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THE LIMITS OF CELEBRATION: NATIONAL DAYS AS 'COMMEMOBRATIVE' RITUALS

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_Abstract

This _*Essay* challenges the taken-for-granted 'celebratory paradigm' that dominates scholarly understandings of national days. Drawing on comparative evidence from Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe, it argues that national days are frequently not occasions of unambiguous celebration but hybrid ritual formations that intertwine joy, commemoration, and mourning. To capture this ambivalence, the article advances the concept of commemobration, denoting national day rituals that blend celebratory performances of nationhood with solemn practices of remembrance and grief. The argument unfolds through a comparative analysis of national day ceremonies in Poland, Hungary, Finland, and the Baltic states. Particular attention is devoted to Poland's Independence Day on 11 November, which exemplifies a conflicted commemobrative pattern shaped by historical trauma, political polarization, and the rise of illiberal populism. The analysis shows how state-centered commemorations coexist with, and are increasingly overshadowed by, nationalist counter-rituals such as the March of Independence, producing a ritual landscape marked by both heroic glorification and collective victimhood. By situating national days along a continuum ranging from celebration and commemoration to grief and mourning, the article reconceptualizes national days as complex ritual events. It concludes by arguing that national day studies should move beyond the sociology of celebration and nationalism studies to engage more systematically with memory studies and death studies.

1_Introduction: Challenging the 'Celebratory Paradigm' of National Days

In 2022, six months into the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, governmental authorities announced that there would be no public celebrations on Ukraine's National Day. Celebrated since 1991 on 24 August, Ukraine's national day marks the country's declaration of independence in the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Until the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea in 2014, however, the holiday struggled to capture the public's imagination: a poll conducted in 2013 revealed that Independence Day was considered the most important holiday by merely 12 percent of Ukrainians. By 2024, this figure had surged to 64 percent, outranked only by Christmas and Easter, Christianity's most sacred religious holidays.[1]

While this was not the first time national day celebrations had followed a different script—military parades have been canceled on several occasions for reasons ranging from ideological considerations and public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic to shortages of public funds—the 2022 cancellation nevertheless marked a decisive shift in how Ukraine observes its national day. Instead of a triumphant military parade marching along Kyiv's ceremonial avenues, Khreshchatyk Street became the

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site of a very different kind of procession: destroyed Russian tanks, weapons, and other war-torn relics filled the space, while ordinary citizens inscribed them with messages of loss and grief. The trauma of Mariupol—the city razed to the ground by indiscriminate Russian bombing—featured prominently among these spontaneous expressions of mourning.[2] Since 2022, as the Russo-Ukrainian war has dragged on into an increasingly deadly stalemate, Ukraine's national day has continued to be observed rather than celebrated, following similar patterns characterized by an uneasy mixture of national pride and hope, imbued with anxiety about the future and tinged by the tragedy of wartime losses.

Ukraine's suspended festivities suggest that national days are not simply celebratory reaffirmations of sovereignty. Under conditions of war and collective trauma, they emerge as state rituals of grief-management: calendrical devices through which political communities absorb loss, narrate sacrifice, and stage collective vulnerability. What is publicly performed on such days goes beyond expressing joy in statehood, and consists of an affective negotiation in which pride, resilience, anxiety, and mourning are woven together. Inspired by this transformation, this *_Essay* reconceptualizes national days as ritual arenas in which the nation presents itself at once as sovereign and shaped by suffering, intermixing celebration and grief within a single ceremonial frame. Ukraine's national day celebrations—and their transformation under the pressure of an ongoing war and shifting geopolitical contexts—call into question what might be termed the 'celebratory paradigm' of national day rituals. Modelled on the most emblematic national day celebrations, namely the United States' Independence Day (4 July) and France's Bastille Day (14 July), this celebratory paradigm consists of state-sponsored rituals with broad civilian participation, characterized by sustained moments of "collective effervescence."[3] In these paradigmatic cases, national days unfold through large-scale military parades (flamboyantly staged during France's national day festivities, but absent in the United States), enlivening political speeches, spectacular fireworks, public feasts, and entertaining musical concerts. Together, these elements render national day events as predominantly celebratory displays of national belonging, collective identity, and state sovereignty.

