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Nativism and Nostalgia in the Netherlands¹

Josip Kešić,² Sammy C. Frenkel,³ Isabel Speelman,⁴ and Jan Willem Duyvendak⁵

This article scrutinizes the employment of temporality in nativist discourse. Looking at nostalgia in the context of contemporary nativism reveals that the operative temporality is not limited to just the past. The perception of “threat,” central to nativism, does not only inform historical claims made by nostalgic nativists, but also refers to the present and to the future in which this threat is to be overcome. After defining nativism, the article focuses on nostalgic invocations of the national past. To what (imagined) times do nativists refer when they speak about the “good old days”? What exactly is perceived as attractive about those days? The next section deals with the dystopian and utopian invocations of the future. As for the empirical scope of this article, we focus on the two most influential representatives of the Dutch radical right: Partij voor de Vrijheid and Forum voor Democratie. We conducted a discourse analysis of textual and verbal material from the period between 2006 and 2021. By analyzing the entanglements of past, present, and the future in nativist discourses, this article seeks to enrich our understanding of the role temporality plays in the dominant debates about national belonging.

KEYWORDS: nostalgia; temporality; memory; nativism; radical right; Netherlands.

INTRODUCTION

How to understand the recent intensification of nostalgia in public life across the West? We claim that this is part of the rise of nativism, that is, the opposition to an internal minority that is seen as a threat to the nation due to its “foreignness” (Higham 2002; Kešić and Duyvendak 2019; Massey 2020). This perception of threatening foreignness fuels a nostalgic attitude toward an idealized past in which the native population is imagined to have lived harmoniously, without the negative interference of alien forces. Studying the rise of nostalgia and that of nativism jointly—indeed, as concurrent developments—finds its social and political relevance in the exclusionary effects of these phenomena. As Bertossi et al. (2020) argue, “The emphasis [...] on temporal differences among citizens, combined with the idea that the past was ‘better’, makes it

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very hard for new, ‘foreign’ citizens to become full-fledged citizens. The nostalgic mood effectively excludes them from the national body” (Bertossi et al. 2020, 5).

In this article, we study the employment of temporality in nativist discourse, our foremost focus being the nostalgic invocation of the national past. To what (imagined) times do nativists refer when they speak about the “good old days”? What exactly is perceived as attractive about those days? Looking at nostalgia in the context of contemporary nativism reveals that the operative temporality is not limited to the past. The perception of “threat,” central to nativism, does not only inform historical claims made by nostalgic nativists, but it also refers to the present and to the future without these threats. In other words, nativist nostalgia revolves equally around the present and the future as it does around the past. By analyzing nostalgic discourses while taking into account the entanglements of past, present, and future, this article intends to contribute to understandings of the role of temporality in contemporary discourses of national belonging.

Nowhere are nativism and its ramifications pertaining to nostalgia so prevalent and explicitly articulated as in the discourses of the radical right, recently gaining significant political success throughout Europe and the United States (Akkerman et al. 2016; Blee 2007; De Genova 2016; Eger and Valdez 2014; Mudde 2019; Rydgren 2007; Vieten and Poynting 2016). While nativism is not limited to the radical right, it has been most prominent and most overtly propagated on this side of the political spectrum, up to the point that scholarship conceptualizes the radical right such that nativism is one of its constitutive features.⁶

To understand nativist nostalgia in the West, the empirical focus of this article is the Dutch radical right. Like in other Western countries, the Dutch radical right has had enormous political success and impact in the past decades by (a) invoking a glorious version of the past to draw boundaries between “natives” to the country and “non-natives,” (b) opposing the alleged multicultural hegemony in the present, and (c) invoking a future in line with nativist hierarchies. The nostalgic mood is fueled by various discourses from the radical right such as anti-elitism, Islamophobia and anti-black racism, all sharing nativism as their underlying core (Duyvendak and Kešić 2022). Given the transnational character of radical-right nativism in the West (e.g., Miller-Idriss 2020), the Dutch context can be seen as an exemplary case, albeit in an unconventional way: its exemplarity is related to its unlikeliness. With the Netherlands being perceived by scholars and the general public alike as a symbol of tolerance and multiculturalism (e.g., Shorto 2014), exclusionary nativism would seem surprising indeed. Equally counterintuitive is the fact that nostalgic sentiments can flourish in a country with a reputation for being modern and progressive (Schinkel 2017). That nativist nostalgia has become a powerful political force even in such an unlikely case proves how widespread the rise of nativism is across Western democracies.

⁶ In addition to nativism, other characteristics of the radical right are anti-elitism (or populism) and authoritarianism (Backlund and Jungar 2019; Mudde 2017; Wodak 2019). Anti-elitism refers to the skeptical attitude toward elites, be that intellectuals, the EU, or any other group not perceived to represent the “true” majoritarian “people.” Lastly, radical-right parties express strong support for a charismatic leader, traditional values, and view security as a central political topic. The contemporary radical right is transnational in character and often has operated as a movement in online spaces (Baele et al. 2020; Pasieka 2017).

