

# The (re)Construction of a National Identity in Times of Disasters

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The (re)Construction of the Dutch National Identity throughout the Watersnoodramp of 1953 and COVID-19

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I proudly present you my final thesis and hope you enjoy reading it.

Emma Fokt

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# Executive summary

The pluralistic coexistence of identities makes the construction of identities a highly suitable research subject however it also makes understanding it a weary and challenging task. Whereas most studies within the field of identity construction focus on identity construction in relation to others. This research is particularly interested in the construction of a national identity in relation to non-human factors, specifically in relation to disasters. Through a case study of the Netherlands, this research has aimed to contribute to the knowledge gap on identity construction in relation to non-human factors.

In January 2020, a new infectious virus rapidly spread across the world. This virus is now known as COVID-19. Due to COVID-19, initial planned field work had to be canceled. However, taking full advantage of the context presented with, this research chose to conduct research on the (re)construction of the Dutch national identity throughout COVID-19. Alongside a literature review, a comparative analysis was conducted in which the (re)construction of the Dutch national identity throughout COVID-19 was compared to the (re)construction of the Dutch national identity throughout the Watersnoodramp of 1953. The Watersnoodramp of 1953, a flood, being the biggest natural disaster to hit the Netherlands throughout the twentieth century. Besides the literature review and the comparative analysis, thirteen online semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from several provinces of the Netherlands. This research has shown how feelings of collectiveness, being real or imagined, are at the base of a national identity. Moreover, this research showed how these feelings of collectiveness are brought forward, reproduced and disseminated in a context of disaster. It is either through togetherness or anxiety that these feelings of collectiveness are created.

Two factors which heavily influence the enhancement of the feeling of collectiveness are highlighted throughout this research. The first being contemporary media and the second being a shared past of suffering. Contemporary media not only conveys but constitutes disasters as well, meaning that disasters are largely dependent on media in how they will become known and responded to. Moreover, this research has shown how influenced by contemporary media, strong feelings of collectiveness arise within collections of imageries, behavior of role models and royalty, charity and the national remembrance culture. Secondly, disasters offer opportunities for people to share their sufferings. It often requires common effort to overcome that suffering. Both the common effort to overcome the suffering as well as the shared suffering result in enhanced feelings of collectiveness.

It is through either togetherness or anxiety that this feeling of collectiveness both created and imagined by media, surroundings and people themselves, can (re)construct a national identity or as understood throughout this research, a 'we' collective. When motivated by togetherness, the national identity of 'we' is constructed on a shared past of suffering as well as overcoming that suffering. However, when motivated by anxiety, the national identity of 'we' is constructed on the purpose of reducing self-related uncertainties. This by depersonalizing one's own identity and becoming one with a group, in this case the 'we'. Because COVID-19 is still ongoing, it is too early to draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, this research will elaborate on what can already be seen concerning the Dutch national identity (re)construction throughout COVID-19. However, the future will have to tell which remembrance culture is created by the media and how people have experienced, suffered and overcome COVID-19.

**Keywords:** National identity construction, Disasters, Netherlands, Watersnoodramp, COVID-19

# Table of content

<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1 Problem statement.....	7
1.2 Research questions.....	7
1.3 Scientific and social relevance .....	7
1.4 Outline .....	8
<b>Chapter 2 Theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.1 Conceptual framework.....	9
2.1.1 National.....	9
2.1.2 Identity .....	10
2.1.3 National Identity.....	10
2.2 Theoretical lens.....	10
2.2.1 Constructivist approach .....	10
2.2.2 (Social) Identity theory .....	11
2.3 Conclusion.....	11
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods</b> .....	<b>12</b>
3.1 Research design .....	12
3.2 Methods .....	12
3.2.1 Primary data.....	12
3.2.2 Secondary data.....	13
3.3 Sampling .....	13
3.4 Data analysis.....	15
3.5 Research ethics.....	15
<b>Chapter 4 Introducing the disasters</b> .....	<b>16</b>
4.1 How it all started.....	16
4.1.1 The Watersnoodramp.....	16
4.1.2 COVID-19.....	16
4.2 Comparing the disasters .....	17
4.2.1 Fighting the enemy: togetherness and anxiety.....	17
4.2.2 Scale.....	18
4.2.3 Duration .....	19
4.3 Conclusion.....	19
<b>Chapter 5 Disasters and media</b> .....	<b>20</b>
5.1 Mediated disasters.....	20

5.2 Feeling of collectiveness .....	21
5.2.1 Collection of imagery materials .....	21
5.2.2 Role models .....	22
5.2.3 Charity .....	23
5.2.4 National remembrance culture.....	24
5.3 Conclusion.....	24
<b>Chapter 6 National identity (re)construction .....</b>	<b>26</b>
6.1 (national) Identity construction.....	26
6.2 Watersnoodramp.....	29
6.3 COVID-19 .....	30
6.4 Conclusion.....	30
<b>Chapter 7 Discussion and conclusion .....</b>	<b>32</b>
7.1 Discussion.....	32
7.1.1 Disasters.....	32
7.1.2 Feeling of collectiveness .....	32
7.1.3 Identity construction .....	34
7.2 Theoretical contribution .....	35
7.3 Limitations and recommendations .....	36
7.4 Conclusion.....	37
<b>References.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>44</b>
Appendix 1: Topic list interview .....	44
Appendix 2: Interview invitation.....	45
Appendix 3: Overview of Jensen’s (2018) framework on feeling of collectiveness.....	46
Appendix 4: Self-identification descriptions .....	46

# Chapter 1 Introduction

On the one hand current society is often seen as one of exponential population growth, global trading, and innovative new technological advances. All resulting in the interconnected, fast and continuously changing world that we live in today. On the other hand, current society is also seen as one of risk and uncertainties (Beck et al., 1992) as a consequence of that very same modernization. Whereas the consequences of modernization in the first half of the twentieth century were still controlled and limited, they became uncontrollable and unconstrained in the second half of the twentieth century (Beck et al., 1992: 13). Structures and connections started to decompose quicker than the time it took to cast them or as Bauman (2007: 1) refers to it: *“We are witnessing a shift from a solid to a liquid phase of modernity”*. An illustration of this liquid phase of modernity is the separation of power and politics which generates uncertainty. Politics are still taking place at a local level but the power to act has moved to the politically uncontrollable global space. In the past nation states served as a factor of stability to which people could turn in times of trouble but now that the power to act has moved away to a global level it is unsure where people can turn to for local political issues. The ambiguous question that remains is whether globalization is a self-initiated process, an uncontrollable force which is happening to us, or both.

Regardless of being self-initiated or uncontrollable, as explained, globalization brings along uncertainties as well as challenges. One way of dealing with this is finding coping mechanisms. As De Graaf (2019) states: *“A lot of people suffer from the need for closure, a human condition to look for an easy explanation in times of stress and crisis in order to cope with risks and uncertainties”*. The two most common coping mechanisms are: 1) finding quick and easy escape goats, and 2) identity and *heimat*. The latter refers to the tendency to fall back to the comfort and familiarity of ones own community (De Graaf, 2019). However, as Bauman (2019) states, this longing for a feeling of safety is often based on a distant memory or imagination from the past. Another way of reducing these social context triggered uncertainties, is through identification. This process of identification however is often understood in relation to ‘the other’. *“[...] Feelings of uncertainty, particularly about or related to self, motivate people to identify with social groups and to choose new groups with, or configure existing groups to have, certain properties that best reduce, control, or protect from feelings of uncertainty”* (Hogg, 2007: 69). When categorizing someone to a specific group, that person is seen as a stereotype of that group rather than a unique person, therefore the person becomes depersonalized (Hogg, 2007: 79). The same process occurs when self-categorizing. By identifying with a specific group, one becomes depersonalized and one’s self-conceptions change to that of the group, which reduces self-related uncertainties (Hogg, 2007: 80). This research however aims to move beyond the comprehension of identity construction in relation to ‘the other’. Instead, this research is interested in identity construction in relation to non-human factors, more specifically disasters. Research that has taken place at this junction of identity and disaster studies have focused on shared trauma, how identities influence post disaster recovery, how commemorative events associated with national identities change and alter from generation to generation, solidarity and disasters, and how disasters becoming national disasters (Gist & Lubin (1999); Elliott & Hsu (2016); Frew & White (2015); West & Smith (1996); and West (2000)). Whereas West (2000) already touched upon a disaster becoming national, or even part of a national identity, this research is specifically interested in how a disaster can reshape or better yet reconstruct an already existing national identity.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the world's largest humanitarian network, defines a disaster as: *“[...] a sudden, calamitous event that seriously disrupts*

*the functioning of a community or society and causes human, material, and economic or environmental losses that exceed the community's or society's ability to cope using its own resources”* (IFRC, n.d.). In other words, disasters are events that disrupt the normal functioning of a community or society. The two disasters which will be examined throughout this research are the Watersnoodramp of 1953 and COVID-19. Whereas this comparison might seem unlikely at first, it has proven to be most valuable. This because as Mostert (2020) stated, until today the link between water and the Netherlands is still being used to promote unity. But how did the Watersnoodramp become a symbol for unification, and how was it able to (re)construct the Dutch national identity? When finding answers to these questions, more can be understood about the construction of identities in relation to disasters. This information contributes to understanding if and how COVID-19 can (re)construct the Dutch national identity.

## 1.1 Problem statement

On the fifth of January 2020, a disease outbreak news item about a new virus was published by the World Health Organization (WHO). It mentioned a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China. This news item turned out to be the first of many since this was the starting point of a catastrophic virus spreading rapidly around the world. This virus became known as COVID-19. Within weeks the virus was categorized as a global pandemic, a disaster which disrupted the world as we knew it. At the time of writing (December 2020), COVID-19 has been going on for almost a year and still has no clear ending insight. Never before has our current generation been faced with such a long period of distress due to the COVID-19 disaster, making this specific situation exceptionally suitable for analyzing the (re)construction of a national identity. This because as Kitaoka (1999) stated: *“It is when a country is confronted with new and fundamental challenges that its pursuit of identity becomes most vigorous”*.

## 1.2 Research questions

Since COVID-19 offers such a unique opportunity to examine people’s experiences on the (re)construction of a national identity in times of a disaster, this will be the main aim of this research. It is through a feeling of collectiveness, caused by either togetherness or anxiety, that a (re)construction of a national identity is possible. Through a case study of the Netherlands, this research will examine the (re)construction of the Dutch national identity throughout two disasters, COVID-19 and the Watersnoodramp of 1953. In doing so, this research aims to contribute to current knowledge about identity (re)construction in relation to non-human factors. The central question of this research is:

*“How is the Dutch national identity (re)constructed throughout the Watersnoodramp of 1953 and COVID-19”*

The sub questions which support the research question are:

- How is a national identity constructed?
- How did the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 become national disasters?
- What Dutch national identity has been constructed in relation to the Watersnoodramp?
- To what extent is the Dutch national identity being reconstructed throughout COVID-19?

## 1.3 Scientific and social relevance

Little to no literature has been written about the (re)construction of a national identity in relation to non-human factors such as disasters. Even less so, on the effects of a long-term disaster such as COVID-19



on the (re)construction of a national identity. This is evident in e.g., how identity construction in relation to disasters is not mentioned once in the 17 volumes of the book series on Identity Studies in the Social Sciences (SpringerLink, n.d.). Instead, focus was placed on “*ways in which social and personal identities are lived and performed in spaces and contexts such as schools, work places, clinics, homes, communities, streets, politics and public life, and explores a range of theoretical, methodological and epistemological debates over, for example, the demise of essentialist models, the rise of 'identity politics' and the relationship between psychological and social processes*” (SpringerLink, n.d.). By placing this research at the intersection of the fields of identity, nationalism, and disasters, this research aims to contribute to this existing knowledge gap. Moreover, as Visoka (2020) argues, nationalism could be seen as one of the most detrimental peace-breaking factors in conflict societies. Meaning that a better understanding of how a national identity is (re)constructed, also contributes to the study field of peace building. This because understanding how a national identity is (re)constructed will help put national solidarity above and beyond regional disruptions such as disasters. Finally, this research aims to contribute to a current research project by Jensen, van Asperen, van Egeraat, Nijhuis, Duiveman and Meijer, on the role of disasters in shaping local and national identities in the Netherlands in the period 1421–1890. This by analyzing the construction of the Dutch national identity in two specific disasters post 1890. An important element which has been considered within this research is the role of contemporary media in not only conveying but also constituting a disaster.

The societal relevance of this research lies within the characteristic of aiming to understand a phenomenon which all participants are faced with, namely: national identity (re)construction. Providing insights on how such a (re)construction of a national identity occurs in relation to disasters, will contribute to society since the notion, whether noticeable or not, seeps through all layers of society. Such as the political sphere, in which national identities play a pivotal role in influencing social cohesion and political integration.

## 1.4 Outline

This research consists out of six sections. The first section contains a concise literature review as well as a description of the theoretical lens. Within the second section, the methodology and methods used throughout the research are described. The third section introduces, discusses, and compares the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. The following section analyses the role of contemporary media in conveying and constituting disasters. Then, a section will follow on the conceptualization and construction of the participants their identities as well as the national identity (re)construction in relation to the previously mentioned disasters. The final section contains a critical discussion, limitations, suggestions for further research and lastly a conclusion.

