wellbeing of those affected. In a cross-sectional study among 31 caregivers bereaved due to COVID-19, Bovero et al. (2022) found that having the opportunity to attend the funeral was related to absence of complicated grief. Neimeyer and Lee (2022) studied a group of 831 United States citizens, bereaved due to COVID-19 and identified several factors related to the pandemic that predispose grief outcomes. Higher endorsement of two items, 'feeling upset that the deceased was not given the proper burial or memorial service' and 'feeling upset about not being able to say goodbye to the deceased properly' was associated with functional impairment and dysfunctional grief. In contrast, a quantitative study among 114 Turkish bereaved individuals who lost a loved one during the pandemic did not find a relationship between attendance of the funeral or performance of grief rituals and grief reactions (Arslan & Buldukoğlu, 2023).

Taken together, most quantitative studies conducted prior to the pandemic demonstrated limited to no association between engagement in and evaluation of grief rituals and grief reactions over time. However, restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic create a new situation, in which a few studies revealed contradictory results. Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the possible impact of the pandemic on various aspects of funeral services and

grief rituals, and how this is associated with distressing grief reactions, including symptoms of PG. This may provide valuable information for professionals working with bereaved people. Accordingly, we conducted a cross-sectional survey study in a heterogeneous convenience sample of bereaved people, enrolled in different countries.

The first aim of our study was to gain insight in the possible impact of COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of the funeral service and grief rituals in different countries. It was hypothesised that participants would report a negative impact of the pandemic on their experience of the funeral and grief rituals. By more objective measures, it was hypothesised that individuals who suffered a loss during the pandemic would attend funerals less often, would perform less collective and individual rituals, would evaluate funerals as less positive, and the rituals they would perform as less helpful, compared to participants who lost their loved one prior to the pandemic. In addition, it was expected that participants would perform alternative rituals during COVID-19 pandemic. Our second aim was to examine the relationship between various aspects of the funeral service and grief rituals and the intensity of PG symptoms. Based on previous empirical studies, it was hypothesised that the performance and evaluation of the funeral service and grief rituals would be somewhat, albeit not very strongly, associated with the intensity of PG symptoms.

METHODS

DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

A cross-sectional study was conducted using online questionnaires that were distributed between November 2020 and December 2021. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University (FETC, 20-0221; 21-2009). The survey was made available in several languages, namely English, Greek, Spanish, German and Turkish. Dependent on availability, validated translations of questionnaires were used and remaining items were translated using forward/backward translation procedures. Bereaved individuals who lost a loved one since 2019 from various, mostly European, countries were invited to participate in the study. They were recruited via convenience sampling methods, such as announcements on social media groups for bereaved individuals, newsletters of funeral organisations, and researchers' personal network. All participants received an information letter and signed informed consent.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 251 participants completed the online survey. Participants who were bereaved before 2019 ($n = 4$), with unknown date of the loss ($n = 12$), or no complete questionnaires ($n = 3$) were excluded, leaving $N = 232$ participants for the analyses. Their age varied from 18 to 87 ($M = 37.35$, $SD = 14.33$) years. The number of days between the death of the loved one and completion of the questionnaire ranged from 1 through 1,017 days (33 months)

($M = 274.50$, $SD = 205.01$ days). Table 1 shows additional demographic and loss-related characteristics, for people bereaved before and during the pandemic.

Table 1. Demographics and loss-related characteristics of the sample and group differences ($n = 232$)

Characteristic		Pandemic	Pre-pandemic	Test
		<i>M (SD)</i>		
Age		37.88 (14.16)	35.46 (14.92)	-1.06
Time since loss (in days)		218 (173.43)	480 (178.87)	9.41**
		<i>n (%)</i>		χ^2
Gender	Male	30 (16.6)	8 (16.0)	0.01
	Female	150 (82.9)	42 (84.0)	
Education	Lower than university	78 (42.9)	9 (18.0)	10.51**
	University or higher	103 (56.6)	41 (82.0)	
Country of origin*	Western countries	124 (68.1)	42 (84.0)	4.85
	Non-western countries	58 (31.9)	8 (16.0)	
Religion	Christian	102 (56.1)	25 (50.0)	3.76
	Muslim	12 (6.6)	3 (6.0)	
	Atheist	23 (12.6)	12 (24.0)	
	Other (e.g., spiritual)	42 (23.1)	10 (20.0)	
Deceased	Close relative (i.e. partner, child, brother/sister, parent)	94 (52.2)	22 (44.0)	0.99
	Other relative/friend	87 (47.8)	28 (56.0)	
Cause of death	COVID-19	49 (26.9)	3 (6.0)	12.81**
	Illness (e.g., cancer)	37 (20.3)	17 (34.0)	
	Natural death (e.g., old age)	27 (14.8)	12 (24.0)	
	Other (e.g., unexpected medical causes, accident)	69 (37.9)	18 (36.0)	

* Participants were born in 32 different countries. Western countries were mostly represented by Greece ($n = 59$), Germany ($n = 50$), United Kingdom ($n = 26$) and Spain ($n = 19$). Non-western countries were mostly represented by Turkey ($n = 32$) and Mexico ($n = 31$). ** $p < .01$.

MEASURES

Socio-demographic variables registered included (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) level of education, (iv) country of birth, and (v) religious affiliation. Loss-related characteristics included (vi) relationship to the deceased, (vii) cause of death and (viii) date of the loss. A dichotomous variable was created for time of loss, with participants who experienced loss prior to the pandemic (between January 1st 2019 and March 10th 2020) coded as 0 and those who experienced loss during the pandemic (since March 11th 2020) coded as 1. 11 March 2020 was the date the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 was a pandemic (WHO, 2020).

PG symptoms were measured with the 18-item Traumatic Grief Inventory self-report version (TGI-SR; Boelen & Smid, 2017). Participants rated how often they experienced 18 putative markers of PG in the past month (e.g., 'I had trouble to accept the loss') on 5-point scales (1 = never to 5 = always). The items of the questionnaire are in line with the DSM-5-TR

and ICD-11 criteria of prolonged grief disorder (PGD), with a cut-off score of ≥ 61 indicating probable PGD. Research has shown good psychometric properties of the scale (Boelen et al., 2019a). Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .94 in our study.

Five aspects of the funeral service were measured, namely (i) funeral attendance, (ii) funeral evaluation, (iii) comfort, (iv) planning, and (v) adverse events. (i) To rate funeral attendance, participants were instructed to score the item 'Did you attend the funeral of your loved one?' with three possible options, namely 'physical attendance', 'I did not attend' or 'other (such as via livestream/online)'. (ii) Evaluation of the funeral was measured using the general evaluation scale of the Funeral Evaluation Questionnaire (FEQ; Mitima-Verloop et al., 2021). This scale consists of four items, namely 'I have been able to say good-bye to my loved one in the best way that was possible', 'The way in which the period around the funeral was organised, was important in processing the loss', 'I experienced the funeral as sad but positive', and 'The goodbye went exactly as I imagined it'. Items were scored on 5-point scales (1 = not at all to 5 = very much applicable). Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was .80. The last three aspects were added based on the study of Gamino et al. (2000), concerning possible factors that influence grief responses, namely (iii) comfort (i.e., 'Do you describe the funeral of your loved one as comforting?'), (iv) planning (i.e., 'Did you participate in the planning of the funeral?'), and (v) adverse events (i.e. 'Were there any distressing or adverse events in connection to the funeral and if yes, how distressing were these events?'). Participants rated to what extent items applied to them on 5-point scales (1 = not at all to 5 = very much applicable).

Five aspects of grief rituals were measured, namely (i) performance of collective rituals, (ii) performance of individual rituals, (iii) helpfulness of collective rituals, (iv) helpfulness of individual rituals, and (v) helpful alternative rituals, based on the study of Mitima-Verloop et al. (2021). Participants were instructed to score the item 'What grief rituals or activities did you perform?' by selecting yes (scored as 1) or no (scored as 0) for 'individual grief rituals in memory of the deceased (carried out alone)' and for 'collective grief rituals (carried out with other people)'. When 'yes' was selected, participants scored the item 'How helpful were these activities in general?' for individual and/or collective grief rituals, on 5-point scales (1 = very unhelpful to 5 = very helpful). (v) Participants rated the statement 'I found helpful alternative grief rituals to perform' on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all to 5 = very much).

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the experience of the funeral and grief rituals was measured using two self-constructed items, namely 'Did the restrictions due to COVID-19 have an impact on the experience of (i) the funeral and (ii) grief rituals or activities after the funeral?' Both questions were scored on a 3-point Likert scale with 1 = very negative impact, 2 = negative impact and 3 = no negative impact. Because a pre-pandemic loss might have happened shortly before the date of declaring the pandemic, and engagement in grief rituals often takes place in the months to years after a loss, these questions were answered by all participants. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to explain their answer, with an open ended question. This question was not answered by all participants; some

answers were quoted to illustrate findings from the quantitative analyses (see Discussion section).

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 27.0 (IBM Corp., 2020). Two participants had one missing value on the TGI-SR questionnaire which were replaced using person mean imputation (Enders, 2003). To address our first aim, we compared participants bereaved before and during the pandemic, in terms of individual characteristics, loss-related variables, aspects of the funeral, and aspects of grief rituals. To this end, descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-tests, and Pearson's chi-square tests were used. To correct for multiple testing, a significance level of $p < .01$ was applied. Regarding our second aim, we compared the groups pre-pandemic and during pandemic on PG symptoms, using descriptive statistics and an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to control for time since loss, cause of death and relationship to the deceased. Pearson correlations and point biserial correlation coefficients were calculated to evaluate associations between aspects of the funeral, aspects of grief rituals, and PG symptoms.

RESULTS

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ASPECTS OF FUNERAL SERVICES AND GRIEF RITUALS

Bereaved individuals who lost their loved one during the pandemic ($n = 182$) were compared to participants who lost their loved one prior to the pandemic ($n = 50$). Differences were found between level of education, with more people with higher education in the pre-pandemic group (see Table 1). Logically, the time since loss was significantly higher pre-pandemic and there were less COVID-19 related deaths reported (although a COVID-19 related death was possible in the days before the WHO declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic). No significant differences between other demographic variables or loss-related characteristics were found.

