European Memory in Populism

Representations of Self and Other

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Chapter 1

(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?

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This chapter reflects on the paradox of Eurosceptic populists critical of the European Union mobilizing ideas of European values, heritage, and civilization. We examine the role of the past and especially of a certain understanding of 'European heritage' in far-right-wing populist, nationalist discourse in Europe today. We also interrogate the 'perverse confluences' (cf. Clarke et al., 2014: 15) of such populist ideas with allegedly inclusive notions of European heritage promoted by EU institutions. For many right-wing populists, Europe is comprised of diverse cultural nations and regions that unite in a moral 'communion of shared values' (Thran and Boehnke, 2015: 192) that are grounded in a shared civilizational heritage. This brand of Europeanism coexists with a strong sense of national identity and even a militant nationalism. The best example is Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West), a German nationalist, anti-Islam, and anti-migrant right-wing movement that has informed populist attitudes across Europe and now has chapters in several other countries, including the UK and the Netherlands. Amidst fluttering Dutch flags, a banner at a recent Pegida demonstration in the Netherlands reciting 'Islamization=EUthanasia' (*Islamisering=EUthanasie*) shows that populists view an alleged ongoing 'Islamization' as a deadly threat not only to national culture but also to Europe, which some of them hold dear.

Our argument is based on a qualitative data analysis of the responses given by approximately eighty populist parties' supporters across Europe. Ayhan Kaya and Ayşe Tecmen's CoHERE team interviewed them between 15 March and 30 May 2017 in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands. What do these people think of 'European culture' and a 'European heritage', and how do such understandings relate to their belief in national culture? We asked Kaya and Tecmen to include these two questions among the ones they administered. Populist supporters' answers illuminate how a discourse of civilizational European heritage coexists in varying degrees of tension with populism's emphasis on the centrality of the nation.

In the tradition of Ruth Wodak (2015), we define right-wing populism as a political discourse rather than a fully fledged, articulated ideology: a loosely connected set of ideas, attitudes, and socialized and politicized emotions.

Populist discourse fundamentally relies on a sharp us/them divide and on a distinctive understanding of 'the people' as non-immigrant, white, and disenfranchised (Wodak, 2015; see also Mouffe, 2005). 'The people' are discursively pitted against an enemy 'other'. Antagonistic towards political elites, populists however scapegoat migrants and minorities for rising inequalities and poverty, thus substituting a class enemy with a cultural, racialized one. Such others are imagined as hard, if not impossible, to assimilate, and are therefore regarded as a threat to what populists view as the indispensable foundation of a political community: a primordial, essentialized national culture.

By excluding migrants and minorities from both national and European collectives on the ground of their alleged cultural incommensurability, right-wing populist discourse mobilizes what social scientists since the late 1980s have called 'new racism' or 'cultural racism' (Balibar, 1991). With older, biologically based racial hierarchies being discredited due to their association with Nazism, a new form of racism in disguise has emerged that emphasizes the incompatibility of heritages and values (Lentin and Titley, 2011; Lentin, 2014). This racism is 'concealed inside apparently innocent language about culture' (Barker, 1981: 3; Stolcke, 1995). In the late 1990s, Verena Stolcke observed in Europe

> the resurgence of the old demon of racism in a new guise. [There is] a perceptible shift in the rhetoric of exclusion. . . . From what were once assertions of the differing endowment of human races, there has risen since the seventies a rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion that emphasizes the distinctiveness of cultural identity, traditions, and heritage among groups and assumes the closure of culture by territory.
>
> (1999: 25)

Nation, identity, culture, heritage, and territory are conflated and made isomorphic in populist discourse: people are 'fixed in place' by their cultural belonging and heritage. Through cultural racism, ideological constructs of heritage and memory, rendered immutable and natural, are mobilized to shape new racialized understandings of 'the people'.

Populists do not believe in the hard-and-fast existence of national cultures and heritages only. Even nationalist political forces may legitimize themselves by donning the mantle of European heritage – often talked about as European civilization. According to Roger Brubaker (2017: 1193), the national populisms of Northern and Western Europe, including those of France and the Netherlands, mobilize a discourse of 'civilizationism' that constructs the 'opposition between self and other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms'. In this discourse, Islam and the figure of the Muslim are placed in the position of the other. Such deep preoccupation with an alleged Islamic civilization threat ('Islamization' is the code word for stoking fears of Europe's disappearance) drives a paradoxical stance: the combination of 'identitarian Christianism' with a fervent defence of secularism and liberal values such

as gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech – which coexist with the traditional social conservatism and illiberal authoritarianism of the far right.

The most successful among the European right-wing populist parties have combined a rhetoric of citizens' resentment towards elites for the financial crisis and ensuing austerity, with accusations of a cultural decline, enabled – so they believe – by overly liberal immigration policies. Parties like the National Rally in France, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and Alternative for Germany have drawn on racist sentiment to assert that Islam is incompatible with European values and traditions and, by extension, that multiculturalism (which they associate with the EU) is unsustainable. Despite their nationalist ideology, however, by establishing Muslims as the universal out-group, these parties implicitly unify the people of Europe by defining non-Muslim Europeans as a community rooted not in political loyalty towards the EU but rather in their common heritage. Our analysis of the CoHERE populism interviews reveals the existence of a sense of shared European heritage – even if vague and implicit – among many populist supporters alongside their deep attachment to national cultures.