# Chapter 2 Theoretical framework

## 2.1 Conceptual framework

### 2.1.1 National

In the studies of nations and nationalism there are two major streams, the primordialists and the modernists. Primordialists argue that nations are fixed and natural, and that: “*Group solidarity is derived from primordial ties which bind people together, either by virtue of genetic links or through perceived cultural similarities based on such features as language, religion, territory and kinship*” (Smith, 1998: 145-53, 233 as cited in Coakley, 2017). One of those primordialists and prominent nationalism expert is Anthony Smith. Smith (1986: 22-32) argues that a nation originates from ethnos, and ethnos he then explains, has six dimensions: 1) a collective name, 2) a common myth of descent, 3) a shared history, 4) a distinctive shared culture, 5) an association with a specific territory, and 6) a sense of solidarity. On the other side are modernist scholars like Ernest Gellner (1983: 56) for example, who argue that nations are: “*Modern concepts driven by the set of socio-economic and political changes that followed in the 19th century and essentially created by elites*” (Smith, 1998: 18-24, 224 as cited in Coakley, 2017). In other words, Gellner argues that nationalism is a consequence of the industrial society we are currently in. Unlike primordialists, Gellner (1983: 85-7) suggests that the emergence of nation depends on the abolition of the very same ethnos who primordialists believe nations originate from.

However, to get thorough understanding of nationalism and the establishment of nations, a third stream, the constructivist approach should also be taken into account. Whereas modernists depict a nation as wholly modern, constructivists do not see a nation as wholly new but rather as primarily socially constructed. Although both modernists and constructivists argue a nation is created or emerging from the elites, modernists argue this is driven by socio-economic and political changes whereas constructivists argue this is not driven through certain circumstances but rather just socially constructed (Coakley, 2017). Scholars like Ernest Renan and Benedict Anderson are known for their constructivist understanding of a nation. Benedict Anderson argues that a nation is an imagined political community (Anderson, 2006). Imagined because community members of even the smallest nation will never know, meet, or hear most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of a community (Anderson, 2006). According to Anderson (2006) nations are imagined as territorially limited, as a community, and as sovereign. Imagined as territorially limited because even the largest nations have finite boundaries beyond which lie other nations. Imagined as a community because the nation is always conceived as a deep comradeship, despite any inequalities that may prevail. Finally, imagined as sovereign because the supreme authority is located in the nation itself. Another constructivist, Renan (1882), describes a nation as a collective will of being together. According to Renan (1882) there are generally two things which constitute the soul of a nation. One is the past, “*The possession in common of a rich legacy of memories*” (Renan, 1882: 10), in other words, all that people jointly forget and remember. A nation therefore thrives on the feeling of the sacrifices that are already made and those which are still expected to be made. The other is the present consent, “*The desire to live together and to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received*” (Renan, 1882: 10). Knowing that your fellow people have suffered, rejoiced, and hoped the same way as you did is according to Renan the base of the construction of a national identity. The key concept for Renan (1882) is ‘suffered together’, “for suffering unites more than does joy” (Renan, 1882: 10). This because suffering imposes and requires common effort to overcome the suffering. Throughout this research, the concept of

suffering together will be divided in shared suffering and the common effort to overcome that suffering. Since both are at the base of identity construction, these two concepts will be thoroughly analyzed when looking at the possible (re)construction of a national identity in times of disasters.

### 2.1.2 Identity

Now that the concept of a nation and nationalism has been explored, it is time to move on to the second part, 'identity'. The notion of identity is far from new. When taking a quick tour through the history, it was Aristotle in Greek ancient times who said: "*Every property and every accident belonging to the one belongs to the other, so far as they are the same*" (as cited in Barnes, 1977). With this Aristotle already touched upon notions of sameness and identity. After Aristotle many other scholars, like Georg Hegel (1770-1831), followed. Inspired by Immanuel Kant, Hegel came up with the dialectic of identification and distantiation, which inspired the thought of recognizing the other as that against which you define yourself (Hegel in Brons, 2015). With this, instead of focusing on sameness, Hegel focused on the differences between you and the other. Elaborating on Hegel's dialectic of identification and distantiation, Simone De Beauvoir brought forward the theory of the *other* as a constructed opposition from which the *self* is constructed (De Beauvoir in Brons, 2015). Both emphasizing how one can construct a self-identity by constructing the other. When taking Hegel's and De Beauvoir's perspective on identity and placing that on a national scale. One can see the same construction of the other through which one's own national identity is constructed. This is seen back in the reference-group theory by Robert Merton (1968), in which one's identity is seen as being, partly, shaped by the identification with and comparison to reference groups. Reference groups being the groups that individuals use as a standard for evaluating themselves. Around the same time as De Beauvoir, sociologist Erving Goffman also dove into the identity debate. Within his book 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1956), Goffman (1956) describes how there is no such thing as a true self. Goffman (1956) rather sees the self as a performed role. Goffman states how the world is a stage and how we humans all play our predetermined roles. In this world that Goffman describes, it are the roles itself which are the true performers. With this, Goffman conceptualized identity as being plural and out of our control rather than a static and possessive attribute. With this quick tour through the history of the concept of identity, one can see how identity has always been and will always remain a central notion in life. Sometimes noticeable and sometimes unnoticeable.

### 2.1.3 National Identity

Even though many scholars have written both in the field of nationalism and identity, defining the concept of national identity remains a weary and challenging task. This, because it refers to both an individual's sense of self as well as to an individual's relations with others (Andreouli and Chrysochoou, 2015). Throughout this research, a national identity will not be defined in relation to 'the other', neither as static nor uniform. Rather, identity will be understood in relation to a non-human factor, being both pluralistic and coexistent.

## 2.2 Theoretical lens

### 2.2.1 Constructivist approach

Over time, debates surrounding identity have divided scholars into two separate strands, namely: essentialists and constructivists. Whereas essentialists claim that identity is having a required set of attributions, constructivists claim that identities can be plural and that they are socially constructed.

Examining the (re)construction of a national identity requires a comprehension of identity as something which is fluid and multi-layered. It is for this particular reason that this research will take on a constructivist approach. Similar to what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) stated about gender: “No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between male and the eunuch that is called feminine”, this research will conceptualize identity as socially constructed. The advantage of using a constructivist approach rather than an essentialist approach is that the first emphasizes taking into account culture and context (Derry, and McMahon, as cited in Kim, 2001: 2). This is particularly valuable for this research since the aim of this research is to examine if and how one's national identity can be (re)constructed in a context of high risk and uncertainty, a disaster.

### 2.2.2 (Social) Identity theory

The second theory used throughout this research is a combination of the identity theory and the social identity theory. Before explaining why combining both theories is relevant for this research, it is important to understand the differences and similarities between the two. Both theories are similar in their perspectives on the social basis of the self-concept and on the nature of normative behavior, and how they perceive the social nature of self as being constituted by society (Hogg et al., 1995: 255). However, they differ in disciplinary roots, where identity theory comes from a sociological background, social identity theory comes from a psychological background (Hogg et al., 1995). Moreover, identity theorists emphasize role-based identities in which the focus is on individuality and interrelatedness with others in counter roles in the group (Stets and Burke, 2000). This in contrast with social identity theorists who emphasize group-based identities in which they focus on finding uniformity within a group (Stets and Burke, 2000). Although this research takes on an understanding of identity similar to Goffman in which identity is seen as a performed role, it does not exclude group-based identities. This because as Lentin (2008: 38) stated: *“It is there where individual belongings and collective identities meet which is also the stage at which identities are contested and negotiated”*. However, as West (2000) argues, this negotiation also takes place in relation to disasters. *“Natural disasters were core elements shaping Australia’s national identity”* (West, 2000: 198) and *“[...] in Australian natural disasters other than cyclones, we find a congruent discourse, due to their symbolic connection to national identity”* (West, 2000: 198). In other words, somehow the negotiation of a national identity takes place in the disaster discourse as well. To understand how an identity is negotiated in relation to disasters, this research will understand identity as possibly being an individually performed role as well as possibly being based on a group membership. Combining these theories will contribute to understand identities as being a fluid, multi-layered and even a multi-origin concept.

## 2.3 Conclusion

To conclude, this research will analyze identity construction in relation to a non-human factor, namely disasters. Through a combination of the constructivist approach with the identity theories as stated above, this research will compare the Watersnoodramp with COVID-19. Focus will be placed upon the negotiation of a national identity in the discourse of disasters. More specifically, the feeling of collectiveness within disasters. Created through either togetherness or anxiety, as well as the enhancement of the feeling of collectiveness through both contemporary media as well as a shared past of suffering.

# Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

This chapter explains the methodological decisions that were made throughout this qualitative research. To understand what the Dutch national identity means for the participants and how their national identity is (re)constructed, it was necessary to consider as many aspects and characteristics of the participants life as possible (Boeije et al., 2009). Since qualitative research offers the possibility of grasping the social reality of our participants as well as the contexts and situations they are in (Boeije et al., 2009), it formed the most suitable research design for this specific research. However, to grasp the social reality of the participants within the limited time available for this research, the sample size had to be kept relatively small. By limiting the number of participants to thirteen, this research was able to not only scratch the surface but really dive into the broader and deeper context in which a national identity is constructed.

## 3.1 Research design

This research took on a case study research design, in which an in-depth study has been conducted into the (re)construction of the Dutch national identity in times of disasters, specifically the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. Since the research took place during COVID-19, there was little to no previous literature available on the relation between COVID-19 and (re)construction of national identities. Therefore, this research has combined the case study research design with the exploratory research design. The latter aims at gaining more insights and familiarity surrounding new and unfamiliar topics, which makes it suitable for research about COVID-19. Both research designs do not aim to confirm or debunk previous research but rather to broaden current knowledge about COVID-19 and the (re)construction of national identities in times of disasters.

## 3.2 Methods

### 3.2.1 Primary data

To collect the primary data, this research has used the qualitative data collection method of semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is a flexible data collection method that gears towards two-way communication, in which both the interviewer and the participant have the possibility of going off topic. This was of specific use for not only receiving answers but background stories and reasonings behind the answers as well. Using semi-structured interviews was especially useful within this research because it allowed participants to express their views, fears and opinions concerning Covid-19 and the Dutch national identity in their own words (Keller and Conradin, 2010).

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, elements of life-history interviews were used as well. This because life-history interviews offered pivotal insights in factors which influenced the participant's construction of a national identity. It was crucial to take into account these factors because as De Beauvoir (1949) stated; the relations around you shape who you are as a person. The combination of the two qualitative data collection methods contributed to understanding how the participant's construction of their identity was constructed throughout their lives. Appendix 1 shows the topic list used for the interviews. The primary data collected from the semi-structured interviews with elements of life-history interviews helped answering the sub questions about how a national identity is (re) constructed in general as well as in times of disasters.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not allowed. Therefore, the interviews were conducted online through a program called *Zoom (Video Communications)*. Although most participants were more familiar with Skype, Zoom offered better functionalities regarding the interview, the most important one being the function of being able to record a meeting. Fortunately, none of the participants were weary for possible privacy risks and gave their consent for using *Zoom*. Unlike face-to-face interviews where you can talk in a quiet and neutral setting, the online interviews took place in the room most convenient for both the participant as the interviewer. Not being able to control the location of the interview made the online interviews more sensitive for external interferences such as for example background noise and disturbances. An advantage of the online interviews was that it offered the participant more flexibility in deciding when the interview should take place since both the interviewer and the participant did not have to travel for the interview. Moreover, it was the safest option of conducting interviews while being in quarantine due to COVID-19. The disadvantage of the online interviews was that it was harder to make a personal connection with the participant. By taking the time to talk to the participants before diving into the interview however, this issue was mostly overcome.

Before the interviews took place, the participants were contacted and were sent an invitation (Appendix 2). During this first contact, the participant was informed about the topic of the interview and was preemptively asked for consent for using the data collected in the interview. Once the intention of the interview was clear, a time and date for the interview was set. Since the interviews were held online, through Zoom. The participant was asked if (s)he was familiar with Zoom. If not, a test session was planned one day before the actual interview. In this test session the participant was able to get to know Zoom. Prior to the interview, the participant was asked to make sure that (s)he was in a quiet and comfortable place in which (s)he was able to speak freely during the interview. Finally, a day before the interview, the participant received a reminder in which the date and time of the interview were emphasized. The interviews themselves were expected to last approximately 60 minutes. However, some interviews turned out longer due to the openness and willingness to talk of the participants. Due to the quarantine, most participants were eager to talk.

### 3.2.2 Secondary data

This research also collected secondary data to complement the primary data as well as supporting the literature review and the comparative analysis. The secondary data is scientific literature gathered from the following databases: WUR Library, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. For the collection of secondary data, the literature search was limited by focusing specifically on the concepts such as identity, disasters, and media. Important to keep in mind when using secondary data, is knowing the data was collected with a different purpose than this research. The secondary data collected from the databases as mentioned above helped answering the sub question of what a national identity is, as well as the sub questions about what national identity was (re)constructed during the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19.

## 3.3 Sampling

Participants for the interviews were selected through a non-probability sampling method. Meaning that participants were selected on non-random criteria. This is specifically suitable for exploratory and qualitative research, which this research is (Boeije et al., 2009). Unlike quantitative research this research aimed at elaboratively exploring a small sample size. Those who identified with the Dutch national identity fitted within the sample population. From this sample population, a sample size of thirteen people was selected. This due to limited available time as well as the aim of conducting more

in-depth interviews in order to really grasp how a national identity is (re)constructed. To get a broad representation of the Dutch population this research selected participants from various sexes, age groups, provinces, and professions (see table 1).