As for the empirical scope of this article, we limit ourselves to Dutch political discourse since the early 2000s, which marked a proliferation and intensification of nativist sentiment in debates on national belonging and cultural diversity. We analyzed a wide range of discursive material produced by political actors, including public and political debates, policy documents and political programs. In particular, we focus on the radical right's two most influential representatives: Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, led by its founder Geert Wilders) and Forum voor Democratie (FVD, led by its founder Thierry Baudet), two parties which entered Dutch parliament in 2006 and 2017, respectively. Our research on these two parties is based on a discourse analysis of speeches, party manifestos, parliamentary debates, website publications, and YouTube videos. The time period covered by this data is 2006–2021. To show that our conclusions are pertinent beyond the Dutch case, we selectively added examples from the French and American contexts.

After defining the concept of nativism, this article analyses how historical topics pervade the political debate at the time when the rise of the Dutch radical right started. In this context, the central topic was the alleged failure of integration of “non-natives.” This failure was attributed to both migrants, perceived to have insufficient knowledge of Dutch culture and history, and elites, who were held to lack historical consciousness and appreciation for the nation's history. As we will show, this focus on the past was taken over by the Dutch radical right. But it did not limit its temporality to the past. In the final section we unpack the entanglements between conceptions of the distant past and two imagined scenarios for the unfolding of the future in the nativist discourses of the radical right.

NATIVISM

Contentious debates over belonging and citizenship all across the globe are deeply inflected by notions of the native and nativeness. Both in its nascent stages in Romantic Europe (Leerssen 2018) and in the postcolonial context, national belonging has proved “fundamentally autochthonous and productive of a hierarchical separation between national-natives (autochthons) and migrants (allochthons)” (Sharma 2020, 13). From this perspective, *nativeness*, if not *nativism*, has always been core to the idea of the nation. Nativeness as a form of group belonging is fundamentally based on the notion of “territorial rootedness” (Malkki 1992), inherently presupposing “a naturalized link between a limited group and a certain place” (Sharma 2020, 4). According to this essentialist relationship between group and geography, “true nationals are those who are Native to the territory” (Sharma 2020, 7). Insiders are considered “people *of* the place,” while the outsiders are seen as “people *out of* place.” Inherent in nativeness as a “territorializing concept of identity” (Malkki 1992, 25) is a conflation of “culture and people, nation and nature” (Ibid., 29).⁷ When notions of nativeness are invoked antagonistically, it becomes nativism,

⁷ Since this territorial belonging to a place is naturalized, it is often racist. According to this type of Boden racism, “some sort of ‘natural’ ground is thought to determine the character and value of individuals and collectives” (Schinkel 2017, 137). Nativeness as the “naturalized identity between people and place” (Malkki 1992, 26) implies that “ideas of national soil are racialized and racist ideas of blood are territorialized” (Sharma 2020, 4).

which we, inspired by John Higham (2002), propose to define as “an opposition to an internal minority that is seen as a threat on the grounds of its foreignness.”

Claims that some people are *of* the place while others are *out of* place always presuppose criteria to establish who is linked to the soil and therefore constitutes the native “nation” and who is not. One of these criteria is time. Nativism is often, but not always, anchored in the belief that those whose families have been living in what is now the Netherlands for centuries should have a larger say about the country’s culture and identity, have more rights, and ultimately belong “more” than immigrants.⁸ The strength of Dutch nativism is reflected in the constant, widespread use of the term *allochtonen* (literally meaning “not from this soil,” see Geschiere 2009) to denote “non-western,” non-white immigrants (including from the former colonies), their children, and their grandchildren, all who never actually migrated, in opposition to *autochtonen* (from this soil). This leads to Dutch-born minority children, the large majority of whom have Dutch nationality, being persistently addressed as outsiders. Thus, the past often plays a central role in the nativist problematization of people and ideas, considered both foreign and threatening to the national identity.

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS A PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

In many Western countries, the terrorist attacks in New York and European capitals in the early 2000s have inflamed public debates on national identity and migrant integration. In this moral panic deeply informed by nativism, historical consciousness plays a central role. An exemplary voice in the Dutch context is the public intellectual and then prominent member of the Dutch Labour party, Paul Scheffer, who wrote the highly influential essay *Het Multiculturele Drama* [The Multicultural Drama] (2000). In line with the mainstream consensus, the Netherlands, for Scheffer, is essentially a liberal, tolerant and open society jeopardized by cultural aliens, especially from Islamic countries. Their supposed lack of integration is not only caused by their cultural alterity and reluctance to adapt to modern society, but also by the native elites who have refrained and continue to refrain from demanding newcomers’ assimilation into the liberal national community. What Scheffer sees as elites’ excessively detached attitude toward the threat presented by foreigners can supposedly be explained by their lack of pride in and even aversion to national identity. Purportedly, this ‘relativist’ attitude is most clearly expressed in the Dutch neglect of national history.