In the case of Bastille Day, adopted as France's official national day in 1880 in the context of marking the centennial of the French Revolution of 1789, the holiday's celebratory nature emerged only gradually. It developed out of a highly contested political

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arena, shaped by struggles between diverging political forces, into a largely non-conflictual and consensual celebration of 'Frenchness.' In an ironic paradox, scholars have argued that it is precisely this collective amnesia underpinning the contemporary celebration of Bastille Day that has rendered it a highly successful ritual performance of national togetherness.[4] Moreover, echoing Ernest Renan's insistence on the crucial role of forgetting in the forging of national identities,[5] the 14 July celebrations make no reference to the widespread violence unleashed during *La Terreur*, which was constitutive of the French Revolution. All these conspicuous absences and voluntary omissions—the Reign of Terror, the guillotine, political atrocities, and the thousands of victims—have made it possible for Bastille Day to emerge as a prime example of the celebratory paradigm of national day festivities.

Starting from these contrasting cases, this *_Essay* grapples with the very notion of 'national day celebration,' arguing that the celebratory paradigm underpinning the United States' Fourth of July and France's *le 14 juillet* obscures a much more diverse spectrum of national day performances. To make this case, I center my argument on exploring non-celebratory forms of national day ceremonies in countries that either blend joyful festivities with sober commemorative practices or enact rituals that espouse an explicitly anti-celebratory ethos bordering on states of mourning. The *_Essay* begins by providing a broad critical overview of the existing scholarship on national days. It then introduces the concept of 'commemobration' as an alternative framework for understanding national day rituals in Central and Eastern Europe, with particular attention to Poland. The argument subsequently turns to Finland and the Baltic states, where it explores puzzling cases of national day commemobrations infused with historical narratives of suffering and resilience, and emotional atmospheres that blend national hope and pride with grief and mourning.

2_National Day Studies: An Emerging Field

Although a growing body of scholarship has taken shape over the past couple of decades, a sui generis 'national day studies' remain a far-fetched endeavor. Despite their crucial role in structuring the nation-state's calendrical order of public festivities, and their equal importance as vehicles for the periodic re-articulation of socio-political solidarities and expressions of national belonging, national days have been largely neglected across the social sciences. With very few exceptions, political sociology has

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failed to draw systematically on the Durkheimian tradition by applying theories of ritual enactment as a conceptual framework for the analysis of national day performances. Efforts made in this direction have tended to sidestep national day celebrations, instead focusing on other solidarity-generating symbols and rituals—for example, Robert Bellah's work on "civil religion in America."[6]

The modern classics of nationalism studies—Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Anthony D. Smith—have likewise missed the opportunity to foreground national day festivities as instrumental mechanisms in the political process of nation-making, as well as ritual devices through which modern states perform national identity. Curiously, the main impetus for the scholarly study of national days emerged from Marxist historiography. It was Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's notion of "invented traditions," and particularly Hobsbawm's critical analysis of national days as components of state-led programs aimed at reviving a largely imagined past for the purposes of political legitimation, that brought national days to wider academic attention.[7]

A decisive shift occurred with the publication of David McCrone and Gayle McPherson's edited volume *National Days: Constructing and Mobilizing National Identity*, which laid the groundwork for the emergence of a distinct field of national day studies.[8] This was followed by subsequent edited volumes and journal articles that broadened the range of case studies covered in the literature and enriched it with diverse methodological approaches spanning the quantitative–qualitative spectrum.[9] The most thorough examination of national days was nevertheless carried out by Gabriella Elgenius in her monograph *Symbols of Nations: Celebrating Nationhood*.[10] Together with national anthems and national flags, national days are conceptualized as forming the building blocks of modern nation-states' symbolic regimes. Based on a comparative semiotic analysis of European flags and national holidays, Elgenius identifies three distinct regimes of national symbolism: a pre-modern symbolic regime, characteristic of countries whose symbols and ceremonies invoke historical episodes and figures predating the French Revolution of 1789—taken as a fundamental threshold of modernity (e.g., Ireland, Portugal, Spain); a modern symbolic regime (ca. 1789–1914), specific to countries that define national memory and identity by invoking political moments such as revolutions, independence, and the adoption of constitutions during the "long nineteenth century" (e.g., Greece, Poland, Romania); and a post-imperial symbolic regime (post-1914 onward), developed by nation-states that emerged from the disintegration

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of empires in the aftermath of the First World War (e.g., the Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania).

