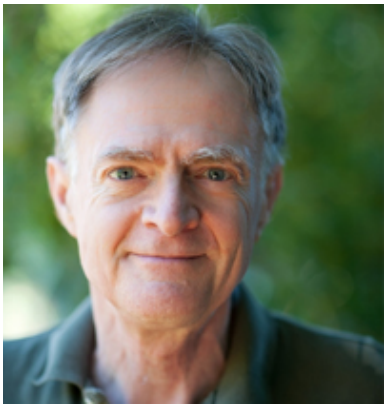
Why Artificial Intelligence Must Be Stopped Now



Richard Heinberg

03-21-204 ~ *The promise of AI is eclipsed by its perils, which include our own annihilation.*

Those advocating for artificial intelligence tout the huge benefits of using this technology. For instance, an article in CNN points out how AI is helping Princeton scientists solve "a key problem" with fusion energy. AI that can translate text to audio and audio to text is making information more accessible. Many digital tasks can be done faster using this technology.

However, any advantages that AI may promise are eclipsed by the cataclysmic dangers of this controversial new technology. Humanity has a narrow chance to stop a technological revolution whose unintended negative consequences will vastly outweigh any short-term benefits.

In the early 20th century, people (notably in the United States) could conceivably have stopped the proliferation of automobiles by focusing on improving public transit, thereby saving enormous amounts of energy, avoiding billions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions, and preventing the loss of more than 40,000 lives in car accidents each year in the U.S. alone. But we didn't do that.

In the mid-century, we might have been able to stave off the development of the atomic bomb and averted the apocalyptic dangers we now find ourselves in. We missed that opportunity, too. (New nukes are still being designed and built.)

In the late 20th century, regulations guided by the precautionary principle could have prevented the spread of toxic chemicals that now poison the entire planet. We failed in that instance as well.

Now we have one more chance.

With AI, humanity is outsourcing its executive control of nearly every key sector—finance, warfare, medicine, and agriculture—to algorithms with no moral capacity.

If you are wondering what could go wrong, the answer is plenty.

If it still exists, the window of opportunity for stopping AI will soon close. AI is being commercialized faster than other major technologies. Indeed, speed is its essence: It self-evolves through machine learning, with each iteration far outdistancing Moore's Law.

And because AI is being used to accelerate all things that have major impacts on the planet (manufacturing, transport, communication, and resource extraction), it is not only an uber-threat to the survival of humanity but also to all life on Earth.

AI Dangers Are Cascading

In June 2023, I wrote an article outlining some of AI's dangers. Now, that article is quaintly outdated. In just a brief period, AI has revealed more dangerous implications than many of us could have imagined.

In an article titled "DNAI—The Artificial Intelligence/Artificial Life Convergence," Jim Thomas reports on the prospects for "extreme genetic engineering" provided by AI. If artificial intelligence is good at generating text and images, it is also super-competent at reading and rearranging the letters of the genetic alphabet. Already, AI tech giant Nvidia has developed what Thomas calls "a first-pass ChatGPT for virus and microbe design," and applications for its use are being found throughout life sciences, including medicine, agriculture, and the development of bioweapons.

How would biosafety precautions for new synthetic organisms work, considering that the entire design system creating them is inscrutable? How can we adequately defend ourselves against the dangers of thousands of new AI-generated proteins when we are already doing an abysmal job of assessing the

dangers of new chemicals?

Research is advancing at warp speed, but oversight and regulation are moving at a snail's pace.

Threats to the financial system from AI are just beginning to be understood. In December 2023, the U.S. Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC), composed of leading regulators across the government, classified AI as an "emerging vulnerability."

Because AI acts as a "black box" that hides its internal operations, banks using it could find it harder "to assess the system's conceptual soundness." According to a CNN article, the FSOC regulators pointed out that AI "could produce and possibly mask biased or inaccurate results, [raising] worries about fair lending and other consumer protection issues." Could AI-driven stocks and bonds trading tank securities markets? We may not have to wait long to find out. Securities and Exchange Commission Chair Gary Gensler, in May 2023, spoke "about AI's potential to induce a [financial] crisis," according to a U.S. News article, calling it "a potential systemic risk."

Meanwhile, ChatGPT recently spent the better part of a day spewing bizarre nonsense in response to users' questions and often has "hallucinations," which is when the system "starts to make up stuff—stuff that is not [in line] with reality," said Jevin West, a professor at the University of Washington, according to a CNN article he was quoted in. What happens when AI starts hallucinating financial records and stock trades?

Lethal autonomous weapons are already being used on the battlefield. Add AI to these weapons, and whatever human accountability, moral judgment, and compassion still persist in warfare will tend to vanish. Killer robots are already being tested in a spate of bloody new conflicts worldwide—in Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palestine, as well as in Yemen and elsewhere.

It was obvious from the start that AI would worsen economic inequality. In January, the IMF forecasted that AI would affect nearly 40 percent of jobs globally (around 60 percent in wealthy countries). Wages will be impacted, and jobs will be eliminated. These are undoubtedly underestimates since the technology's capability is constantly increasing.

Overall, the result will be that people who are placed to benefit from the technology will get wealthier (some spectacularly so), while most others will fall even further behind. More specifically, immensely wealthy and powerful digital technology companies will grow their social and political clout far beyond already absurd levels.

It is sometimes claimed that AI will help solve climate change by speeding up the development of low-carbon technologies. But AI's energy usage could soon eclipse that of many smaller countries. And AI data centers also tend to gobble up land and water.

AI is even invading our love lives, as presaged in the 2013 movie "Her." While the internet has reshaped relationships via online dating, AI has the potential to replace human-to-human partnering with human-machine intimate relationships. Already, Replika is being marketed as the "AI companion who cares"—offering to engage users in deeply personal conversations, including sexting. Sex robots are being developed, ostensibly for elderly and disabled folks, though the first customers seem to be wealthy men.

Face-to-face human interactions are becoming rarer, and couples are reporting a lower frequency of sexual intimacy. With AI, these worrisome trends could grow exponentially. Soon, it'll just be you and your machines against the world.