Table 1 Participant Overview

	Sex	Age group	Residence, Province	Profession	Date interview
P1	F	30-65	Ede Gelderland	Chef	12/06/20
P2	F	65+	Deventer Overijssel	Retired	14/06/20
P3	M	30-65	Arnhem Gelderland	Teacher	15/06/20
P4	M	30-65	Benthuizen Zuid-Holland	Business owner	15/06/20
P5	M	18-30	Heeswijk-Dinther Brabant	Business owner	16/06/20
P6	F	18-30	Tilburg Brabant	Student	25/06/20
P7	F	18-30	Deventer Overijssel	Programma secretary	01/07/20
P8	F	30-65	Benthuizen Zuid-Holland	Business owner	01/07/20
P9	M	18-30	Wageningen Gelderland	Student	01/07/20
P10	M	30-65	Wierden Overijssel	Branch manager	03/07/20
P11	F	18-30	Amsterdam Noord-Holland	Sustainability consultant	23/07/20
P12	F	30-65	Zwartsluis Overijssel	Nurse	30/07/20
P13	F	30-65	Harderwijk Gelderland	Nurse	31/07/20

Having a representation of different genders is important for the validity of the research. Different genders might have different connotations with the concept of a national identity. Taking into account the age group of the participants is also of interest for this research since certain age groups were more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others. Meaning that this could have affected the answers of the participants. Besides the age group, the residence and residential provinces of the participants are also taken into account. This because COVID-19 hit some parts of the country harder than other. Especially in the beginning, when the province of Brabant was a hotspot for COVID-19 infections, this province was hit disproportionately hard. A fourth factor of interest for this research was the participants their professions. Several participants argued that COVID-19 is a disaster due to the large scale economic and financial affects the aftermath is going to have in the Netherlands. The participants expressed serious concerns about expected job insecurity and participant 3 (2020: 12) stated: *“Personally I experience little nuisance from COVID-19 but if you are working in the hospitality industry or when you own a business its a whole other story”*. Therefore, the participants professions have significant influence on their answers and should be taken into account. Finally, the date of the interviews is also taken into account. Since the start of COVID-19, the virus has gone through highly dangerous phases in which the care system was under high pressure but also through phases in which the consequences

of COVID-19 were barely visible anymore. Since the interviews were all conducted through this highly changeable context, it is an important factor to take into account. These five factors all heavily influenced the answers of the participants and therefore their understanding of a disasters and the (re)construction of their national identity in relation to disasters.

Initially, participants have been sampled through voluntary response sampling. Instead of selecting participants, people volunteered themselves to participate in the research. Through online requests on social media, more specifically through WhatsApp, this research reached most participants. A post was created in which participants had shortly been introduced to the topic, purpose and process of the interviews. Although voluntary response sampling is biased since some people are more likely to volunteer than others, this sampling method suited this research best due to the exploratory nature of this research. Simultaneously a second sampling method was used, among those who did voluntary participate in the research. This being the snowball sampling method. Although the sample population of this research was not hard to access, snowball sampling acted as an useful tool for reaching more participants. Those who participated voluntarily had been asked to suggest additional people who might be interested in participating as well.

### 3.4 Data analysis

After the interviews were conducted, all the interviews were fully transcribed. In order to analyse the collected data, this research conducted a thematic analysis. As Braun & Clarke (2006 as cited Nowell et al., 2017: 2) state: “[...] *thematic analysis should be a foundational method for qualitative analysis*”. A thematic analysis is a method for “*systematically identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set*” (Braun & Clarke, 2012: 57). The thematic analysis showed how all the interviews could be separated in roughly two sections: identity and COVID-19. Within these sections several themes were recognized such as identity construction, national identity construction, media, and COVID-19. This turned out to be valuable when comparing and analyzing them for patterns, relations and theories in order to link the data back to the research question (Boeije et al., 2009).

### 3.5 Research ethics

Before the interviews started, the participants were once more asked for consent, for the interview to be recorded and data to be collected and used for the research. If at any time during the interview the participant felt uncomfortable or wished to stop, (s)he was able to do so. In order to make the participants feel comfortable and free to talk about anything they want, guarantee was given to the participants that the data will be handled anonymously. The collected data will be stored in a secured way privately for at least one year and will be stored by Wageningen University & Research for a period of 10 years. Storing this data together with corresponding documentation will allow research who were not involved in the research to understand the data, its context, and the conditions for using the data (Wageningen University & Research, 2020). Once the data is anonymized and the research is completed, Wageningen University & Research will publicize the result in their theses databank, open to third parties.



## Chapter 4 Introducing the disasters

This chapter will first introduce the disasters, by giving a concise summary of how the disasters took place. Once the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 have been introduced, the disasters will be compared based on three elements: 1) cause and enemy, 2) scale, and 3) duration. This comparison will show how a different feeling of collectiveness was established throughout the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. Where the feeling of collectiveness throughout the Watersnoodramp was based on togetherness, the feeling of collectives throughout COVID-19 is based on anxiety.

### 4.1 How it all started

#### 4.1.1 The Watersnoodramp

On the night of the 31st of January 1953 disaster struck in the Dutch provinces of Zeeland, South-Holland and Western-Brabant. A combination of heavy storm weather and spring tide caused a storm tide which led to water levels rising as far as up to 5 meters above sea level. Water defenses such as dykes broke down and the country flooded. With 1836 casualties, the Watersnoodramp turned out to be the biggest natural disaster to hit the Netherlands in the 20th century. Although the direct damages of the Watersnoodramp were limited to within three provinces, the Watersnoodramp was categorized as a national disaster. So, what is it that made these regional catastrophic events a national disaster? According to one of the participants the Watersnoodramp had been categorized as a national disaster because the whole country was affected (Participant 12, 2020). She stated that the call for offering shelter was spread and received throughout the entire country and that affected families moved across the whole country after the disaster struck (Participant 12, 2020). In other words, this participant showed how not only direct but also indirect involvement can create a feeling of collectiveness across a country. Another participant emphasized the natural component of the disaster stating there is a significant difference in human and natural induced disasters. Since the Watersnoodramp was a natural disaster the feeling of collectiveness was increased (Participant 13, 2020). The participants hereby showed how a regional disaster constructed a feeling of collectiveness among all Dutch citizens.

#### 4.1.2 COVID-19

In December 2019 the first reports came in about an unknown cluster of symptoms spreading rapidly among the population of the Chinese city of Wuhan. Then, on the fifth of January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) published its first disease outbreak news item about a new virus named “SARS-CoV-2”, better known as COVID-19. Within a matter of weeks, COVID-19 a virus originating from China, was categorized as a global pandemic. As stated by Liu et al. (2020): “SARS-CoV-2 is believed to be a spillover of an animal coronavirus and later adapted the ability of human-to-human transmission”. COVID-19 is specifically dangerous to humans since it is highly contagious, has a high reproduction number (shows how fast the virus is spreading) and it continuously evolves among the human population (Liu et al., 2020). Moreover, at the moment of writing this thesis, COVID-19 has already caused 9184 casualties and this number is still rising since there is no cure against the virus yet. Whereas COVID-19 started out on the other side of the world and went global before becoming active in the Netherlands, the Watersnoodramp started out regional. This being said, both disasters are now categorized as national disasters in the Netherlands. So how come this global disaster became a national disaster? When asking this question to the participants, only one stated that COVID-19 was not a national disaster. Participant 3 (2020) stated COVID-19 could not be seen as a national disaster due to

the high interconnectedness of countries caused by globalization. Meaning that the global character of the COVID-19 pandemic does not automatically makes it a Dutch national disaster as well (Participant 3, 2020). The other participants all agreed that COVID-19 is indeed a national disaster. The most common reasons they all brought forward were: 1) because COVID-19 (in)directly affects everybody without exceptions, 2) it's on everybody's mind, 3) we need to stand together to fight the virus, and 4) the large scale consequences it has caused for the Netherlands (mostly financially). The participants hereby showed how a global disaster constructed a feeling of collectiveness among all of the participants.

## 4.2 Comparing the disasters

### 4.2.1 Fighting the enemy: togetherness and anxiety

When comparing the Watersnoodramp with COVID-19 it is important to first look at the cause of the disaster. The Watersnoodramp was caused by an extreme weather condition, meaning it had a natural cause. COVID-19, being a virus, also has a natural cause. However, when participants were asked which disaster reminded them of COVID-19, the Watersnoodramp did not come up. Five participants stated that COVID-19 reminded them of the Spanish flu due to the fact they are both pandemics which spread globally. Four other participants however, all stated that COVID-19 was a new and unique disaster. When asked about the uniqueness of COVID-19, the participant mentioned that they were never before exposed to the direct consequences of a disaster, its large scale, long duration, and its uncontrollability (Participants 1, 5, 6 and 13, 2020). More specifically, participant 1 (2020: 13) and participant 13 (2020: 14) emphasized the major impact and scale of COVID-19, stating: *“COVID-19 is unique since it is such a long time ago that a disease had such an effect [...] the Mexican flue did not have such an effect on the world like COVID-19 has. Moreover, COVID-19 can not be compared to events such as a financial crisis or war since these are caused by humans and this... I don't think people are to blame for COVID-19”* and *“COVID-19 is unique in its scale, how the whole world suffers from it, and in how it is uncontrollable”*. Unlike participant 1 and 13 who emphasized the unique character of the disaster, participants 5 and 6 emphasized the unique experience COVID-19 has had on them personally. This by stating: *“For me COVID-19 is unique due to the major effects it has on our daily lives and how I have never experienced anything like this before from up close [...] COVID-19 limits my daily activities”* (Participant 5, 2020: 10) , and *“It is hard to compare COVID-19 to anything because I have never experienced a disaster such as COVID-19”* (Participant 6, 2020: 10). Data therefore shows how both the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19, regardless of their cause, are perceived differently. Moreover, it also shows how individuals going through the same disaster can still perceive that disaster differently.

Moving on to the visibility and ability to fight to the enemy. In the case of the Watersnoodramp, the enemy is water, a visible enemy. Because water is visible, people saw the danger coming and could work together to stop further suffering. Once the water had done its damage, disaster recovery started immediately. In the night of the Watersnoodramp, people all over the disaster struck areas started to work together to keep the water out. To do so, sandbags were prepared and stacked on top of each other . In the days and weeks to follow, these emergency water seals were replaced by stone and temporary cofferdams (Watersnoodmuseum, n.d.). Moreover, the Watersnoodramp also gave cause to the *'Delta Works'*, a series of construction projects to protect the country from the water. Dams, sluices, dykes and storm surge barriers were improved and newly build across the country. In other words, the visibility of the enemy gave opportunity to fight against the water at the moment of the disaster, as well as the

opportunity to prevent future floods. The visibility and ability to fight the enemy helped creating a strong feeling of collectiveness based on togetherness.

COVID-19 however, is an invisible enemy which we can not fight against. Since COVID-19 is invisible, there is no way of controlling it, like it was the case with water during the Watersnoodramp. It is this element of being uncontrollable which causes fear and anxiety according to the participants. *“I think it is terrifying [...] people are again traveling from country to country, but nobody is going into the mandatory quarantine. [...] it makes people and COVID-19 uncontrollable”* (Participant 13, 2020: 9). The impact of the inability to control COVID-19 was specifically shown by participant 8 who was dealing with sick family members and was overcome with emotions during the interview. She expressed how COVID-19 made her feel anxious about all she could lose: *“Especially because COVID-19 is such a devious virus, it makes you think... What if I do have it... I would feel terrible if I would infect other people”* (Participant 8, 2020: 10). Since there is no available vaccine against COVID-19 yet, these feelings of fear and anxiety will not lessen. Some participants even stated these feelings were intensified rather than lessened. This because of the framing of the media on the negative and bad news about COVID-19. *“In the beginning there was no other news than COVID-19 news shown in the media however it was a little bit focused on sensation. When a lot of people died, they would tell you all about it but now that it is getting a bit lesser you hear less about COVID-19 on the news as well. Media doesn’t tell you when things are getting better as much as they tell you when things are going bad. I think it is important to share positive news as well to reduce anxiety among the people. It is just scary”* (Participant 5, 2020: 6).

Moreover, whereas the Watersnoodramp led to the construction of the Delta Works in which people were able to defend themselves from future floods, no such thing is possible with a virus. New viruses could erupt at any moment and there is no way of preventing this. Therefore COVID-19 is not only a disaster but also a reminder to mankind of its vulnerability. *“Our world feels small and we humans started to feel indestructible and untouchable. But now that everybody has spent over four months in quarantine because some virus is spreading across the world, it is clear that we aren’t. We aren’t... We are vulnerable and COVID-19 has been our reality check in realizing this”* (Participant 7, 2020: 13). The lack of visibility and ability to fight the enemy created feeling of collectiveness based on anxiety rather than togetherness.

#### 4.2.2 Scale

Besides cause and enemy, another significant difference between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 is the scale on which it took place. The Watersnoodramp mostly took place within three provinces, Zeeland, South-Holland and Brabant. Therefore, its victims were directly limited to those provinces. With COVID-19 however, the disaster is not contained to certain areas. COVID-19 is a global virus which is not limited by or contained within any physical or social boundaries, as also shown by participant 6. *“It was very naïve but when I was in Italy last January, COVID-19 was already a thing in China but when I saw my Chinese roommate with a facemask, we joked about it. [...] So later when the first messages about COVID-19 came on the news in Italy, I already realized it was getting closer than I thought but I still didn’t think it would reach the Netherlands. Two weeks later however, the first cases of COVID-19 in the Netherlands were announced and were only two blocks away from my house. I remember going to Tilburg and then all of the sudden... I know it’s naïve, but I just never expected COVID-19 to come to the Netherlands, I thought it was something for less developed countries”*(Participant 6, 2020: 10-11). Anyone, at any time, at any place can get infected by the virus which results in feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. As mentioned before, it is this element of being

uncontrollable which makes COVID-19 as fearful as it is. Moreover, since COVID-19 is not limited by any boundaries, the world has become the disaster struck area. This makes the devastating impact of COVID-19 impossible to oversee.