Recent contributions have also examined national days from the perspective of their audiences, investigating whether and to what extent participation in such ceremonies strengthens feeling of national belonging. For example, Coopmans, Lubbers, and Meuleman analyzed generational and ethnic differences in the Netherlands through survey data, asking "to whom national days matter" and how participation correlates with national attachment.[11] While such approaches illuminate how national days resonate with different segments of the population, the present *_Essay* adopts a different analytical perspective. Rather than measuring the effects of participation, it interrogates the ritual form itself. The concern here is not primarily whether national days generate belonging, but how they are structured as ceremonial events and what affective configurations they institutionalize. By emphasizing their commemobrative character, the *_Essay* shifts attention from individual attitudes to the ritual matrix through which nations stage sovereignty by binding performances of triumph to memories of loss.

Beyond establishing national days as a legitimate topic of scholarly analysis and providing an emerging conceptual framework, these recent works have also highlighted the diversity of national day festivities beyond the paradigmatic models of the Fourth of July and *le 14 juillet*. They acknowledge that national day events frequently transgress the taken-for-granted celebratory framework by incorporating commemorative practices that foreground not only a glorious past, but also darker historical episodes of loss and suffering. For instance, McCrone and McPherson characterize national days as "commemorative devices in time and place" that "shed light on how national identity is imagined, shaped, and mobilized."[12] In a similar vein, Elgenius points out that in many countries national day festivities are not reducible to joyful celebrations of statehood, togetherness, and collective identity. In such cases, national days "include a somber start to the festivities with the laying of wreaths at memorials, commemorative ceremonies, and church services."[13] Moreover, it is through commemorating sacrifice, emphasizing historical suffering and collective loss, and integrating moments of silence and solemn processions into the ceremonial program that national day festivities create and consecrate political communities as transhistorical 'moral federations,' in which membership is granted on the basis of acknowledging the sacrifices made by national predecessors.

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State-sponsored ceremonies performed during national holidays that combine celebratory elements with strong commemorative features fit uneasily within the conventional category of 'national day celebrations.' National day festivities that perform the nation through a hybrid repertoire—melding joyful practices of identity celebration with solemn rituals that evoke traumatic historical episodes, commemorated through moments of silence, the laying of wreaths, and other grief-infused memorial gestures—can be conceived as 'commemobrations.' The notion of commemobration captures more than the mere coexistence of celebratory and commemorative elements. It designates a ritual formation in which triumph and loss are structurally interwoven. In such ceremonies, sovereignty is narrated through sacrifice, and collective identity is reinvigorated by recalling historical suffering. Rather than alternating between joy and solemnity, commemobrative rituals hold these affects together, thus producing an atmosphere of ambivalent attachment in which pride and grief reinforce one another. This dual hybridity is not accidental. It reflects historical trajectories of many nation-states whose political existence was forged through violent struggle, occupation, and loss. Commemobration thus condenses multiple temporal layers within a single ritual frame: the memory of past trauma, the affirmation of present statehood, and anxieties about future vulnerability. Naming this configuration allows us to move beyond the binary distinction between celebration and commemoration and to attend more closely to the affective registers through which nations remember themselves through public rituals such as the ones staged during national holidays.

Moreover, the term highlights that in numerous European countries, primarily in Central and South-Eastern Europe, national days are not merely platforms for celebrating state sovereignty and nationhood. Rather, they are defined by a particular ethics of remembering, one that glorifies the nation through a ritual language emphasizing heroic sacrifice and honoring collective loss in the turbulent making of modern nation-states—often accomplished through violent struggles for independence. In the remainder of this *_Essay*, I take up this under-theorized analytical thread and develop it to account for cases of national day festivities—such as Poland's 11 November—that depart markedly from the celebratory model dominating the existing literature.

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3_National Days as Conflicted Commemobration: Poland's 11 November

Although many national day festivities staged across Central and South-Eastern Europe could be characterized as 'commemobrations' rather than purely celebratory performances of nationhood (e.g., Greece, Romania, Bulgaria), Poland's Independence Day (*Narodowe Święto Niepodległości*) stands out as a particularly prominent case. Observed annually since the interwar period on 11 November, it commemorates Poland's restoration of sovereignty in 1918 from the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires, following 123 years of state nonexistence.[14] Like many national days in the region, 11 November in Poland embodies a fractured continuity and a profoundly "conflicted history."[15] After Poland regained independence in the aftermath of the First World War, the country's political elites became embroiled in intense ideological strife between Józef Piłsudski's vision of a multiethnic and multicultural Poland grounded in civic patriotism and Roman Dmowski's ethno-nationalist definition of Polishness.