As the U.S. presidential election nears, the potential release of a spate of deepfake audio and video recordings could have the nation's democracy hanging by a thread. Did the candidate really say that? It will take a while to find out. But will the fact-check itself be AI-generated? India is experimenting with AI-generated political content in the run-up to its national elections, which are scheduled to take place in 2024, and the results are weird, deceptive, and subversive.

A comprehensive look at the situation reveals that AI will likely accelerate all the negative trends currently threatening nature and humanity. But this indictment still fails to account for its ultimate ability to render humans, and perhaps all living things, obsolete.

AI's threats aren't a series of easily fixable bugs. They are inevitable expressions of the technology's inherent nature—its hidden inner workings and self-evolution of function. And these aren't trivial dangers; they are existential.

The fact that some AI developers, who are the people most familiar with the technology, are its most strident critics should tell us something. In fact, policymakers, AI experts, and journalists have issued a statement warning that "mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war."

Don't Pause It, Stop It

Many AI-critical opinion pieces in the mainstream media call for a pause in its development "at a safe level." Some critics call for regulation of the technology's "bad" applications—in weapons research, facial recognition, and disinformation. Indeed, European Union officials took a step in this direction in December 2023, reaching a provisional deal on the world's first comprehensive laws to regulate AI.

Whenever a new technology is introduced, the usual practice is to wait and see its positive and negative outcomes before implementing regulations. But if we wait until AI has developed further, we will no longer be in charge. We may find it impossible to regain control of the technology we have created.

The argument for a total AI ban arises from the technology's very nature—its technological evolution involves acceleration to speeds that defy human control or accountability. A total ban is the solution that AI pioneer Eliezer Yudkowsky advised in his pivotal op-ed in TIME:

"[T]he most likely result of building a superhumanly smart AI, under anything remotely like the current circumstances, is that literally everyone on Earth will die. Not as in 'maybe possibly some remote chance,' but as in 'that is the obvious thing that would happen.'"

Yudkowsky goes on to explain that we are currently unable to imbue AI with caring or morality, so we will get AI that "does not love you, nor does it hate you, and you are made of atoms it can use for something else."

Underscoring and validating Yudkowsky's warning, a U.S. State Department-funded study published on March 11 declared that unregulated AI poses an "extinction-level threat" to humanity.

To stop further use and development of this technology would require a global treaty—an enormous hurdle to overcome. Shapers of the agreement would have to identify the key technological elements that make AI possible and ban research

and development in those areas, anywhere and everywhere in the world.

There are only a few historical precedents when something like this has happened. A millennium ago, Chinese leaders shut down a nascent industrial revolution based on coal and coal-fueled technologies (hereditary aristocrats feared that upstart industrialists would eventually take over political power). During the Tokugawa Shogunate period (1603-1867) in Japan, most guns were banned, almost completely eliminating gun deaths. And in the 1980s, world leaders convened at the United Nations to ban most CFC chemicals to preserve the planet's atmospheric ozone layer.

The banning of AI would likely present a greater challenge than was faced in any of these three historical instances. But if it's going to happen, it has to happen now.

Suppose a movement to ban AI were to succeed. In that case, it might break our collective fever dream of neoliberal capitalism so that people and their governments finally recognize the need to set limits. This should already have happened with regard to the climate crisis, which demands that we strictly limit fossil fuel extraction and energy usage. If the AI threat, being so acute, compels us to set limits on ourselves, perhaps it could spark the institutional and intergovernmental courage needed to act on other existential threats.

By Richard Heinberg

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by Earth | Food | Life, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Speaking Papiamentu ~ On Re-Connecting To My Native Tongue

03-07-2024 ~ It starts at Schiphol, the Amsterdam airport. Before that, I am still immersed in my life in Jerusalem, busy with family matters and with grassroots activism against the Israeli occupation, while under pressure to finish grant proposals for the multicultural Jerusalem feminist center and art gallery where I work. I do not have time to connect emotionally to my trip, which still feels more like a yearly obligation to visit my elderly mother in Curaçao, when I would rather spend my precious vacation time trekking in Turkey or Nepal.

I usually have a few hours to kill, not enough to take the train into Amsterdam and visit old friends, which I do on my return trip when I have almost twelve hours between planes. And so, I silently wander around the airport, feeling a little like a spy, as I do in Jerusalem when I hear Dutch tourists speaking on the street, not suspecting that I, who probably look like a local to them, would understand. Not identifying myself as a speaker of Dutch, I take in the talk, smiling to myself, my little secret.

Here, in transit at the airport – a liminal space par excellence – I sometimes pretend to be a total stranger and address the salesperson in English. Perhaps that has more to do with the fact that I have not yet woken up my slumbering Dutch, or do not want to give away my unfamiliarity with the currency and other taken-for-granted facts of daily life in the Netherlands.

Or perhaps it is my resistance to being taken for an *"allochtoon"* – that polite way they refer to the "not really Dutch," who nevertheless hold Dutch citizenship – a category that groups together the mostly Moslem migrants and those of us, from the former Dutch colonies, blacks and whites alike. It is a label that had not yet been coined when my schoolteachers in Curaçao taught us to see Holland as our "mother country," to sing *Wilhelmus Van Nassauwe*, the Dutch national anthem, on Queen Juliana's birthday and to accept the Batavians, a Germanic tribe, as "our" ancestors. They say that when you count, you invariably give away your mother tongue – to this day I count not in Papiamentu, but in Dutch, so totally did I embrace the colonial language.

I was four when I learned Dutch in kindergarten. I remember the feeling of utter embarrassment when everyone expected me to speak Dutch with my cousins whose father was Dutch, and I ran away crying. I was losing the secure ground that Papiamentu provided, having to jump into the deep waters of a foreign language without a life-vest before I knew how to swim.

Very soon, however, I was speaking Dutch fluently, determined to excel in the language. I wanted to know it even better than the Dutch children whose parents came from Holland. I spoke Dutch with all my school friends, even though most of us spoke Papiamentu at home, including the handful of schoolmates from my own community, the Sephardic Jews who settled on the island in the seventeenth century, after fleeing the inquisition in Portugal and Spain.