### 4.2.3 Duration

A third significant difference between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 which will be discussed in this section is the duration of the disaster. The Watersnoodramp took place within a single night. It was a short and intense moment of disruption. This, in sharp contrast with COVID-19 which has been going on for 11 months already and still has no clear ending insight. Whereas the Watersnoodramp happened within a very short period, its damage was clear and people were able to immediately work on the recovery. With COVID-19 however, the damage is building up slow and gradually. In fact, due to the long duration of COVID-19, a new way of living has become normalized. *“COVID-19 is one of those things which will create a pre- and post COVID-19 time. [...] COVID-19 will be a large disruption of the world as we know it but eventually will go back to what we now call the ‘old normal’, versus what they now call the ‘new normal’ ”* (Participant 3, 2020: 13). The participant stated how he believes the ‘old normal’ will indeed be the same as the ‘normal’ before COVID-19 (Participant 3, 2020). Moreover, he also stated how the long duration of COVID-19 has led to a normalization of living with the constant threat of COVID-19. Or better yet, the normalization of a disaster. Therefore, the difference in duration of the disasters not only affects the recovery of a disaster but also the very perception of a disaster.

## 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has first introduced and summarized both the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. This showed how both a regional and a global disaster can create a feeling of collectiveness. Hereafter, the disasters were compared on cause and enemy, scale, and duration. Within the comparison of cause and enemy, a clear difference was shown between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. Whereas the Watersnoodramp had a visible enemy, people were able to fight against the water together. COVID-19 however is both invisible and uncontrollable leading to feelings of fear and anxiety. Moreover, the comparison of scale showed how the Watersnoodramp was a disaster limited to a certain area whereas COVID-19 is not limited by or contained within any physical or social boundaries. Finally, the comparison of duration showed that the Watersnoodramp created a short and intense moment of disruption of the normal functioning of society whereas COVID-19 has a long and gradual impact on society. To conclude, the Watersnoodramp created a strong feeling of collectiveness based on togetherness while COVID-19 created a less enhanced feeling of collectiveness based on anxiety.

## Chapter 5 Disasters and media

This chapter will discuss the role of media in not only conveying disasters but also constituting them. Hereafter, the impact of mediated disasters on enhancing the feeling of collectiveness will be analyzed. This will be done by using the four pillar framework by Jensen (2018). The four pillars of Jensen's framework are: the collection of imagery materials, the role of royalty, charity, and the national remembrance culture (Jensen, 2018). A quick overview of this analysis can be found in appendix 3.

### 5.1 Mediated disasters

Media has always played a pivotal role in conveying disasters and their impacts across space and time (Cottle, 2014: 5). As participant 3 stated: *"All communication around you determines what you are and what you think"* (Participant 3, 2020: 7). However, it is within modern society that the role of media has changed. Media is no longer merely conveying and communicating the disaster but is constituting it as well. This increasing impact of media was also recognized by participant 1 (2020: 6), who stated: *"First the media acted as a government messenger but somewhere along the way media started to involve all kinds of other subjects in relation to COVID-19 and by doing so the media influenced the COVID-19 image a bit too much. [...] Now that things are going well the media is no longer publishing the death rate of COVID-19 but rather daily hospital admissions. I have noticed how people instantly eased down and I think the media had a huge impact on this. [...] Media started to influence people's behavior"*. The data collected from the interviews confirms this as several participants stated how they felt that the media framed COVID-19 news by focusing on the bad news and leaving out the good news (Participants 5, 7, 12 and 13, 2020). It was all about numbers; how many people got infected and how many died. *"I think it's a shame how in the beginning you only heard about the people that had gotten ill and how many people had died. Media never showed numbers of how many people got better and I think it's a shame that this information has been left out"* (Participant 12, 2020: 9). Participant 11 even mentioned how she stopped watching the news all together because of the negative framing. *"I stopped following the news because it wasn't getting any better and eventually, I will hear about it anyway. I'm not going to follow the news by the letter since it can change at any second and it isn't getting any better. Its not good for my state of mind"* (Participant 11, 2020: 8). According to two participants, this negative framing resulted in feelings of anxiety (Participant 5 and 7, 2020). *"In the beginning I could not sleep well because it COVID-19 felt so uncontrollable and scary"* (Participant 7, 2020: 6).

According to Cottle (2014), it is the advanced and combined involvement of the following six features which allows media to play such a central role in disasters. The first two features are 'scale' and 'speed', due to increased interconnectivity through platforms such as the internet, today's media is able to reach the entire world in matter of seconds. Thirdly there is 'saturation', people nowadays expect constant access and availability of information. This being said, many participants complained about the high amount of information about COVID-19 to which they were exposed at the beginning of March. Stating it was: *"In the beginning all media was about COVID-19 and it was a bit too much"* and *"In the beginning COVID-19 was still unknown and at that point I felt overrun with information"* (Participants 1 and 12, 2020: 6 and 9). The fourth is 'social relations', no matter where disaster struck media is able to create a feeling of connectedness by sharing details such as the nationalities of the deceased. The next feature is 'surveillance', this links to the enormous amount of available information both bottom-up and top-down. The enormous availability of information was also stressed by the participants who stated they gained information about COVID-19 through TV, internet, mobile applications, regional and national news papers, other people, and even universities and hospitals. Due to the high level of

available information the surveillance capacity of today's media is significantly enhanced. The final feature as mentioned by Cottle (2014) is 'to see'. Referring to the opportunity to not only read and listen about disasters but also to see them. Like the feature of social relations, the feature to see creates a feeling of witnessing the disaster and therefore creates a feeling of connectedness to the disaster.

These features show how contemporary media is not only deeply intertwined with society but also within contemporary disasters (Cottle, 2014). And as Cottle states: "*It is through these forms and flows that disasters today principally become defined, dramatized and publicly constituted*" (Cottle, 2014: 17). It is clear that mediated disasters have significant impact, but to what extent can mediated disasters redraw the boundaries of a moral community and reconstruct a national identity? To answer this question the following section will analyse the impact of media on disasters and the shared past of suffering, more specifically its impact on enhancing the feeling of collectiveness. Whether the feeling of collectiveness is motivated by togetherness or anxiety, it remains to be the base for a national identity.

## 5.2 Feeling of collectiveness

### 5.2.1 Collection of imagery materials

The first pillar of Jensen's framework is the collection of imagery materials. This pillar is about the representation of the disaster, including texts, images, and theater plays. One significant difference in the representation of the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 is the depiction of the enemy. Whereas the Watersnoodramp shows you devastated houses, fleeing people and the ruins caused by the water, COVID-19 shows you the particle, distanced people and facemasks. Not having the ability to depict the enemy causes a certain distance from the disaster which is reaffirmed by the participants who mention the sly and devious character of COVID-19, as discussed previously in chapter four.

When examining the collection of imagery materials about the Watersnoodramp, most representations contain one of the three reoccurring elements of horror, remarkable rescues or religious morals (Jensen, 2018). Although the horrific events were based on true events, literature often added imagination and emotion. Within representations of remarkable rescues, individuals were often singled out and saluted for their bravery. Finally, a great deal of the representations of the Watersnoodramp were told with the purpose of affirming God's presence. When analyzing the collection of imagery materials on COVID-19 a different story is told. The three reoccurring elements within COVID-19 are the focus on a common goal, the quest for legitimacy, and the negative framing. The common goal which comes back in the representations of COVID-19 is to overcome COVID-19 safely. "*A common goal, to get through the period of COVID-19 as safe as possible*" (Participant 8, 2020, 17). In doing so, emphasis is put on collaboration, only together we can get through this disaster safely. This common goal creates a common effort to overcome the suffering which enhances the feeling of collectiveness and has been used for ages. As will be further discussed in the next section, royals and governments make great use of this. The quest for legitimacy however, is something entirely new. When searching on the term 'Watersnoodramp', Google Scholar comes up with 1.310 hits. When doing the same for the term 'COVID-19', an astonishing amount of 1.320.000 hits already come up on Google Scholar. Considering COVID-19 is a global disaster which is taking place over a long period of time as well as within an era of fast and unlimited information, this massive difference comes to no surprise. Although this high amount of available information enhances the surveillance capacity, it also overwhelms and clouds our judgements at times. How can one find truth in an era of 'misinformation' and 'fake news'? The quest for legitimacy within the collection of imagery materials on COVID-19 has become pivotal due to two

specific threats. Namely, *“the threats to public health and international relations, ranging from the proliferation of damaging health advice, such as ingesting bleach, to politically motivated conspiracies about where the virus originated from”* (Roozenbeek et al., 2020: 2). This threat to international relations was also referred to by participant 8 (2020: 20) who stated that COVID-19 may become even larger than it already is in terms of the political sphere and its influence on both privacy and democracy. Finally, there is the negative framing. As mentioned before, several participants mentioned the negative framing of the media about COVID-19. Instead of enhancing the feeling of collectiveness, the negative framing resulted in feelings of vulnerability and insecurity.

### 5.2.2 Role models

The second pillar as described by Jensen (2018) is role models and the role of royalty. Throughout the Watersnoodramp, heroes and heroines presented themselves to the greater public. Regular folks performing extraordinary acts of bravery. This way, people could identify themselves with the heroes and heroines (Jensen, 2018). At the same time, those with high rankings in society such as Queen Juliana and political leaders visited the disaster struck areas to show sympathy to the victims. Louis Bonaparte was the first royal who understood how to utilize a disaster in legitimizing authority. By offering help to victims and personally visiting the disaster struck areas he showed compassion which resulted in great support and sympathy by the people (Jensen, 2018).

Unlike the Watersnoodramp, COVID-19 does not offer the opportunity for regular folks to perform acts of bravery. This being said, those working within the health sector were mentioned as the heroes of COVID-19 by several participants. *“When I read about the people in the health care sector and how they all worked so hard, and how terrifying it must have been, it really got to me”* (Participant 7, 2020: 7), and *“Hats of to those working in the health care, praise them [...] How hard they have worked while endangering themselves... respect to those who have worked night and day.”* (Participant 2, 2020: 16), and *“When I was at the Intensive Care last night, [...] I was talking and joking around with the health care workers and when I walked out, I took a deep bow. They asked me why and I told them they have always been great but now I respect them even more! They are working on the front line. [...] I highly appreciate all that they are doing”* (Participant 4, 2020: 14).

When asking the participants who they feel are role models throughout COVID-19, three names were mentioned by all participants: 1) King Willem-Alexander, 2) Prime minister Mark Rutte, and 3) minister of public health affairs Hugo de Jonge. Whereas the role of the king and Mark Rutte were explicitly mentioned, the role of Hugo de Jonge was not. Just as Queen Juliana visited the disaster struck areas in Zeeland, King Willem Alexander visited nursing houses and hospitals. Moreover, a speech of the king was broadcasted on national TV in which he spoke to the people about COVID-19 and the precautions that had to be taken. Some participants felt positive about this speech, but others missed out on it all together. In general, the participants did realize and appreciate the king’s function in enhancing the feeling of collectiveness through visitations and speeches. However, most participants stated that they themselves did not feel the need for the presence of the royals. *“I can only speak for myself, but I do know that people around me find the presence of the royals very important. They believe it is important that the King and Queen give their opinion on the situation and that they create a certain connectedness by showing the people how important it is to listen and obey the rules. Especially elderly people still place the royals on a pedestal. As long as you can reach people, it is great. But if reaching people requires a sign language interpreter that is okay too. As long as you can reach the people, reach the target group, in this case the whole of the Netherlands”* (Participant 10, 2020: 18). Another participant emphasized the symbolic meaning of the royals, stating how the royals are a central point within society

among which the people can stand together (Participant 9, 2020). One participant also mentioned the well thought of collaboration between the government and the royalties. *“I think the collaboration between the government and the royalties is well thought off. Where the royalties took on the emphatic part, Rutte and the government took on the technical part. I think this worked really well. Moreover, the royalties visiting institutions who are hit hard by COVID-19 has proven to be a enhance the image of the royalties”* (Participant 3, 2020: 13). When analyzing the role of Mark Rutte, all participants felt like he was doing the best he could in the given circumstances. Unlike, King Willem-Alexander whose presence was not necessarily valued, Mark Rutte his presence was highly appreciated and valued. *“I think Mark Rutte did really well in showing us how to respect others and how to handle things, I really started to see the value in this”* (Participant 1, 2020: 11). Some participants even showed how a disaster moves beyond politics, stating: *“I would not vote for him, but he is doing really well and really taking care of things”* (Participant 9, 2020: 16) and *“Voting polls show Rutte is doing a great job, his polls are increasing. I think everybody things he did a good job”* (Participant 4, 2020:12). This shows how not King Willem-Alexander but rather Mark Rutte could be seen as the Louis Bonaparte of the twenty first century.