This protracted political conflict extended into the state ceremonial calendar of the Second Polish Republic, preventing the emergence of a consensus around the establishment of an official national holiday. It was only in 1937 that Parliament finally designated 11 November as Poland's official national day—Independence Day—thereby placing the cult of Piłsudski at the very center of the ceremonial program. From this point onward, 11 November assumed a mixed character: it glorified Poland's national redemption after 123 years of partition while imbuing the celebration with a repertoire of symbolic gestures expressing the Polish tradition of martyrology and its peculiar "need to suffer."[16] National day festivities thus mingled triumphant military parades with memorial rituals suffused with ceremonial grief, including Catholic masses commemorating the war dead, pilgrimages to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and wreath-laying ceremonies at statues of national heroes. The national day celebrations of 11 November were banned during the Nazi occupation of Poland (1939–1945) and later suppressed under the Polish People's Republic, when the official national day was set to 22 July, marking the 1944 Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. Partially reappropriated from 1978 onward, 11 November was legally reinstated as Poland's national day in 1989, while the communist party was still in power.

In post-socialist Poland, 11 November re-emerged as the country's most prominent state ceremony, modeled on the interwar Piłsudskite blueprint and intermixing "solemn and carnivalesque tones."[17] The solemn dimension consisted of Catholic masses; the

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official state ceremony led by the President in the presence of diplomatic officials; military parades; the roll call of war heroes; military reviews at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; and wreath-laying ceremonies at the Piłsudski statue. The carnivalesque dimension, by contrast, was expressed through historical reenactments featuring actors dressed in period costumes. These state-centered ceremonies implied a highly codified choreography, following an official ritual script that staged a master narrative of national redemption rooted in the peculiar tradition of Polish martyrological tropes. They simultaneously celebrated the resurrection of an independent and sovereign nation-state while casting "Poland as a victim of the cruelty of history and Polish patriots as sacrificial sufferers."[18] This duality led the Polish-American historian and political scientist Mieczysław B. Biskupski to conclude that Polish Independence Day "is not a day of celebration; it is a day of reflection. […] November 11 is the nostalgic recollection of a lost greatness."[19] Poland's national day ceremonies thus convey the uneasy meaning of being "a day on which you reflect on the triumph and tragedy of being a Pole."[20] Triumph and tragedy, celebration and commemoration, national pride and historical trauma—these are the paradigmatic features of national days as 'commemobration,' which the Polish case so powerfully embodies.

The Polish model of solemn commemobration underwent a rapid transformation with the rise of illiberal populism.[21] Already in 2012, when Biskupski's monograph on Poland's Independence Day was published, he posed the question: "Is the Third Republic an endecja [right-wing nationalist] vision come true?"[22] By that time, the March of Independence, organized by far-right groups, had already been established as a nationalist counter-ritual to the official national day celebrations. First staged in 2009, the March grew steadily over the following years and by 2011 attracted more than 50,000 participants.[23] In 2016, attendance rose to approximately 100,000, and in 2018—when Poland marked the centennial of the 1918 restoration of state sovereignty—the March of Independence reached a record 200,000 participants. As one observer noted, "within one decade, this event evolved from a local assembly of far-right extremists in Warsaw into official state celebrations organized under the auspices of the nationalist-populist Law and Justice (PiS)."[24] The March's transformation from a right-wing counter-manifestation into a state-sponsored ritual occurred after PiS became the governing party in 2015. This shift became particularly evident in 2018, when President Andrzej Duda delivered a speech at the opening of the event.[25]