In my elementary school days, the teachers forbade us to speak Papiamentu even in the schoolyard, claiming it was the only way to learn proper Dutch. And so, I read, wrote, and thought in Dutch – it became my first literary language, as Papiamentu was basically only a spoken language at that time. Now, as I write this in 2007, after forty-two years away from the Dutch speaking world, my Dutch gets rusty, until I find myself again surrounded by its sounds and it returns to me and becomes almost natural.

I roam around the halls of the airport's immense shopping center, not quite knowing what I am looking for. It is rather busy at the camera counter – I realize it is not a place to come with all my questions about which new camera to buy, my first digital SLR, after getting excited with the results of my digital point and shoot. Up to now, I had refrained from following the footsteps of all the other photographers in my family and never took my photography seriously. All that changed when I realized that editing my digital photos could finally give me the control over my images that I sought.

No, there is no point shopping here, I'd better look at cameras in Curaçao at a more relaxed pace, where the prices will certainly be lower. At least they used to be, when I was growing up and the island was still a duty-free paradise for American tourists.

Suddenly I remember that once, in these huge avenues of shops designed to entice travelers on the move, there used to be a stand with fresh, raw herring. I do not see it anymore, even though this is still the season of the celebrated first herring catch – the end of June. It fills me with longing, even though "new" herring was not something we ate at my home, it is what the "real Dutch" loved. Raw herring is a taste I developed later, and yet, it is so very much a taste from that past, perhaps from my acquired Dutch identity, and I feel that eating herring now would prepare me for my return.

I search for a shop that used to sell every possible variety of *drop* – salted licorice

– yet not daring to ask for it, perhaps so as not to expose my weakness, my secret addiction or not admitting it to myself. I have a good spatial memory – I remember you had to walk through a drug store to get to it, and it is a long way from the main shopping center with the largest stores. I find the drugstore, but now there is a cosmetics counter in the back. The millions of foreigners who pass through this airport obviously do not have the taste for the salty and pungent licorice, a taste that you only acquire if you grow up in Dutch culture, and so it was not profitable to maintain a shop that specializes in salted licorice.

Without quite making a conscious decision, I meander into a store where they sell Dutch delicacies – cheeses, fish, chocolates, biscuits. And there, on one of its shelves, I see a large box of salted licorice, which I buy immediately. I taste one, and as soon as it has melted in my mouth, I take another, and yet another. It is not that salted licorice reminds me, like the Proustian *petite madeleine*, of a lost childhood, rather, it reawakens my desire for more and more salted licorice. I can forget about licorice completely, go about my daily life in Jerusalem without knowledge or reminiscence of it, without even longing for it, in fact, I do not care much for sweets, and then, suddenly, as soon as I taste it again, I turn into a licorice addict. It is a lot easier not to eat it at all, than to eat it in moderation.

I start to move towards the gate, still sneaking my fingers into the box of licorice that is now in my backpack, hidden from my own conscience, as I suppress the certain knowledge that soon I will develop a bellyache. There is a long line outside the closed hall where a second hand-luggage check is held before you can enter it – much like the flights to Israel – but it is not weaponry that is being sought here, but drugs.

Most of the people in the line are Afro-Antilleans, seemingly living in Holland and going back to the islands for a family visit, sometimes accompanied by a Dutch spouse and children in all shades of skin color, wearing their best clothes. There is also an assortment of casually dressed Dutch tourists, mostly young couples out to spend their vacation in the tropics, invariably scuba diving at the magnificent coral reefs – something that I, as a native, never learned to do.

I begin to hear Papiamentu, a word here and there, a mother calling a child, snippets of a conversation. Somehow, I still feel a little like a foreigner, an outsider, an eavesdropper. But the reality of the past week, the tense work on the proposals is all gone, as if it never existed. Even my exasperation with the Israeli

occupation of Palestine has left me, as if a heavy burden has been lifted from my back. I am relieved not to have to think about it, for I am essentially an introspective person who realizes she must take a moral stand and become an activist, despite herself.

Slowly, my mouth full of licorice, I start to get that familiar sensation that I recognize from my previous border-crossings in Amsterdam. I cannot give it a name, it is a sense of strangeness, of looking at myself from the outside, this licorice-eating woman who is standing in line with other speakers of her mother tongue, when she lives in an everyday reality where nobody really knows her Papiamentu-speaking-self, where she has absolutely no occasion to let it out. I realize I am a stranger to those closest to me, and how this part of me, the woman-who-speaks-Papiamentu, is unknown to them, cannot be known to them.

There is a song by a popular Israeli singer who immigrated from Buenos Aires, that speaks of living his life in Hebrew and that he will have no other language – yet in the depths of the night, he still dreams in Spanish. I do not even dream in Papiamentu. This part of me is totally absent in my life in Israel, where I have nobody with whom to speak my language – as far as I know, I am the only Papiamentu speaking person in Jerusalem. And so, as soon as I return to Jerusalem, I stop living in Papiamentu. Nobody there knows that part of me.

When I asked a friend what it felt like to live in a country where French, her mother tongue, is not spoken, she answered that language is a home you can take with you to wherever you go. She has her French-speaking relatives and enjoys movies and books in French. For me, Papiamentu cannot possibly be a home away from home – without an expatriate community with which to connect, when my mother tongue has less than 300,000 speakers and none of them can be found in my immediate vicinity and when the phone connection to that distant country that nobody else here calls, has always been outrageously expensive.

I cannot even find solace in writing my mother tongue, living in a Papiamentu world of my own – since Papiamentu, at least for me, is not a written language. Its orthography was only formalized after I left the island, and I still find it strange to read, with its strict phonetic spelling, so that words originating from Spanish or Dutch are written in unfamiliar ways.

Feeling that Curaçao means nothing to those who have never lived there and who

do not know my language, I do not dwell on my background – I do not talk about where I come from. I am not willing to play the role of an exotic bird from a little island in the Caribbean. On the other hand, I refuse to be thrown into better-known categories, such as "Argentinean", sharing little with South Americans – other than their music and dance – as I learned Spanish only in sixth grade, and unlike English, it always remained a foreign language to me.