These in-person interviews were conducted in the native language of the respondents. Selected via snowball sampling, female and male populist parties' supporters aged eighteen to sixty-five were interviewed. Supporters belonged to the National Rally (then known as the National Front, NF) in France, Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, Golden Dawn (GD) in Greece, the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, and the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. We captured populist voters' attitudes towards European culture/civilization and European memory/heritage by inviting open-ended answers.

Answers were subsequently analyzed using the classic qualitative method of grounded theory (Glaser, 1978) in a three-stage process. In the first stage, we inductively constructed analytical codes and abstract categories extracted from the data. Applying narrative identity theory (Scalise, 2015), we avoided ambiguous categories like 'pride', 'attachment', and 'loyalty' as well as 'scaling' perceived degrees of belonging to Europe, and paid attention instead to emic categorization and the distinction between meanings attributed to Europe and meanings attributed to the EU. In the second stage, we built on quantitative research on European cultural identity (Mitchell, 2014; Schilde, 2014; Westle and Segatti, 2016) to perform theoretical sampling and refine the categories obtained in the first stage. In the third stage, we integrated these categories into a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006).

Overall, despite confounding the EU, Europe, and European heritage, interviewees tend to contrast a negatively connoted EU as economically disadvantaging for the nation-state and the working classes with a positively connoted idea of European heritage combining ancient Greek and Roman history with Christianity and the Enlightenment. World War II is frequently mentioned as a key shared experience within an often broadly and vaguely understood

'European history'. Unlike in Brubaker's sample, it is especially the French and German interviewees in our sample who uphold a sense of a common European heritage. This is not so much the case among Dutch populist supporters, but it is possible that the timing of the CoHERE interviews, which took place immediately after a heated 2017 electoral campaign dominated by public debate on 'Dutch norms and values', may have influenced interviewees' responses. The Southern European populists in the CoHERE sample support political formations that are very different from the Northern European ones, and very different among themselves. While far-right parties throughout Europe have changed or at least rebranded themselves by donning some kind of liberal mantle, Greece's ultranationalist Golden Dawn is neo-fascist and explicitly draws on Nazi symbols and references. Its leader proudly identifies as a racist (Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, 2016). Among the CoHERE Greek interviewees, negative feelings about Europe abound but cannot be interpreted as a repudiation of European heritage. Rather, these feelings are connected to interviewees' perception of being forcibly excluded by the EU (and more powerful European nations) from a European civilization Greece itself originally birthed. The CoHERE Italian interviewees supporting the Five Star Movement (which, despite claiming to be non-ideological, has embraced the anti-immigrant positions of its coalition partner in government, the far-right Northern League) also remarked that European countries share the same history.[1]

Across the sample, there are frequent references to Christianity, and sometimes a Judeo-Christian civilization, as the shared European heritage. At times this heritage is qualified as European, at times as broadly Western (which includes the US). Overall, while a notion that a common European heritage, and especially a common European history, is widely shared, its translation into a common cultural identity is not at all straightforward. Populists' cultural racism, in other words, does not solidify into the idea of a common European culture and identity.

Populist parties' vision of Europe as a tight bond of European nations

When asked about their ideas of European heritage, many interviewees, especially in France and Germany, espoused positions similar to those aired during the much-mediatized congress of European far-right populists in Koblenz on 21 January 2017, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration in the US. The congress envisioned a 'new Europe' to be remade by populists. In her speech, Marine Le Pen set out the vision of a 'Renaissance of Europe' propelled by resurging European cultures and a 'diversity' of strong nationalisms living in freedom and harmony with each other (Engelhart, 2017). Thibaud Gibelin, NF parliamentary aide and spokesperson, told a *New Yorker* journalist during the congress that Europeans clearly share a cultural heritage: 'We have our

Roman roots, our language, our culture; the cathedrals you see, whether in Cologne or Paris, that are gothic, that's transnational; the Renaissance was a European phenomenon; and the great religious moments that marked Europe, the spread of Christianity, the Reformation, those were never isolated to one nation' (Zerofsky, 2017). This is a list of the historical periods, processes, and movements that are broadly seen as the pillars of European heritage also by many non-populists, including EU institutions (e.g. Shore, 2006; Delanty, 2009). The Enlightenment is placed at the top of this list as the pinnacle of European civilization and source of the idea of freedom this populist congress explicitly celebrated.

The meanings that such parties attach to Europeanness is most often implicit and relational: Europe and European heritage are pitted against both the EU and migrants/Islam – these latter two are often brought together. In AfD's programme, for example, beyond the standard opposition to the EU and the euro, Europe is mentioned only briefly, and in the section about asylum policy, which argues that 'the future of Germany and Europe must be secured in the long term. . . . Migratory movements from Africa to Europe can destabilize the continent in a few years' time' (Zuwanderung and Asyl, 2018). On the party's website, statements by prominent AfD members explain why migration is a threat to Europe and its heritage. The party's deputy, Beatrix von Storch, claims that 'European *Leitkultur* [lead culture] stands on the basis of common value canons: the three hills Golgota, Acropolis and Capitol, which are the foundation of occidental culture and which Islam is incompatible with'. But for von Storch it is not only Islam that stands against a European 'lead culture'. 'Brussels' central state is ahistorical and uneuropean [*sic*], going against the motto of unity in diversity' (Alternative für Deutschland, 2018). Here, von Storch seizes on this key EU principle and the idea of Europe by turning it against itself while implying that right-wing populists are its most genuine adherents.