How the Dutch relate to their national history is seen not only as emblematic of the problem of national identity and integration but, because of this, also as a part of the solution. The idea is that in order to protect the liberal nation, elites must firmly

⁸ We do not want to imply that nativism should always include a differentiation between natives and non-natives (immigrants) based on a *hierarchical chronology* relative to the home soil, as for instance Hervik does when he defines nativism as the “favoring of established inhabitants over newcomers that eventually leads to the marginalization of the latter” (Hervik 2015, 796). Similarly, Betz’s definition also contains this temporal hierarchy between groups: “Nativism represents primarily a political doctrine that holds that the interests and the will of the native-born and inhabitants of long standing should reign supreme over those of new arrivals [...]” (Betz 2017, 171). This focus on chronology fails to account for the fact that long-standing elites are often perceived by radical-right nativists as non-natives, and conversely, that some newcomers, such as whites called “expats” instead of “immigrants” are not problematized.

demand migrants' integration. A precondition for this is that the Dutch and their elites must know who they are, be proud of their cultural identity, and propagate it toward newcomers. For that reason, Scheffer proposes a conscious and active celebration of national identity through the cultivation of national history. In his words:

The denunciative way in which we have dealt with national consciousness in the Netherlands isn't welcoming. We pride ourselves in having no national pride. This boundless attitude of the Dutch doesn't contribute to integration, because more often than not, it conceals a detached and heedless society. Today, the postmodern *historical* vision dominates in which every "we" is immediately suspect. [...] A happy-go-lucky multiculturalism is spreading because we are not able to explicate what keeps society together. We say too little about our borders, don't cherish a relation to *our own past* and treat our language nonchalantly. A society which forsakes itself has nothing to offer to newcomers [...] Let's start with taking the Dutch language, culture and *history* much more seriously. (Scheffer 2000, italics added, translation ours)

In response to the perception that the Dutch lack national pride and historical awareness, politics took a historical turn. Illustrative of this prevalence of history is the Dutch 2017 coalition agreement, which states that the historically embedded liberal values (such as freedom of religion, sexual and gender equality, and separation of church and state) are "values we are proud of and which constitute who we are. It is extremely important that we actively propagate that history and those values. These are the anchors of the Dutch identity in times of globalization and uncertainty" (Rijksoverheid 2017, 17).

In such discourse, the idea that national history is an important ingredient in solving contemporary problems does not only apply to the "native Dutch" population but even more so to those citizens regarded as non-native. In 2011, the Minister of Integration formulated the requirement for foreigners to adapt to both the country's laws and its unwritten cultural norms and customs as follows:

The fundamentals that shape social life in the Netherlands are *historically* formed and are points of reference which many Dutch share and which are not to be lost. This is not only about the attainments and the principal values that form the foundation of the Dutch nation state, but also about points of reference that have evolved *historically* and culturally, like the Dutch language, certain monuments or architectural characteristics or the unwritten ways and codes of behavior that have developed during the course of *history*. (Donner 2011, 7–8, italics added, translation ours)

This example illustrates the prevalence of the assumption that all aspects of Dutch society and its identity are fundamentally defined by their history, and that historical consciousness is vital in dealing with problems regarding national identity and the integration of migrants.

Historical Narratives

As any other social phenomenon, collective memory and identity are socially constructed (Nora 1989; Radstone 2000). National identity based on historical consciousness is often constituted by and transmitted through historical narratives: meaningful employments of events, periods and trajectories of the nation's past (for Britain, see Reynolds 2017). Differences among narratives lie in the variable selection and interpretation of elements from national history, as well as the overall depiction of the nation's historical trajectory. We will focus on the most prevalent narrative among nativists: the

“Narrative of Rebirth.” However, in order to understand the specificity of this nativist narrative of the past, it is useful to contrast and contextualize it by briefly addressing two other narratives of the past that prevail in Dutch public discourse.

Both inside and outside of the country, the Netherlands is stereotypically seen as a tolerant country. The “Narrative of Perpetual Tolerance” is largely responsible for this characterization. It conjures up this image by offering an essentialist depiction of continuity with an idealized past. This narrative presents an alleged harmonious relation between the different religions in the Netherlands. In doing so, the narrative rewrites the past by ignoring interreligious conflict and excluding inimical periods such as the 20th century pillarization when the Netherlands was a deeply divided country along confessional lines. The “Narrative of Perpetual Tolerance” is also closely related to the secular embrace of Christian heritage as the foundation of cultural identity and in discourses that conflate historically antagonistic traditions by using anachronistic labels such as “Judeo-Christian-humanist” culture. By implying harmony between historically often antagonistic groups, traditions or religions, thus through foregrounding continuity and correspondence whilst omitting discontinuity and difference, it becomes possible for nativists to create a nostalgic image of a homogenous nation.

The other narrative of the national past that invokes the image of the Dutch as a liberal, tolerant nation is the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress.” Where the “Narrative of Perpetual Tolerance” depicts national history positively through the invocation of harmonious (trans)historical continuity, the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress” does so by representing the nation’s past in terms of antagonistic discontinuity. In contrast to other narratives which exclude conflict within and differences between periods of national history, the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress” is predicated on acknowledging the nation’s historical struggles. Interestingly, this often results in a self-congratulatory self-image. What makes the Dutch superior in those cases is not only their liberal, progressive present but also their capacity throughout the centuries to overcome problems and to continually move in the right moral direction. Without idealizing the past (as it includes many negative aspects one would deem un-Dutch), the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress” depicts a positive historical process culminating in the ideal state of completion in the present.