And so, rather than allowing myself to feel the loneliness, I let that part of me go – I have erased it. It is a part of me that I do not speak *about*, if I cannot speak *from* it. I do not even miss my Papiamentu-speaking-self when away from the island. I do not live with a sense of loss, longing for a vanished childhood, for a hidden identity, for my language as a home – just like, in my daily life, I can completely forget about the pleasures of eating salted licorice. Until recently, I did not realize that I have been paying a price for the erasure of such a central part of who I am. Rather than being a stranger to those around me, I was a stranger to myself.

It is, perhaps, because I am not an exile that I do not feel that sense of loss – I have had the privilege to return to Curaçao almost every year since I have been living in Jerusalem. Or rather, I do not believe I deserve to indulge in a feeling of loneliness, after all, I left my native country voluntarily to study abroad, knowing I would never return to live there. I am not like the homeless, the displaced, the refugees who were forced to abandon their language.

Perhaps I can speak of a sense of self-exile, as I did not find my place in the complex colonial society of the island, with its racial, class and gender segmentation and hierarchy, its strict internal borders, where everyone had their place, and knew it. I did not want to accept the place I was assigned, as a female member of a privileged class, whose movements across these internal borders, unlike those of the men of that class, were heavily restricted.

At a young age, I became aware that each social group took for granted its own conception of the world, its own truth, which often was in contradiction to the others, and that kept them within their borders. And so, even when living on the island as a high school student, I had already learned to be an outsider – one who refused to see herself as embedded within the internal boundaries and tried to see beyond them.

I was like the *stranger*, a concept developed by the sociologist Georg Simmel

referring to someone who is both near and far, who is spatially inside a social group, yet at the same time, not quite a member of it – not committed to its norms, values, definitions of reality. It means being in liminal space between the groups, a position that frees you to take on a broader perspective, allowing you to be more "objective" (1). In other words, I was already a budding anthropologist, thriving on the threshold – the *limen* – between different ways of life.

It is this adaptability as an outsider that prepared me to cross cultural and language borders without experiencing culture shock – to adopt English with utmost ease, even before I went to college in the USA in the second half of the stormy sixties, where I found myself again in the liminal spaces of critical thought and the struggle for social justice, together with other foreigners and with students of color – a period that has consolidated my social consciousness.

A year or so after graduating, I had no difficulty adapting to life in Jerusalem, becoming fluent in spoken Hebrew when I moved here with the Jewish American man I met at the university in the Boston area and married, raising two children who have always insisted on speaking Hebrew with us.

My life in Jerusalem revolves around spoken Hebrew, while I also nourish my English, which has gradually replaced Dutch as my literary language. In fact, it is the only language in which I am able to write today. I never became proficient in written Hebrew and do not feel pressured to perfect it, another expression of my political ambivalence about living in Israel. I guess I take pleasure in being a perennial outsider.

I do not even have Israeli nationality, as the Dutch at the time did not permit dual citizenship, and that suits me well to this day. In 1970, when we first arrived in Jerusalem, I saw it as a bit of an adventure trip to a young, exciting country with an ethnically diverse, anthropologically intriguing society. The occupation of the Palestinians did not appear as malevolent as it became over the years. I am certain I would not have wanted to settle here today.

As I stand in line at the Amsterdam airport, catching a plane to Curaçao, I hear my mother tongue and smile at the people waiting to get on the plane, in acknowledgment that I understand. There is no sense of spying anymore; it is replaced by an eagerness to identify myself as a speaker of Papiamentu. I blend in with those waiting to be checked, voicing my agreement, of course, in Papiamentu, that the waiting is taking much too long.

Finally, on the plane, at my window seat, for which I always ask so I can see, and photograph, the island when we are landing, I realize I am shedding the layer of my everyday life in Jerusalem, like an overall, or rather a heavy spacesuit that cloaks my entire body and dictates my movement. It takes me a while to recognize that Papiamentu-speaking-self that is crammed inside, the way I think, twinkle my eyes, dance the *tumba* in Papiamentu. I regain a visceral quality, not just a language – all those things that get lost in translation.

An American friend, on hearing me switch to Papiamentu while on the phone with one of my cousins living in Boston, exclaimed in delight: “you become a totally different person when you speak Papiamentu!” It was a moment of deep recognition, of acknowledgement. She was the first person who was not from the island, who saw me, and her remark, like a paradigm leap, enabled me to see myself, and feel the person that I am, fully, with all my layers of language.

The flight is long, sometimes close to ten hours, or even more if there is a stopover in St. Maarten or Bonaire, two other Dutch islands in the Caribbean. I

try to sleep and seldom watch the movie, while I make a concerted effort to wean myself, temporarily, from my licorice habit. I speak Dutch and Papiamentu on the plane with the flight attendants or the people sitting next to me.

If I flew a different airline or route, say via Madrid and Caracas, the transition to my Papiamentu-speaking-self would be delayed. Perhaps it would be more abrupt. Would I then have time to reflect on this sense of strangeness that overcomes me at the Amsterdam airport? Perhaps, I would immediately adopt my Papiamentu-speaking bearing from the moment I land, as if I had never been away. I would not have the chance to see myself from the side, as a woman I do not know in my ordinary life. I would not feel the pain and loneliness of not being able to share such a vivid part of myself. I would not have come to writing this essay and realizing that this part of me is a stranger in my other life.

Who is this woman who becomes again a speaker of Papiamentu, when standing in line at the Amsterdam airport? There, I reconnect with an inner core that I have denied myself all those years. There is the music of the language – juicy words like *barbulète, kokolishi, warawara, maribomba* – just their sounds make me dance, take me back to a childhood rich in fantasy and folktales.

Yes, there is a sense of coming home when I speak Papiamentu – a mother tongue is, after all, a home, but not one I can take with me to places where there are no other speakers. It is a home in the sense that it makes me whole again, that fills me with the lifeforce of who I fully am.

From the airplane, I finally catch a glimpse of the island below. My heart begins to somersault, as more and more of my island becomes visible. Enthralled I begin to photograph. I have always loved to look down from airplanes, to see landscapes as gigantic, two-dimensional paintings. But most of all I love to look at Curaçao – seeing it not abstractly, but in its very physical manifestation – its large inner bays, shaped like fig-leaves with a narrow passage to the sea; the waves splashing against the rocks of its rugged north coast, and its flat plain of dry, red sands along the sea near the airport. I already feel myself there as I identify all the bays where I have been, or the hills I have climbed with my brother Fred. From the air, I get ideas for new places to explore, and of course, to photograph.