The Rassemblement National (National Rally, NR), led by Marine Le Pen, refers to Europe in the first paragraph of its program for the 2017 presidential elections, but this reference is used to promote Euroscepticism or criticism of the EU and European integration. The NR's first priority is to return national sovereignty to France as the country becomes part of a 'respectful Europe' and a 'Europe of independent nations' (Engagements présidentiels Marine, 2017). While equally hostile to Islam and migrants as the AfD, the NR claims to defend French (rather than European) culture and civilization, as stated in article 91 of the electoral programme. As for the Dutch PVV, its leader, Geert Wilders, has asserted that there is 'no single European identity', reaffirming his party's absence of a clear programmatic position on the issue. Nevertheless, in several speeches, Wilders has echoed AfD's von Storch by referring to a 'European civilization . . . based on the legacy of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome', and to Europe's problems of 'Islamization, terrorism and mass immigration' (Wilders, 2017). The PVV holds the populist view that the EU usurps European identity and imposes an artificial political community upon the true European patriots.

The Greek GD is a far-right fascist movement, its main objective being a Greek 'nationalist revolution'. In the 'Ideology' section of its official website, it calls for a 'Europe of nations', like other populists do, as such a Europe would be a 'political expression of ideological patriotism and nationalism at a pan-European level', based on an intergovernmental approach that preserves national character (Tassios, 2016).

Instead of foregrounding ethno-nationalism, the ideologically ambiguous and internally heterogenous Italian M5S prioritizes reforming the EU's economic policies and ending austerity. According to the party programme, the only way to tackle Europe's economic problems is by approaching them as sovereign and independent states in a multipolar world – a view that is consistent with other European populist parties. But the M5S also seeks to build an alliance of Southern European countries to 'prevent Italy from becoming the source of cheap manual labor for Northern European countries and their tourist fun park'. According to the programme, Europe is 'a geographic identity, whose values, history and peculiarities do not identify with the European Union and even less with the Euro' (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2018). To sum up this brief sketch, populist political programmes point to the emergence not of a common populist doctrine of European cultural identity but rather at an ensemble of shared ideas and attitudes – a sense of European heritage and values as superior to non-European ones, by which what is meant is often Islam – underpinning nationalist ideology.

What does a far-right European heritage look like?

When asked about the existence of a European culture, the CoHERE respondents gave negative answers. But this was not the case when respondents reflected on the existence of a common European history. In the interviews, there are mentions of the Greek, Roman, and Christian heritage of Europe to which both supporters and party manifestos refer, yet only a minority of respondents perceive those cultural and religious roots as a basis for a coherent and tangible European culture. As many respondents stress, even though these common roots and shared experience of historical events represent 'common points across Europe', eventually each nation developed and retains its own culture. But how do 'cultural' conceptions of Europe and ideas of a common civilizational pool vary across our interviewees?

Despite their pronounced ideological differences, interviewees from the European South share an idea of European heritage, yet one that they feel is betrayed by a (Northern) Europe that does not appreciate Greek/Italian contributions to it. Greek respondents in particular, and to an extent also the Italians, take credit for the values and principles the European Union was built upon – democracy and even civilization itself. However, there is a notable absence of a spillover from the narratives on heritage/memory to those on culture/civilization. A few Italian M5S supporters emphasize that the Roman Empire once tried to keep Europe united, while almost all Greek interviewees

proudly state Europe's Greek ancestry: 'When we were teaching them [other Europeans] civilization, they were living in caves'.[2] For many Golden Dawn supporters, what is now called 'European heritage' is actually the heritage of Greek civilization. As an interviewee points out, 'There is Greek memory and heritage in the European one, not the other way around' (Male, 57, lawyer, Argos). In this view, Greek civilization is the origin of European civilization, but Europe refuses to recognize its 'classical debt' (Hanink, 2017).

Different are the arguments put forward by the Northern interviewees – the Dutch, Germans, and French – who tend to distantiate themselves from Southern (and Eastern) Europeans, painting them as homogeneous blocks. Unlike in Brubaker's (2017) sample, populist supporters in the Netherlands appear to be the most averse to notions of European culture. The French express the greatest concern about its current deterioration, while the Germans position themselves between the two. While a number of Dutch respondents recognize the existence of 'common points' across European countries, they do not consider them to be defining elements of an overarching European culture and civilization. Instead, they emphasize the differences between European countries, drawing a clear line between 'us' and 'them'. 'There are too many differences between Southern Europeans and Northern Europeans, they are not the same. So we are more related to Germans, but I wouldn't like to compare myself with Polish or Romanian people' (Female, 54, housewife, Rotterdam). PVV supporters' statements about the non-existence of a European culture and heritage are tied to their strong perception of the persistence of *both* cultural and economic differences within Europe – they clearly distinguish between poorer and richer countries – but also to their negative opinions concerning the EU. As we elaborate in more detail in the next section, the tendency to 'culturalize' economic and political divides and processes, and the related idea of distinct cultural regions within Europe, play an important role in shaping narratives of European identity, which is especially important in the Dutch case. Italy and Greece are mentioned by Dutch respondents as 'economic problems' for the Netherlands and its citizens, depicting the EU as a malfunctioning organization using Dutch taxpayers' money to pay other countries' debts.[3]