These narratives are dominating the Dutch political and public debates and discourse on identity and diversity (Duyvendak 2020a, 2020b). However, it is important to emphasize that these narratives are by no means exclusive to the Dutch context. As we have shown elsewhere (Bertossi et al. 2020; Bertossi and Duyvendak 2020), the same narratives have developed in other countries. A variant of the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress” was famously articulated by Fukuyama in his “End of History” thesis, claiming the victory of a societal model based on democracy and markets. The idea is that history was “accomplished” after the collapse of the communist world in 1989 with Western capitalist liberalism as superior and therefore remaining the only functioning ideology and system at the global level. Later “The Narrative of Accomplished Progress” would inform the misleading rhetoric used to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The “Narrative of Accomplished Progress” is very strongly present in France as well, for instance in claims about the superiority of the French ideology of republican integration, which is seen as having survived even in the darkest periods of

French history (think of the Dreyfus Affair, Vichy, the Algerian war). Despite these crises, or perhaps even thanks to these crises, French republican universalism comes closer and closer to its accomplishment. Similarly, the “Narrative of Perpetual Tolerance” is dominant in the debate about *laïcité* (French secularism). Herein, it is suggested that *laïcité* has always been a central element of the definition of the French political tradition of immigrant integration, even if in reality this notion has only been applied to immigrants and their children (and mainly Muslims) since the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Bertossi 2016).

Against the background of these two temporal narratives, the specificity of nativist discourse with regard to the past, present, and future will become clearer. In the next section, we first analyze the nativist mobilization of the past and then the relationship between nostalgia and the future as central features in nativism’s temporality.

THE PAST IN NATIVIST NOSTALGIA

A Vague Past

Nativism deems alien forces, including the alienated elite, a threat to the nation. This nativist diagnosis of the present entails a nostalgic gaze toward the past. By way of implication, that which is under threat now had been safe in the past. The nostalgic past is implied in the very perception that something is gone (but used to exist) or under threat (but used to thrive). In other words, conceptions of the past influence conceptions of the present and vice versa (Argenti 2017; Thijssen 2012; Zeitlyn 2015). The nativist discourse of the radical right revolves around a sense of loss of what is captured in the recurring notion of “achievements” (“*verworvenheden*”): positive and valuable aspects of social and political life that have been built by the Dutch people. Examples include democracy, prosperity, public healthcare and welfare, freedom of speech, women’s and LGBTI+ rights, or more generally “our way of life.” Central in nativists’ laments about the alleged decay or even disappearance of natives and their national culture are not only these achievements as such, but also the historical time itself and the concomitant effort of fellow nationals in the past. The appreciation of national “achievements” in terms of time and process explains why in nativist discourses a general and vague past is more prevalent than references to specific historical events, persons or periods.

The idea that “achievements” emanate from and are part of the nation’s *longue durée* historical process within an indeterminate past, can be illustrated by the nativist deployment of phraseologies such as “the Judeo-Christian tradition” and “classic-humanistic roots.” A tradition is deemed valuable because it is rooted in the past and had to be maintained over time; in that sense it is an achievement. The “Dutch” culture, way of life, and norms and values are allegedly shaped by a long-standing tradition, implying a lasting past in order to contrast it to Muslims in the present: “The core of our program is our love for the Netherlands. For our civilization, our history and our city building. The Judeo-Christian tradition, the classic-humanistic world: everything we inherited from centuries-long building and brooding” (Forum voor Democratie 2021, 2, translation ours). The PVV foregrounds

the same self-image: “We are a country with Judeo-Christian and humanistic roots. Everything we have has its source there: our prosperity, separation of church and state, democracy” (Partij voor de Vrijheid 2010, 33, translation ours).

The idea of a long-standing Dutch culture bringing about “achievements,” the fruits of which are deemed visible in “everything we have” (the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress”), forms fertile ground for the temporal distinctions between people, that facilitate nativism. After all, some can be considered part of this historical Dutchness and some are considered alien to it. The nostalgic mobilization of the distant past, then, serves to historically root the identity of the first group in the distant past by suggesting historical continuity between present natives and their ancestors. Nativist nostalgia seeks refuge in the past from the threatening foreignness in the present by historicizing the “native values,” making cultural differences even harder to bridge because the past cannot be changed. The conviction that some people (natives) historically belong to the nation makes nostalgic invocations of the past unwelcoming to immigrants. The message to Dutch citizens framed as “non-native” is that their side of history is not as important as the imagined past of the white Dutch. It tells these citizens they do not truly belong in the Netherlands.

In contrast to other national contexts where national origin myths play an important role in the way national identity is imagined, the Dutch radical right does not refer to a specific period or event that marks the time the native Dutch entered the world, let alone the world stage. The historization of the Dutch native identity relies rather on vague historical continuity, not on a specific point of origin.

Emblematic of the invocation of a vague past in nativist discourse is the usage of the word “*weer*,” which means “again”/“over.” When used nostalgically, it refers to a desired social, cultural or political predicament from the past, which is threatened or non-existent in the present. This is accompanied by a desire for the revitalization of that predicament. Indeed, “again” articulates the need to reinstall what has been lost. “Again” occurs in this nostalgic form eight times in the FVD’s 2017 election program and 14 times in their 2021 election program. “Again” or “*terug*” (“back”) is also part of every slogan featured on their election posters and occurs four times in their 2021 election video (Forum voor Democratie 2020b). “Again” also features in the title of the PVV 2017 election program: “Nederland weer van ons!” (Netherlands Ours Again!) (Partij voor de Vrijheid 2017). Through the use of “again,” PVV and FVD frequently suggest that the distant past is better than the present predicament in which the native population is, allegedly, under the yoke of hegemonic multiculturalism. “Again” often alludes to one of the following themes: sovereignty (e.g., “bosses of our own country again,” Partij voor de Vrijheid 2012, 14), pride (“a Netherlands to be proud of again!,” Partij voor de Vrijheid 2006, 1), democracy (“our democracy has to be restored again,” Forum voor Democratie 2021, 3), education (“all those beautiful things the West brought about should be taught again [in schools],” Forum voor Democratie 2017, 17), and economic vitality (“we need to do everything within our power to activate our economy again,” Partij voor de Vrijheid 2012, 18); (“the [entrepreneurial] dynamic needs to come back again to the Netherlands,” Forum voor Democratie 2017, 12). “Again” refers simultaneously to the present and future, and to a general, indeterminate national past. References to concrete historical phenomena are often lacking. This nostalgically alluded past is

rather vague and functions as an empty signifier whose semantic vagueness is its main strength as it can be interpreted and exploited in many ways.

