

ARTICLE

Collective nostalgia: Triggers and consequences for collective action intentions

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Abstract

Global trends surveys suggest that collective nostalgia for one's country is widespread. Moreover, research indicates that collective nostalgia is used by populist radical-right parties to mobilize their voters against immigration. We focused on antecedents of collective nostalgia and its consequences for collective action in the context of national identity. In particular, we hypothesized that collective nostalgia for the country's past is triggered by a sense of collective discontinuity and subsequently engenders collective action intentions to protect the national ingroup and limit the presence of immigrant outgroups. We tested this hypothesis in a three-wave longitudinal cross-lagged panel study ($N = 1489$) among native Dutch majority members. The results were consistent with the hypothesis. The findings highlight the relevance of collective nostalgia as an emotional response to collective discontinuity that drives collective action intentions aimed at protecting ingroup continuity. We discuss implications of the findings for the literature on collective nostalgia and group dynamics as well as the broader literature on collective action and provide directions for future research.

KEYWORDS

collective action, collective nostalgia, immigration, national identity, self-continuity

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BACKGROUND

In many Western societies, public and political debates on national identity and immigration have become deeply nostalgic. Populist far-right parties, such as the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands and the National Rally in France, which are represented in parliament, claim that the growing ethno-cultural and religious diversity of Western societies causes native majority members to no longer feel at home in their own countries. These parties argue that ‘we’ should protect the continuity of the nation by going back to a time when it was ‘just us’ (Duyvendak, 2011; Hochschild, 2018; Mols & Jetten, 2014). Global trend surveys confirm that many people feel like ‘strangers in their own land’ or left behind by the progress and changes happening in their country (Ipsos, 2020, 2021). Such threatening changes in relation to one’s country and national identity may trigger collective nostalgia for ‘the good old days of the country’, as holding on to the past can help people to maintain or restore collective continuity (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015). Indeed, collective nostalgia is widespread in the West: In most countries, more than 50% of the population longs for the way their country was in the past (Ipsos, 2020, 2021).

Social psychologists have extensively studied personal nostalgia—a sentimental longing for one’s unique individual past (Routledge, 2015; Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2020, 2022a). However, only recently have they begun to examine collective nostalgia—a sentimental longing for objects, periods or events from a past shared with fellow group members or compatriots—and its consequences for group processes and intergroup relations (Cheung et al., 2017; Smeekes et al., 2018; Wildschut et al., 2014; Wohl et al., 2020). This latter body of work is largely inspired by intergroup emotions theory (Mackie et al., 2009), which posits that, in addition to personal emotions, people can experience emotions on the basis of their social identity. Whereas personal nostalgia concerns a longing for ‘the way I was’, collective nostalgia concerns a longing for ‘the way we were’.

Literature has established that personal and collective nostalgia are empirically distinct and that collective nostalgia is particularly relevant for understanding group processes and intergroup relations (Smeekes et al., 2015; Wildschut et al., 2014). Although collective nostalgia often engenders favourable attitudes and behaviours towards the ingroup (Cheung et al., 2017; Wildschut et al., 2014), it can beget prejudice against outgroups in the context of national identity and immigration (Smeekes et al., 2015, 2018). Furthermore, collective nostalgia has become a new master-frame of populist radical-right wing parties and explains, in part, why people support these parties and their anti-immigrant agendas (Elçi, 2022; Smeekes et al., 2021; Wildschut et al., 2021).

However, little work has focused on antecedents of collective nostalgia and its consequences for collective action in the context of national identity and immigration in Western societies. Researchers have proposed (Davis, 1979; Sedikides, Wildschut, Gaertner, et al., 2008) and illustrated (Kim & Wohl, 2015; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015) that a potent trigger of personal nostalgia is self-discontinuity (i.e. a sense of disruption between one’s past and present selves), but it is unclear whether this phenomenon applies to collective nostalgia and collective discontinuity in relation to national identity (i.e. a sense of disruption between one’s past and present national identity). Moreover, whereas there is some cross-sectional evidence that collective nostalgia is positively related to collective action tendencies that favour the ingroup (Cheung et al., 2017), the direction of this relation has not been tested in the context of national identity. Finally, it is unknown whether and how collective nostalgia on the basis of national identity gives rise to collective action intentions towards immigrant outgroups.

We examined in this article whether collective nostalgia for one’s country is triggered by collective discontinuity and subsequently spurs collective action intentions to protect the national ingroup and reject immigrant outgroups. We relied on a three-wave longitudinal dataset that included a representative sample of native Dutch adults.

Collective discontinuity as a trigger of collective nostalgia

Self-continuity, a sense of connection between one's past and present self, is a psychological need (Vignoles, 2011; Vignoles et al., 2006) that applies both to personal and social identity (Vignoles, 2011). In the latter case, people need to feel that their ingroups have continuity over time (i.e. collective continuity; Sani et al., 2007). Collective continuity is a key reason for why people identify with their ingroup and is related to higher social well-being, security and self-esteem (Sani et al., 2007, 2008, 2009; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015).

Given that self-continuity is a psychological need, experiencing a disruption in self-continuity is aversive. In the social psychological literature, self-discontinuity is defined as the sense of a disruption between one's past and present self as a consequence of change (Kung et al., 2016). Collective discontinuity can thus be seen as a threat to group identity whereby people feel that their enduring essence of identity is weakening as a consequence of social change (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014a, 2014b). Personal nostalgia can function as an emotional coping mechanism in response to threats to self-continuity (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022b). Furthermore, emotional coping is effective not only against threats to one's individual circumstances, but also against threat to the group or society (Ojala, 2012). Hence, holding on to the collective past may be a way in which members cope with perceived discontinuity of their group identity.