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Spurred by the illiberal turn in Polish society and fueled by collective anger over the 2015 refugee crisis, as well as growing frustration with the European Union, the March of Independence has come to overshadow the state-centered, somber ceremonies with a populist mass rally in which an exclusivist vision of Catholic Poland is staged through large-scale popular participation. Numerous observers have documented in ethnographic detail the ritual practices performed by the marchers. The audiovisual atmosphere of the march is strikingly performative: thousands of white-and-red flags are waved by the crowd, while large banners bearing the names and symbols of nationalist organizations—including the antisemitic National Radical Camp—are carried by participants against a backdrop of patriotic music. The theatricalization of history is further accentuated through reenactments in period costume, with large segments of participants marching in military uniforms from various historical epochs. Anti-communism also features prominently in the symbolic repertoire of the March of Independence. In particular, the cult of the so-called "cursed soldiers"—fighters in the anti-communist resistance against Soviet domination—occupies a central place among participants.[26]

This emerging repertoire of ritual practices—increasingly shaped by football hooligan culture and including chants, torches, flares, pyrotechnics, and clashes with law enforcement officers—was discursively framed through a coherent set of ideological themes articulated in the March's annual official slogans and posters. These ranged from classic ethnonationalist tropes ("Poland for Poles, Poles for Poland" in 2015; "Strong Nation, Great Poland" in 2022) and religious proclamations ("We Want God!" in 2017) to calls for reclaiming national sovereignty from the European Union ("Let's Get Poland Back" in 2012). Another category consisted of xenophobic rallying cries couched in a civilizational discourse that unmistakably targeted non-European 'others,' particularly Muslim migrants and refugees from the Middle East ("Our Civilization, Our Rules" in 2020). Despite the stadium-like atmosphere celebrating a conservative vision of Polishness—combined with the sacralization of the nation through explicit religious symbolism and a pronounced martial language—the March of Independence rallies nevertheless incorporate pervasive tropes of historical heroization and, especially, collective victimization. In this regard, scholars have noted with some surprise that, "contrary to expectations," the narratives and practices enacted during the March "only fleetingly refer to independence, focusing instead on events and historical actors that emphasize the intimate relationship between Polishness and Catholicism, militant

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heroism, and Polish victimhood."[27] In a country whose national memory is deeply pervaded by historical trauma and collective martyrdom, the March's success hinges on its organizers' ability to tap into this mnemonic reservoir and mobilize participants by connecting these historical sensibilities to contemporary fears, anxieties, and resentments rooted in current socio-economic, cultural, and political realities.

Poland's Independence Day has seen its state-centered, solemn commemorations augmented by the nationalist and militant March of Independence, which has arguably been institutionalized under the Law-and-Justice (PiS) rule as a populist para–national day. This ritual addition to the 11 November festivities can be read as a process of "symbolic thickening" of Poland's public culture in the context of rising right-wing populism.[28] Over the past decade and a half, 11 November has developed into a ritual means of asserting Poland's continuous struggle for sovereignty, both historically—by commemorating the 1918 restoration of statehood, subsequently challenged by Nazi occupation and decades of communist rule—and contemporarily, by projecting a vision of a Catholic Poland fighting for its freedom within an encroaching liberal and 'immoral' European Union, against the perceived 'flood of Islam,' and against the country's post-communist corrupt elites. Although it has fundamentally altered the nature of state festivities by transforming the national day into a nationalist ritual of exclusivist belonging, the March of Independence paradoxically reinforces the 'commemobrative' character of Poland's national holiday.

4_Discussion and Conclusions: From Celebration to Commemobration

Poland is certainly not a unique case of national day ceremonies that blend celebration and commemoration into a commemobrative pattern. Rather, commemobrations constitute a prevalent model of national day rituals across Northern and Central-Eastern Europe. Romania's National Day on 1 December, commemorating the 1918 unification of Transylvania and other territories with the 'Old Kingdom,' presents a similar ethos of remembering. State-centered ceremonies publicly staged on this occasion emphasize war sacrifice, historical oppression, and political struggle for national emancipation within an otherwise celebratory framework dominated by military parades and solemn rituals. While grief-infused memorial practices are less prominent than in the Polish

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case, Romania's national day nevertheless exemplifies a commemobrative configuration in which celebration is inseparably intertwined with narratives of suffering and sacrifice.