Table 2 presents group differences for aspects of the funeral and grief rituals. Participants bereaved during the pandemic rated the impact of the restrictions on their experience of the funeral on average as (very) negative. The impact of the restrictions on the experience of grief rituals was also negative for participants during the pandemic. These scores were significantly more negative compared to the participants pre-pandemic, both for the impact of the restrictions on the experience of the funeral and for the experience of grief rituals, with large effect sizes (respectively $d = 0.75$ and $d = 0.80$).

Table 2. Aspects of the funeral, grief rituals and group differences ($n = 232$)

Characteristic		Score	Pandemic	Pre-pandemic	Test	
			n (%)		χ^2	
Aspects of the funeral	Attended funeral?	Yes	126 (69.2)	39 (78.0)	1.56	
		No	48 (26.4)	8 (18.0)		
		Other	8 (4.3)	2 (4.0)		
			<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>t-test</i>	
		General evaluation (FEQ)	1-20	11.68 (4.57)	12.90 (4.82)	1.47
		How comforting was funeral?	1-5	2.63 (1.25)	2.95 (1.47)	1.40
		Participated in planning of funeral?	1-5	3.20 (1.63)	3.00 (1.52)	-0.68
		How distressing were adverse events?	1-5	2.40 (1.60)	2.00 (1.43)	-1.44
		Did COVID-19 affect funeral?	1-3	1.79 (0.79)	2.69 (0.58)	7.44*
			<i>n (%)</i>		χ^2	
Aspects of grief rituals	Performed individual rituals?	Yes	92 (50.5)	26 (52.0)	0.03	
		No	90 (49.5)	24 (48.0)		
	Performed collective rituals?	Yes	101 (55.5)	34 (68.0)	2.52	
		No	81 (44.5)	16 (32.0)		
			<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>t-test</i>	
		How helpful were individual rituals?	1-5	3.40 (1.05)	3.42 (1.17)	0.11
		How helpful were collective rituals?	1-5	3.33 (1.11)	3.21 (1.18)	-0.56
		Finding helpful alternative rituals?	1-5	2.40 (1.19)	1.77 (1.06)	-3.35*
	Did COVID-19 affect rituals?	1-3	2.04 (0.84)	2.55 (0.65)	3.97*	

Note. FEQ = Funeral Evaluation Questionnaire. * $p < .001$.

Despite the restrictions during the pandemic, around 70% of the participants physically attended the funeral of their loved one, while 26.4% did not attend a funeral service. Pre-pandemic, the percentage of participants attending the funeral was higher, although this difference was not significant. No group differences were found in the general evaluation of the funeral, the level of comfort, the involvement in planning or the level of distress of adverse events connected to the funeral (see Table 2).

During the pandemic, half of the bereaved individuals participated in individual rituals and more than half in collective rituals. Both types of rituals were evaluated as somewhat to quite helpful. No group differences were found on ritual performance or helpfulness of the rituals (see Table 2). Almost half of the participants (44.6%) indicated that they found helpful alternative rituals to perform (somewhat to very much). Finding helpful alternative rituals was significantly higher among individuals bereaved during the pandemic.

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN FUNERAL SERVICES, GRIEF RITUALS AND PG SYMPTOMS

On average, participants had a total score of 49.26 (minimum = 18, maximum = 85, $SD = 16.31$) on the TGI-SR. People who lost their loved one during the pandemic (estimated $M = 49.94$) had similar symptom levels of PG compared to participants before the pandemic (estimated $M = 46.19$), when controlling for time since loss, cause of death (COVID-19 and unexpected death vs. other) and relationship to the deceased, $F(1, 225) = 1.95$, $p = .16$.

Cause of death and relationship to the deceased were significant covariates. In the whole sample, 61 participants (26.4%) scored above the cut-off score of 61 indicating probable PGD. Of the 146 participants who lost their loved one more than 6 months ago, which is the formal timing criterion for a diagnosis of PGD as per ICD-11 (WHO, 2019), 33 participants (22.4%) scored above the cut-off score. Table 3 shows correlations between aspects of the funeral, grief rituals, and PG symptoms. Funeral attendance was positively associated with PG symptoms, indicating higher symptoms levels for participants who attended the funeral. General funeral evaluation and experiencing the funeral as comforting were negatively related to PG symptoms, indicating more positive evaluation and more comfort related to less PG symptoms. Experiencing adverse event(s) and participating in planning was both associated with higher PG symptoms. No associations were found between performance and helpfulness of individual and collective grief rituals or finding helpful alternative rituals and PG symptoms.

Table 3. Pearson correlations and point biserial correlations between aspects of the funeral service, grief rituals and PG symptoms

Characteristic		<i>n</i>	PG symptoms
Aspects of the funeral	Attended funeral? (0=no, 1=yes)	221	$r_{pb} = .18^*$
	General Evaluation (FEQ)	173	$r = -.20^*$
	How comforting was funeral?	172	$r = -.33^*$
	Participated in planning of funeral?	173	$r = .31^*$
	How distressing were adverse events?	174	$r = .27^*$
	Did COVID-19 affect funeral?	222	$r = -.15$
Aspects of grief rituals	Performed individual rituals? (0=no, 1=yes)	231	$r_{pb} = .07$
	Performed collective rituals? (0=no, 1=yes)	231	$r_{pb} = -.06$
	How helpful were individual rituals?	117	$r = -.15$
	How helpful were collective rituals?	133	$r = -.13$
	Finding helpful alternative rituals?	221	$r = -.02$
	Did COVID-19 affect rituals?	219	$r = -.13$

Note. PG = Prolonged Grief. Funeral attendance is taken as a dummy variable, in which the answer 'other' was disregarded. r = Pearson correlation, r_{pb} = point biserial correlation. * $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of the funeral and grief rituals in a diverse sample of bereaved individuals from different countries. Furthermore, it was examined how these aspects were related to PG symptoms.

Results revealed that participants rated the impact of the pandemic on their experience of both the funeral service and post-funeral grief rituals as (very) negative. Despite this, no significant differences in various aspects of the funeral service and grief rituals, such as

funeral attendance, funeral evaluation, and the performance and helpfulness of individual and collective rituals, were observed between participants bereaved before vs. during the pandemic. This is striking, given the numerous restrictions that were put on engagement in grief rituals in countries all over the world (Lowe et al., 2020). Apparently, the negative impact that participants experienced did not directly indicate less attendance or a negative evaluation of the funeral and grief rituals they engaged in. The non-significant difference in funeral attendance might be due to the fact that, in relation to the duration of the pandemic, the period and number of countries in which intimate family members were not or hardly allowed at funerals was relatively short. Furthermore, it is possible that different factors were connected to the negative impact of the restrictions, which were not considered in our study. For example, literature points toward the lack of social support from more extended family and friends who were not able to participate in the funeral due to restrictions (Mortazavi et al., 2023).

These results might also suggest that bereaved individuals acknowledged that the restrictions had a major negative impact on their experiences, but also appreciated the funeral service as positive because it was the best way possible at that time. It is a well-known aspect of human judgment to evaluate situations to a reference point, and not in isolation (Adler & Fagley, 2005). In the comment section of our questionnaire, participants described for example how grateful they were for the minimal support they received, how they experienced more solidarity and support because of the difficult circumstances, and how individual rituals such as lighting a candle helped them to grieve their loved one alone. This is reminiscent of prior observations that, when adversity strikes a large group, the shared experience can have positive effects (Mancini, 2019). During the pandemic, participants were more able to find helpful alternative rituals to perform. This outcome is consistent with previous qualitative studies conducted during the pandemic, reporting how people were able to create alternative rituals and creative new strategies to remember and grieve their loved ones (Borghi & Menichetti, 2021; Lowe et al., 2020). These findings connect well with Burrell and Selman's (2022) conclusion, that the benefit of rituals depends on the ability of bereaved individuals to shape rituals in such a way that is meaningful to them.

A considerable number of participants reported high levels of PG symptoms, even 6 months post loss. Symptom levels of PG were especially high among those bereaved after an unexpected death (including COVID-19) and those having had a close relationship to the deceased. This corresponds to previous studies, underlining the concern that the pandemic will lead to a higher prevalence of grief disorders (e.g., Eisma & Tamminga, 2020).

Different aspects of the funeral were related to PG symptoms. However, the directions were not always as expected, and all correlations were small. The positive association between funeral attendance and PG symptoms could be explained by the fact that during the pandemic, often only close relatives were allowed to physically attend the funeral, and a close relationship to the deceased is a common factor related to more intense grief

(Lobb et al., 2010). Interestingly, this result differs substantially from the study of Bovero et al. (2022), which included a very specific sample of bereaved individuals due to COVID-19 in the first wave of the pandemic in Italy. The great diversity of restrictions across time and across countries should be taken into consideration while comparing studies. Being involved in planning of the funeral was also related to higher PG symptoms, likely because involvement overlaps with being in a closer relationship with the deceased. An alternative explanation could be that funerals have been planned without the support of others due to restrictions on social contact (Mortazavi et al., 2023). Further studies could focus more on characteristics of those attending in relation to other aspects of the funeral such as comfort and funeral evaluation.

Although associations between aspects of the funeral and PG symptoms were weak, these findings are interesting as they differ from the results of the longitudinal study of Mitima-Verloop et al. (2021). In contrast to aspects of the funeral, and in line with Mitima-Verloop et al. (2021), engagement in collective and individual rituals, their helpfulness, as well as performing alternative rituals were not related to PG symptoms. Besides looking at symptom levels of grief, further studies should focus on other aspects to get a better understanding of the impact of grief rituals. For example, Becker et al. (2022) showed that dissatisfaction with the funeral was related to higher costs spent on medical and welfare services. Ritual elements, gaining more attention in therapeutic grief interventions, serve different functions and intentions, and their impact should therefore be measured in a broad sense, including concepts such as meaning and recognition (Hernandez-Fernandez & Meneses-Falcon, 2021; Mitima-Verloop et al., 2020; Wojtkowiak et al., 2021). In addition, future studies could investigate the importance of cultural and religious values in relation to COVID-19 and grief, as restrictions led to major discrepancies between religious rituals, values, and government regulations (Nurhayati & Purnama, 2021).