This reasoning is in line with intergroup emotions theory (Mackie et al., 2009), which proposes that people can experience collective emotions when they think of themselves as members of a certain group or society. The perception of a disruption in the continuity of one's country will likely make one's national identity salient and subsequently elicit collective nostalgia for the past of one's country. Indeed, cross-sectional evidence indicated that anxiety about the future of one's country (i.e. collective angst) was positively associated with collective nostalgia in 22 countries (Smeekes et al., 2018). Accordingly, we hypothesized that collective discontinuity in the context of one's national identity triggers collective nostalgia.

Collective nostalgia and collective action tendencies towards the ingroup and outgroups

Intergroup emotions theory proposes that the function of collective emotions is to regulate attitudes and behaviours directed at one's group (ingroup) as well as those directed at other groups (outgroups; Mackie et al., 2009). In addition, the theory posits that the way in which collective emotions influence attitudes and behaviours depends on the particular function of an emotion. Personal and collective nostalgia serve a restorative function: They help people to maintain personal or group continuity when the relevant need is undermined (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019; Smeekes et al., 2018). Nostalgizing for the positively remembered aspects of one's past clarifies which aspects of one's self or identity are valued and should be maintained (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022b). For groups, in particular, such a renewed sense of social identity based on shared past experiences increases awareness of the values and traditions that bind members together and so should be protected (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015). It is therefore likely that collective nostalgia conduces to collective action intentions aimed at safeguarding collective continuity.

Consistent with this possibility, a cross-sectional study during the 2014 Hong Kong Umbrella Movement indicated that collective nostalgia was positively related to actions (e.g. hanging slogans, occupation) intended to support the ingroup (Cheung et al., 2017). Moreover, studies have shown that collective nostalgia is related to ingroup-favouring behavioural intentions (e.g. volunteering for the ingroup, preferring ingroup consumer products; Dimitriadou et al., 2019; Wildschut et al., 2014). In the context of national identity, ingroup-favouring collective action intentions that follow from collective nostalgia are likely to take the form of wanting to protect the continuity of cultural customs and traditions of the national ingroup. The notion that collective nostalgia shapes collective action intentions

by providing information about what it means to be a group member fits with recent extensions of the social identity model of collective action, which advocates that identity content is particularly relevant for expanding the social psychology of collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2018).

Although collective nostalgia can clarify what constitutes 'our' unique group identity, it also marks group boundaries by rendering salient differences between the ingroup and relevant outgroups. Qualitative research in an organizational setting (Milligan, 2003) suggests that collective nostalgia triggered by collective discontinuity is associated with delineating differences between employees who were part of the positively remembered past ('old-timers') versus those who were not ('newcomers'). Similarly, research in the context of national identity and immigration in the Netherlands has demonstrated that collective nostalgia contributed to exclusionary understandings of national identity based on the past, marking differences between the original native majority members of the country and immigrant newcomers (Smeekes, 2015; Smeekes et al., 2015). In both of these contexts, nostalgizing for a positively remembered past shared with fellow group members rendered the 'old-timer' social identity salient, highlighting differences from outgroups that were not part of this past and helping ingroup members to maintain ingroup continuity. These findings are in line with self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), which proposes that people tend to define themselves in terms of their social category membership (rather than as individuals) when their social identity is salient and tend to use ingroup prototypes to mark group boundaries. The social categorization between 'us'—the original inhabitants of the country—and 'them'—immigrants that have arrived later from elsewhere—that may stem from collective nostalgia for the country is related to anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attitudes (Smeekes, 2015; Smeekes et al., 2015, 2021). Moreover, collective nostalgia is linked to anti-immigration attitudes cross-culturally (Smeekes et al., 2018).

Being a collective emotion, it is likely that collective nostalgia regulates not only attitudes but also collective action intentions towards outgroups. In the context of national identity and immigration, we propose that collective nostalgia conduces to collective action intentions to reject immigrant outgroups. Collective action intentions aimed at limiting the presence of immigrants in the country may help national ingroup members to maintain continuity of their 'old-timer' national identity.

Overview

We tested the hypothesis that collective nostalgia is triggered by perceived collective discontinuity, and subsequently conduces to ingroup protecting and outgroup-rejecting collective action intentions. In doing so, we carried out a three-wave panel study among a representative sample of native Dutch adults. We focused on collective nostalgia and collective discontinuity in relation to national identity among native majority members in the Netherlands. This national context is relevant, because many native Dutch feel that their country and its identity are changing too fast (Van Houwelingen, 2019), and a considerable share of the Dutch population (37%) longs for the way their country used to be (Ipsos, 2020). Moreover, the country has witnessed the increasing electoral success of populist radical-right parties, which often appeal to collective nostalgia in an attempt to mobilize their voters for their protectionist and xenophobic agendas (Mols & Jetten, 2014; Smeekes et al., 2021).

METHOD

Participants

Our data were collected via the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel, administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). This panel consists of 5000 households, comprising 7000 individuals, who complete 15–30 min online questionnaires once a month for payment. The panel is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population

register of Statistics Netherlands, including households without Internet access (which are provided with computer and Internet connection). We were offered the opportunity to collect the first two data waves with a 5-month interval (Sedikides et al., *in press*), free of charge via a competitive round of research proposals organized by Open Data Infrastructure for Social Science and Economic Innovations.¹ In particular, Waves 1 and 2 were collected in March 2019 and July 2019, respectively. Wave 3 (for which the authors submitted a new research proposal) was collected in December 2020—16 months after Wave 2.