Evident from COVID-19 is how role models tried to enhance the feeling of collectiveness. This, by stating collectiveness is crucial in the fight against the virus. Every time new updates about the virus were available or new measurements against the virus were taken, the government made sure there was a live broadcast on national TV. During this broadcast, the lasted changes were told, and opportunity was given to the media to ask questions. Throughout these live broadcasts, the same message was centralized: *‘Alleen samen krijgen we corona onder controle’*, which roughly translates to: *‘Only together we can contain the spread of COVID-19’*. Due the emphasis on this message by both the government and media, they attempted to enhance the feeling of collectiveness. Moreover, a clear emphasis on collectiveness was shown throughout the broadcasts. In the broadcast of Rijksoverheid on June 24th, 2020, Hugu de Jonge even referred to the Watersnoodramp by stating: *“Compare this to our century long fight against the water, it gave us the reputation of being able to keep our feet dry. We did so by building dykes, and today we are building those dykes again, together we can prevent a second wave of infections. [...] We together are that dyke”* (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

### 5.2.3 Charity

The third pillar is charity and played a pivotal role during the aftermath of the Watersnoodramp. Media praised charity and stated how merci and charity were part of the Dutch national identity (Jensen, 2018). Throughout all charity activities, emphasis was placed on how this was typically Dutch. This resulted in a lot of support and charity by the Dutch. People all over the country took in friends and family who had become victimized by the water. Moreover, it was this character of being charitable that was highlighted by media as being typical Dutch, resulting in even more charity. When taking COVID-19, charity has a very different role. Unlike the Watersnoodramp were people came together to help each other out and the feeling of collectiveness was enhanced, COVID-19 measurements explicitly ask you to stay away from others in other to stop the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, small acts of charity did enhance the feeling of collectiveness temporarily (Participant 4, 2020). *“When an action was organized in which everybody went outside to applaud the health care workers, I really felt connected with the Dutch national identity. I believe the feeling of collectiveness that I felt at that point is typically Dutch. Same thing goes for similar action in which people rented a scissor lift and started singing for those who were quarantined. I wonder if other countries have this as well”* (Participant 4, 2020: 14). Similar as in the Watersnoodramp, participant 4 states that being charitable is part of the Dutch national identity. Other participants however, expressed a fear of possibly spreading or getting the virus which stopped



them from helping others. *“We are holding back. I have been bringing around coffee in an elderly home for over twenty years but now I had to cancel”* (Participant 2, 2020: 15). In other words, the feeling of anxiety was stronger than the feeling of togetherness. This because people are condemned to their own islands of (social) isolation which results in more individualization. People are fighting COVID-19 together yet alone.

#### 5.2.4 National remembrance culture

The final and fourth pillar of Jensen’s (2018) framework is national remembrance culture. *“A national culture is a discourse – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves”* (Hall 1996a, p. 613, as cited in Wodak, 2009: 23). In other words, the discourse of a national remembrance culture produces meanings in which a nation, despite being real or imagined, can be identified. The discourse produces a shared past. As previously mentioned, scholars such as Smith, Renan and Anderson all emphasize the importance of a shared history in establishing a feeling of collectiveness. As Renan (1882) argues, it is a shared past as well as a present consent which constitute the soul of a nation. Based on Renan’s (1882) notion of suffering together, this research has divided the concept in two, 1) suffering together, and 2) the effort to overcome that suffering. This because as Renan (1882) states unification arises through common effort to overcome the shared suffering. Therefore, this section will analyse how such a shared history, a national remembrance culture is created throughout both disasters. As (Cottle, 2014: 17) stated: *“Both old and new disasters have become increasingly dependent on media in respect of how they become known and responded to”*. The national remembrance culture around the Watersnoodramp is highlighted by the ‘what does not kill you makes you stronger’-mentality. Although horrible events took place during the Watersnoodramp, the remembrance culture is not only about the suffering but also about the fight against water and how the Dutch won that fight, the overcoming of suffering. When looking at the remembrance culture of COVID-19 it is till too early to draw any definitive conclusions, but the remembrance culture can not be places upon overcoming the suffering since it does not require common effort but rather individual isolation. This being said, there are two differences between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 which might affect the national remembrance culture. The first is the representation of the victims. After the Watersnoodramp personal stories about losses, victims and heroes were spread by the media. Throughout COVID-19 however, one can see how people have turned into numbers. Everyday new numbers are published about the spread of the virus but as mentioned by the participants, this turning people into numbers creates an abstract understanding of the severity of the disaster. Which in turn, could result in less of a remembrance culture. A second difference between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 which might affect the national remembrance culture is the duration of the disaster. As mentioned before, the Watersnoodramp caused a short but intense disruption within society. COVID-19 on the other hand is going on for 11 months. Since COVID-19 is such a long term disruption of the normal way of living, a new normal has been established. Within this new normal, the constant threat of COVID-19 has been normalized and therefore feels less impactful.

### 5.3 Conclusion

As has become clear within this chapter, media and identity construction are highly intertwined. Where media first merely conveyed and communicated a disaster, it now also has the ability to constitute a disaster. Through the advancement and combined involvement of scale, speed, saturation, social relations, surveillance and the ability to see, media is able to play a pivotal role in society as well as within contemporary disasters. The four pillar framework of Jensen (2018) showed the impact of mediated disasters on the feeling of collectiveness. This, in turn is a crucial element within identity

(re)construction. The first pillar, the collection of imagery materials, showed differences in the representation of the disaster as well as the focus of the representation. Where the Watersnoodramp showed horror, remarkable rescues or religious morals, COVID-19 showed a common goal, a quest for legitimacy or negative framing. The second pillar, role models and the role of royalty, showed how in both disasters royalty visited the disaster struck areas and showed their compassion. Remarkable however, is the enhancement of feeling of collectiveness by the government and media throughout COVID-19. The third pillar, charity, showed how there is a clear difference in charity within the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. During the Watersnoodramp the feeling of collectivity was higher due to the ability to fight the enemy, being the water, together. COVID-19 measurements however, ask for (social) distance and isolation making people fight the virus together but alone.

Finally, the fourth pillar, the national remembrance culture was discussed. Whereas the focus of the national remembrance culture of the Watersnoodramp was on how the Dutch won the fight against the water, the focus of COVID-19 is still unclear because the disaster is still going on. However, what the data does show is how the feeling of collectiveness throughout the Watersnoodramp is based on togetherness whereas the feeling of collectiveness throughout COVID-19 is based on anxiety. This being said, there are clear differences in representation of victims and duration which might affect the national remembrance culture. As Renan (1882) stated, it is the possession of a common national remembrance culture in which people jointly forget and remember which constitutes a nation. Moreover, understanding the national remembrance culture is of specific importance since suffering together and the imagined community are central in the (re)construction of an identity. Therefore, the difference in national remembrance culture between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 might be crucial in the creation and imagination of the feeling of collectiveness.

## Chapter 6 National identity (re)construction

Based on the data collected from the interviews, this chapter will discuss the construction of a national identity according to the participants. Once it is clear how the participants construct their identity and the Dutch national identity, this chapter will further discuss the national identity (re)construction in relation to the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19.

### 6.1 (national) Identity construction

To understand how the participants construct the national identity, it is important to first understand how they construct their own identity. To do so, the data of the participants has been analyzed for comprehensions on identity and its construction. Although the identity construction is highly situational and contextual, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) identify two specific modes of self-identification. The first one is relational, meaning that one may identify oneself by position in a relational web, e.g. an employer-employee relation (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). The second mode of self-identification is categorical, meaning that one may identify oneself by membership or shared attributes, e.g. nationality or gender (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Data shows (Table 2) how 12 out of 13 participants self-identify themselves by membership or attributes. Categorical memberships and attributes that were referred to are among others: Brabander, caring, hospitality, sincere, and Dutch. These are understood as categorical since they refer to a communality between the participant and others. Appendix 4 shows a complete overview of which categorical memberships and attributes the participants identified themselves to. Participant 13 was the only one who identified herself both relational as well as categorical. The relational identifier she used was ‘mother’, and the categorical identifiers she used were ‘caring’ and ‘woman’. Mother is understood as relational since it refers to a mother and child relation rather than an element of communality between the participant and others. *“You only become a mother once you really did become a mother, it sounds logical but from that point on a person changes. Before becoming a mother, work was everything to me but now my family and my motherhood has become my main priority”* (Participant 13, 2020: 13).

Table 2 Overview identity construction participants

	<b>Self-identification as:</b> Relational and/or categorical	<b>Nationality as:</b> Primordialist, Modernist or Constructivist	<b>Dutch national identity as:</b> Described in a maximum of 3 words
<b>P1</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Stubborn and rigid
<b>P2</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Easy going and royalists
<b>P3</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Always looking for consensus, efficient and tolerant
<b>P4</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Down to earth, cozy and closed
<b>P5</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Diverse, down to earth and tolerant
<b>P6</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Diverse, direct and the Dutch language
<b>P7</b>	Categorical	Constructivist	Does not exist
<b>P8</b>	Categorical	Modernist	Does not exist
<b>P9</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Liberal, direct and boring
<b>P10</b>	Categorical	Modernist	Traders and the Dutch language
<b>P11</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Simple, rigid and down to earth
<b>P12</b>	Categorical	Primordialist	Easy to adjust, cozy and loyal
<b>P13</b>	Relational and categorical	Primordialist	Down to earth, positive and hospitable

Before being able to answer the main question of this research of how the Dutch national identity is (re)constructed in relation to disasters it is crucial to understand how a national identity is understood. As stated before by Lentin (2008: 38), where individual and collective identities meet, identities are contested and negotiated. Therefore, this research has not only looked at the comprehension the participants their individual identity but also at their comprehension of a national identity, a collective identity. As mentioned before in the theoretical framework and shown in table 2, this research has categorized three ways of understanding the construction of a nationality. Primordialists argue nations are fixed and natural, modernists argue nations are modern concepts driven by socio-economic and political changes, and constructivists who argue nations are social constructions emerging from effort to mold masses into new collectives.

First the ten participants who were identified as primordialists will be discussed. Participant 1 is identified as a primordialists due to her understanding that a national identity is passed on from generation to generation. Even though she mentions that a national identity can change, she emphasizes the fixed character of a national identity (Participant 1, 2020). Participant 2 is identified as a primordialists due to her focus on a fixed national identity. *“It is a matter of where your cradle was placed”* (Participant 2, 2020: 7). She states how others can obtain the Dutch national identity but only if they change, thereby emphasizing the fixed and static character of a national identity. Like participant 2, participant 3 also emphasizes the fixed character of a national identity by stating how a national identity can only be obtained if the other adjusts and changes him or herself (Participant 3, 2020). Participant 4 (2020) sketches a clear difference between being Dutch and feeling Dutch. In being Dutch, he takes on a primordial view by stating how one is Dutch when obtained a Dutch passport. Hereby, he shows a static understanding of the Dutch national identity. However, when talking about feeling Dutch participant 4 takes on a primordial view by stating the importance of language. Participant 5 his understanding of a national identity is align with those of 2 and 3, only adding that a national identity is fixed in traditions as well. By bringing the place of where one is born in relation to a national identity, participant 6 shows a primordial understanding of a national identity. *“I think that when you are born in the Netherlands, you have a Dutch national identity. However, when moving to the Netherlands in a later stage, it is very hard to become Dutch [...] One can add the Dutch national identity to the identity one already has but one cannot completely become Dutch”* (Participant 6, 2020: 9). In other words, participant 6 shows a primordial understanding of a national identity because she sees an identity fixed and unchangeable. Participant 9 is also seen as a primordialist due to his understanding of a national identity in relation to fixed elements such as language and education. Participant 11 was harder to identify since she describes a national identity as having the same mindset. Although this definition of a nation identity seems almost constructivist, she is identified as primordialist due to the fixed elements simpleness and down to earth, which she relates to the mindset. Participant 12 is identified as primordialist due to her understanding of a national identity similar to participant 6. *“Not everybody can have the Dutch national identity, undisputedly there are people who want it but are not able to have it due to their connectedness with their roots, it would bring too much trouble”* (Participant 12, 2020: 5). Stating that old roots are not changeable and therefore emphasizing the static and fixed character of a national identity. Lastly, participant 13 is also identified as primordialist. This because, like participant 2, she emphasizes the relation of where a person is raised and the national identity that person has.

Secondly, there were two participants who were identified as modernists. The first one being participant 8. Participant 8 is identified as a modernist due to her understanding that a Dutch national identity does not exist but rather the idea of a Dutch national identity. She continues by stating how this idea is based on the stereotypical Dutch person. Moreover, she is identified as modernist because she clearly states how time has created a new Dutch national identity, thereby mentioning a clear difference between the

old and new Dutch national identity as seen as a modern concept driven by time. The second participant identified as modernist is participant 10. *"I think it is sad how the Dutch national identity sometimes disappears. When I look at the total history and what is happening right now, I think it is terrible. [...] Of course, slavery should not have happened but reflecting on it in the context it was situated you should detest it but not hide it"* (Participant 10, 2020: 5). With this statement, participant 10 showed, although not wanting it, that a national identity is driven by socio-economic and political changes. Due to this understanding of a national identity, participant 10 is seen as a modernist. Lastly, there was one participant who was identified as a constructivist, namely participant 7. This by arguing that a national identity does not exist and that identities are created for whomever desire that particular identity at that specific time. *"I think people want to grab hold of a national identity. They try and create one... one that suits them best in a certain situation and then find people with similar ideas about that creation"* (Participant 7, 2020: 5). Moreover, she states how this is done in order to enhance the feeling of collectiveness: *"It creates collectiveness, a feeling of unity"* (Participant 7, 2020: 5).