Several limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, the study included a heterogeneous sample from different countries and in different times during the pandemic. Therefore, the results may not all apply to specific groups under specific circumstances during the pandemic. Furthermore, because of the convenience sampling methods, there is a possibility of response bias (e.g., underrepresentation of individuals with intense grief reactions). Nevertheless, a strength of the present study is that it extends previous research by including various aspects of the funeral service and grief rituals. In addition, the unique situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic led to greater diversity in engagement and experience of the funeral and grief rituals and therefore stronger measurements.

In conclusion, despite the negative impact of restrictions due to COVID-19 that many bereaved experienced, this impact seemed limited on engagement in and evaluation of funerals and grief rituals during the entire period of the pandemic. Associations were found between negative funeral experiences and symptom levels of PG, although these associations were weak. Besides the negative aspects, COVID-19 restrictions may also bring some positive aspects, such as experiencing more close connections because of

the difficult circumstances and the possibility to create meaningful alternative rituals. Our results underline the resilience of individuals and the importance to look beyond symptoms when studying the importance of funerals and grief rituals.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B. Mitima-Verloop: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

T.T.M. Mooren: Conceptualisation, writing – review & editing, supervision

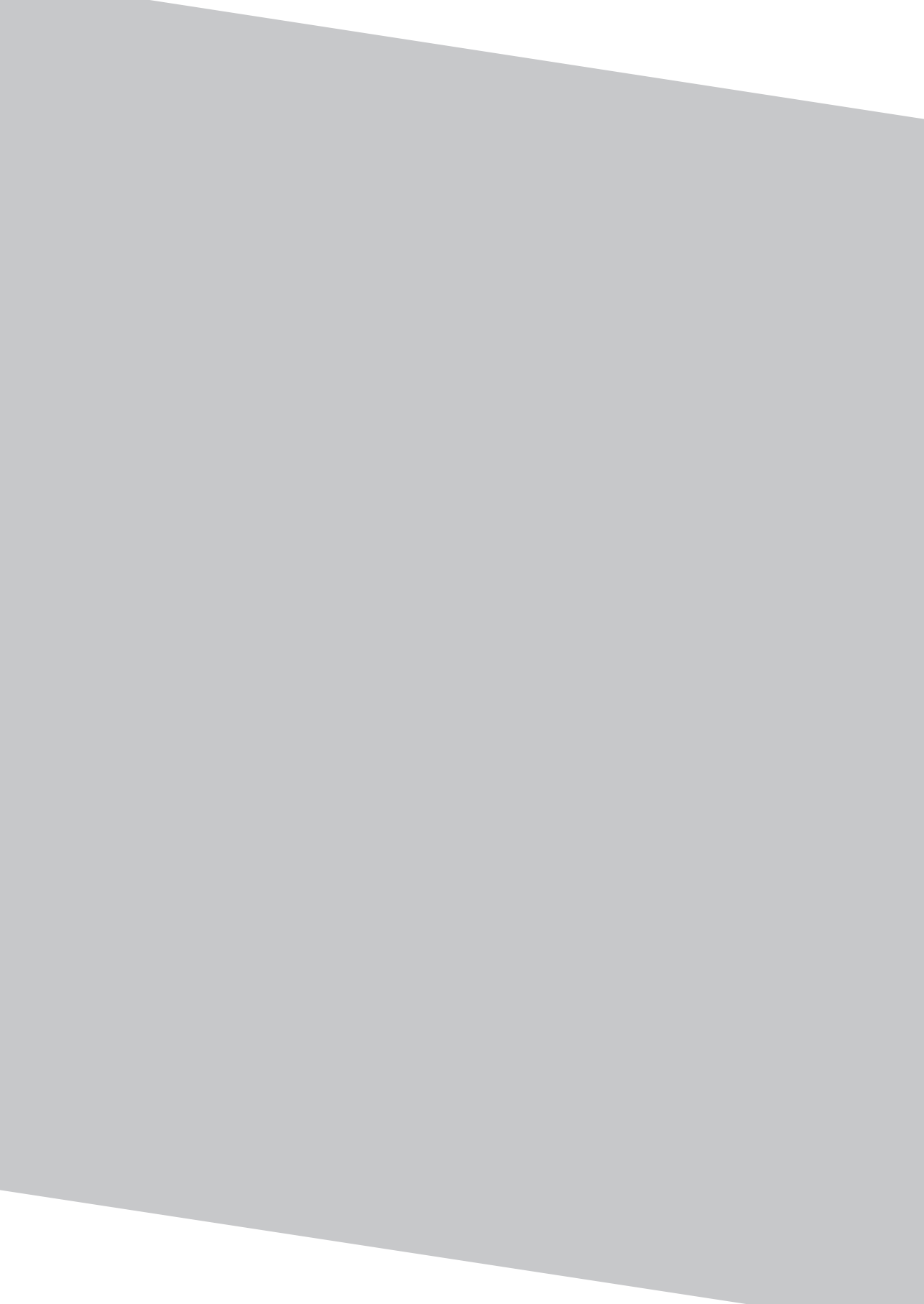
M.E. Kritikou: Investigation, formal analysis

P.A. Boelen: Conceptualisation, methodology, writing – review & editing, supervision

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Summary and general discussion



In response to distressing events and losses, people often gather to remember and commemorate. Commemorations are assumed to support those affected by disruptive events to cope with their experiences. Yet, remembering stressful events may also take its toll, for example by increasing negative feelings or re-experiences of the past. This dissertation sheds light on the individual impact of collective commemorations and ritual performances in relation to mental health. First, we aimed to increase our understanding of the individual impact of commemorations and ritual performances on clinical symptoms, such as posttraumatic stress, prolonged grief, and emotional responses. Our second aim was to further unravel how commemorations can contribute to coping with war experiences and loss, for whom and in what situations. Three different angles of studying commemoration were included, namely the individual *impact*, the *context* in which the event takes place, and the ritual *performances*.

In this general discussion, we will summarise the main findings of the studies presented in the previous chapters. The first part includes four chapters describing studies examining individual responses to large-scale collective commemorations organised after war, genocide, and large-scale violence. These studies were mainly performed in the Netherlands and were related to Remembrance Day, the national day for commemoration rooted in World War II (WWII). Part two includes two chapters that focused on the impact of small-scale commemorative gatherings, namely funeral services, and rituals performed after the loss of a loved one. Subsequent to the summary, all results of the studies are integrated in a discussion section to further elaborate on the aims of this dissertation. Furthermore, the overarching strengths and limitations of all studies are discussed. Last, implications of the findings for further research, clinical practice, and policy are presented.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

PART I. COLLECTIVE COMMEMORATION AFTER WAR AND LARGE-SCALE VIOLENCE

In **Chapter 2**, we delved into the literature to study the relation between commemoration and posttraumatic stress and grief responses after commemoration. In this scoping review, 26 empirical studies were identified based on which an evidence-informed model was formulated including aspects that potentially affect individual responses. We found that posttraumatic stress and grief often increased during and after commemoration, especially among those with prior mental health complaints. Also, other individual characteristics, such as age, and contextual factors, such as cultural context, political involvement, or the ritual performances, seemed to be associated with the psychological impact of commemoration. Furthermore, the presence or absence of psychosocial aspects, namely the experience of recognition, support, meaning making, emotional expression, and individual memories, seemed to influence posttraumatic stress and grief reactions.

We further investigated these aspects in relation to emotional responses after commemoration with a quasi-experimental study, presented in **Chapter 3**. A total of 307

respondents from different ages, with and without war experience and with different cultural backgrounds watched a broadcast of the Dutch National Commemoration on Remembrance Day. Before and after watching, they filled in a survey including questions about experienced emotions. Watching the commemoration had an emotional impact on participants. Negative emotions, especially sadness, increased after looking at the commemoration and positive emotions, especially happiness, decreased. Individual characteristics, such as age and gender, were only weakly associated with these emotional responses. Posttraumatic stress symptom severity predicted increased negative emotions, although this relationship was also weak. The cultural background of participants was not related to the emotional response. Focusing on psychosocial aspects gave more insights in understanding individuals' emotional responses to commemoration. The experiences of meaning making, support, and, to a lesser extent, recognition were related to increased positive emotions. These kinds of supporting factors did not reduce emotions such as sadness or downheartedness but could moderate the impact of these feelings by increasing positive affect.

Chapter 4 focused specifically on children, a post-war generation, and their feelings towards WWII commemoration. Using mixed methods, including group interviews with 55 children and surveys among 374 children, we found that most children in the Netherlands from nine to 18 years old engage in WWII commemoration and rate this as (very) important. Learning lessons from the past is most often mentioned by children as an incentive to continue with WWII commemoration. Furthermore, children commemorated because it is part of a cultural tradition and for social reasons, such as providing support and respect to survivors and connecting with others. Key elements for children to appreciate commemoration were comprehension of the rituals and context of commemoration, making the concept of war tangible, inclusiveness in terms of who participates and who is commemorated, and an atmosphere that is linked to feelings of sadness, dignity, and respect.

In **Chapter 5**, we studied another specific group in their emotional responses towards commemoration in the Netherlands, namely war-affected immigrants. Interviews were performed with 25 immigrants from different countries, who fled their country because of war or large-scale violence and resettled in the Netherlands. Most immigrants participated in Remembrance Day, which kindled different and mixed emotions, including sadness as well as longing and gratitude. Memories about their own war experiences and losses often arose, of which the impact varied from distress to relief. The context of war in participants' countries of origin, such as ongoing conflict or a contested history, often kept them away from collective commemoration related to the war or conflict they fled from. Through Remembrance Day, most war-affected immigrants experienced social connectedness and openness for (emotional) expression which contributed to dealing with their past experiences.