We needed sufficient power to estimate a complex structural equation model with latent variables involving many parameters. We thus aimed for 2000 native Dutch majority members. CentERdata approached 2497 household members to take part in our survey. For Wave 1 (T1), attrition was 563 (22.5%) resulting in $N = 1934$. Of these participants, 1918 were approached to take part in Wave 2 (T2), for which attrition was 224 (11.7%) resulting in $N = 1694$. For Wave 3 (T3), 1594 panel members who took part in T2 were approached; here, attrition was 105 (6.6%) resulting in $N = 1489$. The loss of participants after T1 was due to two reasons. First, 116 (6.0%) participants were not selected by the LISS panel for a follow-up wave. Second, 329 participants (17.0%) dropped out.² In total, 1489 participants—our final sample—completed all three waves.

The characteristics of this sample closely matched those of the native Dutch adult population. The sample consisted of 51.1% men and 48.9% women. Age ranged between 16 and 95 years ($M = 55.59$, $SD = 17.14$). Of participants, 7.2% completed primary education, 44.9% completed a lower level of secondary (22.4%) or tertiary (22.5%) education, 47.9% completed a higher level of secondary (10.7%) or tertiary (37.2%; higher applied or university) education, and 0.4% did not report their educational level.

Measures

Collective discontinuity

We assessed this variable with the following three items that we constructed for the purposes of this study: ‘Dutch identity is no longer what it used to be in the past’, ‘Throughout history, the Dutch culture has undergone a lot of changes’, ‘Many Dutch traditions have been lost over time’ (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha_{T1} = .79$, $\alpha_{T2} = .78$, $\alpha_{T3} = .79$).

Collective nostalgia

We assessed this variable with four items that we adapted from Cheung et al. (2017) and Smeekes et al. (2015). Participants indicated the extent to which, while thinking about their country, they were ‘nostalgic about the way Dutch people were in the past’, ‘nostalgic about the values that Dutch people had in the past’, ‘nostalgic about the good old days of the Dutch’, and ‘nostalgic about the sort of place The Netherlands was before’ (1 = *never*, 5 = *to a great extent*; $\alpha_{T1} = .93$, $\alpha_{T2} = .93$, $\alpha_{T3} = .94$).

¹The measures of collective nostalgia, personal nostalgia and control variables of Wave 1 have been used in a previous publication (Sedikides et al., *in press*), which addressed collective nostalgia as a predictor of populist radical-right voting.

²We examined differences in the mean scores of the key variables at T1 between participants who stayed at T2/T3 and those who dropped out or were unselected for a follow-up wave at T2/T3. There were no differences between those who stayed and dropped out at T2/T3 on (a) T1 collective discontinuity: T2: $t(1928) = -0.986$, $p = .324$; T3: $t(1928) = -1.246$, $p = .532$, (b) ingroup protection: T2: $t(1921) = 0.729$, $p = .466$; T3: $t(1921) = -0.199$, $p = .842$, or (c) outgroup rejection: T2: $t(1920) = 1.077$, $p = .281$; T3: $t(1920) = 0.918$, $p = .359$. Also, whereas there was no difference on the T1 measure of collective nostalgia between those who stayed and dropped out at T2, $t(1927) = -1.254$, $p = .210$, there was a difference between those who stayed after T2 and dropped out at T3, $t(1927) = -2.607$, $p = .009$. Thus, participants who no longer took part in the study after T2 had somewhat lower mean scores on T1 collective nostalgia ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.93$) than those who stayed at T3 ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.92$). However, this mean difference is small ($M_{diff} = 0.13$) and hence unlikely to have influenced the results.

Ingroup protection

We assessed this variable by relying on established measures of collective action intentions (Górska et al., 2020; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Participants indicated their willingness to engage in each of the following actions to protect original Dutch customs and traditions: (1) send an email of protest to the government, (2) participate in a demonstration, (3) help organize a petition, (4) donate money to the cause (1 = *very unwilling*, 7 = *very willing*; $\alpha_{T1} = .90$, $\alpha_{T2} = .91$, $\alpha_{T3} = .89$).

Outgroup rejection

We mirrored the assessment of this variable to that of ingroup protection. Participants indicated their willingness to engage in the same four actions described above, but now in relation to limiting immigration to the Netherlands (1 = *very unwilling*, 7 = *very willing*; $\alpha_{T1} = .93$, $\alpha_{T2} = .94$, $\alpha_{T3} = .93$).

Control variables

We controlled for personal nostalgia at T1, assessed with the Southampton Nostalgia Scale (Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, Hepper, & Zhou, 2015), in an effort to establish the discriminant validity of collective nostalgia. The Southampton Nostalgia Scale ($\alpha_{T1} = .95$) consists of seven items. Three of them refer to whether participants find nostalgia important, significant, or valuable (e.g. 'How important is nostalgia for you?'; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), and four refer to nostalgia proneness (e.g. 'How prone are you to feeling nostalgic?'; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) or frequency of nostalgic engagement (e.g. 'Generally speaking, how often do you bring to mind nostalgic experiences?'; 1 = *very rarely*, 7 = *very frequently*). We also controlled for highest attained educational level at T1 (1 = *primary education*, 6 = *university*), age at T1 (in years) and gender at T1 (1 = *male*, 0 = *female*), because these demographic characteristics have been associated in prior work with collective nostalgia for the country and negative attitudes towards immigrants in the Netherlands (Smeekees, 2015).