By expressing concerns about European culture's deterioration due to immigration (without mentioning economic disparities), many French respondents indirectly endorse the idea of a common identity. The majority explicitly acknowledge the existence of a shared European heritage and historical memory grounded in common experiences and religious roots, which finally culminated in the EU's creation. This European heritage is imbued with colonial nostalgia for the past 'great empires'. Such is the narrative:

> Yes, there is a European culture. Christianity is one of the factors unifying Europe. There is a culture with Greek-Latin bases. The great empires, and the Christian civilization, are factors unifying the Europeans.
>
> (Male, 31, parliamentary assistant, Toulon)

However, only half of the sample agree on the actual existence of a European culture and civilization in the present. Instead, the other half claim that 'a European history does exist, but not a European culture' (Male, 50, unemployed, Romorantin-Lanthenay), because each country retains its own culture and traditions. This indicates a considerable level of convergence between the Dutch and French narratives, as respondents from both countries express contradictory meanings of common heritage and common culture, ultimately decoupling the two and minimizing their mutual influence. For most of the French interviewees, the perceived spread of Islam and Muslim communities in Europe facilitates a nation-centred narrative instead of a European one. The NF supporters stress the importance of preserving their state's *laïcité* or (alleged) neutrality towards religious beliefs to preserve French identity and culture. Nevertheless, a few French interviewees do see an 'Islamic threat' challenging the whole of Europe.

Among the AfD respondents, the sample is evenly split between those recognizing the existence of both a European culture and memory/heritage and those who, instead, believe that there is no European culture because countries are too dissimilar. Yet, the German respondents do also point out, like in the Dutch sample, that the German nation and culture are very similar to other Northern European nations. As in the French NR sample, the German respondents foreground the religious and historical roots of Europe. As a consequence, AfD supporters are very concerned, as are their NR counterparts, about the possible contamination and deterioration of European culture and values by migrants from culturally and religiously different countries:

> We have a European culture because we are all similar to each other. We are different from Italians or Greeks but at the end we, as people from Europe, are more similar compared to people from Arabic countries.
>   . . . That wave of asylum seekers is a threat to our European heritage because they want 'Arabistan' here.
>
> (Female, 56, saleswoman, Dresden)

As one of our reviewers, Markus Balkenhol, pointed out (see also Barker, 1981), right-wing populist understandings of identity here come very close to tribal ones, particularly to how anthropologists have rendered identity dynamics and 'contextual ethnicity' in classic segmentary societies, like the Nuer of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). The Nuer nation is divided into tribes and those into segments that have many of the characteristics of a tribe itself, like a distinctive name, a unique territory, and a common sentiment. For Evans-Pritchard, 'the members of any segment unite for war against adjacent segments of the same order and unite with these adjacent segments against larger sections'. In other words, segments or lineages form an in-group identity when they are at war with other neighbouring lineages, but the same lineages that were once opposed may unite against a tribe of a bigger order – in the name

of common ancestors. These tribes, in turn, can form a comprehensive tribal identity when faced with an external enemy, for instance the British or the neighbouring Dinka nation. The populists in the CoHERE sample and particularly the AfD supporters of the last quote deploy a similar logic: the 'German nation' is defined vis-à-vis the Italians, Greeks, and Poles. All of them can and in fact must unite – so the logic goes – in the face of an external, existential threat like Islam(ization), specifically those 'asylum seekers' who are said to aim to turn Europe into 'Arabistan'. This logic makes ethnic groups into entities simultaneously bounded and flexible, ascribed via primordialist bonds, territorial boundaries, and cultural traits, and yet shifting contextually, according to the specific scalar process at stake in any given moment.

Ethnic regionalism versus the EU

The idea of a Europe made up of different nations and cultural regions undergirded by shared values and a shared civilizational heritage is widely recognizable among our interviewees. Also common – if implicit – is the related notion that this European heritage is superior to others. A Le Pen supporter offers this narrative:

> Europe was renowned all over the world, and spreads everywhere its values of democracy, its values of freedom, its culture. . . . In my opinion, there is a European civilization, which is important, which is beautiful, which besides is diverse, really diverse. . . . When you are travelling in Europe, you see that it is diverse everywhere. There are the Eastern countries, which are the Slavic countries. There are the Northern countries. They are the Anglo-Saxons. . . . All the countries . . . Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands. . . . It's also different. And there are the Latin languages. . . . All these mixes are contributing to define Europe as a renowned civilization.
>
> (Male, 39, unemployed, Toulon)

This narrative foregrounds a number of key populist tropes – all shot through with contradictions. First, many interviewees refer to a common cultural foundation, mostly articulated as a common European heritage/history and a set of shared 'European values'. This common cultural foundation does not rule out national cultures. To the contrary, the nation's primacy is buttressed by European values that are the product of a shared history and heritage. Second, Europe is both one and diverse. Such diversity is equated with the different European nationalities but also with broad and vaguely defined European cultural regions, illustrated by the way the quote above slips from the national ('Belgium') to the regional ('Northern Europe'). Here, culture (European, regional, national) is both fixed and flexible – deep rooted, primordial ('Anglo-Saxon', 'Latin'), anchored in space, and mapped onto a distinctive territory

whose boundaries must however remain conveniently fuzzy for this European puzzle to (seemingly) make sense. Third, this narrative exudes a sense of European superiority tinged with a nostalgic longing for colonial 'grandeur' of which the present is only a pale, 'watered-down' imitation.