PART II. FUNERAL SERVICES AND GRIEF RITUALS AFTER THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

The loss of a loved one is an inevitable experience for human beings, and commemorative rituals are often used to come to terms with the loss. **Chapter 6** described a longitudinal survey study among 552 recently bereaved individuals and 289 individuals three years post-loss. The study investigated the associations between the evaluation of a funeral, the use of grief rituals, and the course of prolonged grief symptoms over time. Most participants reported that the organisation of the funeral was important to process their loss, and they engaged in individual and collective rituals in the years after the loss. Although the funeral and usage of grief rituals were considered helpful, a positive evaluation and performance of rituals were not associated with the course of grief reactions over time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, various restrictions were put on the performance of commemorative grief rituals. Bereavement scholars raised their concerns about the impact of these restrictions on the development of prolonged grief symptoms (e.g., Eisma et al., 2020). Therefore, we conducted a cross-sectional survey study during the COVID-19 pandemic and compared responses of 50 participants bereaved before the pandemic with 182 individuals who lost their loved one during the pandemic (**Chapter 7**). The study explored the possible impact of the pandemic on the performance and evaluation of commemorative rituals after loss and their relationship with grief symptoms. Due to the circumstances during the pandemic, we could address several of the limitations of our longitudinal study, such as the limited variety in the nature, attendance, and evaluation of rituals. Findings of this study indicated that attending a funeral was related to more grief symptoms, whereas a positive evaluation of the funeral was related to less grief symptoms. Engagement in other collective and individual rituals was not related to grief severity.

INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

THE IMPACT OF COMMEMORATION ON CLINICAL SYMPTOMS AND EMOTIONS

Many scholars have mentioned the importance of commemoration in coping with disruptive experiences, such as war, genocide or disaster (Hunt, 2010; Miller, 2012; Veil et al., 2011). Also the performance of rituals after the loss of a loved one is frequently linked to processing loss (Lensing, 2001; Wijngaards-De Meij et al., 2008). However, based on cognitive trauma theory, it is plausible to assume that commemorations bring associations with past experiences and associated responses to the fore among those directly affected (Ehlers & Clark, 2000). Therefore, commemorations may be experienced as stressful and disturbing events as well. To date, very few empirical studies have examined the impact of commemorations or ritual performances from a psychological perspective. This is an important topic, given the widespread use of commemoration with a potentially distressing impact for those involved. Therefore, the first research question of this dissertation was:

What is the impact of collective commemorations and ritual performances on posttraumatic stress symptoms, prolonged grief, and emotional responses?

Our studies revealed an increase of symptoms and negative emotions, as well as a decline in symptoms and the experience of positive emotions shortly after commemoration. The long-term impact of commemorations and ritual performances on posttraumatic stress, grief reactions, and emotional responses appeared to be limited.

Increased symptoms and negative emotions

Our review (Chapter 2) revealed that collective commemorations can lead to an increase of posttraumatic stress and grief responses. For example, several clinical case studies have reported an increase of nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusions in individuals who attended a commemoration (Amen, 1985; Faltus et al., 1986; Hilton, 1997; Musaph, 1990). Especially individuals who directly experienced the war or genocide that was commemorated, and who suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other psychiatric disorders prior to the commemoration, experienced an increase in posttraumatic stress symptoms. This is in line with our expectation based on the cognitive model of PTSD from Ehlers and Clark (2000), postulating that associations between stimuli or situations in the present and a situation in the past are particularly strong for traumatic memories.

Watching the commemoration especially evoked feelings of sadness among individuals (Chapter 3). Other studies have reported various negative emotional responses to commemoration as well, such as sadness, anxiety, anger, bitterness, and resentment (Beristain et al., 2000; Burnell et al., 2010; Magierowski, 2016; Oushakine, 2006). When looking at the context of the Dutch Remembrance Day, our findings are in line with the focus on victimhood and personal suffering that is central in Dutch commemorations (Raaijmakers, 2014). Even children in the Netherlands expect an emotional climate in which sadness, respect and dignity is central. Interestingly, children who felt more sad during the WWII commemoration they attended, perceived the event as more positive (Chapter 4).

Results suggested a relation between more severe grief reactions and aspects of funeral services after the loss of a loved one. During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals who attended a funeral experienced more intense grief symptoms compared to those who did not attend. In addition, more negative funeral experiences were related to more grief symptoms (Chapter 7). These relations are also found in prior research (e.g., Gamino et al., 2000). However, because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, we cannot imply causation in this relationship. Our longitudinal study (Chapter 6) did not indicate that more satisfaction with the funeral or more performed rituals were associated with a stronger decline in grief reactions over time.

Decreased symptoms and positive emotions

In the studies reviewed in Chapter 2, scant evidence for a decline in posttraumatic stress

symptoms or grief reactions through engaging in commemorations was found. Some studies reported minor short-term improvements on some stress symptoms, such as avoidant thoughts (Gasparre et al., 2010; Watkins et al., 2010; Watson et al., 1995; Chapter 5). In qualitative studies, descriptions of relief of trauma distress were reported that could be interpreted as reduction of stress symptoms. For example, veterans described how commemoration helped them to make a distinction between now and then, which could reduce symptoms such as intrusions (Barron et al., 2008). Despite an initial increase of stress and grief symptoms, several authors describe how commemoration may reduce symptoms over time by uncovering suppressed emotions or starting a mourning process (e.g., Faltus et al., 1986; Musaph, 1990). However, these claims have not yet been substantiated with empirical findings.

When looking at the experience of positive emotions, we found an increase in feelings of inspiration and pride after commemoration (Chapter 3). Feelings of gratitude were especially reported by war-affected immigrants as a response to the Dutch Remembrance Day (Chapter 5). The experienced emotions were often mixed by nature. Solomon and Stone (2002) explained how positive and negative emotions can be experienced simultaneously, but also how emotions can be mixed in itself, with both positive and negative connotations. This became clear, for example, in the way war-affected immigrants described a longing for meaningful commemoration in their country of origin, an emotion that was connected to both sadness and hope (Chapter 5). Various studies in different contexts and countries have reported responses such as pride, gratitude, feelings of empathy and solidarity after commemoration (Jacobs, 2014; Watkins & Bastian, 2019; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2011). Writing from a sociological point of view, Durkheim (1912) stated that collective gatherings, regardless of the positive or negative valence of the event, enhance social identity and positive affect. Our quasi-experimental study (Chapter 3) gave some indications in that direction. An increase of positive emotions was observed among participants who watched the commemoration live on Remembrance Day but not among those watching commemoration footage on another day. The individual experience of watching the footage on a random day in the year may have undermined the effect of enhancing social identity and positive affect.

A decrease of grief symptoms was observed among individuals who evaluated the funeral as more positive during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chapter 7), although no change was observed in the course of grief symptoms in our longitudinal study (Chapter 6). Both studies were performed in different settings and times. Our longitudinal study evaluated the perception of the funeral in relation to long-term grief reactions. The COVID-19 pandemic was a unique situation in which participants varied more in terms of funeral and ritual experiences. In this study, we included various aspects of the funeral as outcome measures, such as funeral attendance, experiencing adverse events and feeling comforted. When comparing the outcomes in these chapters with other studies, it is plausible that there are specific aspects of the funeral that are related to short-term grief adjustment (Bovero et al., 2022; Gamino et al., 2000).

No (long-term) impact

Most longitudinal studies that were included in our review did not find any long-term effects of commemoration on posttraumatic stress or grief symptoms (e.g., Silverman et al., 1999; Watson et al., 1995; chapter 2). In our longitudinal study, we did not find an impact of the perception of the funeral or ritual performances on grief reactions after the loss or three years post-loss (Chapter 6). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the performance of grief rituals after the funeral was not related to grief symptoms either (Chapter 7).

In conclusion, the short-term impact of collective commemorations can be associated with increased posttraumatic stress, grief symptoms, and negative emotions. Simultaneously, positive emotions may arise, such as gratitude and inspiration. The long-term impact of commemorations and ritual performances on symptom level seems limited. However, many individuals have positive attitudes towards commemoration and do rate the performance of rituals as helpful in dealing with their experiences. To further understand how commemoration can benefit individuals, we must look beyond symptom levels.

COMMEMORATION AND COPING WITH DISRUPTIVE EVENTS

In the introduction of this dissertation, we described three angles from which commemorations can be studied, namely the impact of commemorations, the context in which the events take place and the performance of commemorative rituals. These aspects of commemoration are highly interrelated and need to be in balance to create meaningful commemorations (Holsappel, 2020). Combining these three angles may be key to further understanding the variety in individual responses to commemorations and how commemorations may be beneficial or meaningful for those involved. Our second research question addresses these topics:

How can commemorations and rituals contribute to coping with war experiences and loss, for whom and in what situations?

Based on our study findings, we will discuss different ways in which commemorations and rituals may contribute to dealing with past experiences. Furthermore, we elaborate on study findings regarding individual characteristics and aspects of the context and ritual performances that may impact individual responses.

Mechanisms facilitating coping

The studies presented in this dissertation highlight how commemoration impacts four relevant psychosocial mechanisms, namely support, meaning making, recognition, and expression of emotions. First, through collectively commemorating or performing rituals together, individuals can experience social and societal support, social connectedness and belonging (Chapter 2 to 5).

“The commemoration became more important for me in the last two years, with all the terrorist attacks taking place. I think you have to come together in difficult times, because together you are stronger. Then you can help each other, support each other, and prevent this from happening ever again.” (Girl, 16 years, chapter 4)

Social support and connectedness are known to foster recovery after loss and protect from developing long-lasting problems after distressing events (Brewin et al., 2000). Yet, commemoration can also function as a magnifying glass, underscoring a lack of support and connection.

Second, rituals contribute to the reconstruction of meaning after loss or shocking events (Wojtkowiak, 2018). Collective commemoration can give new meaning to family narratives or advance a framework of losses as heroic and worthwhile (Jacobs, 2014; Possick et al., 2007; Chapter 2). It may, however, also lead to negative meaning making, such as strengthening identification with victimhood (Oushakine, 2006). Both children and war-affected immigrants assigned meaning to the commemoration in terms of learning lessons from the past with the goal of preventing new wars (Chapter 4 and 5).

The third aspect of how commemoration can contribute to coping is recognition and acknowledgement.