Data analytic strategy

We first derived descriptive statistics (i.e. means and correlations) in SPSS 25.0 and then proceeded to test our measurement and structural models using Mplus statistical software, version 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). In Mplus, we created latent variables for our four key constructs of interest at T1, T2 and T3 (collective discontinuity, collective nostalgia, ingroup protection and outgroup rejection) and for personal nostalgia at T1. We began by examining measurement invariance over time for the four key constructs through confirmatory factor analyses. For evaluating global model fit of our measurement models, we used root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA < .05), comparative fit index (CFI > .970) and standardized root mean residual (SRMR < .08).

We subsequently used structural equation modelling to estimate a cross-lagged panel model (Figure 1). This was the most suitable model for our purposes, given that we were interested in between-person variance (Orth et al., 2021). That is, we aimed to test whether participants who perceive higher (vs. lower) collective discontinuity experience a subsequent rank-order increase in collective nostalgia. Likewise, we aimed to test whether participants who experience higher (vs. lower) collective nostalgia report a subsequent rank-order increase in ingroup protection and outgroup rejection. We therefore estimated the cross-lagged paths (1) between the predictor (collective discontinuity) and the mediator (collective nostalgia), and (2) between the mediator and the outcomes (ingroup protection and outgroup rejection). We controlled for intra-individual changes by estimating paths representing the temporal stability of each key construct (e.g. collective nostalgia at Time 3 is predicted by collective nostalgia at Time

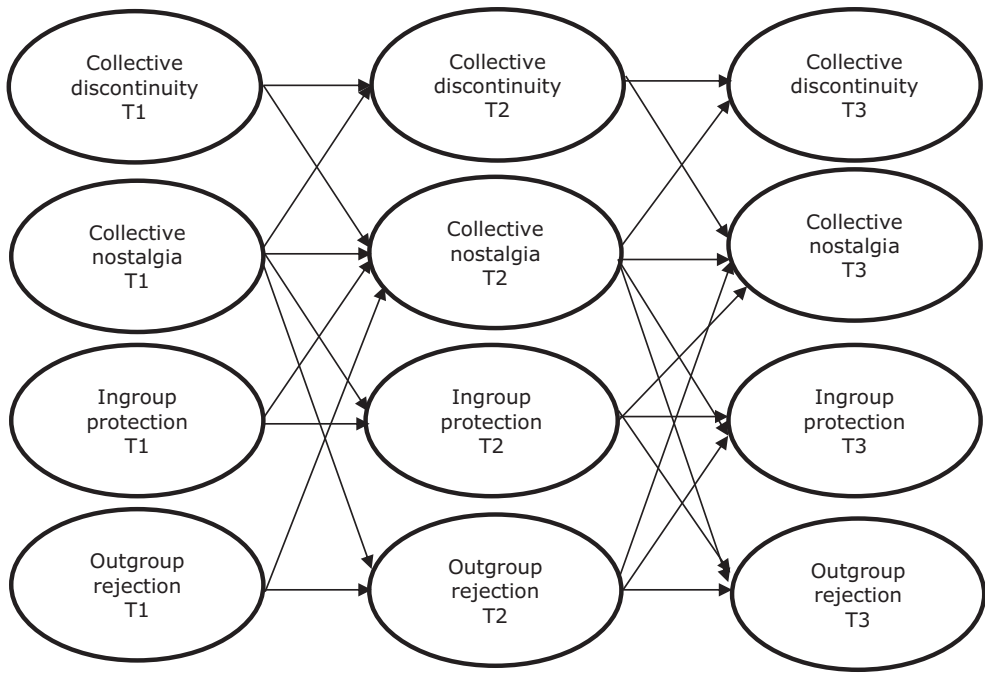


FIGURE 1 Cross-lagged panel model. *Note:* Cross-lagged paths are estimated between (a) collective discontinuity and collective nostalgia and (b) collective nostalgia and ingroup protection and outgroup rejection (controlling for personal nostalgia, education level, age and gender at T1, and controlling for correlations between latent variables within the same time point). To simplify, we do not show indicators of and correlations among latent variables

2, which is in turn predicted by collective nostalgia at Time 1). Moreover, we controlled for correlations among latent variables assessed at the same time point. We tested a model with and without control variables. In the former model, we controlled for personal nostalgia (latent variable), age, gender and education at T1 by adding paths between these variables and the latent variables for the key constructs at T2 and T3. We tested the indirect effects using bootstrapping with 1000 samples and 95% confidence intervals. The percentage of missing values within each wave did not exceed 1% for any of the variables, and we addressed the issue with Mplus using full information maximum likelihood estimation.

RESULTS

Descriptive results

We report in Table 1 the means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations between the key constructs across the three time points. Correlations among collective discontinuity, collective nostalgia, ingroup protection and outgroup rejection were significant and in the expected positive direction (Table 1). Overall, participants experienced high collective discontinuity, as a t-test against the scale midpoint indicated ($t_{T1}[1929] = 46.83, p < .001$; $t_{T2}[1690] = 45.72, p < .001$; $t_{T3}[1488] = 51.15, p < .001$). In general, participants reported somewhat low (i.e. below the scale midpoint) collective nostalgia at all time points ($t_{T1}[1928] = -12.12, p < .001$; $t_{T2}[1689] = -11.51, p < .001$; $t_{T3}[1488] = -6.694, p < .001$). At all time points, endorsement of ingroup protection ($t_{T1}[1922] = -41.47, p < .001$; $t_{T2}[1685] = -39.95, p < .001$; $t_{T3}[1483] = -41.33, p < .001$) and outgroup rejection ($t_{T1}[1922] = -50.85, p < .001$; $t_{W2}[1685] = -46.88, p < .001$; $t_{T3}[1483] = -45.29, p < .001$) was below the scale midpoint.