And now, a few years later, I realize that something is starting to happen to me when I photograph the island on my yearly visits to my mother. It is through my photography that I begin to look more closely at the island, becoming more and more connected. I discover that I can *transcend* the outsider stance that seems to be inherent in the act of taking pictures, meeting my subject on a deeper level without holding back, as I am thrown into the realms of the senses, the psyche, of history and memory.

And the more I open myself to the island's rhythms, sounds and textures through my lens, the harder it becomes to leave my language behind. To let the woman that I am on the island be erased.

Back in Jerusalem, I continue to work with the photos – enhancing the digital images and uploading them to my photo-website, while also creating photobooks. In other words, I am no longer cutting myself off from the island.

Sharing the images, I see that people really look, and I begin to realize that through my photographs, they can see a part of myself that I did not let them know before. I realize that with my photographs, I am speaking Papiamentu. That I am saying *kokolishi, maribomba, warawara*. And I am being understood.

Notes:
1. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger", Kurt Wolff (Trans.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press, 1950, pp. 402 – 408.

Bio:

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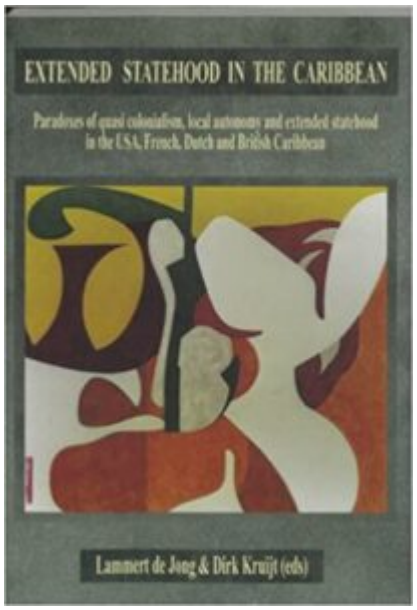
Lammert de Jong & Dirk Kruijt

(eds). Extended Statehood in the Caribbean Paradoxes of quasi colonialism, local autonomy and extended statehood in the USA, French, Dutch and British Caribbean



Lammert de Jong & Dirk Kruijt (eds). – *Extended Statehood in the Caribbean Paradoxes of quasi colonialism, local autonomy and extended statehood in the USA, French, Dutch and British Caribbean*
Rozenberg Publishers 2005 – ISBN 90 5170 686 3

Het complete boek (PDF): 070211ExtendedStatehood

Zie voor RQ -online versie: https://rozenbergquarterly.com/extended-statehood-in-the-caribbean

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Far Right Win In Dutch Elections

Shows How Quickly The Right Is Rising In Europe

Geert Wilders – Photo: nl.wikipedia.org

Geert Wilders's election is an ominous harbinger. The hour has come for Europe to stymie the spread of the far right.

The dramatic victory of the far right provocateur Geert Wilders in the recent Dutch elections is yet another extremely worrisome sign that Europe is shredding the veil of tolerance and becoming more brazenly exclusionary. Indeed, the spread of far right radicalization across the continent signals that Europe is engulfed in a profound political, social and moral crisis.

Wilders's Party for Freedom, or PVV, which has been on a long ascent, took 37 of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber. This was 20 more seats than it won in the 2021 elections, while the other parties lost seats, making the extreme right the largest party in the national parliament. The radical left was hit the hardest, losing nearly half of its elected representatives.

Wilders's political career has been built around anti-Islam and anti-immigration rhetoric. In fact, in 2016 he was charged with inciting hatred and discrimination against Dutch Moroccans. He always had a solid base of voter support, though it

was never previously strong enough to allow him to become a power broker in Dutch politics. Obviously, the political dynamic has now changed, and Wilders is in the process of seeking possible governing coalitions. Eager to become prime minister, Wilders said he is willing to moderate his positions, but that's only because he is having a hard time luring partners to form a coalition government with his far right party.

As undoubtedly one of Europe's most blatantly racist politicians, Wilders's campaign called for an end to asylum for all refugees, the "de-Islamization" of the Netherlands and a Brexit-style referendum on the European Union (EU). He was seen as a political outsider, but pollsters got it wrong. Nonetheless, that more Dutch voters turned to Wilders's message at this point in time should not come as a surprise to anyone. Across Europe — north, south, east and west — far right parties have broken into mainstream political consciousness as many voters are fed up with establishment parties. Italians were hardly surprised when Giorgia Meloni's radical right Brothers of Italy won a clear majority in Italy's 2022 snap general election.

Once considered fringe organizations destined to political invisibility, Europe's far right movements and parties have gained ground with frustrated working-class and disappointed middle-class citizens, including youth voters. Moreover, they are having an impact as both right and center-left mainstream parties have adopted an anti-immigration stance while they push the neoliberal agenda even harder, catering to the needs and interests of the rich and the business class. The result of all this is that more voters turn to the far right as anti-immigration policies gain increased support and neoliberalism shreds the social safety net and widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The Netherlands endured 13 years of neoliberal rule led by the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD, a center-right party which promoted the interests of private enterprise and big business and paid little attention to the needs of the average citizen. A scandal over government efforts to reduce child welfare payments by subjecting thousands of low- and middle-income families to scrutiny and falsely accusing them of obtaining benefits illegally alienated a sizable segment of voters, as did the Groningen gas affair, in which the authorities put gas profits before the safety of surrounding communities. Such scandals, along with rising concerns about the cost of living and housing shortages, played a major role in the growing mistrust of the government and

fueled the perception that a wind of change was needed in Dutch politics. Moreover, the VVD had decided to make immigration a key campaign issue, so one should not be surprised, as Dutch author and editor Auke van der Berg told me over email, that many voters ultimately opted to select "the original (PVV–Wilders) and not the copy."

Naturally, Wilders's victory stiffened other far right leaders' resolve to carry on with their campaign against a cosmopolitan and multicultural Europe. Congratulations poured in from Hungary's Viktor Orbán; the Italian deputy minister and leader of the extreme-right party, Matteo Salvini; and France's Marine Le Pen. But as French Minister Bruno Le Maire said of Wilders's election win, this was a consequence of "all the fears that are emerging in Europe" over immigration and the economy.