The fact of populist discourse articulating the idiom of 'diversity' reflects the institutional EU language of 'unity in diversity', which percolates through political discourses opposed to it. But the way in which this NR supporter and many others in our sample speak about cultural diversity resonates with the right-wing theory of ethno-pluralism or ethno-regionalism, which divides the world into ethnically and culturally homogeneous nations and regions and accuses migrants of 'messing up' this naturally harmonic order (Thran and Boehnke, 2015: 200).

An important influence for the NR and other far-right formations across Europe, the French New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*) since the late 1960s has been theorizing ethno-regionalism as an alternative to multiculturalism, based on a strong idea of 'cultural differentialism' and the rejection of the fact of lived multiculture in Europe. For the New Right, immigration corrupts and culturally destroys both the host and immigrant societies (Spektorowski, 2003). As the New Right manifesto declares, humanity is irreducibly diverse, made up of a variety of 'races, ethnic groups, languages, customs, even religions' and ultimately of different cultures, which alone provide the setting for human life to flourish: 'Man [*sic*] is rooted by nature in his culture' (de Benoist and Champetier, 2012: 28, 19). In the twenty-first century, the 'future belongs to large cultures and civilizations' (de Benoist and Champetier, 2012: 38), like the European and the North American ones, in a world in absolute need of 'clear and strong identities' (de Benoist and Champetier, 2012: 32). Grouped around the think tank GRECE (Research and Study Group for European Civilization), New Right intellectuals such as Alain de Benoist have theorized the rebirth of an old/new ethno-regional Europe united by a common cultural foundation. While New Right proponents loudly argue that their ideas are not racist because their differentialism is 'culturally' and not 'racially' based (Betz, 2003; see also de Benoist, 1999), their civilizational Europeanism and vision of a cultural Europe where alleged non-Europeans have no place smacks of a deeply racialized European superiority as well as also of ethnically cleansed, projected geographies.[4] (For de Benoist, 'the European race is not the absolute superior race. It is only the most apt to progress', quoted in Spektorowski, 2016: 126).

In our sample, cultural difference is always, if more or less explicitly, marked, its renderings sliding into cultural racism. Ideas of cultural hierarchies and moral taxonomies of cultures and heritages within and beyond Europe percolate through the CoHERE interviews. Some cultural regions do move in and out of Europe in interviewees' perceptions, depending on where they contingently draw Europe's borders, which is always a very context-dependent exercise. Europe is often equated with Western Europe or a Western Europe

plus (a 'core Europe' surrounded by a lesser European periphery or a fluid bor-
derland of uncertain European status). These are some sound bites:

> When I say Europe I mean Western Europe, I cannot relate with people
> coming from Romania.
>
> (Female, 54, housewife, Rotterdam)

> European civilization and culture exist, and it's limited to some countries –
> Italy, Spain, England, Portugal, France, Germany. Maybe also Hungary
> and Poland.
>
> (Male, 54, executive in industry, Romorantin-Lanthenay)

> Europe expanded from six to twenty-eight countries. I agree to integrate
> countries, but poor countries such as Romania or Bulgaria is [*sic*] not good.
>
> (Male, 23, graphic designer, Romorantin-Lanthenay)

> With this blatant enlargement of the EU, taking countries such as Bulgaria,
> the whole idea of European culture has been watered down.
>
> (Male, 49, printer, Dresden)

Whatever they think about a cultural Europe notwithstanding, CoHERE
interviewees have a negative opinion of the European Union. The EU is
often described as a failure, a 'union of the bankers' (M5S), devoid of equal-
ity among its member states (GD), using money to pay other countries'
debts (PVV), and causing nations' loss of sovereignty (NF). The Italian and
Greek respondents stress the EU's inability and unwillingness to help its
own member states cope with the economic and the refugee crises, as well
as the 'disparities and Germany being the master of EU' – a 'cruel' union
of unequally treated countries in which the richest countries' well-being is
preserved at the expense of the suffering ones. Deep frustration with the EU
institutions is dominant in the CoHERE interviews. Images of corruption
abound. Dutch interviewees share negative feelings towards the EU, but they
justify them by complaining that 'our money is used to pay their debts' –
'their' refers to Greece, Italy, and sometimes Portugal. The overwhelming
impression is one of disappointment, frustration, and failed expectations
about Europe – and the sense of a deep lack of solidarity, which is sought,
instead, in the nation.

Corrosive multiculturalism: culture as nature

Rejection of immigration and multiculturalism is a standard feature of nearly
all the interviews. NF supporters are not alone in their anxieties about an
alleged 'Islamization'. Respondents from all five countries claim a loss of
culture and heritage by way of a multiculturalism they strongly associate with
failing EU policies. The Italian interviewees are the only relative exception

to this tendency, which can be explained by the M5S's ideological specificity and anomaly ('beyond Left and Right'). Yet, even in the M5S sample a number of interviewees oppose multiculturalism as a form of 'cultural contamination' provoking a loss of identity. The following is far from an uncommon idea:

> We [Europeans] have a legacy, and this from being positive has become negative because we are in an era of dislocation, multiculturalism. There are wars between cultures with a will to form one culture to take the other's place and make it disappear: I think of Islam, which wants to impose itself as the new European culture.
> (Male, 54, executive in industry, Romorantin-Lanthenay)

If people are rooted in their cultures, which are in turn anchored to specific territories, immigration and cultural mixing compromise this order and lead to 'wars between cultures' and a gloomy scenario of alternating cultural invasions and cultural extinctions. We see here a politics of fear that stokes anxieties about an Islamic invasion (Wodak, 2015; de Koning and Modest, 2017).