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations at T1, T2 and T3

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Collective discontinuity T1	5.17	1.09	–												
2. Collective nostalgia T1	2.75	0.92	.45 ^{***}	–											
3. Ingroup protection action T1	2.56	1.52	.12 ^{***}	.29 ^{***}	–										
4. Outgroup rejection T1	2.22	1.54	.23 ^{***}	.37 ^{***}	.70 ^{***}	–									
5. Collective discontinuity T2	5.16	1.04	.66 ^{***}	.40 ^{***}	.14 ^{***}	.25 ^{***}	–								
6. Collective nostalgia T2	2.75	0.91	.41 ^{***}	.72 ^{***}	.29 ^{***}	.37 ^{***}	.47 ^{***}	–							
7. Ingroup protection T2	2.52	1.52	.11 ^{**}	.26 ^{***}	.56 ^{***}	.51 ^{***}	.15 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	–						
8. Outgroup rejection	2.25	1.54	.19 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}	.49 ^{***}	.65 ^{***}	.26 ^{***}	.39 ^{***}	.74 ^{***}	–					
9. Collective discontinuity T3	5.32	0.99	.56 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.10 ^{***}	.22 ^{***}	.60 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.07 ^{**}	.20 ^{***}	–				
10. Collective nostalgia T3	2.84	0.94	.41 ^{***}	.68 ^{***}	.23 ^{***}	.33 ^{***}	.44 ^{***}	.70 ^{***}	.27 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.47 ^{***}	–			
11. Ingroup protection T3	2.41	1.49	.12 ^{***}	.19 ^{***}	.54 ^{***}	.45 ^{***}	.16 ^{***}	.23 ^{***}	.54 ^{***}	.50 ^{***}	.13 ^{***}	.26 ^{***}	–		
12. Outgroup rejection T3	2.17	1.56	.21 ^{***}	.28 ^{***}	.46 ^{***}	.61 ^{***}	.25 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}	.47 ^{***}	.62 ^{***}	.24 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.73 ^{***}	–	
13. Personal nostalgia T1	4.25	1.23	.18 ^{***}	.46 ^{***}	.20 ^{***}	.14 ^{***}	.16 ^{***}	.39 ^{***}	.16 ^{***}	.13 ^{***}	.17 ^{***}	.36 ^{***}	.09 ^{***}	.09 ^{***}	–
14. Education T1	3.70	1.53	-.14 ^{***}	-.26 ^{***}	-.06 ^{***}	-.14 ^{***}	-.16 ^{***}	-.26 ^{***}	-.07 ^{***}	-.16 ^{***}	-.15 ^{***}	-.27 ^{***}	-.03 ^{***}	-.12 ^{***}	-.00
15. Age T1	54.06	17.89	.17 ^{***}	.26 ^{***}	-.02 ^{***}	-.02 ^{***}	.12 ^{***}	.23 ^{***}	.01 ^{***}	-.02 ^{***}	.11 ^{***}	.19 ^{***}	-.05 ^{***}	-.01 ^{***}	.07 ^{***}
16. Gender T1	0.47	0.50	.041	.00	.00	.10	.06 ^{***}	.03	.09 ^{***}	.09 ^{***}	.08 ^{***}	.01	.13 ^{***}	.11 ^{***}	-.037

*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Measurement invariance over time

	Chi-square	df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI
Configural	3522.48	867	.045	.037	.943
Metric	3705.31	890	.046	.049	.939
Scalar	3816.82	912	.046	.050	.937

Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual.

Measurement invariance

We examined the measurement invariance of our key constructs over time through configural, metric and scalar invariance models. We tested a measurement model with latent variables representing our key constructs at T1, T2 and T3 (collective discontinuity, collective nostalgia, ingroup protection and outgroup rejection). We accounted for method effects of items in our measures of ingroup protection and outgroup rejection by allowing the error terms of constructs measured by the same action (i.e. send an email of protest to the government, participate in a demonstration, help organize a petition and donate money to the cause), within the same wave, to correlate in all models (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First, we tested an unconstrained model (i.e. configural invariance) and then constrained the loadings of the same latent constructs across the waves (i.e. metric invariance) and subsequently constrained both the loadings and intercepts to be invariant over time. All models showed an adequate fit to the data (Table 2), indicating measurement equivalence over time for our key constructs. Moreover, the configural model showed that all items had high standardized loadings on their corresponding constructs (Table 3). This result, together with the adequate fit of the configural model, indicates that our key constructs are reliable and empirically distinct.