When asking the participants how their identity was constructed and who might have influences this, all participants unanimously agreed on the significant importance of family and in particular parents and partners. This due to the way you (un)conscious pick up things and learn things from them. *"Parents have certain ways and believes and although they do not force them on you, you are growing into them"* (Participant 6, 2020: 5). Besides family, one participant mentioned the influence of media on identity construction, namely: *"The people around you as well as all information you somehow absorb are determinative of how you construct your own identity [...] Including media and such"* (Participant 3, 2020: 7). Another participant elaborated on how experiences, your past, also influences your identity construction: *"What you experienced also plays a role, and how you have processed those experiences"* (Participant 13, 2020: 14).

When asked to describe the Dutch national identity in a maximum of three words most participants used categorical identifiers. Table 2 shows which identifiers were used by the participants in describing the Dutch national identity. Remarkably, when asked about the requirements belonging to the Dutch national identity, only two of the participants went back to their previous answers in which they described the Dutch national identity in three words. Only two participants stated there is no such thing as a Dutch national identity. These participants were participant 7 and participant 8 who states that the Dutch national identity does not exist, but the stereotype Dutch person does. Later on in the interview however, she states how she is proud to be Dutch. When asked to elaborate on this she stated the following: *"That is weird is it not, I don't think it exists, but I do say I am proud to be Dutch [...] I think this is because I do like the fact that I am from the Netherlands, I think we invented great things such as the Delta Works and everything is just well organized here. [...] Moreover, it is my family and my past which make me feel connected to the Dutch national identity"* (Participant 8, 2020: 4).

From the 11 participants who do believe the Dutch national identity exists, six emphasized the element of language as a requirement belonging to the Dutch national identity. This is not strange considering language is crucial in communication as well as bringing across emotions. In fact, besides the four pillar framework by Jensen (2018), language as well plays an important role in enhancing the feeling of collectiveness (Jensen, 2018). This was confirmed by the participants who stated: *"I believe language is the basis, without language you cannot feel involved or participate in society"* (Participant 5, 2020: 4), *"Dutch is familiar"* (Participant 13, 2020: 4), *"I think that when you ask a Moroccan grandmother who's been living in the Netherlands for over 30 years but still does not speak a single word of Dutch, she wont feel Dutch"* (Participant 4, 2020: 6), *"Language creates a feeling of sharing something that others don't share with you"* (Participant 6, 2020: 4), *"I believe when you have a shared language"*

*which you both speak, it is easier to feel connected” and “If someone wants to feel Dutch and wants the Dutch national identity, the least you might expect is for them to know the Dutch language”* (Participant 12, 2020: 5-6), and (Participant 12, 2020: 6), and finally participant 9 (2020: 6) who stated: *“The two most important aspects of having a Dutch national identity is living in the Netherlands and speaking the language”*. Another requirement of the Dutch national identity as brought forward by the participants is the willingness to adapt. Several participants stress the importance of an open stand towards adjustment. *“You should be open to the Dutch national identity and you should want to adjust yourself to it in terms of respect and values”* (participant 13, 2020: 9-10), *“You have to be willing to adjust”* (participant 2, 2020: 4), *“As long as you have the same ideals of the simple and down to earth Dutchman”* (Participant 11, 2020: 7), and *“Adjusting as in taking part in society and accepting the commonly shared values who we have in the Netherlands”* (Participant 3, 2020: 6). This open stand towards adjustment can also be seen as othering. A process in which ‘the other’ is depicted in order to reaffirm ‘the self’, namely all that the other is not.

## 6.2 Watersnoodramp

Due to its geographical location, the Netherlands has a long history of water management. As far as dating back to the seventh century, stories about floods were told. Many times, the floods were presented as an act of God in punishing, warning or saving the people (Mostert, 2020). Moreover, this link between religion and floods was enhanced even more due to the fact that churches often reminded people of post disaster situations. This because churches were often located on higher grounds and therefore acted as a place of refuge after a disaster (Duiveman, 2019). Coming together in post disaster situations therefore fostered solidarity and a communal identity (Duiveman, 2019). However, floods did not only stimulate religious feelings but monarchist feelings as well (Duiveman, 2019). In 1740-1741 the first known example of Dutch compatriotism was displayed by Jan Wagenaar during a flood (Bosch, 2012). He stated he felt the need of his fellow compatriots and therefore started collecting money to help victims of the flood (Bosch, 2012). Through this statement, it can be confirmed that in the eighteenth century already, the self-image of an imagined community existed (Mostert, 2020). Part of this self-image was the constant fight against the water as well as the ability to reclaim land. It is due to the inclusion of water in the already existing self-image of the nation that the Watersnoodramp had opportunity to reconstruct the Dutch national identity. Whereas the Dutch national identity first centralized around the fight against the water and reclaiming land. The Watersnoodramp amplified the element of cooperation. This by placing emphasis on how charity has always been typical for the Dutch throughout the recovery phase of the Watersnoodramp. With the arrival of the Delta Works, the new Dutch national identity which had been constructed in relation to the Watersnoodramp was one in which ingenuity was centralized. Moreover, the Delta Works had become a symbol of that very same cooperation and ingenuity.

Besides the already existing self-image, there is another reason why this reconstruction of the Dutch national identity could take place. Namely that of finding a quick and easy escape goat. As previously mentioned, De Graaf (2019) identified two coping mechanisms to cope with stress and crisis. In case of the Watersnoodramp, there was an easy target who to blame, the water. Since there was an obvious explanation for the stress and crisis, people were able to talk about it, localize it and even more importantly, neutralize it (De Graaf, 2019). Doing so created unity and a feeling of collectiveness since together they were able to fight off the water and build the Delta Works to prevent new floods.

## 6.3 COVID-19

Whereas the Watersnoodramp could utilize the already existing self-image concerning the element of water within the Dutch national identity, no such thing was in place for COVID-19. Therefore, one of the preconditions which allowed the Watersnoodramp to reconstruct the Dutch national identity is absent during COVID-19. Moreover, the Watersnoodramp provided an obvious cause for the disaster which was easy to localize and could be neutralized. Furthermore, the Watersnoodramp also has the Delta Works as symbol for collective effort and ingenuity whereas COVID-19 has neither an easy explanation, solution, nor a symbol for overcoming the suffering. If the virus has been overcome, it is not through common effort like at the Watersnoodramp but rather through large transnational companies who mass produce vaccinations. Therefore, it is a challenge to produce a symbol for COVID-19 which is as powerful as the Delta Works have been for the Watersnoodramp.

Just as in the past: *“Whenever there was fast social change, political turmoil or external threats, as in the late eighteenth Century, the 1930s and 1940s and since the 1990s, the link between water and the Netherlands was used to promote national pride and unity and stimulate action”* (Mostert, 2020: 1). This link between water and the Netherlands was used by minister of public health Hugo de Jonge in order to promote unity during one of the live broadcasts in which the Dutch citizens were updated about COVID-19. This feeling of collectiveness was also enhanced through imagery, role models, charity and national remembrance culture. These pillars are in turn heavily influenced by media, which not only convey but also constitute disasters by influencing how disasters become known and how they are responded to. This being said, there is a clear difference between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 in the feeling of collectiveness. Although COVID-19 did result in small moments of collectiveness such as a national moment to applaud the health care workers, it did not enhance certain characteristics enough to reconstruct the Dutch national identity. As previously stated, the invisibility of the enemy and the duration of COVID-19 have likely also contributed to this.

However, since there is no opportunity to easily and quickly solve the problem, people look for another coping mechanism. Namely that of identity and *heimat*. In order to deal with insecurities and threats of COVID-19 people have a tendency to fall back to the comfort and familiarity of ones own community. This feeling is enhanced even more due to the intelligent lockdown that the Netherlands is currently situated in. Meaning that people are asked to work and stay home as much as possible and keep distance from others. Interestingly enough though, the participants show that they are not looking for identity and *heimat* because they are longing for a feeling of safety which they believed they had in the past but rather because they are looking for the security of the collectiveness. They long for the sense of unity that they had pre-COVID-19.

## 6.4 Conclusion

To conclude, despite the different views on nations and national identities, all participants agreed to the significant role of family and more specifically parents and partners in the process of identity construction. Emphasizing how identity construction comes from the continuous exposure of the ideals and behavior of those around them. When asked to describe their own as well as the Dutch national identity, mostly categorical identifiers were used. Furthermore, the analysis the Watersnoodramp showed how a self-image concerning the element of water was already present in the Dutch national identity before the Watersnoodramp took place. Moreover, a clear depiction of the escape coping mechanism was shown in which the Dutch together localized and neutralized the enemy, in this case the water. The analysis of COVID-19 showed how feelings anxiety rather than togetherness and

cooperation are central to the disaster. Moreover, the Dutch national identity has not been reconstructed by the virus yet. This due a lack of a pre existing self-image concerning viruses as well as the inability to localize and neutralize the disaster which resulted in a less enhanced feeling of collectiveness. However, a feeling of collectiveness and the creation of a 'we' has taken place throughout COVID-19.



## Chapter 7 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter will elaborate on the main findings of this research in relation to existing literature. Moreover, this chapter will also describe four limitations which arose throughout the research and how these were handled. Finally, recommendations for further research and a conclusion will be presented.

### 7.1 Discussion

#### 7.1.1 Disasters

Central to this thesis is the identity construction in relation to two disasters, the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. This immediately leads to the first point of discussion, namely if both of these events can and should be categorized as disasters. As stated by Perry & Quarantelli (2005: 49), when classifying disasters there are three main paradigms: 1) a disaster as a duplication of war, 2) a disaster as an expression of social vulnerabilities, and 3) a disaster as an entrance into a state of uncertainty. When taking these paradigms, it becomes clear that both disasters fit within different paradigms. The Watersnoodramp fits within the paradigm of a duplication of war. This because the Watersnoodramp was a catastrophe which can be imputed to an external agent (Perry & Quarantelli (2005), namely the water. COVID-19 however fits in the third paradigm, being an entrance into a state of uncertainty. As pointed out by the participants, COVID-19 causes uncertainty due to the invisibility of the virus as well as the vulnerability of all humans. One can not escape or avoid a COVID-19 infection and furthermore there is no clear solution for COVID-19 insight. Due to their large scale consequences, how they (in)directly affected the whole country, and how they disrupted the normal functioning of society, both events can therefore be categorized as disasters.

Where COVID-19 feels as an obvious choice taken the current circumstances, the choice for the Watersnoodramp could be disputed. This because the two disasters are different in their very nature. The one having a physical enemy, the water, and the other having an intangible enemy, namely a virus. However, the decision to compare COVID-19 with the Watersnoodramp was a well thought of decision. As mentioned previously, somehow *“Whenever there was fast social change, political turmoil or external threats, as in the late eighteenth Century, the 1930s and 1940s and since the 1990s, the link between water and the Netherlands was used to promote national pride and unity and stimulate action”* (Mostert, 2020: 1). The comparative analysis showed that up to today, this link between water and the Netherlands is still used to promote unity. Finding out how the Watersnoodramp has such a strong relation to the Dutch national identity construction therefore helped understanding how a national identity can be reconstructed in times of disasters. Thus, making the Watersnoodramp an incredibly valuable disaster to compare COVID-19 with.

#### 7.1.2 Feeling of collectiveness

As stated previously, it is a shared past as well as a present consent which constitute a nation (Renan, 1882). This research has shown that besides a shared past and a present consent, there is third element at the base of a national identity, namely the feeling of collectiveness. This feeling of collectiveness becomes most vigorous when a country is faced with new or fundamental challenges (Kitaoka, 1999). This research has shown how throughout the Watersnoodramp as well as COVID-19, these feelings of collectiveness are indeed centralized when a country is faced with fundamental challenges. However, during the Watersnoodramp these feelings of collectiveness were motivated by togetherness whereas

the feeling of collectiveness throughout COVID-19 is motivated by anxiety. Despite being real or imagined, there are two significant enhancers of this feeling of collectiveness during disasters. The one being contemporary media and the other being a shared past of suffering. Although the focus of this research has been on these two specific enhancers, there are many other objective and subjective factors which influence the feeling of collectiveness (İnaç and Ünal, 2013). An important enhancer of the feeling of collectiveness which has not been discussed so far is the overall concept of discourse. Like Wodak (2009), this research presumes that through discourses, national identities are constructed and conveyed. However, this research focused specifically on media instead of discourse because media is a tangible example of how discourse constitutes a feeling of collectiveness and therefore influences the national identity construction.

By using the four pillar framework of Jensen (2018), this research showed how, influenced by contemporary media, feelings of collectiveness were enhanced within the collections of imageries, behavior of role models and royalty, charity and the national remembrance culture of disasters. Since COVID-19 is still going on, it is too early to draw definitive conclusions. This being said, significant differences between the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 are visible within collection of imagery materials thus far. Two differences which stood out were the differences in the representation of the disaster more specifically the focus of that representation, and the amount of information. Where the Watersnoodramp showed horror, remarkable rescues or religious morals, COVID-19 showed a common goal, a quest for legitimacy or negative framing. This resulting in more enhancement of the feeling of collectiveness throughout the Watersnoodramp than COVID-19. Moreover, there is large difference in the amount of available information on both disasters. Whereas Google Scholar came up with 1.310 hits on the Watersnoodramp, it came up with 1.320.00 on COVID-19. This extreme high amount of available information caused a feeling of being overwhelmed and uncertainty about what is true. The latter, resulting in distrust about the virus leading to the so called disbelievers which will be further discussed throughout the limitations. As these results show, contemporary media strongly influences the feeling of collectiveness since it no longer merely conveys disasters but constructs them as well.