The Glorification of Colonialism

Thus, the past as invoked in deeply nostalgic nativist discourses of the Dutch radical right is more often than not vague and indeterminate, without references to specific periods of national history. An exception to this general trend is the role of the Dutch “Golden Age,” the 17th century in which the Dutch were viewed as a world power because of their role in global colonialism, trade and sovereignty.⁹

Due to the topic’s contentiousness, references to this period are most often done through allusion. FVD’s Thierry Baudet, for example, argues in a speech that “in Europe, we have never shied away from ideals beyond our horizon. On the contrary: we chose them as a guideline (. . .): the vast seas and undiscovered countries yonder, where we sailed and from which we returned with new spices, new inventions, new techniques” (Baudet 2017). In a parliamentary debate, he stated that “[We stand] amidst the debris of what was once the greatest and most beautiful civilization the world has ever known. A civilization that covered every corner of the world, that was full of self-confidence” (Baudet 2019). The “Golden Age” also figures in FVD’s visual self-presentation, most notably by the prominent role of a VOC-ship on banners. The colonial past is presented as a positive period of the nation’s history, associated with adventure, power, pride, and collective confidence.

Such nostalgia transforms from a romantic into a defensive register when the radical right is triggered by postcolonial and anti-racist voices criticizing the exploitation and racism inherent in colonialism. The ideological criticism and physical desecrations of statues of prominent “national figures” by the Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020 once more inflamed the political employment of nativist nostalgia. Dutch nativists labeled the post-colonial momentum in the public sphere and public space as “iconoclastic fury” (*beeldenstorm*), alluding to the Protestant destruction of Catholic statues. This postcolonial de-sacralization of the past evoked a nativist response in the form of counter-mobilizations to protect and celebrate the national heroes, who embody the glorious past on which a bright future can be built. Representative of this protectionist backlash is FVD’s slogan “protect our heroes” (for PVV, see Bosma 2021).

A case in point is Thierry Baudet’s victory speech after his FVD had become the largest party in the 2019 provincial (and, indirectly, Senate) elections. It invokes an ideal past, a negative recent past/present—in which “multiculturalism” dominated its policies resulting in an increase of migrants and Islam, threatening “Dutch culture”—and a rebirth (present/future). Baudet states that the national past is part

⁹ The radical right sometimes invokes an old trope, the 80-year war between the Netherlands and Spain, in which the Dutch declared themselves independent from their Spanish ruler, as captured in the “Act of Independence” (“Akte van Verlatinghe”). In the PVV’s 2010 election program, it is suggested that the Dutch people itself arose from collective revolt against a tyrannical Spanish king: “We were born from a revolt, a freedom strife . . . [where] our people declared themselves independent of the king of Spain” (Partij voor de Vrijheid 2010, 1). They continue to write that we need a similar act of resistance against the current political elite.

of the “greatest and most beautiful civilization the world has ever known” (Baudet 2019), referring to colonial expansion, and that it is rich with the “most beautiful” arts. However, the cultural superiority purported to characterize the national past is perceived to be “almost gone” at the hands of elitist politics and media: “As with all these other countries of our boreal [white] world, we are being destroyed by the very people who should have protected us.”

The cocktail of glorification, romanticization and overt defense of the colonial past, characteristic of “post-imperial nostalgia” (Chovanec and Heilo 2021) is not limited to the Dutch iteration of right-wing nativism. Such attitudes toward historical colonialism are prevalent in other Western settings as well, and often surface at important political events such as the Brexit referendum and the Trump election shows (Russo 2020).

NATIVIST FUTURES

Temporality in nostalgic nativism consists of an entanglement of past, present and, notably, the future (Bailey and Madden 2017; Muzzetto 2006). Since it deems the present predicament as a threat to the natives and their national identity, it not only nostalgically invokes a positive past, but also the future that appears in two different, yet coexisting and mutually reinforcing modes: as a dystopia and as a utopia.