Main results

We estimated the cross-lagged panel model, presented in Figure 1, with and without the inclusion of control variables. We report these results in Table 4. When participants perceived higher (vs. lower) collective discontinuity, they experienced a subsequent rank-order increase in collective nostalgia at later time points. This relation was not reciprocal: Individual differences in collective nostalgia were not associated with change in individual differences in collective discontinuity over time. The results are consistent with the hypothesis that collective discontinuity acts as a trigger of collective nostalgia. In addition, when participants experienced higher (vs. lower) collective nostalgia, they reported a subsequent rank-order increase in ingroup protection at later time points. Although there was a reciprocal effect from ingroup protection to collective nostalgia from T1 to T2, a Wald chi-square test indicated that this effect was significantly weaker than the T1 to T2 effect of collective nostalgia on ingroup protection ($\chi^2[1] = 14.342, p < .001$). Additionally, in the model that excluded the control variables, ingroup protection at T2 was linked to lower collective nostalgia at T3. Finally, when participants experienced higher (vs. lower) collective nostalgia, they reported a subsequent rank-order increase in outgroup rejection at later time points. Although there was a reciprocal effect from outgroup rejection to collective nostalgia from T2 to T3, a Wald chi-square test indicated that this latter effect was weaker than the T2 on T3 effect of collective nostalgia on outgroup rejection ($\chi^2[1] = 16.952, p < .001$). These results align with the hypothesis that collective nostalgia is conducive to more ingroup protection and outgroup rejection, and demonstrate that the influences of ingroup protection and outgroup rejection on collective nostalgia were more subtle and variable over time.

Next, we examined indirect effects (Table 4). We observed significant longitudinal indirect effects of collective discontinuity on both ingroup protection and outgroup rejection via collective nostalgia. When participants perceived higher (vs. lower) collective discontinuity at T1, they reported a rank-order

TABLE 3 Standardized factor loadings of configural model at T1, T2 and T3

	T1	T2	T3
Collective discontinuity			
1. Dutch identity is no longer what it used to be in the past	.759	.768	.748
2. Throughout history, the Dutch culture has undergone a lot of changes	.690	.672	.697
3. Many Dutch traditions have been lost over time.	.768	.782	.805
Collective Nostalgia			
<i>When thinking about the Netherlands, to what extent do you feel...</i>			
1. ...nostalgic about the way Dutch people were in the past	.841	.856	.868
2. ...nostalgic about the values that Dutch people had in the past	.844	.846	.846
3. ...nostalgic about the good old days of the Netherlands	.891	.890	.890
4. ...nostalgic about the sort of place the Netherlands was before	.913	.897	.897
Ingroup Protection			
<i>Willingness to engage in each of the following actions in order to protect original Dutch customs and traditions:</i>			
1. Send an email of protest to the government	.838	.860	.832
2. Participate in a demonstration	.865	.885	.860
3. Help organize a petition	.906	.918	.884
4. Donate money to the cause	.742	.737	.710
Outgroup Rejection			
<i>Willingness to engage in each of the following actions in order to limit immigration to the Netherlands:</i>			
1. Send an email of protest to the government	.898	.904	.895
2. Participate in a demonstration	.904	.919	.911
3. Help organize a petition	.938	.937	.920
4. Donate money to the cause	.799	.789	.806

increase in ingroup protection and outgroup rejection at T3, via a rank-order increase in collective nostalgia at T2.

Subsequently, we turned to the effects of the control variables in the cross-lagged panel model (Table 5). Personal nostalgia was unrelated to the dependent measures, had a variable relation with collective discontinuity and was consistently positively related to collective nostalgia, so participants who felt personally nostalgic were more likely to experience collective nostalgia. Education was negatively associated with collective nostalgia, outgroup rejection and collective discontinuity, but the last association was only significant at T2: Higher educated participants had weaker collective nostalgia, expressed lower support for outgroup rejection and manifested lower collective discontinuity. Age was positively related to collective nostalgia and negatively related to ingroup protection, but the latter association was only significant at T3: Older participants were more likely to experience collective nostalgia and less likely to express support for ingroup protection. Gender was positively related to ingroup protection and outgroup rejection, but the latter association was only significant at T3; Gender also had a significant positive relation with collective discontinuity at T2: Men were more likely than women to perceive collective discontinuity and support ingroup protection and outgroup rejection.

DISCUSSION

We hypothesized, on the basis of an integration of motivated identity construction theory (Vignoles, 2011), intergroup emotion theory (Mackie et al., 2009) and social categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987),

TABLE 4 Standardized estimates for the cross-lagged panel model

	With controls, β	Without controls, β
Cross-lagged effects		
Collective discontinuity → Collective nostalgia		
Time 2	.105 ^{***}	.110 ^{***}
Time 3	.118 ^{***}	.111 ^{***}
Collective nostalgia → Collective discontinuity		
Time 2	.057	.070 [*]
Time 3	-.047	-.007
Collective nostalgia → Ingroup protection		
Time 2	.132 ^{***}	.115 ^{***}
Time 3	.076 [*]	.052 [*]
Ingroup protection → Collective nostalgia		
Time 2	.069 [*]	.069 [*]
Time 3	-.054	-.067 [*]
Collective nostalgia → Outgroup rejection		
Time 2	.084 ^{**}	.086 ^{***}
Time 3	.146 ^{***}	.128 ^{***}
Outgroup rejection → Collective nostalgia		
Time 2	.027	.018
Time 3	.092 ^{**}	.092 [*]
Stability effects		
Collective discontinuity		
Time 2	.817 ^{***}	.809 ^{***}
Time 3	.790 ^{***}	.789 ^{***}
Collective nostalgia		
Time 2	.665 ^{***}	.713 ^{***}
Time 3	.626 ^{***}	.696 ^{***}
Ingroup protection		
Time 2	.623 ^{***}	.629 ^{***}
Time 3	.539 ^{***}	.555 ^{***}
Outgroup rejection		
Time 2	.690 ^{***}	.697 ^{***}
Time 3	.544 ^{***}	.554 ^{***}
Indirect effects	β, Confidence interval	β, Confidence interval
Collective discontinuity T1 → Ingroup protection T3 (via Collective nostalgia T2)	.008 [0.001, 0.018]	.008 [0.000, 0.015]
Collective discontinuity T1 → Outgroup rejection T3 (via Collective nostalgia T2)	.015 [0.007, 0.028]	.014 [0.006, 0.024]