Moreover, this research has shown how the role of royalty has changed over time. Whereas the presence of royalty was highly appreciated throughout the Watersnoodramp, its role was less appreciated throughout COVID-19. As the participants stated, it was prime minister Mark Rutte who fulfilled that role model. This being said, the participants did emphasize how role models still play an important role throughout disasters in giving the right example, offer consolation and unifying the country. When moving on to charity, a discussion could be started on whether it was charity or rather solidarity which enhanced the feeling of collective in both disasters. As stated by West (2000: 201): “[...] *consistent with the Durkheimian tradition of social thought that predicts that collective representations will sometimes outstrip reality in the interest of social solidarity*”. Meaning that individuals identify with a conscience collective and once differences become apparent that are not legitimated by the existing status hierarchy, such as the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19, group members will feel a moral compulsion to alleviate them (Thijssen, 2012: 455). “*Moreover, the alleviation of differences creates mutual dependencies and through these dependencies individuals will regard themselves as part of a whole*” (Durkheim [1893] 1969: 228 as cited in Thijssen, 2012: 455). This is as Durkheim would refer to it, mechanic solidarity. Durkheim argues mechanic solidarity occurs between members of a close community however this research has shown how charity based on mechanic solidarity can occur in imagined communities as well.

As mentioned before, COVID-19 is an ongoing disaster. This means that drawing any conclusions on its national remembrance is not yet possible. When discussing the national remembrance culture, it is

important to make the connection between the national remembrance culture and a shared past of suffering by Renan (1882). The latter, being the second significant enhancer of the feeling of collectiveness discussed throughout this research. Renan (1882) discusses how the soul of a nation is constituted out of a shared past of suffering and a present consent of wanting to live collectively. The importance of a shared past of suffering or sharing dysphoric emotions as Duiveman (2019) would say is found to be crucial for constructing a national identity. This because as Duiveman (2019: 547) stated: *"When dysphoric emotions are experienced and shared, fellow sufferers are integrated in one's personal narrative. The identity of the individual and the group's identity then merge"* and as Renan (1882:10) stated: *"suffering unites more than does joy"*. Suffering unites because it requires common effort to overcome suffering. When zooming in on the Watersnoodramp this is clearly shown. By not only sharing a past of suffering but also overcoming the suffering together, a strong sense of feeling of collectiveness arose. However, if the suffering has to be undergone individually, as is the case in COVID-19, this suffering results in anxiety rather than togetherness. Linking the findings of this research back to the literature, it shows how COVID-19 indeed leads to dysphoric emotions which are shared among the Dutch citizens. Several participants stated how they felt anxious and scared due to invisibility and inability to control COVID-19. However, paradoxically the common effort to overcome the suffering, exists out of individual actions, namely to keep distance and stay isolated.

To promote unity and stimulate action during a turmoil situation, the Dutch government used the link between water and the Netherlands. On the one hand this worked well during the Watersnoodramp because the cause of the disaster was easy to locate and possible to neutralize. Besides being able to work together throughout the aftermath of the Watersnoodramp, the Dutch citizens were also able to prevent floods from happening again by creating the Delta Works. People were able to share their suffering and more importantly they were able to overcome the suffering through common effort. On the other hand, this did not work well throughout COVID-19 since COVID-19 requires individuality instead of common effort to overcome the virus. Whereas the Watersnoodramp has a strong shared past, COVID-19 is still taking place. Therefore, the shared past of COVID-19 is still being created. However, data already shows how the national remembrance culture, and the shared past resulting from this, of COVID-19 is focused on anxiety where the focus during the Watersnoodramp was on togetherness and cooperation. Especially a symbol for collectiveness such as the Delta Works have become for the Watersnoodramp is lacking throughout COVID-19. Thus far, the shared past of suffering of COVID-19 contains little to no unification or enhancement of the feeling of collectiveness. This because people had and still have to fight the virus together yet alone.

### 7.1.3 Identity construction

Throughout this research, a national identity is understood as an imagined community as well as a mental construct. This research has looked at both individual identity construction as well as national identity construction. This because it is where these two identities meet, where identities are contested and negotiated (Lentin, 2008: 38). However, as West (2000) already stated, this negotiation of an identity also takes place within the discourse of disasters. This research has focused specifically on the negotiation of an identity within this discourse of disasters. Data showed (Table 2) how 12 out of 13 participants self-identified by categorical attributes. Moreover, the data analysis showed how most participants have a primordialist understanding of identity. Meaning they understand identity as something fixed and static. By doing so, they referred to identity as somewhat of an individual belonging. This individual identity is contested and negotiated throughout the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. Specifically, in relation to the feeling of collectiveness that arose throughout these disasters because the feeling of collectiveness can reduce self-related uncertainties.

Moreover, this research has seen a national identity as an imagination being brought forward, reproduced and disseminated within disasters. However, one could argue that this imagination: *“is real to the extent that one is convinced of it, believes in it and identifies with it emotionally”* (Wodak, 2009: 22). When the Watersnoodramp took place, a strong feeling of collectiveness motivated by togetherness was created through both media as well as the shared past of suffering as explained in the previous section. This strong feeling of collectiveness was emphasized even more in the collection of imagery that followed after the Watersnoodramp. Moreover, the Dutch national identity already contained an element of water. Previous to the Watersnoodramp, this element of water was about the fight against the water and reclaiming land. However, due to the strong feeling of collectiveness and strong focus on cooperation, the Watersnoodramp was able to partially reconstruct the Dutch national identity. This was specifically done within the element of water. The new Dutch national identity reconstructed by the Watersnoodramp was one of perseverance, ingenuity and cooperation. It is believed that the latter even resulted in the egalitarian and democratic society the Netherlands is today (Mostert, 2020).

When analyzing COVID-19 in how it has unfolded thus far, it is clear that the feeling of collectiveness is not as strong as it was during the Watersnoodramp. Key in this is that the feeling of collectiveness throughout COVID-19, unlike the Watersnoodramp, is motivated by anxiety. Data showed how participants felt anxious about the fact that even if the Netherlands took measurements against COVID-19, this would stop COVID-19 since other countries might take different measurements. This shows as Bauman (2007) states, despite politics still taking place at a national level, that the power to act has moved on to an uncontrollable global space, thereby generating uncertainty. It is within this arena of uncertainty that the participants did show a strong connection to the imagined collective of ‘we’. This specifically came forward when asking the participants how the Dutch government was doing in trying to control COVID-19, in comparison to other countries. This shows how the participants their identity is seen as being partly shaped by the identification with and comparison to reference groups (Merton, 1968). By using a reference group, the participants defined themselves in a ‘we’. Moreover, this reaffirms, as stated in the beginning by both Bauman (2007) and Hogg (2007), that identification is indeed a way solidifying the fluid and reducing uncertainties. *“The search for identity is the ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless”* (Bauman, 2007: 82). By identifying to a specific group, in this case the ‘we’ of the Dutch citizens, the participants depersonalized themselves and became one with the ‘we’ which in turn reduced self-related uncertainties. Specifically, during COVID-19 these self-related uncertainties are high since people have to fight COVID-19 alone. When asked who belongs to this ‘we’, the participants were not able to define it besides ‘we’ being Dutch citizens. As Anderson (2006) states, they are referring to a not existing community, or better yet an imagined community. The ‘we’ the participants referred to is as much created as it is imagined in order to reduce the uncertainties they are dealing with. Imagined as a community because somehow a sense of compatriotism has arisen between fellow-members whom they have never met. Nevertheless, the findings of this research show how this ‘we’ is mostly likely temporary and only exists within the time of uncertainty, in this case COVID-19.

## 7.2 Theoretical contribution

As mentioned before, the relation between identity construction and non-human factors has received little attention. Research that has been conducted within this subject have focused on shared trauma, how identities influence post disaster recovery, how commemorative events associated with national identities change and alter from generation to generation, solidarity and disasters, and how disasters

becoming national disasters. The theoretical contribution of this research has therefore been broadening current knowledge on the relation between identity construction and non-human factors, more specifically disasters. Scholars such as West (2000) have already touched upon a disaster becoming national, or even part of a national identity. However, this research has examined how a disaster can reshape or better yet reconstruct an already existing national identity either temporarily or permanently. Since COVID-19 is still taking place, this research is highly valuable in understanding how a national identity is (re)constructed throughout a disaster. This because it shows how national identities are created and imagined narratives which can move beyond social and physical boundaries. Meaning that national identities can be valuable in overcoming uncertainties and disruptions such as disasters. As Visoka (2020) stated, understanding how nationalism and national identities are used throughout disasters is crucial in resolving conflict societies. Finally, this research has contributed to the research project by Jensen et al. on the role of disasters in shaping local and national identities in the Netherlands in the period 1421–1890. This by analyzing the (re)construction of the Dutch national identity in two disasters post 1890. This research has specifically added to this research project by taking into account the role of contemporary media in not only conveying but also constituting a disaster.

### 7.3 Limitations and recommendations

Despite careful attention to the preparations and conduction of this research, there have been some limitations and shortcomings. These limitations provide interesting opportunities and recommendations for further research. This section will discuss two limitations which came up specifically within this research and two limitations which this research has dealt with which could come up in other research as well. The first and biggest limitation of this research is the context in which this research has been conducted and written. At the start of this research, around March 2020, COVID-19 was a completely new, highly infectious and extremely harmful virus. It was only a short month after the first Dutch case of COVID-19, that the Netherlands went into a so called ‘intelligent lockdown’. The national measurements against COVID-19 made huge impact on the Dutch citizens, including myself. *“I am telling you [...], everywhere around you all you can hear is corona, corona, corona”* (Participant 4, 2020: 9). Since COVID-19 limited daily activities, there is less to do and therefore the high impact of COVID-19 on people’s lives could have been intensified through boredom. However, as time went by, the constant threat of COVID-19 had become normalized. This became evident in how the participants referred to the ‘old’ and ‘new’ normal. It is in between this period of COVID-19 being perceived as highly dangerous and the threat of COVID-19 being normalized, that the interviews were conducted. Therefore, the timing of the interviews heavily influenced the perceived severity of COVID-19 and therefore the answers of the participants. Therefore, I recommend that further research should be done on the relation of identity construction and COVID-19. Conducting similar research both near the end of COVID-19 as well as some time after COVID-19 will offer interesting data to which this research can be compared. Combined, this will produce a more thorough understanding of national identity construction in times of disasters, specifically how COVID-19 did or did not reconstruct the Dutch national identity. Moreover, further research on the possible reconstruction of the Dutch national identity should focus on how COVID-19 is experienced, processed and remembered. In regard to the latter, special attention should be given to the role of the media. This due to the ability of contemporary media of not only conveying but also constituting a disaster as well as being able to influence how a disaster becomes known and responded to. In other words, contemporary media could highly affect the national remembrance culture of COVID-19.

A second limitation of this research is that this research has only taken into account COVID-19 believers. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the number of disbelievers has grown rapidly. In the beginning of COVID-19, the legitimacy of COVID-19 was obvious. However, somewhere along the line its legitimacy and severity got questioned and the number of COVID-19 disbelievers started to grow significantly. According to Proffitt (2020), there are three reasons for this rapid grow of COVID-19 disbelievers: 1) we select our own informational sources, 2) In the face of uncertainty we are biased to perceive the world as we would like it to be, and 3) Our intelligence abandons us when we try to reason about facts that conflict with our personal biases. However, due to the timeline of this research, COVID-19 disbelievers were left out of the research. Realizing the lost opportunity here, I recommend further research should be done into the perception of national identity construction among COVID-19 disbelievers. This because inclusion of data from the disbelievers might lead to very different conclusions.

The third major limitation concerns the interviews. Although qualitative interviews are traditionally face to face (Bolderston, 2012), this research had to conduct its interviews online due to the national measurements taken against COVID-19. Even though, there was an opportunity to interview some participants face-to-face in a later phase of the research, the decision was made to not do this. This research has tried to conduct all the interviews in similar conditions and because earlier interviews were already conducted online the decision was made to conduct all interviews online. Conducting online interviews brought forward limitations in the sense of how to reach participants, how to engage with the participants and how to exclude external interferences. This being said, there were also some clear advantages of conducting interviews, such as: 1) the ability to reach remote participants, 2) potential reduction in reactive bias, and 3) efficiencies in time and cost (Bolderston, 2012: 73). Since I, myself was not so much familiar with online tools for interviewing, I simply chose the one most suitable given the circumstances. However, in doing so I may have not taken full advantage of the online possibilities. Therefore, I recommend future researchers to critically analyse and review the variety of available online tools. This to find out which they are most comfortable with and which tool best suits the purpose of their research.

The fourth limitation also concerns the interviews and is about language and translation. Since this research was about the Dutch national identity and all participants spoke Dutch, it only felt logical to conduct the interviews in Dutch. However, since this research is written in English, all data had to be translated. This might have led to nuances and meanings getting lost in translation. Moreover, the decision was made that the person who collected the data would also translate the data. This decision was backed up by the argument that this person is best suited to not only grasp the translation but the meaning and the context of the data as well. However, having the same collecting and translating the data brings risks as well. As brought forward by Temple and Young (2004), the distinction between the insider and outsider can become blurry. Although the objectivity of the researcher in this particular can be assured, one always has his or her personal biases which affect their understanding. Therefore, I recommend that future researchers make sure an objective second translator is involved. This second translator can reaffirm if the translations are placed within the right context.