Dystopian Future

The negative depiction of the future in nativist discourse logically follows from the very definition of nativism itself as “an opposition to an internal minority that is seen as a threat on the grounds of its foreignness.” Indeed, the notion of threat ambiguously encompasses both a hazard to the present as well as a risk in the future. In other words, the apocalyptic image of the future is invoked through the extrapolation of the present. The idea is that were the Dutch to continue treading the current path, they would arrive at a situation of doom. Illustrative of this doomed future narrative is how the FVD leader Thierry Baudet presents current societal transformations as setting off a domino effect from the threatening present to the apocalyptic future. Referring to an alleged hegemony of the left-liberal, multiculturalist ideology, in particular feminism and postcolonial anti-racism, he warns the general public (i.e., the white native Dutch):

Really sickly, how that goes and this is only getting worse. Because the more we give in to the ‘wokeness’ movement, the hungrier they get. So some people think that now that we have abolished Black Pete [the black-faced servant of Saint Nicholas, authors], all is well, all is brought to balance. To those people I say: it will only get worse. Now they’ll move on to the next project. They will *never* stop. *Everything* will be tackled and everything has to disappear. Our whole identity must disappear. And we revolt against that. (Forum voor Democratie 2020a, italics added, translation ours)

With each domino hitting the ground, the fall of the next is instigated. People who criticize Dutch traditions are depicted as aggressors whose “hunger” will never be satisfied, and FVD as dutiful defenders.

Characteristic of the nativist discourse is that the notion of threat can potentially be associated with a wide range of different and even disparate issues and topics. Although the allegedly devastating long-term effects of immigration of non-white people on the native population is the main trope, many other social and political phenomena can and are related to it, including those in other countries. For example: PVV's Martin Bosma published a book *Minderheid in eigen land—Hoe progressieve strijd ontaardt in genocide en ANC-apartheid* [Minorities in their own land—How progressive struggle degenerates into genocide and ANC apartheid] (Bosma 2015) that focuses on how white South-Africans became victims of anti-white “genocide.” In this book, Bosma draws a parallel with the Netherlands and Europe, warning of the ongoing and possibly intensifying (self)destruction of the white man. Of course, these examples from the Dutch context are part and parcel of the well-known and transnationally circulating replacement theories (Miller-Idriss 2020).

With regard to what leads to this dystopian future, nativist discourse attributes to the allegedly multicultural elites different degrees of agency and responsibility (from passive neglect to active complicity) and intentionality (from unintended consequences to deliberate policies). The elite is perceived to pose a *direct* threat to the nation when it criticizes and undermines its native identity and culture through the imposition of multicultural, cosmopolitan ideas, and policies, including the planned replacement of the white population in the Netherlands and by extension Europe at large. Elites are also perceived to contribute to this potentially apocalyptic future *indirectly*, by allowing the immigration of non-natives such as Muslims and black people, who are blamed not only for changing the native culture but also for undermining the demographic dominance of the native population. Such apocalyptic scenarios about the future combine racialized versions of Huntington's clash of civilizations with Fin de Siècle concerns for the decadent degeneration of Western culture and its weakened position in light of inter-ethnic competition.

Utopian Future: The Narrative of Rebirth

In line with the general content of collective nostalgia, the nativist discourse of the Dutch radical right depicts the future in a negative way. However, concluding that nostalgic nativism is mainly conservative and backward looking would not do justice to the utopian, forward looking orientation it also embraces. The negative depiction of the future outlined above coexists with, and functions to support and justify, “the alternative”: a positive image of the future invoked through what we call the “Narrative of Rebirth.” Where the negative image of the future is an extrapolation of the negative present, the positive one is a continuation of the more distant past.

By also invoking the future in a positive way, nostalgic nativism blurs the traditional divide between “progressive” and “conservative.” The notion of authentic progress in the context of an alleged multicultural threat plays an important role in the nativists' ideological self-presentation. PVV opens their 2010 election program as follows: “Go ahead, call us old-fashioned. But we believe that the best days of the Netherlands are ahead of us (. . .). If we want it, we can do anything” (Partij voor de Vrijheid 2010, 5–6). This self-image of progressiveness is enhanced by the dismissive

belief that their political opponents are not progressive in a way that is beneficial to the very nation they should represent and protect. Thus, nostalgic nativism distinguishes between the false progress of the multicultural hegemony and the authentic progress as envisaged by nativists. The attitudes and ideas pertaining to Dutch natives function as the benchmark against which to determine whether progress can be called as such. Emblematic of the importance of the future-oriented notion of progress adopted by nativists is a speech by Frederik Jansen, the leader of the youth branch of FVD and a member of parliament:

Not only has the past become taboo but the future has as well (...). Because the future of humanity no longer lies beyond this world, if you ask Obama and his allies at the VVD, Groen-Links, and D66. 'Progressive', they call themselves. But their vision of the future has nothing to do with progress. Progress in their view is 'freeing' individuals in every possible way from everything that binds them [...] History is not over, the future is not over. We are going to embrace the future, we are going to push our boundaries again, and we are going to reach beyond the finite together. This century will be our era. (Forum voor Democratie 2018, translation ours)

In a discourse reminiscent of the anti-enlightenment Romantic criticism of modernity's destructive and disenchanting "progress" leading to uprootedness and alienation (Leerssen et al. 2018), nativists present themselves as the ones who still dare to dream about a future where the essential role of rootedness in one's national community is acknowledged and protected. Nativist discourse serves political entrepreneurs of the radical right in presenting themselves as saviors and as the only vehicles through which the suppression or even disappearance of the Dutch natives and their culture can be stopped and turned around. In other words, they see themselves as the only actors that can bring about the desired predicament in which Dutch natives and their culture will reign supreme. Thus, ideas about the present are related to conceptions of the future (Bryant and Knight 2019).