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

that collective nostalgia is triggered by collective discontinuity and subsequently engenders collective action intentions to protect the ingroup and restrict threatening outgroups. We tested this hypothesis in the context of national identity and immigration, using cross-lagged structural equation panel modeling on a three-wave longitudinal dataset that involved a representative sample of native Dutch adults.

TABLE 5 Standardized estimates for the control variables in the cross-lagged panel model

Effect	β
Personal nostalgia T1 → Collective discontinuity	
Time 2	-.006
Time 3	.057*
Personal nostalgia T1 → Collective nostalgia	
Time 2	.060**
Time 3	.085***
Personal nostalgia T1 → Ingroup protection	
Time 2	-.021
Time 3	-.011
Personal nostalgia T1 → Outgroup rejection	
Time 2	.001
Time 3	-.039
Education T1 → Collective discontinuity	
Time 2	-.046*
Time 3	-.037
Education T1 → Collective nostalgia	
Time 2	-.079***
Time 3	-.071***
Education T1 → Ingroup protection	
Time 2	-.008
Time 3	-.002
Education T1 → Outgroup rejection	
Time 2	-.063**
Time 3	-.014
Age T1 → Collective discontinuity	
Time 2	-.014
Time 3	.024
Age T1 → Collective nostalgia	
Time 2	.045*
Time 3	.039*
Age T1 → Ingroup protection	
Time 2	-.013
Time 3	-.094***
Age T1 → Outgroup rejection	
Time 2	-.037
Time 3	-.035
Gender T1 → Collective discontinuity	
Time 2	.055*
Time 3	.027
Gender T1 → Collective nostalgia	
Time 2	.027
Time 3	-.028

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Effect	β
Gender T1 → Ingroup protection	
Time 2	.047*
Time 3	.086***
Gender T1 → Outgroup rejection	
Time 2	.036
Time 3	.059*

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

Results were consistent with the hypothesis. Individuals who experienced higher (vs. lower) collective discontinuity manifested an increase in collective nostalgia at later time points, but collective nostalgia was unassociated with collective discontinuity at later time points. In addition, individuals who experienced more (vs. less) collective nostalgia exhibited an increase in collective action intentions to protect the national ingroup at later time points. Although ingroup protection was also related to an increase in collective nostalgia from T1 to T2, this effect was weaker than the T1 to T2 effect of collective nostalgia on ingroup protection. Thus, whereas collective nostalgia and ingroup protection may mutually reinforce over time, the path from collective nostalgia to ingroup protectionism was stronger and more stable over time. Furthermore, individuals who experienced more (vs. less) collective nostalgia evinced an increase in collective action intentions to restrict the outgroup over time. Although outgroup rejection was also related to more collective nostalgia from T2 to T3, this effect was weaker than the T2 to T3 effect of collective nostalgia on outgroup rejection. Hence, similar to the findings for ingroup protection, whereas the paths between collective nostalgia and outgroup rejection may mutually reinforce over time, the path from collective nostalgia to outgroup rejection was stronger and more stable over time. Finally, individuals higher (than lower) on collective discontinuity reported an increase in ingroup protection and outgroup rejection over time via stronger collective nostalgia.

Implications

Our findings extend the nascent collective nostalgia literature. In particular, they highlight that, similar to personal nostalgia being triggered by self-discontinuity (Kim & Wohl, 2015; Sedikides et al., *in press*; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015), nostalgia for one's country constitutes a response to perceived discontinuities in one's national identity, so whereas personal nostalgia increases as a reaction to perceived discontinuity in one's individual self, collective nostalgia can increase as a reaction to perceived discontinuity in one's national identity, with the potential to restore it (Milligan, 2003; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019; Smeekes et al., 2018).

Although literature on collective nostalgia in the context of national identity and immigration has been concerned with demonstrating the emotion's relevance for understanding intragroup and intergroup attitudes (Smeekes et al., 2015, 2018; Wildschut et al., 2014; Wohl et al., 2020), our findings indicate that collective nostalgia for the nation also has the potential to shape collective action intentions towards the national ingroup and immigrant outgroups in ways that safeguard ingroup continuity. Prior work on the link between collective emotions and collective action has mainly focused on negatively valenced collective emotions, such as anger, fear, shame and guilt (Van Zomeren, 2016). We enrich this literature by showcasing the influential role of nostalgia as another, and mainly positively valenced (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019), collective emotion in driving collective action intentions. Furthermore, by providing support for the postulated link between collective nostalgia and collective action intentions, our results complement and extend recent research reporting cross-sectional evidence for the relation between collective nostalgia and ingroup-favouring collective action (Cheung et al., 2017).

Our results generalize beyond personal nostalgia, age, gender and educational level. Hence, in the context of national identity and immigration, it is collective (and not personal) nostalgia that conduces to collective action intentions and does so above and beyond assorted demographic characteristics.