## 7.4 Conclusion

Instead of focusing on the identity construction in relation to others, like most research within the field of identity construction does, this research has focused on identity construction in relation to a non-

human factor namely disasters. This by comparing the Dutch national identity (re)construction in relation to two disasters, the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19.

First the sub question of how a national identity is constructed was answered. Throughout this research, a national identity was seen as pluralistic and coexistent. Moreover, it was understood as an imagination being brought forward, reproduced and disseminated in the context of disaster. Besides this constructivist approach, two other approaches to understanding a national identity were discussed, primordialism and modernism. Primordialism referring to a national identity as fixed and static, and modernism referring to a national identity as being modern concepts driven by socio-economic and political changes. Among the participants, all three approaches of understanding a national identity were represented. This being said, most participants showed a primordialist understanding of a national identity and, except for one, all participants used categorical identifiers to describe an identity. By doing so, they referred to identity as somewhat of an individual belonging. When examining what is at the base of a national identity, three elements were identified. Two of them, namely a shared past and a present consent are based on Renan's (1882) understanding of what constitutes the soul of a nation. The third element is a feeling of collectiveness and this element came forward during this research. This research has specifically examined the motivation behind the feeling of collectiveness as well as how this feeling is enhanced.

Then the second sub question of how both the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19 became national disasters was answered. Participants stated that due to their large scale consequences, how they (in)directly affected the whole country, and how they disrupted the normal functioning of society, both disasters were seen as national disasters. Remarkably, most participants referred to economic consequences such as a financial crisis. When analyzing their answers, it is the presence of the feeling of collectiveness throughout both disasters which makes them national disasters. When comparing the two disasters, three differences were highlighted: 1) cause and (visibility of) enemy, 2) scale, and 3) duration. The Watersnoodramp was caused by extreme weather conditions and the areas directly affected were limited to three provinces. Moreover, the disaster happened over night and there was a clear and visible enemy, the water. COVID-19 however, was caused by a animal to human crossover of an animal coronavirus. The disaster struck area of COVID-19 knows no limitations and it is still unclear when COVID-19 will be over. Finally, unlike the Watersnoodramp, COVID-19 has to deal with an invisible enemy which no one can run from which results in feelings of uncertainty.

Once both disasters were compared and discussed, the presence and enhancement of feeling of collectives throughout the disasters was analyzed by Jensen's (2018) framework. This because a feeling of collectiveness, despite being real or imagined, is at the base of a national identity. This research highlighted two significant enhancers of the feeling of collectiveness during disasters, contemporary media, and shared past of suffering. Contemporary media strongly influences the feeling of collectiveness since they not only convey disasters but construct them as well. Therefore, the way disasters become known and responded is in large parts determined by contemporary media. Influenced by media, strong feelings of collectiveness arise within the four pillars of Jensen's (2018) framework: collections of imageries, behavior of role models and royalty, charity and the national remembrance culture.

The first pillar, the collection of imagery materials, showed differences in the representation of the disaster as well as the focus of the representation. The Watersnoodramp showed horror, remarkable rescues or religious morals. Presenting both a shared suffering as well as a shared effort to overcome that suffering. Resulting in a feeling of collectiveness motivated by togetherness. COVID-19 so far,

shows a common goal, a quest for legitimacy or negative framing. Thus far presenting a shared suffering but a lack of common effort to overcome that suffering because of the uncontrollable aspect of the virus. Therefore, resulting in a feeling of collectiveness motivated by uncertainties and anxiety rather than togetherness. The second pillar, role models and the role of royalty, showed how in both disasters royalty visited the disaster struck areas and showed their compassion. However, it also showed how during COVID-19, the link between water and the Netherlands was used to promote unification and action. Thereby, reaffirming the feeling of collectiveness motivated by togetherness throughout the Watersnoodramp. The third pillar, charity, showed how there is a clear difference in charity within the Watersnoodramp and COVID-19. During the Watersnoodramp people could help each other by opening up their homes, donating money and supporting another where possible. During COVID-19 however, people are not able to help each other due to (social) distance and isolation. Resulting in people fighting the virus together yet alone and therefore a less enhanced feeling of collectivity. Finally, the fourth pillar, the national remembrance culture was discussed. This pillar is similar to Renan's (1882) notion of a shared past of suffering which forms the second significant enhancer of the feeling of collectiveness. Disasters offer opportunities for people to share their sufferings and to overcome that suffering often a common effort is required (Renan, 1882). Both the common effort to overcome the suffering as well as the shared suffering result in enhanced feelings of collectivity. The national remembrance culture of the Watersnoodramp was focused on both the suffering as well as the overcoming of that suffering. Moreover, the Delta Works have formed a symbol of cooperation and ingenuity which strongly enhances the feeling of collectiveness. The national remembrance culture of COVID-19 has not been determined yet. However, what can be said already is that the lack of common effort in overcoming the suffering highly lessens the feeling of collectiveness. Moreover, it is a reminder of having to fight to virus alone and therefore increases the feeling of uncertainty.

The third and fourth sub question as well as the main question of how the Dutch national identity is (re)constructed throughout the Watersnoodramp of 1953 and COVID-19 will now be answered. As said, this research has found three elements at the base of a national identity, a shared past of suffering, a present consent, and the feeling of collectiveness. The Watersnoodramp was a disaster in which people shared their suffering. Moreover, common effort was required to overcome that suffering. This resulting in a strong sense of a shared past of suffering as well as a present consent because people needed each other to prevent future floods. All of this resulted in a strong feeling of collectiveness motivated by togetherness and cooperation. It is through this feeling of collectiveness created and imagined by media, surroundings and people themselves, combined with a pre existing self-image surrounding the element of water and water acting as an enemy easy to locate and neutralize, that the Watersnoodramp could partially reconstruct the Dutch national identity. Whereas the element of water within the Dutch national identity before the Watersnoodramp was about the fight against the water and the ability to reclaim land. The element of water within the Dutch national identity after the Watersnoodramp was about perseverance, cooperation and ingenuity. The Delta Works is as much as a symbol as a constant reminder of how together the Dutch were able to persevere and win the fight against the water.

Although, people are currently suffering throughout COVID-19, there is no strong sense of a shared past yet since the disaster is still taking place. Unlike the Watersnoodramp, where the common effort to overcome the suffering was based on togetherness, the common effort to overcome COVID-19 is paradoxically based on individualism. Namely, keeping people at distance and isolation, resulting in self-related anxieties rather than togetherness. Furthermore, a present consent to stick together to prevent new viruses is not in place due to the invisibility as well as the uncontrollability of viruses. Thus far, a feeling of collectiveness is present during COVID-19. However, unlike the Watersnoodramp, the feeling of collectiveness throughout COVID-19 is motivated by anxiety rather than togetherness.



Through anxiety, a 'we' is created and imagined, among which Dutch citizens are included. This 'we' is based on individualism and isolation since that is what COVID-19 requires to overcome the shared suffering. This research has shown how this 'we' is only created to reduce self-related uncertainties. By depersonalizing oneself and becoming one with a group, self-related uncertainties which are found to be high within COVID-19 due to the individualized effort to overcome the suffering, become reduced. However, as Bauman (2007: 83) states: "*Yet far from slowing the flow, let alone stopping it, identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set*". Meaning that this 'we' created and imagined throughout COVID-19 will help reducing self-related uncertainties temporarily but is not expected to permanently reconstruct the Dutch national identity. This due to a lack of a pre existing self-image surrounding the element of viruses, the individual character of the common effort to overcome the suffering, and a feeling of collectiveness based on anxiety rather than togetherness. To conclude, the feeling of collectiveness present during COVID-19 will most likely disappear as soon as the uncertainties related to COVID-19 have disappeared as well.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Topic list interview

### Intro

- Fijn dat u wilt meedoen
- Dit onderzoek gaat over de nederlandse identiteit
- Specifiek hoe de nederlandse identiteit wordt vormgegeven in tijden van rampen
- De vragen zijn opgedeeld in 3 blokken: blok 1 over uzelf, blok 2 over de nederlandse identiteit en blok 3 over het coronavirus.

### Voordat ik begin

- Is het oke als het interview wordt opgenomen?
- Vragen om toestemming om interview te gebruiken voor onderzoek?
- Data wordt geheel anoniem gebruikt

### Middenstuk : Cultuur/Context

- Kunt u mij vertellen waar u bent geboren en opgegroeid?
  - Waar u nog steeds woont?
- Wat voor soort gezin?
- Welke mensen spelen een belangrijke rol in uw leven (in het verleden en/of nu nog steeds)
- Heeft u buitenlandse invloeden in de familie?
- Heeft u in het buitenland gewoon? Zo ja, kunt u mij hier meer over vertellen?

### Identiteit

- 2007 deed Maxima de gewaagde uitspraak: de nederlander bestaat niet
- Bestaat de Nederlander volgens u?
- Wanneer voelt u zich het meest verbonden met de nederlandse identiteit?
- Voelt u zich meer Nederlands in het buitenland? (als u bijv. op vakantie bent)
- Wat is de Nederlandse identiteit volgens u?
  - Kunt u de Nederlandse identiteit in 3 kernwoorden beschrijven? (neem gerust even de tijd hiervoor)
- Kan iedereen een Nederlandse identiteit krijgen?
- Wanneer heeft iemand de Nederlandse identiteit volgens u?
  - Wat zijn volgens u de vereisten waar iemand aan moet voldoen voordat hij/zij zich mag identificeren met de nederlandse identiteit mag noemen?
- Speelt de Nederlandse identiteit een belangrijke rol in uw leven?
- Zou u nu uw eigen identiteit willen beschrijven in 3 kernwoorden
  - Zijn er mensen die invloed hebben op de vormgeving van uw eigen identiteit?
    - Op welke wijze?

### Corona

- Zoals u weet zitten we midden in de corona crisis
- Via welke kanalen heeft u informatie verkregen over Covid-19
  - *TV/Radio/Krant*
  - *binnenlands/buitenlands*
- Hoe vindt u dat de media Covid-19 neerzet?

- *positief/negatief*
- *groot/klein*
- Beschouwd u het corona virus als een ramp, waarom wel/niet?
  - Wat maakt Covid-19 een nationale ramp volgens u?
    - in het algemeen: wat maakt een ramp een nationale ramp?
- Wie kunnen er getroffen worden door het coronavirus?
  - Hoe heeft het coronavirus uw leven beïnvloed?
  - Kent u persoonlijk mensen die besmet zijn met het corona virus?
- Wat vindt u van de Nederlandse aanpak van het corona virus?
  - Bent u op de hoogte van de aanpak van andere landen?
  - Hoe vindt u dat andere landen het corona virus hebben aangepakt?
  - Wat vindt u van de Nederlandse aanpak als u het vergelijkt met andere landen?
- Wie spelen er volgens u een rol in de aanpak van het coronavirus?
- Heeft u het idee dat het coronavirus gezamenlijk wordt aangepakt?
- Ervaart u meer saamhorigheid in tijden van rampen dan in het normale leven?
- Wat vindt u van de aanwezigheid van het koningshuis in de corona crisis?
  - Denkt u dat de aanwezigheid van het koningshuis een saamhorigheidsgevoel opwekt?
    - Waarom wel/niet?
- Bent u bekend met nationale initiatieven die zijn ontstaan tijdens Covid-19?
  - Welke initiatieven zijn u bijgebleven en waarom?
  - Wie zijn volgens u de helden in deze Covid-19 crisis?
    - Weet u specifieke voorbeelden van mensen die een heldenrol op zich hebben genomen?
- Hoe denkt u dat er wordt teruggekeken op Covid-19 over 10/20 jaar?
  - Nationaal herdenkingsmoment?
  - Gaat het herdacht worden
- Aan welke ramp (nationaal/internationaal) doet het coronavirus u denken?
  - Waarom deze ramp?
  - Welke elementen komen terug vanuit die ramp?

#### Slot

- Bedankt voor uw tijd
- Weet u nog andere mensen die interessant zijn voor dit onderzoek?

## Appendix 2: Interview invitation

Via... heb ik vernomen dat je bereid bent deel te nemen aan een interview voor mijn eindschrift. Het betreft een mondeling (online) interview van ongeveer 60 minuten. Het interview zal gaan over de Nederlandse identiteit en het corona virus. Belangrijk om te weten is dat het interview opgenomen zal worden. Graag zou ik voorafgaand van het interview toestemming willen krijgen voor het gebruiken van het interview, uiteraard gaat dit om een anonieme verwerking van het interview. Als je na deze informatie nog steeds bereid bent om deel te nemen aan het onderzoek, hoor ik graag wanneer je beschikbaar bent.

### Appendix 3: Overview of Jensen’s (2018) framework on feeling of collectiveness

	<b>Watersnoodramp</b>	<b>COVID-19</b>
<b>Collection of imagery materials</b>	Depiction of devastation  Horror, remarkable rescues and religious morals	Depiction of particle  Common goal, quest for legitimacy and negative framing
<b>Role models and the role of royalty</b>	Queen Juliana and political leaders  Common people becoming heroes	King Willem-Alexander, Mark Rutte and Hugo de Jonge  Health Care workers are heroes
<b>Charity</b>	A clear enemy to fight against  Toghether against the water	No enemy to fight against  Fighting alone but together
<b>National remembrance culture</b>	Focus on perseverance in the fight against water  Numbers turned into people  Short but intense impact	Focus is still unknown  People turned into numbers  Long but superficial impact : new normal

### Appendix 4: Self-identification descriptions