Indeed, while fearmongering around immigration is surely a factor behind the rise of the far right in Europe, economic issues such as declining standards of living and economic inequality may in fact be the key driver behind the spread of anti-immigration sentiments. The European Union integration project has long been seen by large segments of the continent's citizenry as undermining national sovereignty and strengthening neoliberal economic policies harmful to the working class. Still, we can't ignore the role racism and Islamophobia have played, as it is specifically migration flows from non-European countries that have been touted as a threat, and none more so than Muslim migration. The unjustified fear among those who are calling for tougher immigration laws, as many Dutch citizens have been doing over the years, is of Islam. The problem, for them, is that the immigrants are Muslim, not that they are immigrants. Europe welcomed Ukrainian refugees. But as political scientist Lamis Abdelaaty said, "Europeans see Ukrainians as White and Christian, similar to the way that many in European countries see themselves."

At this point, the question is not whether the far right is surging in Europe, but rather how national governments and the EU alike intend to counter fascism and far right extremism. Fear of the "Other" and the consequences of neoliberalism (economic insecurity, poverty, inequality and deteriorating living standards) are among the main causes behind the increasing public support for far right parties. Left unaddressed, and especially amid organizing conducted via the internet and social media, hard right politics will only grow, and far right violence will likely increase. What took place recently in Dublin, where hundreds of radical right

rioters went on a rampage over unconfirmed reports on social media that three children had been stabbed by an "illegal immigrant," may be a prelude to what the future holds for Western societies unwilling to address the factors that contribute to the spread of far right ideologies.

The rising tide of the far right is terrifying and monstrous, but it's still possible for effective resistance to interrupt this nightmare. Europe's far right ideologues mix nationalistic and social stances, just like their predecessors did in the 1920s and 1930s. The answer to the threat they pose in the 21st century is clear: tackling the root causes of economic inequality and ensuring that no one is left behind. The return of the social state and the expansion of democracy are the best tools available for fighting fascism and far right extremism. They worked in the past and can still work today.

The far right is a menace to decent society. The hour has come for Europe to face the monsters.

Source:
https://truthout.org/articles/far-right-win-in-dutch-elections-shows-how-quickly-the-right-is-rising-in-europe/

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Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left*: *Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Renske Visser – En zijn ogen kan ik lezen. Veertien negentiende-eeuwse brieven uit Parijs, Den Haag en Domburg 1891-1894

Hôtel du Louvre – Parijs

Donderdag, 17 ix 1891

Lieve tante Martha,

Omdat u mij vroeg u in kennis te stellen van onze wederwaardigheden in Parijs, schrijf ik u deze brief. Thomas is na onze aankomst in het hotel gaan rusten. Ik kan de rust niet vinden, het lukt me zelfs niet een boek ter hand te nemen.

Daarom heb ik besloten u te schrijven.

U weet hoe zeer ik aarzelde om samen met Thomas deze treinreis te maken. Omdat hij op zijn standpunt bleef staan, heb ik mijn twijfel laten varen. Na vandaag nemen mijn zorgen om zijn gezondheid toe. Toch wil ik met hem blijven hopen dat het een goed besluit is geweest van de geneesheer van het Johannes de Deo om voor Thomas een afspraak te maken met die Franse neuroanatoom. Thomas vestigt al zijn hoop op professor Charcot. Morgen bezoeken we het Hôpital de la Salpêtrière. Ik hoop dat deze voor hem zo afmattende reis niet vergeefs is geweest.

Toen de trein hedenmiddag het Gare du Nord binnenreed, zag ik hoe moeizaam Thomas zich oprichtte na de langdurige zit. Zijn ledematen waren zo verstijfd dat het leek of hij het dubbele aantal jaren van zijn leeftijd telde. Zijn stem klonk dof van vermoeidheid toen hij een kruier wenkte. Ondanks de wandelstok die hij onlangs op het Noordeinde gekocht heeft, liep hij alsof hij te veel alcohol had genuttigd.

Het was een voorrecht dat het rijtuig van het Hôtel du Louvre voor het station op ons wachtte. Echter, bij het instappen deed er zich een incident voor waardoor ik hevig ontsteld raakte. De koetsier vroeg mij of hij mijn vader kon assisteren. Om te voorkomen dat Thomas dit hoorde, siste ik de man toe: 'Mon mari!' Vanzelfsprekend verontschuldigde hij zich, maar het leed was reeds geschied. Of Thomas het verstaan heeft? Hij was zwijgzaam gedurende de rit. Al duurde het geruime tijd voor ik kalmeerde, ik hield mijn mond om hem niet nodeloos te kwetsen. Op de hotelkamer ging hij zonder zich uit te kleden op bed liggen, terstond viel hij in een diepe slaap. Nadat ik hem toegedekt had, heb ik zo geruisloos mogelijk de koffers uitgepakt.

Nu zit ik bij het venster met uitzicht op de Rue Saint-Honoré en de Comédie Française. Als ik naar rechts kijk, zie ik de Place Royal waar het een komen en gaan is van mensen tussen het Palais en het Louvre. Deze avond zullen we ons tussen hen voegen als we naar de Opéra gaan. De Opéra zal voor mij de beste afleiding zijn om de zorgen om Thomas te vergeten. Ik hoop maar dat hij niet te laat wakker wordt.

Lieve tante, het hotel en onze ruime hoekkamer op de eerste etage zijn werkelijk magnifiek. Voor Thomas is het ideaal dat er een lift aanwezig is. Ik dank u en oom

George dat u ons dit hotel heeft aanbevolen. Ik kan hier beslist een paar maanden verblijven. Als Thomas in het hospitaal verpleegd wordt, hoop ik Parijs te bezoeken. Het is alweer zo lang geleden dat wij hier geweest zijn. Het is werkelijk fameus dat het Louvre op kuierafstand ligt. Weet u dat de Jardin du Luxembourg opengesteld is voor publiek? Ik verheug me erop daarheen te gaan. Terwijl ik dit neerschrijf, voel ik me beschaamd dat ik me zo uitdruk, maar zegt oom George niet altijd dat wij het aangename met het nuttige moeten verenigen?