Our findings have practical relevance. Research indicates that many people across the globe are disengaged from politics (Wike & Castillo, 2018). Our results underline the potential of collective nostalgia for the country to propel people into political action targeted at protecting their national identity. Collective nostalgia reinforced with collective action intentions to protect original national culture and limit immigration. However, the direction of collective action that follows from collective nostalgia is likely to depend on the emotion's specific content, that is the part of their shared past for which people nostalgize. Indeed, collective nostalgia for an open and tolerant national past is related to lower prejudice towards outgroups perceived as threatening (Stefaniak et al., 2021; Wohl et al., 2020). Hence, collective nostalgia for an open society may motivate forms of collective action that safeguard the continuity of a more inclusionary society. We encourage future work to address the association between different collective nostalgia contents and collective action.

Limitations and future directions

Our work had several limitations. To begin, we tested our hypothesis in a single national context and in relation to national identity, raising concerns as to whether our findings are replicable in other countries and for different identities. Given that previous research has documented the cross-cultural generality of the relation between collective nostalgia and ingroup-favouring as well as outgroup-rejecting attitudes (Dimitriadou et al., 2019; Smeekes et al., 2018; Wildschut et al., 2014), it is likely that a similar link exists between collective nostalgia and collective action intentions in other national contexts besides the Netherlands. Nevertheless, future research should continue the pursuit of cross-cultural tests including non-national settings, such as organizations or institutions.

Time intervals between the three data collection waves were uneven for practical reasons. T1 and T2 were 6 months apart, whereas T2 and T3 were 16 months apart. A common pitfall of uneven intervals in longitudinal studies is the potential to miss observing an effect, if the intervals are too short (for the effect to take place) or too long (with the effect fading away; Selig & Preacher, 2009). Although we found some differences in the cross-lagged effects from T1 to T2 compared with T2 to T3, the hypothesized longitudinal effects of collective discontinuity on collective nostalgia, and of collective nostalgia to ingroup protection and outgroup rejection, emerged across the waves. At the very least, we conclude that the documented effects can occur over temporally uneven intervals.

We used a cross-lagged panel model to test our proposed causal mediation model. First, the cross-lagged panel model that we employed does not distinguish within-person and between-person variance, which is considered a limitation by some authors (Hamaker et al., 2015). However, more recent research indicates that this is only a limitation when the goal is to examine within-person associations over time (Orth et al., 2021). When the goal is to examine between-person variance, which was the case in our study, the cross-lagged panel model is the preferred method, because it allows assessing the prospective effect of individual differences in the independent variable on changes in individual differences in dependent variables (Orth et al.). Second, scholars argue that longitudinal (mediation) models cannot unambiguously identify causal relations (because of potential confounders) and should therefore be supplemented with experiments to support causal inferences (Jose, 2016). Although we cannot rule out the possibility that extraneous variables might explain some of the observed relations, a model including control variables (i.e. gender, age and education) yielded similar results. Moreover, the demonstrated longitudinal effects of collective nostalgia on collective action intentions (ingroup protection and outgroup rejection) are consistent with previous experimental findings that collective nostalgia caused increased prejudice towards immigrants (Smeekes et al., 2015), ingroup strengthening behaviours (Wildschut et al., 2014) and ethnocentric product preferences (Dimitriadou et al., 2019). Nevertheless, we encourage future studies to further substantiate our proposed causal claims by

experimentally manipulating collective discontinuity and collective nostalgia and assessing their impact on collective action intentions.

We illustrated that, in the context of national identity, collective discontinuity predicts increased collective nostalgia over time. Future work could examine other (and related) triggers of collective nostalgia. For example, populist radical-right leaders often appeal to collective nostalgia by employing a rhetoric that combines threats to the continuity of national identity with notions of relative group deprivation. In this rhetoric, the country and its identity are portrayed as being on the brink of collapse as a consequence of malicious elites that have disadvantaged national majority groups over immigrant outgroups (Marchlewska et al., 2018; Mols & Jetten, 2014). Restoring the glorious days of the ethnically homogeneous nation is portrayed as one way in which these threats and disadvantages for national ingroup members can be addressed (Smeekes et al., 2021). Relative group deprivation is associated with support for populist radical-right parties and anti-immigrant prejudice (Anier et al., 2016; Marchlewska et al., 2018; Pettigrew et al., 2008). Future research could examine whether group relative deprivation might trigger support for populist radical-right parties and their anti-immigrant standpoints via collective nostalgia for the nation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We set out to test the hypothesis that, in the context of national identity and immigration, collective nostalgia is a response to collective discontinuity and conduces to collective action intentions to protect the ingroup and curtail immigration of outgroups. The results that emerged from our longitudinal cross-lagged panel study were consistent with this hypothesis. Our findings extend literatures on collective nostalgia and group dynamics as well as the broader literature on the relevance of collective emotions for collective action.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Anouk Smeekes: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; funding acquisition; investigation; methodology; project administration; writing – original draft. **Constantine Sedikides:** Conceptualization; data curation; funding acquisition; investigation; methodology; writing – review and editing. **Tim Wildschut:** Conceptualization; data curation; funding acquisition; investigation; methodology; writing – review and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

OPEN RESEARCH BADGES



This article has earned an Open Data badge for making publicly available the digitally-shareable data necessary to reproduce the reported results. The data is available at https://www.dataarchive.lissdata.nl/study_units/view/981.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available via the LISS panel data archive: https://www.dataarchive.lissdata.nl/study_units/view/981. The LISS Data Archive is free to browse. Before you can download data sets, you need to sign a statement.

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