“You feel the suffering of the one who experienced it. And that is a form of togetherness, a moment in which you realise that you are not the only one.” (Woman from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chapter 5)

Although war-affected immigrants in our study did not actively search for acknowledgement of their own suffering, acknowledgement on a societal level in terms of justice and accountability was a recurring theme within various studies (Chapter 2, 3, and 5). Authors have stressed the importance of social and societal acknowledgement of victimhood for individual recovery (Goldsmith et al., 2004; Maercker & Horn, 2013).

Last, rituals have the potential to bring emotions to the surface that are difficult to access under regular circumstances, which enables mourning and the processing of difficult experiences (Ornstein, 2010; Watkins et al., 2010; Wojtkowiak, 2018). In line with this, it is not surprising that emotional expression was related to more negative feelings in our quasi-experimental study (Chapter 3). Yet, the emotional expression and sharing of stories with family members helped war-affected immigrants to open up and break through avoidance, making steps in coming to terms with the past (Chapter 5).

“You suppress those painful memories, but during the commemoration I remember it. For example, how forty babies died in one night because of the cold when we were between the borders of Serbia and Macedonia. Then when I hear the music, I feel relief, the freedom. I’m so thankful.” (Woman from Kosovo, chapter 5)

The presence of societal support, meaning making, recognition, and expression influences the perception of a commemoration as positive and healing. On the contrary, the absence of these aspects was often linked to a negative perception and impact of commemoration (Chapter 2 and 5). Chapter 3 revealed how the experiences of support, meaning making, and recognition are especially linked to positive emotions after commemoration. This suggests that these mechanisms do not take away feelings of sadness or downheartedness that are most often experienced during commemoration but moderate the impact of these feelings by concurrently strengthening positive feelings.

For whom? Individual characteristics

The literature review indicated several individual characteristics that can influence individual responses to commemoration, namely age, gender, cultural background, proximity to war, and a history of mental health problems (Chapter 2). Our studies suggested that these individual characteristics are only weakly associated with emotional responses after commemorations (Chapter 3, 4, and 5). The study of ritual performances after the loss of a loved one provided similar results. Although small differences based on individual characteristics were observed, all associations were weak (Chapter 6). Commemorations and ritual performances have the potential to evoke similar emotions among all kinds of attendees, regardless of their age, background or other individual characteristics. In line with this, Rimé et al. (2011) stated that commemorations rekindle emotions among those who are directly affected, but also elicit emotions among those who listen and observe.

Focusing on individuals who are directly affected by war, including war-affected immigrants, a strong connection was observed between commemoration and war-related memories (Chapter 2, 3 and 5). Importantly, the memories that were evoked through commemoration were not necessarily related to a negative impact of commemoration or the experience of posttraumatic stress symptoms such as re-experiences or intrusions (Chapter 2 and 3). Frijda (2006) stated in the context of WWII remembrance, that memories are often still very vivid among those affected, and do not need a commemoration to come to the fore. Notably, however, Chapter 3 confirmed that posttraumatic stress symptoms prior to attending a commemoration were related to experiencing more negative emotions after the commemoration. This signifies the emotional and possible distressing impact of commemorations for those struggling to cope with their past experiences. This is in line with other research, suggesting that commemoration may contribute more to dealing with the past among people who have sufficiently processed and integrated their past into their lives (Burnell et al., 2010).

In what situations? Context-related aspects

The context in which commemoration takes place plays a significant role in experiencing support, meaning making, recognition, and expression. These aspects do not relate to intra-personal dynamics, but are rather social processes (Wojtkowiak, 2018), which underlines

the importance of looking at the societal context when studying the impact of collective commemoration on individual responses.

Our review highlighted how the cultural and political context can influence the individual impact of a commemoration (Chapter 2). For example, political involvement in a Polish-Ukrainian commemoration ceremony led to conflicting goals, fuelling stress reactions among those involved (Magierowski, 2016). War-affected immigrants mentioned the importance of a context in which the intention for commemoration is clear and aimed at listening to the stories of those affected rather than political motives (Chapter 5). Furthermore, commemoration may contribute to individual processes of dealing with past experiences in a situation in which there is a unified narrative about the past. This could be linked to the importance of individual integration of the trauma narrative after traumatic experiences (Peri et al., 2016). A unified collective memory may provide openness for individual grief and trauma processes and healing. Participants also mentioned how a certain degree of closure of the war is important to be able to collectively commemorate as a society.

“There is no time to commemorate collectively. We went from one war into another war. Which war should we commemorate? Who should we commemorate?” (Man from Iraq, Chapter 5)

In this regard, the recent ceremonies that were organised in numerous countries to mark the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (BBC, 2023) were interesting. Despite the context that there is no closure of this war yet, there seemed to be a unified narrative and clear intention to commemorate among those who attended. Newspapers headlined about the solidarity and support that was experienced during the gatherings, and how people found renewed hope (Prins, 2023).

In what situations? Performance-related aspects

Besides the context-related aspects, performance-related factors are linked to individual responses as well. First, it matters if a ritual is performed individually or in a collective setting. Chapter 6 showed how engaging in individual rituals was highly related to initial grief symptoms. On the contrary, engaging in collective rituals was not related to grief symptoms. This suggests that collective rituals serve a different purpose compared to individual rituals. Possick et al. (2007) argued how individual rituals are more focused on emotional catharsis, whereas public rituals serve a function of public meaning making, defining the loss in collective terms. Both individually and collectively performed rituals may therefore contribute in different ways to coping with war experiences and loss (Chapter 5). Second, the type of ritual matters. Different rituals have a different emotional impact on people. Some rituals are very open to one’s own interpretation, such as the two minutes of silence during Remembrance Day (Chapter 5). Research among children reveals how two minutes of silence during commemoration evokes different thoughts (Imber & Fraser,

2011). Other rituals are less open and more connected to politics, nationalism, or culture, such as singing the anthem or raising the Dutch flag. Among some war-affected immigrants, these specific rituals contributed to feelings of longing and desire for a better future in their country of origin (Chapter 5). For all types of rituals, their benefit and contribution in coming to terms with the past depends on the ability of individuals to shape rituals in ways that are meaningful to them (Burrell & Selman, 2022). Third, our study among children (Chapter 4) indicated that, rather than the specific type of ritual, the way in which rituals are performed influences the impact. Meaningful commemoration was associated with understanding the context of who and what is commemorated and the meaning of the performed rituals. Furthermore, rituals that make the concept of war more tangible by triggering different senses have more impact. Also, inclusiveness in terms of who commemorates, who is commemorated and an atmosphere that fits with children's ideas of commemoration were related to meaningful commemoration. These aspects correspond to the elements of ritual described by Grimes (2014), such as the actors involved in the performance of rituals, the language used to explain or describe what is happening, the place, time, and objects. All these performance-related aspects co-determine the atmosphere of a commemoration and influence the impact of commemoration on individuals.

In conclusion, when we started the work described in this dissertation, we aimed to substantiate general assumptions about the 'healing' impact of commemorations, assisting those involved in dealing with war experiences and loss. Our findings revealed that commemorations and ritual performances can indeed evoke feelings of support, connectedness, and acknowledgement and contribute to emotional expression and meaning making. These aspects are mostly in line with the elements described in the introduction that have been suggested to underlie the potential benefit of rituals in adjustment after loss (Castle & Philips, 2003; Wojtkowiak, 2018). Our findings further indicate that meaningful commemorations do not so much depend on individual characteristics of those engaging in commemorations and ritual performances. Impactful commemorations are rather influenced by the context in which commemorations take place and the performed rituals.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

Several overarching limitations of different studies of this dissertation should be considered when interpreting the overall findings. First, all studies have used convenience sampling methods, and therefore there is a possibility of response bias. Participants knew about the topic of the study beforehand and were approached by researchers or signed up themselves to participate in the studies. This might have led to underrepresentation of individuals with intense posttraumatic stress or grief reactions. Also, individuals with no interest in performance of grief rituals or in commemoration, such as people who never participate in Remembrance Day, might be underrepresented in the studies. This could have affected the

reported (emotional) responses to commemoration and ritual performances (Chapter 3, 6 and 7), or have given a distorted picture of the overall importance that children and war-affected migrants attach to commemoration (Chapter 4 and 5). Second, the chosen study designs differed in their focus on short-term (Chapter 3) and long-term (Chapter 6) impacts of commemoration and ritual performances. Our results regarding the emotional impact of commemoration should be understood as the immediate responses to remembrance events. Third, it is important to be aware of the limitations in generalisability for the different studies. Most studies are conducted in a Dutch setting of commemoration and ritualisation, which is portrayed in the introduction. As the studies revealed, the context of commemoration plays a significant role in the impact on individuals. Therefore, we need to be cautious in generalising specific findings, such as the experienced emotional responses after Remembrance Day, to other settings of commemoration or to other samples. However, the findings in this dissertation give indications for underlying mechanisms and factors that may help to explain different emotional responses in other settings, countries and samples. Hence, comparative research is highly relevant, which will be addressed in the next section on implications for research.

This dissertation has overarching strengths as well. First of all, implicit assumptions, such as ‘commemorating assists in coping with disruptive events’, ‘a better funeral protects against prolonged grief’ or ‘COVID-19 limits the performance of grief rituals which leads to increased grief reactions’ were tested with empirical research methods. Furthermore, participants in our studies represented many groups within the general Dutch society. They included patients with PTSD related to war experiences, second generation affected, veterans, war-affected immigrants, individuals with no direct link to WWII, and children. In addition, both large-scale collective commemorations as well as small gatherings and ritual performances in remembrance of a lost loved one were studied. Also, each study was conducted with a different sample that included a substantial number of participants and sufficient power to detect small effects in the respective analyses. Last, the use of both quantitative and qualitative measures contributed to a more in-depth understanding of the various study findings.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This dissertation aimed to enlarge our knowledge about commemoration and ritual performances with research methods from a psychological perspective. It substantiates commonly made assumptions about the importance of commemoration in dealing with disruptive events and losses by giving indices of how commemoration contributes to coping. Yet, the findings also highlight the complexity of commemoration, indicating that conclusions about the benefit of commemoration should be drawn cautiously. Especially the use of standardised methods to measure posttraumatic stress and grief responses have

further developed the clinical perspective on the impact of commemoration. The use of standardised methods should be extended in future research to other outcome measures beyond clinical symptom levels. In recommending a research agenda, three possible lines of research stand out for us.