Thomas zal aanstonds wakker worden. Daarom groet ik u. Adieu, lieve tante, ik hoop dat het u en oom George zeer goed mag blijven gaan, evenals onze geliefde dochter Isabelle. Kust u ons kleine meisje van ons?

Uw liefhebbende nicht,
Laura

—

Renske Visser – En zijn ogen kan ik lezen. Veertien negentiende-eeuwse brieven uit Parijs, Den Haag en Domburg 1891-1894
Rozenberg Publishers, Amsterdam, 2021. ISBN 978 90 361 0658 0 – 92 pagina's – Euro 12,50
Omslag & DTP: BuroBouws, Amsterdam
Verschenen 17 september 2022

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Dankzij donaties van fondsen en particulieren opent Stichting HouseMartin in het najaar van 2022 aan de Hooftskade in Den Haag de deuren van *RespijtHuis HouseMartin* waar daklozen kunnen herstellen van een griep, revalideren na een operatie of waar zij in een enkel geval de laatste levensdagen kunnen doorbrengen.
Door het kopen van *En zijn ogen kan ik lezen* draagt u bij aan de voortgang van RespijtHuis HouseMartin, een kleinschalig logeerhuis dat met inzet van vrijwilligers uit verschillende culturen een warm nest wil bieden aan de meest kwetsbaren in onze samenleving die geen plek hebben om het hoofd neer te leggen bij ziekte.

Website: https://respijthuishousemartin.com

Jean-Martin Charcot

Jean-Martin Charcot (Parijs, 29 november 1825 – Morvan, 16 augustus 1893) was een Franse arts die wordt beschouwd als een van de grondleggers van de neurologie.

Na aan de Sorbonne gepromoveerd te zijn met als specialisme gewrichtsreuma, ging hij werken als ziekenhuisarts. Na enige jaren keerde hij terug naar Parijs, waar hij werd benoemd tot hoogleraar in de pathologische anatomie. Hij verrichtte zeer veel onderzoek naar anatomie en de pathologie van het zenuwstelsel en ontdekte de ziekte amyotrofe laterale sclerose (ALS). Ook toonde hij aan dat multiple sclerose en de ziekte van Parkinson twee verschillende ziekten waren. De ziekte van Charcot-Marie-Tooth, een perifere zenuwziekte is naar hem genoemd samen met Pierre Marie (1853-1940) en Howard H. Tooth (1856-1926). In 1882 werd speciaal voor Charcot de eerste leerstoel voor ziekten aan het zenuwstelsel ingesteld aan het Hôpital de la Salpêtrière (Parijs).

Als dank en erkenning voor zijn werk werd hij in 1883 benoemd tot lid van de *Académie de médecine* en de *Académie des sciences*.

In de latere jaren van zijn carrière deed hij ook onderzoek naar de verschijnselen van hysterie, waarvoor hij onder andere hypnose gebruikte. Ook na zijn overlijden was Charcot van invloed op de psychiatrie en psychoanalyse. Veel van Charcots kennis werd namelijk overgenomen door zijn leerling/student Sigmund Freud. Ook Alfred Binet en Georges Gilles de la Tourette studeerden onder Charcot.

Bron: nl.wikipedia.org

The Abuse Of The Right To Sexual And Reproductive Health In Nigeria: The Way Out

Photo: en.wikipedia.org

Somewhere in Osun State, Nifemi, a three-year old baby, has been put under the knife for her clitoris to be cut off. Somewhere in Zamfara, thirteen-year-old Aisha has been betrothed to a 65-year-old Alhaji. Somewhere in Lekki, ten-year-old Ayoola is being sexually abused by his uncle. Somewhere in Zamfara, new mother, Aisha, just drew her last breath after bleeding profusely due to the negligence of the medical practitioners that handled her childbirth. Each of these people are victims of the failed healthcare system which Nigerians are constantly being subjected to. For a long period of time, the issue of the abuse of the right to sexual and reproductive healthcare in Nigeria has been ignored like a slowly growing pimple. However, the previous pimple has now developed into an unavoidable boil ridden with pus and blood. Much to the chagrin of the powers that be, the ripple effects of the poor handling of sexual and reproductive health in Nigeria, can no longer be swept under the carpet.

The World Health Organisation defines reproductive health as: *"A complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters related the reproductive system, its functions and its processes" [1].* The right to sexual and reproductive health has slowly garnered

recognition over the past five decades. From the World Population Conferences in Rome and Belgrade held at 1958 and 1965 respectively *[2]*, to the Beijing Conference of 1995 *[3]*; reproductive and sexual health has constantly been reaffirmed as a sine qua non in the lives of both men and women. In Nigeria, several Acts, and policies alike, have been enacted in order to guarantee this right to every Nigerian. They include, amongst others: The HIV(Anti-Discrimination) Act, 2013; the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, 2015; and the National Strategic Framework for the Elimination of Obstetric Fistula in Nigeria (2019-2023) *[4]*.

However, the Nigerian situation seemingly sings a different tune. In spite of the existing legal framework, there have been numerous cases bordering on the flagrant abuse of the right to reproductive and sexual health in Nigeria- ranging from child marriage to sexual violence.

Currently, Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa *[5]*. Over 20% of global maternal deaths occur in Nigeria with a staggering 600,000 maternal deaths enumerated from 2005-2015 *[6]*. In the same vein, over 25 percent of Nigerian women have been circumcised, with Osun State hosting the highest prevalence rate of 77 percent *[7]*. Each of these violations have negative effects on victims, hence, the global attention which the right to reproductive and sexual health has attracted. For example, there has been no report on the health benefits triggered by Female Genital Mutilation; however, numerous studies and research works have reported the harmful effects of female genital mutilation which could range from immediate complications which include: shock, haemorrhage and genital tissue swelling; to long-term complications which include: pain during sexual intercourse, urinary tract infections and menstrual problems *[8]*.

Likewise, child marriage holds grave health consequences for the girl child. Young mothers are more likely to experience health conditions such as obstetric fistula *[9]*; disturbingly still, girls between ages 10 to 14 are five times more likely to die at pregnancy and childbirth than women between ages 20 to 24 *[10]*. In the light of these disturbing statistics, the lurking question remains-how do we stop the abuse of the right to sexual and reproductive health?