But the CoHERE interviews also display what Markha Valenta (2011) calls a 'politics of bad memories', erasing cultural change and exchange as well as migration and global connections from the history of Europe. For Valenta, this politics generates a public memory of shocking change whereby people with irreconcilable values and civilizational 'others' disrupt an imaginary stable sociality of rooted, homogeneous communities of mutuality. But 'this yearning for the old pre-immigrant Europe is a yearning for a Europe that never existed: a Europe disentangled and distinct from the rest of the world', for Europe was made through its 'extra-European' entanglements, at the very least from colonialism and imperialism onwards. As noted earlier, appealing to colonial nostalgia – what Paul Gilroy (2004) calls 'postcolonial melancholia' – is common in some populist discourse. Here it is reflected in the interviewees' responses when they refer to something that no longer exists, rather than to something that has never existed:

> This European culture is disappearing. It doesn't exist anymore; it's composed of national cultures opposing each other.
> (Male, 54, executive in industry, Romorantin-Lanthenay)

Culture and heritage here become human nature and are fixed in place. All the interviewed supporters emphasize a strong perception of essentialized cultural differences, understood not so much as biological but as fundamental and essentially unchangeable (and thus almost biologized) traits. National and regional cultures (often associated with religions) are facts of a person's life and radically different from each other. Muslims are not part of France or Europe because they are alien to French and European culture and history. The assumption is

one of a strict isomorphism nation/Europe-culture-territory that alone can guarantee social harmony. Fascist GD supporters make this point clear:

> The Homeland-Religion-Family ideal is falling apart, and I do not want it to collapse. I want the Greek to be a Greek.
>
> (Male, 39, cafe owner, Nafplio)

> Greece should accept immigrants, but under some conditions, with rules, like in the rest of Europe. It will not become Europe's dump. Greeks first and then others.
>
> (Male, 63, dentist, Agia Triada)

These statements are based on a menacing fantasy: the presence of non-Greeks and cultural 'others' on Greek soil endangers the particular 'homeland-religion-family' set-up that makes a Greek, a Greek (in Greece).[5] At the heart of nationalism is the idea of the primordial existence of the nation 'whose "peculiar character" is . . . constituted by cultural factors such as language or historical awareness' (Leerssen, 2006: 560). According to nationalist logic, a nation is a nation because of its distinctive culture and heritage (Handler, 1985). But the twin ideas of the primordial existence of the nation and of homogeneous national cultures rooted in place are an invention, a fiction, generated by a multitude of sites, institutions, discourses, and practices (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). The very discipline dedicated to the study of culture, anthropology, has critiqued since at least the 1980s this notion of bounded, territorialized cultures and unchanging systems of beliefs, values, and practices (e.g. Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Cultures and heritages are not neat locations on a map. Consequently, supporters easily slip between national and European sets of values and ways of life.

Several NF and AfD voters embrace their party's cues and express concern about European cultural decline. In many cases, the presence of Muslims and immigrants is identified as a national danger. Dutch respondents are highly critical of what some call a 'forced melting pot' imposed by the EU through its 'bad' policies and regulations. The Dutch interviewees come out as the most nationalist and xenophobic of all, declaring that many or even most refugees are only 'pretending to be refugees' to benefit from Dutch welfare. They stress the need to protect Dutch people and the Dutch nation, and they reject multiculturalism as a way to preserve 'the nation's cultural core'. The latter is a fiction that is supported by many non-populists as well. Significantly, the (liberal) Dutch prime minister, at the time of these interviews, had bragged about 'Dutch norms and values' during the electoral campaign in an open letter telling those who do not respect Dutch customs and criticize Dutch values to leave the country (Henley, 2017).

Like the Dutch respondents, the German populist supporters reject a multicultural Germany. But they specifically highlight the incompatibility of Muslim

and Christian religious traditions and social norms according to a logic that leads many of them to the conclusion that integration is impossible. For many French interviewees, immigrants' 'assimilation' into French society is better than multiculturalism and a much-demonized 'communitarisme', but it is essentially doomed to fail. A German AfD supporter goes back to the 'origins of Europe' to draw a lesson for the present about the dangers of muddling this order of discreet, territorialized cultures and heritages:

> With the ancient Rome, we had a European heritage. But you already know why the old Rome had fallen, right? Because all the politicians were corrupt and because everything was multicultural there. That is why you can see striking parallels to today, and if you do so, you should pay attention at all costs, right?
>
> (Male, 42, unemployed, Dresden)

Several French Le Pen supporters viewed things similarly. For one, mixing cultures is a 'bad cooking recipe' as it is 'absurd' to expect that doing so would produce something good;[6] for another, 'vivre-ensemble is a total illusion, a kind of stick, and they slap us with that from the morning to the night, and make us accept a situation which does not run and which had never run'.[7] Mixing does not work because cultures are unchangeable, with very deep roots in a specific territory and the past, and incommensurable with each other.