Hungary, by contrast, has adopted a peculiar dual—and indeed plural—model, reflected in its multiple official national holidays. On 20 August, the country celebrates its founding, personified in Stephen I of Hungary, through a range of symbolic actions (such as the flag-raising ceremony), cultural events (concerts and folk performances), religious observances (festive masses and the procession of the Holy Right Hand of St. Stephen around Budapest's St. Stephen's Basilica), and spectacular fireworks over the Danube, all of which convey a distinctly jubilant atmosphere. Hungary's second national day, 15 March, commemorates the modern nation-state by marking the 1848 Revolution and the struggle for independence against Habsburg rule. Here, the burden of history weighs heavily on the ceremonial program, which combines symbols of modern national identity and state sovereignty with the memory of political failure. Commemobrative elements become even more salient in the country's third national holiday, observed on 23 October. On this day, Hungary simultaneously commemorates the crushed 1956 Revolution against Soviet rule and the proclamation of the Third Hungarian Republic in 1989, combining vigils, wreath-laying ceremonies, and memorial services that honor both the heroic victims of Soviet repression and the horizon of hope opened by the end of communism and the subsequent transition to liberal democracy. These latter commemobrative holidays incorporate into an otherwise celebratory framework a set of features that are articulated in their most explicit form on Hungary's Day of National Unity, a national day of mourning observed annually on 4 June, when the nation commemorates the loss of territory and population to neighboring states following the Treaty of Trianon.

A similar grief-infused pattern of national day ceremonies can be found in Finland and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). In stark contrast to the celebrations in (its Scandinavian neighbors)—Norway, Sweden, and Denmark—which developed a model of non-militarized civic celebration, Finland's National Day on 6 December, marking independence from Russia in 1917, is suffused with an ethos of mourning. Church services, together with solemn commemorative rituals such as wreath-laying, candle lighting, and a torch procession beginning at Helsinki's Hietaniemi Cemetery,

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convey a collective mood dominated by sober remembrance of those who fell in Finland's struggle for independence.[29] Along similar lines, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—which all commemorate their independence from Russia, achieved in 1918—share a commemobrative pattern combining solemn acts of remembrance of struggle and sacrifice with public celebrations centered on displays of state power, including military parades, concerts, and other cultural festivities.

What these examples reveal is that in countries across Northern and Central-Eastern Europe—and indeed in many non-European contexts as well—national day celebrations are more accurately understood as national day commemobrations. The notion of commemobration advanced in this *_Essay* to account for cases such as Poland's Independence Day on 11 November challenges the prevailing convention of national day celebrations by foregrounding the hybrid nature of these state-sponsored rituals. Rather than consisting solely of joyful expressions of national identity, national day performances frequently embed solemn commemorations and even mournful practices within broadly celebratory frameworks. Accordingly, national days should be reconceptualized as complex ritual events that can be situated along a continuum ranging from celebration and commemoration to grief and mourning. What this implies for the development of a genuine field of national day studies is the need to move beyond the sociology of celebration, as well as nationalism and identity studies, and to engage more systematically with scholarship in memory studies and death studies.[30] Such a move promises to illuminate the overlapping narratives, intertwined temporalities, and diverse affective atmospheres underpinning national day performances, while also enabling a more precise understanding of the particular mixtures of celebration, commemoration, and mourning characteristic of specific national day configurations.

To conclude in a reflexive vein, it is worth recognizing the twinned perils that attend antagonistic configurations of national day ceremonies. At the celebratory extreme, national days risk sliding into uncritical affirmations of collective virtue, cultivating forms of historical amnesia in which the nation's traumas are remembered selectively and its own acts of violence or exclusion fade from view. Such rituals may reinforce ethnocentric closure and narratives of collective innocence. At the opposite pole, national days saturated with mourning and sacrifice can solidify a politics of grievance. When narratives of historical suffering are detached from broader contexts and ideologically charged, they may become vectors of resentment and symbolic claims to

moral superiority or revanche—a dynamic visible in the populist reconfiguration of Poland's 11 November. Between these extremes lies the possibility of a genuinely commemobrative ethos. Such an orientation would sustain the ambivalence intrinsic to national memory: affirming sovereignty and belonging while acknowledging the sacrifices that made them possible, and remaining attentive not only to the suffering endured by the nation but—equally important—to the suffering it has inflicted upon others, including its own subaltern subjects. Between uncritical nationalist celebration and the populist sacralization of mourning, reflexive commemobration offers a civic way of inhabiting national memory without surrendering either to narcissistic self-affirmation or to grievance-driven *ressentiment*.

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