There is no gainsaying the fact that law qualifies as one of the most effective instruments for social control. As a backdrop for this, there is the need to create a strong legal framework which would effectively battle the violation of the right to

sexual and reproductive health in essence, reducing such violations to the barest minimum. One of the major causes of the alarming prevalence of the violation of the right to reproductive and sexual health in Nigeria, can be attributed to the shaky legal system that governs the concept. For example, the recently enacted Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, currently stands as the first and only federal legislation which explicitly prohibits female genital mutilation *[11]*. This, however, has not reduced the rate of Female Genital Mutilation, as only thirteen states having been recorded to have domesticated the act *[12]*. This has proved to be a bottleneck in the battle against the menace of female genital mutilation. Likewise, Nigerian legislations do not seem to protect gender interests.
For example, the Criminal Code does not recognise that boys are indeed, susceptible to acts of sexual violence. The statute stipulates a penalty of life imprisonment for persons who have unlawful carnal knowledge of girls below the age of thirteen *[13]*, and merely prescribes a seven-year sentence for persons who are found guilty of unlawfully "dealing with" a boy under 14 years *[14]*. This is rather disheartening, considering that studies have proved that boys are just as susceptible to sexual violence *[15]*.

In essence, in order to stop the abuse of the right to sexual and reproductive health, there is the need to create a strong legal framework which attends to the needs of both genders; and in the same vein, prescribes strict punitive measures to be meted out on people who either induce, perpetuate, or participate in sexual violence. It is pertinent to note that legislations ought to reflect informed decisions which are aimed to protect all classes of people in the society. The achievement of this feat is largely hinged on the need for women in legislative positions. Research has proven that the burden of reproductive health problems is usually on women *[16]*. However, women occupy only about 6 per cent of federal legislative seats *[17]*. Hence, the need for gender balance in legislative houses is a viable tool which is capable of propelling the Nigerian legal system towards curbing the menace of the abuse of the right to sexual and reproductive health.

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that whilst creating a strong legal framework where violators can be brought to book is quite important, severe punishments do not always serve as strong tools for deterrence *[18]*. Nigeria is a largely patriarchal society; hence, a large number of the acts of violation usually

perpetrated, are linked to cultural and religious roots. In essence, even when laws are enacted to prohibit certain acts, such acts would only be perpetrated in secret. This is because the rate of obedience to prohibitive laws is usually low if such laws contradict the norms of the people. This is where mass sensitization comes in. There is the need to conduct mass campaigns in order to educate the people on the ills of harmful traditional practices, and on the need to protect the sexual health of targeted persons in the society. In order to achieve this, it is important to focus such symposia on traditional and religious leaders. Studies have shown that people usually heed to the dictates of their traditional and religious leaders *[19]*, as they are seen as custodians of the divine authority bestowed by God. With the involvement of traditional and religious leaders, there would be a higher chance that the people would heed to calls for the abandonment of harmful traditions and norms. In the same vein, it is pertinent to note that the target audience for such campaigns and symposia should not be limited to the women and girls in rural areas alone. For example, the prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in urban areas in Nigeria, is relatively high, compared to its prevalence in rural areas *[20]*. This shows that sensitization ought to be targeted at inhabitants of both urban and rural areas; as both classes of people function as perpetrators of the abuse of the right to sexual health. Thus, in areas where sensitization fails, the law would take over and vice versa. Both the law and sensitization are complementary.

Research has proven that one of the leading causes of child marriage is poverty *[21].* In the same vein a study by World Bank reports that there is a huge gap between the prevalence of female genital mutilation amongst girls from rich backgrounds and girls from poor backgrounds *[22]*. What this means is that a large number of the traditional practices usually perpetuated by the Nigerian people are borne out of economic inadequacies. Also, one would notice that poor men usually prefer to see sexual intercourse with their wives as a form of leisure. Most times, since these men cannot afford relaxation centres or leisure courts, when they get back from their respective energy-consuming low-paid jobs, they turn to the only viable form of relaxation- sex. In order to put a stop the menace of harmful practices perpetrated on girls by women, there is the need to improve economic conditions in the country. It is submitted, that the recent proposal of Value Added Tax (VAT) increase, would only aggravate the drastic state of reproductive health in Nigeria. This is because even the poorest people would be taxed heavily. The ripple effect of this is that, a man who can barely

afford to feed his family members, would neither desist from seeing sex as a form of relaxation nor spare a second's thought to any plans for family planning.

It is therefore recommended, that the government put in extra effort into creating more affordable reproductive and sexual health services for the benefit of the masses and in the same vein, implement financial policies that are people and pocket-friendly.

In conclusion, it is of utmost importance that a country which seeks to move forward economically and politically, pays attention to reproductive and sexual health issues. This is because the youths are usually badly hit when the reproductive health policies in a nation, are either non-existent, unimplemented, or inadequate *[23]*. Needless to say, the youths have a stronghold on the labour force of Nigeria.
This means that whatever hits the youths, hits the economy. In the same vein, in tandem with the popularly chanted mantra, youths are indeed, the leaders of tomorrow. Any form of complacency as regards the issues that affect them, could ultimately destroy the political future of Nigeria.
It is therefore, highly recommended that the issues highlighted in this article, be treated with immediate attention.

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[7] National Population Commission; Nigeria Demographic Health Survey, 2013; Abuja, Nigeria.
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[12] Chinedu Anarodo(2015); https://www.google.com/amp/venturesafrica.com/why-nigerias-new-violence-against-persons-prohibition-act-is-only-the-beginning/amp/; Ventures Africa; accessed on the 25th of October, 2019.
[13] See Section 218 of the Criminal Code.
[14] See Section 216 of the Criminal Code.
[15] http://venturesafrica.com/why-nigerias-new-violence-against-persons-prohibition-act-is-only-the-beginning/amp/; accessed on the 25th of October, 2019.
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Previously published in: https://citizenngr.com/how-to-stop-abuse-of-the-right-to-sexual-and-reproductive-health-in-nigeria/