In this positive depiction of the future, the distant past—always presented in a favorable light—holds a central position. More precisely, the direction and appeal of the utopian future rely significantly, though not exclusively, on bringing back the glorified distant past. Nativist articulations of the desired future are not only inspired by the distant past, they also promise a revival of it. As the leader of the youth branch of the FVD Jansen states, "we only have one choice: to perish or to fight for a Renaissance" (Res cogitans 2018). His phrase "pushing our boundaries again" is yet another reference to the Dutch imperialist project during the "Golden Age." As this allusion to Dutch colonial power illustrates, a positive image of the future in terms of authentic progress is based on a glorified past. Another example of the entanglement of nostalgia and the utopian rendering of the future is Baudet's speech titled "FVD is the flagship of the Renaissance fleet," which he presented at the party congress in 2017. In it, Baudet portrays the West as a beacon of cultural resilience. As the title suggests, the speech is aimed at stressing the need for a rebirth and the capability of the West to achieve this. Baudet suggests that the current "existential crisis" presented to us has never been more grave:

Our free, tolerant, liberal, curious, humorous, cheerful, and democratic society is in mortal danger – even fatally injured. However, we must not leave her behind; we must not think that what has passed is gone forever: we must, in the best tradition of the West, bring her back to life. We must bring about a European Renaissance. (Baudet 2017, translation ours)

That the glorious past can and should serve as the basis of a future utopia was also the main message of a speech following FVD's victory in the 2019 elections. Baudet's argument is that, despite the enemies' efforts to undermine what is Dutch and European, the "greatest civilization" remains "inside of us and therefore cannot be taken away." Baudet goes on to channel Donald Trump, stressing that in order to "restore" this inalienable national essence with "its traditions" and in order to "make our country ours again," "we" must be reborn:

Today we have chosen to combat again [...] accept[ing] the idea of resurrection as the guiding motif for Western civilization. The idea that something that was dead, can flourish again, is our ground rule. Because we are the party of rebirth [...] we are going to achieve a renaissance where our confidence [and pride] are restored. (Baudet 2019, translation ours)

The utopian future in nativist discourses of the Dutch radical right is more than a mirror of the past, as it often includes overtly futuristic elements. Examples thereof are the FVD's (symbolic) plans to provide the Netherlands with a high-speed train connection called a "hyperloop," and their aspiration for the Dutch to go to the moon. Baudet explains that this plan is not only a technological aspiration but also has a spiritual reason: "It is very good for a country, for a nation, for a people, to reach for the stars. To have distant ideals that you strive for together" (NPO Radio 1 2021). Even in these cases, though, the distant past plays an important role, because such ambitious projects are presented as materializations of the eternal national character, which is held to have functioned long ago as the force behind the "Golden Age."

Another paradigmatic instance of the interconnection between the glorious past and utopian future is the YouTube video *2040: Our Vision for the Future of The Netherlands*. The outlined design for Dutch society in 2040 contains a return to traditional architecture, the preservation of pride, the creation of historical landmarks, and the revival of the "spirit of the Golden Age" as well as a supersonic train network in the form of a hyperloop, a new natural forest, and an airport at sea. Not only in the cultural achievements, but also in the language and imagery used, various temporal notions can be identified. The past is invoked verbally through the repeated use of the word "again" and visually by means of the greenscreen showing a Dutch ship from colonial times at sea. At the same time, the video contains futuristic elements such as special effects and highly advanced technology. In the video, Baudet articulates this utopian future as following:

And as was to be expected, this Nexit¹⁰ opened possibilities for the Netherlands to become a global trading nation once again (...). The Netherlands became a global power again. We regained control of our country (...). And our confidence returned (...). In short, we won the spirit of the Golden Age. It might sound like a fantasy, it might sound like a fairytale. But all of this is truly possible. If only we dare to choose for change, this could be our future. (Forum voor Democratie 2020b, our translation)

This excerpt exemplifies how the radical right's forward-looking utopianism relies on and often even overlaps with backward-looking nostalgia.

¹⁰ Alluding to Brexit, Nexit is the term for the potential Dutch exit from the European Union.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have shown in this article, to understand contemporary nostalgia in public and political life, it is imperative to look at its conjunction with nativism, a prevalent and contentious discourse of (national) belonging and cultural diversity. Given the centrality of notions of national belonging and its threats, this intersection between nativism and nostalgia is similar to what Boym famously calls *restorative nostalgia*, which “stresses nostos (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home [...] under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy. [...] restorative nostalgia returns and rebuilds one homeland” (Boym 2007).

Despite the prominent presence of nostalgia in nativist narratives, nativism is more than merely conservative and backward looking. Nostalgic nativism not only uses the distant past to deal with threatening otherness in the present, but also to articulate a positive discourse about the future. This means that temporality in nativism includes entanglements between past, present, and futures. A crucial characteristic of nostalgic nativism’s temporality is that the glorified distant past serves as the basis for a utopian future, even in highly futuristic iterations of the future. This utopian projection of the distant and always positively evaluated past onto a desired future, is what we called the “Narrative of Rebirth.” The idea here is that the native population and its culture did not only flourish in the distant past, but that they will thrive again like in the good old, mainly colonial, days.

Such entanglements between nostalgic attitudes toward the distant past and future oriented, even futuristic imaginaries would not be possible without the abstract but appealing presupposition of an unchanging national essence. As our examples drawn from the Dutch radical right illustrate, such essentialist conceptions of Dutch natives often praise traits associated with colonialism such as entrepreneurship, courage, and exploration. The future can only be presented as the continuation of the distant past by assuming the existence of a stable national character that is believed to materialize in different forms in various historical epochs, but can never be reduced to either of these.