Utilising and advancing validated measures for meaning making and recognition

Various studies in this dissertation highlight the importance of meaning making and societal recognition in relation to the impact of commemorations (Chapter 2, 3 and 5). Yet, these concepts are hard to measure in a quantitative way. The research group of Neimeyer (2019) developed six different measures of meaning making in bereavement, permitting a more sophisticated assessment of meaning making. Their *Social Meaning in Life Events Scale* (SMILES) seems especially relevant in relation to collective commemoration (Bellet et al., 2019). As pointed out earlier, meaning making is a social construct, which is negotiated and affirmed within a broad societal context (Neimeyer et al., 2014). Items of the SMILES scale assess the degree to which bereaved individuals can make sense of their loss within the social environment. Further research needs to investigate if these items are applicable to dealing with disruptive events.

Maercker and Müller (2004) developed the *Social Acknowledgement Questionnaire* (SAQ) to measure social acknowledgement as a recovery factor of PTSD. This measure was not deemed suitable to measure societal acknowledgement in relation to commemoration because of the focus on those directly affected. Future research could translate the items to a more societal perspective. Using validated quantitative measures of meaning making and societal recognition in further studies would advance the validity and comparability of studies in different contexts.

Repeating studies in different contexts

Differences in study findings connected to the impact of commemoration are often related to the study sample or context in which the commemoration took place. For example, the study results concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted in a heterogenous sample from different countries and times within the pandemic (Chapter 7), varied substantially from the results of a study among Italian bereaved in the first months of the pandemic (Bovero et al., 2022). Our studies highlighted the importance of including aspects of the context and performance in studying the impact of commemoration. To gain more insights into the relation between context and emotional response after commemoration, it could be relevant to examine these relationships within different contexts. This can also increase the generalisability of various study findings. For example, it would be relevant to investigate emotional responses to commemoration in complex political atmospheres, such as the Balkan region, where history is contested and multiple conflicting memorialisation practices take place (Ashton, 2023; Pollack, 2003). Or in Rwanda, where certain groups experience pressure to participate in commemoration (Ibreck, 2012).

Studying alternative and artistic commemoration

Within the context of this dissertation, we have conducted research in regard to two artistic and novel types of commemoration which is not (yet) published in international peer reviewed journals (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2019; Verloop, 2017). However, these studies do give us a hint of what artistic commemoration could contribute, especially in a highly complex context of commemoration such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina. One artistic commemoration concerns a local commemoration on a square in Amsterdam, in a neighbourhood from where 2.800 Jews have been deported and murdered in concentration camps during WWII. Artist Ida van der Lee crafted a ritual in which participants choose one Jewish person, make a name plate for this person and bring this person symbolically home by placing the name plate on a gigantic map on the square at the place where this person lived. A questionnaire among 74 participants revealed how the ritual especially helped individuals to bring the Holocaust closer to their world of experience. Personal memories came up among half of the participants, of which half was confronted with distressing memories. Yet, half of the attendees experienced the ritual as healing. The other artistic commemoration took place in Sarajevo in 2012. Theatre and filmmaker Haris Pašovic arranged a concert for 'those who could not attend' by placing 11.541 empty red chairs in the main street of Sarajevo to commemorate all who died during the siege of Sarajevo from 1992 till 1996. A media analysis and interviews with attendees revealed the enormous impact of this commemoration, including confrontation with war-related memories as well as feelings of relief, connectedness, and acknowledgement. Especially in this highly politically complex environment, this artistic commemoration seemed to make it possible to connect people in their mourning and distress. The combination of ritual elements such as the actors, time, place, and objects seemed to create a healing environment. Yet, the commemoration led to critical and angry responses as well. Future research is very important in further investigating the value of artistic commemoration in healing and coming to terms with past experiences, as well as the possible negative impact.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

Assisting patients around anniversary dates

The findings presented in this dissertation can benefit clinical practitioners working with war-affected patients or counsellors supporting bereaved individuals. Around anniversary dates, such as an annual war commemoration, stress levels may rise among war-affected individuals (Chapter 2, 3, and 5). Knowing the important dates related to patients' experiences can give insight and recognition for their behaviours or feelings around these dates. Especially for patients with PTSD, commemoration can be connected to increased posttraumatic stress symptoms, grief reactions and negative feelings. Counsellors can discuss and think along with their patients about how to engage in commemoration, or distance from it, in a way that offers safety and comfort. Moreover, clinical practitioners can contribute to meaningful commemoration for a patient, for example by providing support

through watching the commemoration together and talking about the emotions it arose. Also, grief therapists are often able to positively guide or influence collective and individual rituals. Although a direct relationship between the use of rituals and a reduction of grief symptoms may not be proven (Chapter 6), rituals have positive characteristics for dealing with grief (Wojtkowiak et al., 2021).

Commemoration and rituals as part of therapy

When looking at commemorations, there are interesting analogies with some of the core components of trauma-focused therapy (Schnurr, 2017). First, it is reminiscent of a form of exposure. Just as in a treatment setting, commemoration can bring someone back to the past, within a safe and canalised space with a clear boundary in time and place. It creates a liminal space in which someone can remember and reconnect with the past without being permanently flooded with memories (Slochower, 2011). Second, commemorations may provide a space for cognitive restructuring, in which thoughts and meanings connected to the traumatic events are changed by performing rituals and hearing multiple perspectives and stories (Chapter 2). Third, commemorations are vehicles for the regulation and disclosure of emotions. Emotions that are not understood or accepted in other situations can arise and be expressed. Stories can be told or repeated (Frijda, 2006). As a side note, the importance of disclosure and expression depends critically on finding an individually appropriate context to do so, as individuals have shown negative effects when forced to disclose after a traumatic event (Maercker & Horn, 2013). Last, social support and being connected with others are among the best protective factors in developing PTSD (Brewin et al., 2000; Ozer et al., 2003) and are associated with better treatment outcomes (Price et al., 2018). Being connected with one another and experiencing support are important aspects in commemoration as well. Although more research is needed in this direction, commemoration may be a form of guided exposure and as such be used as intervention in trauma-related therapies.

Integrating societal factors in individual therapy settings

Our findings indicate the importance of integrating societal factors into the individual therapy setting (Chapter 3 and 5). Both the traumatic event and the process of recovery takes place in the interaction with families, communities, and society (Maercker & Hecker, 2016). The broader societal context needs more attention when assisting those affected by war. How society views certain parts of history is connected to how people see themselves (Te Brake & Nauta, 2022). Clinical practitioners may address questions within individual therapy like: ‘How important is it for you to feel acknowledged by society as a victim or survivor?’ ‘Are there societal interventions possible that would make you feel more supported or connected?’ ‘What contribution could commemoration make?’ Or: ‘What are other ways in which society could contribute to making meaning of the past?’ (Maercker & Horn, 2013).

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Most of the studies in this dissertation were motivated by questions from national and local institutions responsible for organising and implementing commemorations after war. Their main questions concerned the future of WWII commemoration: ‘How do we attract and involve youth, to pass on the baton of commemoration to next generations?’ And: ‘How can we involve individuals who are more recently affected by war in a safe and meaningful way?’

Involving children and youth

Participation of children in commemoration is highly related to the participation of their parents. So involving parents may indirectly impact their children as well. Furthermore, attracting children does not primarily imply that new rituals or different forms of commemoration should be applied. The performance of traditional and well-known rituals, such as two minutes of silence, the presence of military personnel or an eyewitness account, are highly valued by children. They are easy to comprehend and can make the abstract concept of war more tangible. Yet, this does not imply that commemorations should not change. Open dialogues about critical perspectives should be stimulated, for example about including contemporary wars and violence within commemoration, so that children can decide, well-informed, how they continue and carry the memory of WWII forward.

Involving war-affected

As noted above, it is important to keep in mind that commemorations can temporarily kindle multiple and mixed emotions, including sadness or anxieties related to specific war memories. Those involved in the organisation of commemorations should carefully consider the emotional climate that is created through the ritual performances. Valuable commemoration is associated with dignified and honourable remembrance (Chapter 4). Although it kindles emotions of sadness, commemoration should not have the intention to be a ‘tearjerker’ (Chapter 3). With a very careful, thoughtful, and inclusive organisation, commemoration may be especially beneficial in conflicting contexts, bringing opposing groups closer together (Chapter 5).

Regarding war-affected immigrants, the emotions that can arise should not be a reason to shy away from inviting specific war-affected groups to a commemoration, such as refugees. Commemoration can be of benefit for them, even when the core of commemoration is based on WWII and not directly connected to their war experiences. By mentioning circumstances and implications of WWII in the Netherlands, war-affected immigrants can relate their own story and connect with other war victims (Chapter 5). However, attending commemoration should always be open and not forced by politics or societal pressure and expectations. Those involved in organising commemorative events do well to create a setting in which participants can experience support and connectedness, feel free to express emotions, make meaning of past experiences, and experience recognition for those affected (Chapter 3).

Valorisation – Making a bridge between theory and practice

The findings of the various studies described in this dissertation have been translated into recommendations and presented in novel and appealing ways to clinical practitioners, organisations in charge of organising commemorations, policy makers, and the broad Dutch society. In this way, a bridge was made between academic theory, the study findings and everyday practice. Some examples:

- Theatre group 'Na de Dam' ('after Dam Square') presented in six sketches recommendations to involve children in commemoration for local committees organising commemoration events around Remembrance Day.
- In a guided walking tour through Rotterdam, research findings were connected to the visible historical artefacts and monuments in remembrance of WWII and its impact in this city.
- An animation video was created to present the findings about the individual impact and meaning of commemoration in a simple and accessible way.
- Around Remembrance Day in the Netherlands, the 4th and 5th May, research findings were presented in Dutch newspapers via radio channels and television broadcasts.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, webinars were organised and an online toolkit was made to guide organisations in creating meaningful online or hybrid commemorations.
- The essay 'The second minute of silence' contains a plea for attention for 'those who survived' within the Dutch remembrance culture.
- Many of the study results are translated in various Dutch non-academic general interests magazines, such as magazines for funeral directors (Vakblad Uitvaart), a magazine focused on the impact of disruptive events (Impact Magazine) and a magazine about commemoration (NC Magazine).
- Notable too is that our study in Chapter 6 was 7th in the list of all time most downloaded papers in the journal Death Studies, with over 16.500 views. This indicates that the work in this dissertation is relevant to different audiences.