A heritage both religious and secular: Islam as the non-European

In Pegida's discourse, the signifier 'European' largely overlaps with 'Western', but it essentially refers to no more than 'non-Islamic'. In this logic, Europeans should unify against the threat of an Islamization which, if implemented, would mean the death of Europe and its values. Europe's common heritage is explicitly Christian, at times Judeo–Christian, as a German AfD supporter explained:

> The foundations for our European heritage were laid in ancient Athens and Jerusalem. We are Christian-Jewish and have our roots in the Roman Empire. Our roots also lie in scholasticism, for example, Thomas von Aquin. The Enlightenment is, of course, also crucial to the European heritage, just like the Reformation of the European-Western world. All in all, the civilising draft of a Western European civilisation began long before our time.
>
> (Female, 67, retired, Dresden)

This is a positive, celebratory narrative. The 'tripod' (ancient Greek democracy + Roman legal tradition + Christianity) that, per Vasilopoulou (2017), grounds the far right's civilizational definition of Europe, combines here with a

celebration of the source of liberal values (the Enlightenment) and colonial nostalgia. This complex statement, which resonates with other interviewees' narratives, encapsulates the crucial features of the populist idea of European heritage. Here, evoking a '(Western) European civilization', implicitly understood as superior to others, goes together with a form of 'postcolonial melancholia' (Gilroy, 2004) reminiscent of the 'civilizing mission' and the old colonial 'grandeur' – a discourse which of course erases the massive violence of colonialism and its enduring, pernicious effects in the present (Stoler, 2011, 2016). But colonialism is not the only murderous past of Europe that is erased from this narrative. So too is the Holocaust – what many well beyond the EU agree is the very foundation of a common European memory. Indeed, as Adorno and others have shown, celebrating 'the civilizing draft' of Western European civilization is only possible if one 'forgets' its barbarism (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

Interviewees' narratives are rife with tensions and contradictions. First, these are supporters of parties with (not too distant) illiberal roots and even fascist histories of antisemitism, yet they champion liberal values and even forms of 'philo-Semitism' (Brubaker, 2017). Second, their emphasis on religion (primarily Christianity but also, here, Judaism) as the source of core European values clashes with their celebration of Europe's *laïcité* and Enlightenment secularism. These contradictions, however, serve an important ideological role in right-wing populist discourse: if a liberal philo-Semitism enables populists to protect themselves from defaming accusations of racism (which in Europe tends to be associated exclusively with the Nazi past), their embrace of secularism marks their distance from an Islam deemed irredeemably illiberal in the negative sense.

These contradictions begin to make sense if one considers them in light of right-wing populists' distorted perception of Islam. What strengthens the European bond in populists' eyes is what they identify as Europe's most dangerous enemy: Islam's radical otherness. A German AfD supporter underscores this: 'We have a European culture because we are all more similar to each other than for example to Arabs or Turks. . . . This wave of asylums is a threat to our European heritage'. This is a very good example of what David Theo Goldberg (2006) has called 'racial Europeanization' or the racial 'contouring' of Europeanness which today sees a 'shift in Europe's dominant fixation of concern and resentment from the figure of "the Black" (and prior to World War II that of "the Jew") to that of "the Muslim"' (349).

This is a reactionary mobilization of Europeanness – reactionary because it is a response to the perceived invasion of cultural 'aliens' that makes Europeans unify and rediscover or reinvent their commonalities. It is also a very good example of the essentialist notion of separate civilizational heritages as unchangeable sets of cultural traits, traditions, and values rooted in a deep-seated history, which undergirds much right-wing populist discourse as well as more widespread forms of cultural racism (Lentin and Titley, 2011). One of the

features of today's 'new racism' is precisely its own denial (e.g. Goldberg, 2015), the staunch refusal to admit the durability of institutions of the past in the present, of long-standing hierarchies of cultural worth and their differential impact on people's lives and very life chances (Stoler, 2016; Wekker, 2016). Many populists (and non-populists) today deny being racist but admit strong ideas of cultural difference and incommensurability. 'It's about culture, not race' is the argument. But for many, 'culture' is a code word for race as it has the power to solidify the fluid fact of cultural difference. Heritage plays a role in this dynamic, for it renders culture as deep rooted and thus immutable. A (political) community is its culture, its way of life, its traditions, its heritage. And the gist of the argument of this new racism is that immigrants and refugees, particularly Muslims, as cultural others and radically alien to both national and European heritage, threaten to destroy the homogeneity of such 'civilization'.

As our interview analysis demonstrates, populist right-wing forces uphold an essentialized notion of European heritage that tends to go overlooked in political science analyses. That a fiery nationalism and a focus on national traditions, norms, and values coexists with a sense of Europeanness and a shared European civilization in the discourse of the new populist right (itself remarkably transnational) is a paradox that deserves more scholarly attention. This broader sense of cultural identity resonates with Samuel Huntington's idea that the world is divided into different civilizations, marked by different cultures and religions, which clash with each other as the main source of today's conflict (Huntington, 1993) – ideas that have become tremendously influential well beyond scholarly circles after 9/11 and the war on terror. For Huntington, Western civilization includes the US and Canada but not the Balkans and Greece, which are part of the Orthodox world, and is engaged in a major conflict with the world of Islam. Unsurprisingly, our interviewees distinguish the 'Eastern' and 'Slavic' countries as a separate bloc and refer to a Christian (sometimes a Judeo-Christian) civilization as the shared heritage of Europe.