In nativism’s temporality, the present occupies an exceptional position. The depiction and function of the present are radically different from those of the past and the future. Where the distant past and a potential future are framed in terms of native flourishing, the present is equaled to a permanent state of emergency with the nation and civilization being in a deep crisis, up to the level of mortal danger. To communicate the supposed severity of the current condition, nativists frequently employ metaphors related to natural disaster and illness. Given the vulnerable position of the victimized native population and their culture, the present is presented as an undesirable anomaly on the historical timeline. The present, precisely due to its exceptionalism, justifies the nativist alternatives consisting of the aforementioned entanglement of past and future. In nostalgic nativism, the exceptionalization of the present legitimizes and fosters the romanticization and normalization of the distant past that is transposed into the future. The fact that the present is rejected as a despicable, abnormal exception in national history is the very reason that renders it necessary and desirable to look at the past. This “pure” past, in turn, informs the idea that this “impure” present must be “purified” from the corruptive, threatening forces of

multiculturalism. The desire and promise of the political radical right is that true natives can become “themselves” again and reoccupy their naturally hegemonic position in their own country.

In our analysis, nativist nostalgia came to the fore as the core of the Dutch radical right. This may be surprising for two reasons. First, how can the Dutch context be so exclusionary nativist given its reputation for being liberal and tolerant? As discussed elsewhere (Duyvendak 2011; Duyvendak and Kešić 2022), Dutch tolerance is not a transhistorical national trait but an embattled aspect of the country’s history. More recently, tolerance for those perceived as non-native has diminished, and in some contexts even disappeared. Second, how to reconcile the nostalgic mood with the alleged progressiveness, the future orientation of “the Dutch”? As discussed above, nativist temporality is not limited to embracing the past in a nostalgic mode, as it also includes the de-appreciation of the present day, and high hopes for the future. That future, however, is not necessarily progressive but rather mirrors (the cultural undertones of) the heydays of the past (the “Narrative of Rebirth”). Hence, even though the Dutch have become surprisingly progressive since the 1960s in terms of their values, and therefore at first sight an unlikely candidate for the rise of nativism, they share many orientations with people in other Western countries, such as an appreciation of the past, mirrored in exclusionary nativist dreams of the future.

It is no surprise then that, as in the case of the “Narrative of Perpetual Tolerance” and the “Narrative of Accomplished Progress,” the “Narrative of Rebirth” can be encountered in many other Western contexts. The globally most widely known version of this narrative is Donald Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America great again.” It relies on the wider public to fill in the nostalgic subtext: the past, and the people that occupied it, was better. As well as glorifying and revalorizing the post-war American Dream, it contributes to a problematization of the present and the creation of a hierarchy between “true” Americans and various internal “others” who are considered not fully (but hyphenated) American or even un-American. The latter range from the left (often conflated with the establishment), via Latinos and Muslims to anti-racism protesters. Although not always as explicit, one of the core aspects of Trump’s nativism was about being white. Indeed, the loss of the white majority has become one of the major obsessions of American nativists (Alba 2020). Such nostalgic sentiments, fueled by a negative perception of the present, intensified in 2020 when Trump and his supporters interpreted the anti-racism protests across the United States as “the pastime of an unpatriotic, privileged elite [. . .] in juxtaposition to ‘real Americans’” (Holland and Fermor 2020, 7). Katherine Cramer (2016) has observed that the opposition between the rural and the urban (“rural consciousness”) plays a central role in American present-day nativism. The rural soil symbolizes hard work, true life, masculinity, and a frontier mentality. From nativists’ perspective, all this seems to be “under attack,” “taken away” by those who are foreign to those traditions: immigrants and urban elites alike (Bucci 2017). Trump’s infamous slogan clearly promises that the current crisis of American social relations will be followed by a bright future where the good old days of white American hegemony will be reinstalled.

Another example illustrating the transnational occurrence of the “Narrative of Rebirth” comes from the French context. During the campaign for the French

presidency, an outspoken nativist candidate recently attracted a lot of attention: Eric Zemmour. A striking feature of his discourse is his obsession with France's imperial and colonial grandeur of the past. In his campaign discourse, he has made emotional references to "the land of Joan of Arc and Louis XIV, the land of Bonaparte and General de Gaulle, the land of knights and gentlewomen; the land of Notre-Dame de Paris and the bell towers in the villages," "a country fading away." It is no accident that Zemmour's political party was named "Reconquête" (reconquest). The name is an explicit reference to the 15th-century Spanish *Reconquista*—the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Catholic Spain in 1492. Its adoption makes clear how much nostalgia in radical right-wing politics in France is a matter of regaining what is said to be at risk today—a territory, a land, a culture, a way of life, "ourselves." The titles of his books are very telling in that perspective as well. He wants to reconquer what is allegedly lost or at risk: from *Mélancolie française* (French melancholia) (2010) to *Destin français: quand l'Histoire se venge* (French destiny: when History takes revenge) (2018) and *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot* (France has not said its last word) (2021). As in the case of Dutch nativism, these titles, referring to the French context, are not just nostalgic but future oriented as well. The main characteristic of contemporary nativism is its nostalgic and refined play with temporality: the abhorration of the present and the glorification of the past lay the foundation for an ambivalent future.

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