CONCLUSION

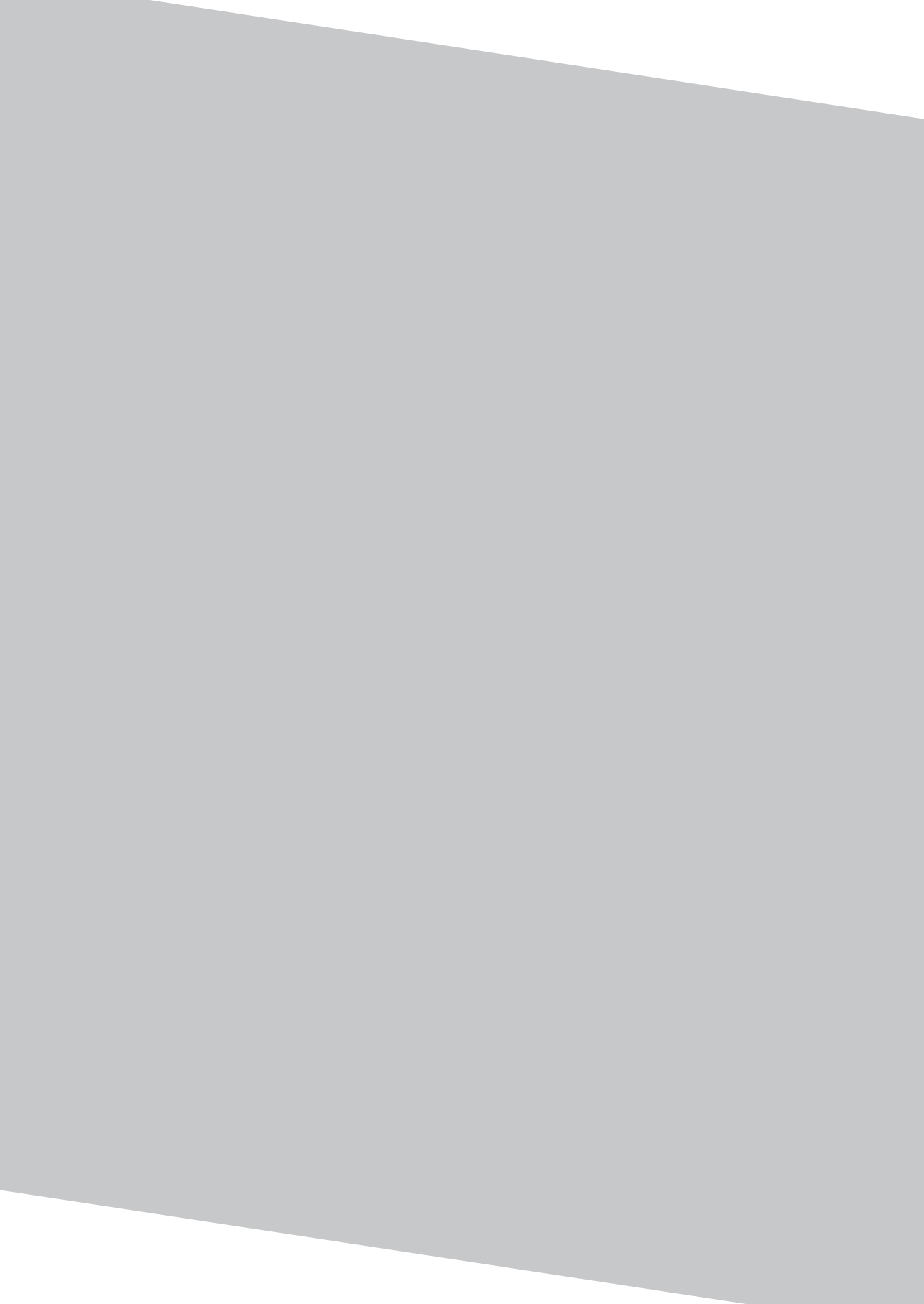
Commemorations and ritual performances can evoke stress-related symptoms and negative feelings. Yet, collective commemorations can be very meaningful to individuals and societies, especially when the context, performed rituals, and impact are in line with each other. The experiences of support, connectedness, recognition, and meaning making do not necessarily take away feelings of sadness or downheartedness. They concurrently strengthen positive feelings, through which commemorations may contribute to dealing with war experiences and loss, thus creating a healing environment.

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Appendices

Samenvatting (Dutch Summary)
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SAMENVATTING

DUTCH SUMMARY

Na stressvolle gebeurtenissen of verlies komen mensen vaak samen om te herinneren en te herdenken. De algemene gedachte is dat herdenken helpend is voor degenen die getroffen zijn, en bijdraagt aan het omgaan met ingrijpende ervaringen. Het herdenken van stressvolle gebeurtenissen heeft echter niet altijd uitsluitend positieve effecten. Negatieve gevoelens of herbelevingen kunnen bijvoorbeeld toenemen. Aan de basis van dit proefschrift ligt de wens om de functie en uitwerking van herdenken in relatie tot trauma en verlies beter te begrijpen en aannames over de helende werking van herdenkingen wetenschappelijk te toetsen. Specifiek wilden we weten wat de impact van herdenken en rituelen is op klinische symptomen zoals posttraumatische stress, persisterende rouw en emotionele reacties. Daarnaast wilden we ontrafelen hoe, voor wie en onder welke omstandigheden herdenken kan bijdragen aan het omgaan met oorlogservaringen en verlies.

In de introductie (**hoofdstuk 1**) wordt ingegaan op de definitie van herdenken. Herdenken is bij uitstek een breed begrip dat bestudeerd wordt vanuit allerlei disciplines. Drie verschillende invalshoeken staan centraal. De eerste invalshoek is het kijken naar de *impact* van herdenken. Dit wordt met name gedaan vanuit de psychologie en is de voornaamste focus in dit proefschrift. De tweede invalshoek is die van de *context* van herdenken, waar met name historici en sociologen zich mee bezig houden. Als laatste wordt herdenken, met name door antropologen en religiewetenschappers, vaak bekeken vanuit de invalshoek van de *uitvoering* van rituelen. De drie invalshoeken hangen sterk samen, en alleen door deze drie gezichtspunten te combineren kan uiteindelijk een antwoord gegeven worden op de vraag hoe herdenken kan bijdragen aan het omgaan met oorlogservaringen en verlies.

In het proefschrift wordt het onderwerp herdenken in twee verschillende contexten bestudeerd. In deel 1 wordt ingegaan op de impact van collectieve herdenkingsbijeenkomsten die georganiseerd worden na oorlog en grootschalig geweld. De meeste studies in deze dissertatie zijn uitgevoerd in de context van de Nederlandse Dodenherdenking op 4 mei, waar de Tweede Wereldoorlog en oorlogssituaties en vredesoperaties nadien herdacht worden. In deel 2 worden kleinschalige herdenkingsbijeenkomsten, zoals een uitvaart of rouwrituelen ter nagedachtenis aan het verlies van een dierbare, bestudeerd.

DEEL 1: COLLECTIEF HERDENKEN NA OORLOG EN GROOTSCHALIG GEWELD

Hoofdstuk 2 bevat een literatuurstudie in de vorm van een *scoping review* waarin gekeken wordt naar de relatie tussen herdenken en posttraumatische stress en rouwreacties. In totaal werden 26 empirische studies geïncludeerd. Herdenkingen in verschillende landen, onder andere in de Verenigde Staten, Engeland, Polen, Guatemala, Bosnië, Israël en Rwanda, gerelateerd aan diverse (burger)oorlogen of genocides, passeerden de revue. De studies laten zien dat posttraumatische stress en rouwreacties vaak toenemen tijdens en na een herdenking, met name bij mensen die voorafgaand aan de herdenking psychische klachten hebben. Individuele eigenschappen, zoals leeftijd, maar ook contextuele factoren

zoals culturele achtergrond, politieke invloeden en het type rituelen, blijken samen te hangen met de psychische impact van herdenken. Ook zijn er vijf psychosociale factoren die invloed hebben op de individuele reactie na herdenken, namelijk het ervaren van erkenning, sociale steun, betekenisgeving, emotionele expressie en het opkomen van individuele herinneringen. Op basis van de analyse in deze *scoping review* is een model gecreëerd met de verschillende factoren die van invloed kunnen zijn op de toe- of afname van posttraumatische stress en rouwreacties.

De invloed van deze factoren op de emotionele reactie na herdenken is onderzocht in een quasi experimentele studie en beschreven in **hoofdstuk 3**. Aan deze studie namen 307 mensen deel van diverse leeftijden, met en zonder oorlogservaringen en met diverse culturele achtergronden. Deelnemers bekeken een deel van de televisie-uitzending van de Nationale Herdenking in Amsterdam. Voor en na het kijken vulden ze een vragenlijst in waarbij onder andere gevraagd werd naar de emoties die zij op dat moment ervoeren. Het kijken naar de herdenking had een emotionele impact op de deelnemers. Negatieve emoties, met name verdriet, namen toe en positieve emoties, met name blijdschap, namen af. Individuele eigenschappen, zoals leeftijd of geslacht, waren voor een klein deel voorspellend voor de emotionele reactie. Ook posttraumatische stress symptomen voorafgaand aan de herdenking voorspelden een toename van negatieve emoties. De psychosociale factoren waren sterker gerelateerd aan de emotionele reacties dan de individuele eigenschappen. Deelnemers die door het herdenken meer betekenis konden geven aan het verleden en steun en erkenning ervoeren door te herdenken, hadden meer positieve emoties na het herdenken in vergelijking met andere deelnemers. Deze psychosociale factoren blijken dus niet zozeer het verdriet weg te nemen, maar wel de impact van deze emoties te verzachten door de toename van positief affect.