To sum up, our interviews show a number of tensions in populist supporters' notion of heritage, which emerges as an important category in people's personal and political lives. Heritage gives depth, roots, and continuity to today's cultures and identities. If 'Europe' is a Europe of nations (like the name of the populists' group at the European Parliament), right-wing populists espouse a sense of civilizational Europeanness and of European heritage, which is however fuzzily defined by its radical otherness from Islam – both secular (in the tradition of the Enlightenment) and Christian at the same time.

The problem(s) with European heritage

The populists in our sample mostly rule out the existence, let alone the desiderability, of a European culture, yet many of them refer to a common European heritage. Their narratives articulate a form of civilizational Europeanism grounded in ideas of a shared civilizational pool and shared histories, which

translate into shared values. These are radically different, incommensurable with those of other civilizations, particularly with regards to religion. Populists deftly combine this belief in a shared cultural foundation with a strong sense of a diversity of discreet European cultures – national and sometimes regional. Northern European interviewees doubt whether Eastern and, at times, Southern Europe are truly part of European civilization. While even the Southern European interviewees in our sample feel forcibly excluded from it, for certain there is no space for non-Europeans, however defined. Despite being riddled with such tensions and contradictions (for instance, where are the borders of such civilizational Europe?), this brand of Europeanism exudes colonial nostalgia and a sense of European superiority; however, this is perceived as being currently under mortal attack by other civilizations.

Our findings show that embracing Europeanism does not at all rule out embracing vicious nationalism and forms of cultural fundamentalism and cultural racism. Even more troubling is the long shadow this populist European discourse casts on EU cultural policies themselves. These findings indicate that, despite multiple European crises, Europe is increasingly imagined as a diverse but essentially united cultural space, a bounded culture-based community, which is racialized in subtle ways and therefore excludes those who are 'in' Europe but not considered 'of' it (Balibar, 2004). EU policymakers as well as scholars working in EU-funded projects like CoHERE, who both study and produce European memory and heritage, are often unintentionally involved in the very processes of racialization that we criticize. While both policymakers and intellectuals like Derrida have long celebrated the progressive, inclusive, 'post-national' qualities of European memory and heritage, as opposed to national and nationalistic ones, 'actually existing' constructions of European heritage often depart substantially from such post-national visions. In fact (some) EU cultural policy indirectly reinstates asymmetric us/them distinctions that it was originally meant to supersede.

The populist Europeanism we have analyzed in this chapter points to key pitfalls of widely circulated constructions of European heritage. The first problem is the fiction of the closure of culture and heritage by territory and the naturalization of a normative isomorphism nation/Europe-culture-territory, which erases the reality of multiculture and turns cultural diversity into a matter of national differences. The EU's motto of 'unity in diversity' is often interpreted in this way. A good example is the inaugural exhibition *It's Our History!* of the first museum of Europe in Brussels, which centres on the video testimonies of contemporary European citizens narrating their own life stories. Chosen for their nationality (one individual with one testimony per EU member state), these Europeans are all white and do not show any sign of religious or other, non-national diversity.

The (lack of) diversity of this allegedly representative sample of Europeans then exposes the second major problem of these kinds of Europeanism – that

is, the lurking risk of constructing European heritage as Christian and, subtly, white. For Yildiz et al. (2016), 'the overtly racist outrages of neo-fascist/far-right populisms merely make explicit and blunt the delicate matter of the inextricability of *any* Europeanism from the propagation of "European"-ness as a formation of racial whiteness, even as it emphatically dissimulates race in favour of ostensibly "cultural" or "civilizational" constructions of difference' (see also de Genova, 2018). Contemporary dominant narratives of Europeanness tend to obscure the long, tentacular history of colonial domination and the ways in which these global entanglements have forged Europe's past and present. In so doing, they produce fictional reconstructions of European history as an 'insular and hermetically-sealed affair' (Yildiz et al., 2016), as illustrated by the new major Brussels museum of Europe, the European Parliament's House of European History, which devotes to colonialism only a small section of its nineteenth-century gallery. What do we do with this idea of 'European heritage' that is so ambiguous – both potentially open-ended, inclusive, even emancipatory and, on the opposite end, tinted with cultural racism?

Acknowledgement

Notes

1 Less than ten years old, the Five Star Movement purports to have overcome the traditional left-right divide by bringing together traditional themes, stances, and policies of both the left and the right, from the defence of the commons to the opposition to migration, into a heterogeneous mix – all under the sign of a celebration of e-democracy. The Five Star Movement then is an outlier in ideological terms, not defining itself as right wing like the other parties of the CoHERE sample.
2 This is an extremely popular phrase – common sense – since it was mentioned almost verbatim by a considerable number of Greek interviewees.
3 These are the quotes: 'Stop sending money to European countries which will never pay them back, like Greece or Italy and Portugal, in the future. This is lost money that should be spent in our own society' (Female, 54, housewife, Rotterdam). Or 'Cooperation is good but only with some countries like Germany and Belgium, our main economic partners. We don't need Italy and Greece' (Male, 56, unemployed, Rotterdam).
4 Interestingly, New Right thinkers like de Benoist are anticolonialist and anti-imperialist because they see the direct connection between colonialism/imperialism and migration, which is a long-term consequence of it (de Benoist, 1999; de Benoist and Champetier, 2012; Spektorowski, 2003).
5 Unlike the Germans and the French, the Greek respondents did not specifically mention Islam as a threat but emphasized migrants as triggering negative cultural dynamics.
6 Male, 44, local civil servant, Toulon.
7 Male, 65, retired, Grenoble.

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