Hoofdstuk 4 gaat specifiek in op kinderen en hoe zij zich verhouden tot het herdenken van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Hiervoor is een *mixed-methods* studie uitgevoerd onder kinderen in de leeftijd van negen tot achttien jaar, met groepsinterviews onder 55 kinderen en afname van vragenlijsten onder 374 kinderen. De meeste van deze kinderen namen deel aan herdenkingen van de Tweede Wereldoorlog en gaven aan dit belangrijk te vinden. Het leren van lessen uit het verleden werd het vaakst genoemd als reden om door te gaan met herdenken. Daarnaast gaven de kinderen aan te herdenken omdat het onderdeel uitmaakt van de culturele traditie. Ook sociale redenen werden genoemd, zoals verbinding maken met anderen en het steunen van, en respect betonen aan overlevenden. Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat kinderen een herdenking meer waarderen als de context van de herdenking en de rituelen die uitgevoerd worden begrijpelijk zijn, als het concept oorlog tastbaar gemaakt wordt, als de herdenking inclusief is aangaande wie herdenkt en wie herdacht wordt, en als de sfeer passend is, dat wil zeggen verdrietig, waardig en respectvol.

In **hoofdstuk 5** wordt een andere specifieke groep belicht, namelijk door oorlog getroffen migranten in Nederland. Hiervoor werden 25 interviews gehouden met migranten uit verschillende landen, die vluchtten vanwege oorlog of grootschalig geweld. De meeste

migranten namen deel aan de Dodenherdenking op 4 mei. Dit wakkerde diverse emoties en gevoelens aan, zoals verdriet, maar ook verlangen en dankbaarheid. Herinneringen aan eigen oorlogservaringen en verliezen kwamen tijdens het herdenken regelmatig naar boven bij de geïnterviewden. De impact hiervan verschilt van verontrusting tot opluchting. Veel geïnterviewden gaven aan dat de context van de oorlog in het land van herkomst, zoals een conflict dat nog altijd voortduurt of een betwiste geschiedenis, hen ervan weerhoudt om het eigen oorlogsverleden samen met landgenoten te herdenken. Door de Dodenherdenking ervaren de meeste door oorlog getroffen migranten sociale verbondenheid en openheid voor emotionele expressie, wat bijdraagt aan het omgaan met eigen oorlogservaringen.

DEEL 2: UITVAART EN ROUWRITUELEN NA HET VERLIES VAN EEN DIERBARE

Na het verlies van een dierbare worden vaak herdenkingsrituelen uitgevoerd om met het verlies om te gaan. **Hoofdstuk 6** beschrijft een longitudinale vragenlijststudie onder 552 nabestaanden die recent een geliefde verloren en een follow-up vragenlijst drie jaar later onder 289 nabestaanden. Een positieve beleving van de uitvaart en het gebruik van rouwrituelen lijken niet samen te hangen met het verloop van rouwreacties over tijd. De meeste deelnemers gaven aan dat de uitvaart belangrijk was voor het proces van rouwverwerking. Individuele en gezamenlijke rouwrituelen werden veelvuldig uitgevoerd, zoals het branden van een kaars of het bezoeken van het graf ter nagedachtenis aan de geliefde. Hoewel de uitvaart en het uitvoeren van rituelen als helpend werden gezien door de deelnemers, hing dit niet samen met het ervaren van meer of minder rouwsymptomen over tijd.

Tijdens de COVID-19 pandemie werden verschillende restricties opgelegd rondom uitvaarten en het uitvoeren van herdenkingsrituelen na het verlies van een dierbare. Meerdere wetenschappers uitten hun zorgen over de mogelijke impact van deze restricties voor het ontwikkelen van persisterende rouwsymptomen. Een onderzoek naar de impact van deze restricties is beschreven in **hoofdstuk 7**. Een cross-sectioneel onderzoek werd uitgevoerd onder 50 nabestaanden die een geliefde verloren voor de pandemie en 182 nabestaanden die een geliefde verloren tijdens de pandemie. Door de omstandigheden tijdens de pandemie konden in dit onderzoek verschillende tekortkomingen uit het longitudinale onderzoek (hoofdstuk 6) geadresseerd worden. In het longitudinale onderzoek was de variëteit in de evaluatie van de uitvaart en de rouwrituelen bijvoorbeeld beperkt omdat het grootste deel van de mensen erg positief was over de uitvaart en de rituelen. De restricties tijdens COVID-19 zorgden voor meer verschillen in beleving. Een positieve evaluatie van de uitvaart was in dit onderzoek geassocieerd met het ervaren van minder rouwsymptomen. Deelname aan andere collectieve of individuele rouwrituelen hing echter niet samen met de ernst van de rouw.

De onderzoeksresultaten van alle verschillende studies zijn samengevat en geïntegreerd in de discussie in **hoofdstuk 8**. Allereerst geven we antwoord op de vraag

wat de impact is van herdenken en rituelen op klinische symptomen zoals posttraumatische stress, persisterende rouw, en emotionele reacties. De onderzoeksresultaten laten zowel een toename van symptomen en negatieve emoties, als een afname van symptomen en een versterking van positieve emoties zien kort na een herdenking. Om beter te begrijpen hoe herdenken kan bijdragen aan het omgaan met oorlogservaringen en verlies, moeten we echter verder kijken dan een toe- of afname van klinische symptomen. Voor wie en onder welke omstandigheden kan herdenken een positieve bijdrage leveren? De impact die een herdenking heeft lijkt niet zozeer afhankelijk te zijn van individuele eigenschappen van degene die herdenkt, maar veeleer samen te hangen met de context waarin de herdenking plaatsvindt en de manier waarop rituelen worden uitgevoerd. Herdenkingen en rituelen kunnen gevoelens van steun, verbinding en erkenning oproepen en bijdragen aan expressie van emoties en het geven van betekenis. Deze ervaringen lijken cruciaal voor een waardevolle herdenking. De implicaties daarvan voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek, voor de klinische praktijk, en voor de praktische keuzes van organisatoren van herdenkingen, worden beschreven in het slot van de discussie. Hopelijk zal de verdieping van onze kennis over herdenken uiteindelijk ten goede komen aan samenlevingen, families en individuen die getroffen zijn door oorlog, geweld en verlies.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bertine Mitima-Verloop was born on 9 April 1993 in Boskoop, the Netherlands. She obtained her Bachelor's and Master's degree (cum laude) in Clinical and Health Psychology at Utrecht University (2014/2015). In her master thesis, that she wrote at ARQ Centrum'45, she studied the relationship between social support, resilience and posttraumatic stress symptoms among young asylum seekers.



After her studies, Bertine moved to Eldoret, Kenya, where she worked as a psychologist for ADAPT, a community-based organisation with programmes for prevention and rehabilitation of alcohol and drug abuse. In 2016, Bertine went back to the Netherlands and started working for ARQ Centrum'45. As a junior researcher, she was involved in a multi-year research project (2016-2019) called '*Rituelenonderzoek*' [Rituals research], studying the function of commemorative rituals. The project was a collaboration between ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre and the National Committee for 4 and 5 May. From 2017 onwards, Bertine worked as a researcher and policy adviser for ARQ Centre of Expertise for War, Persecution and Violence. Within this department, she is a project leader for different projects that are connected to the psychosocial impact and transmission of war on individuals, families and societies. In the project '*Kennis voor de toekomst*' [Knowledge for the future] she worked together with Joods Maatschappelijk Werk (Jewish Social Work) to secure their knowledge and expertise, and make it accessible. The project '*Deskundigheidsbevordering reguliere zorg*' [Professional development regular health care], in cooperation with foundation Pelita, is a multi-year project (2022-2023) to develop various types of training for health care workers to improve the care for elderly originating from the former Dutch East Indies and the Moluccas. Bertine is involved in a number of other projects, including making short documentaries about the intergenerational transmission of war experiences, and trainings and workshops for professionals about elderly people with war experiences and dealing with war and emotions.

Between 2017 and 2021, Bertine worked at Utrecht University as a researcher and teacher. She was involved in the research project '*Een goed afscheid*' [A good farewell], in cooperation with the funeral service company Yarden. Further, she supervised over twenty master students in Clinical Psychology in writing their thesis or performing their research internship.

Besides her work as researcher, Bertine has also worked as a social worker and psychologist in the past years. For several years she worked as a social worker with refugees for Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland. Since 2023, Bertine works for Arkin as a psychologist at a general health care clinic.

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Bertine Mitima-Verloop

Together in silence

**Commemoration, rituals, and coping
with war experiences and loss**

In response to distressing events and personal losses, people often gather to remember and commemorate. Commemorations are assumed to support those affected by disruptive events to cope with their experiences. Yet, remembering stressful events may also increase negative feelings or re-experiences of the past.

This dissertation sheds light on the individual impact of collective commemorations and ritual performances in relation to mental health. It aims to increase our understanding of the relationship between commemorating, clinical symptoms (such as posttraumatic stress and prolonged grief), and emotional responses. Furthermore, the aim is to unravel for whom and under what circumstances commemorations can contribute to coping with war experiences and loss. Findings of six studies, including both quantitative and qualitative research methods, are presented. The first part focuses on collective commemorative gatherings in society that are organised in the aftermath of war, large-scale violence or genocide. Specific attention is given to the experiences of children and war-affected immigrants during Dutch Remembrance Day, a commemoration rooted in World War II. Part two centres around funeral services and grief ritual performances to remember the loss of a loved one, including the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, this dissertation reveals that despite increased stress-related symptoms and negative feelings, collective commemorations can be very meaningful to individuals and societies. Experiencing support, connectedness, recognition, and meaning making are key in strengthening positive feelings, through which commemorations may contribute to coping with war experiences and loss. The findings offer important implications and recommendations for future research, clinical practice, policy-making and institutions responsible for organising commemorations.

Bertine Mitima-Verloop works as a researcher and policy adviser at ARQ Centre of Expertise for War, Persecution and Violence and Utrecht University, and as a psychologist at Arkin.

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