

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“The Anti-Woke Academy”: Dutch Far-Right Politics of Knowledge About Gender

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Abstract

The Dutch parliamentary far right has been considered a relatively liberal outlier to the gender politics of the European far right, yet recent years have shown the increasing anti-gender mobilization of the party *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD). Based on a theoretical framework of anti-gender mobilization, the far right, and politics of knowledge, this article explores anti-gender politics as a form of alternative knowledge production through a qualitative content analysis of the FvD’s online presence. Through applying Verloo’s concept of the episteme, this article’s findings show that the FvD mobilizes against epistemic institutions by claiming they disseminate dangerous knowledge about gender, which they argue presents a fundamental threat to society, captured in conspiratorial terms like “transgender ideology” and “woke.” Simultaneously, the party promotes illiberal gender politics through the establishment of alternative epistemic institutions. This article shows how far-right actors may promote anti-gender politics by presenting themselves as “alternative intellectuals” who seek to carve out an epistemic niche alongside the mainstream.

Keywords: politics of knowledge; far right; gender; mobilization; education; academia

Introduction

In recent years, scholars have noted a stark increase in mobilization against “gender” in Europe (see e.g., Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Krizsán and Roggeband 2021; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Verloo 2018a), characterized by broad opposition against gender equality and women’s and LGBTQI+ rights. This article explores the ways in which such broader “anti-gender” narratives are employed by the far right, based on recent studies that show the increasing engagement of far-right parties and movements in illiberal mobilizations against so-called

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“gender ideology” (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018). Specifically, this article addresses far-right attacks on knowledge production, which remain a “crucial —although under-investigated—part of the current de-democratization process” (Paternotte and Verloo 2021, 558). In a context regularly described as “post-truth” (see e.g., Conrad et al. 2023), the academic literature on the connection between populist politics, knowledge, and epistemic power has indeed grown (see e.g., Giorgi and Eslen-Ziya2022; Huber, Greussing, and Moritz-Eberl2022; Mede, Schäfer, and Fuchslin 2021; Ylä-Anttila2018). At the same time, scholarly inquiry into far-right politics of knowledge in relation to *gender* has remained limited until the present, even when far-right engagement in anti-gender politics has significantly increased in recent years.

Responding to the need to expand the existing body of knowledge on the illiberal gender politics of the far right, this article will explore the ways in which the far right discursively construct and mobilize against knowledge about “gender.” Building on key contributions that engage with the nexus between the far right, knowledge/epistemology, and gender, this article analyzes far-right politics of knowledge through the lens of the “episteme” (Paternotte and Verloo 2021; Verloo 2018b) and as a form of “alternative knowledge production,” referring to processes through which the concept of gender is consigned to the domain of “beliefs and ideas” instead of “reality,” hereby “undermining the knowledge production and truth claims of many decades of gender studies scholarship” (Bracke and Paternotte 2016, 144; see e.g., also Kuhar and Zobec, 2017; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018, 10).

Empirically, this article focuses on the Netherlands, a country in which the parliamentary far right has been considered relatively liberal, at least when compared to the more traditional and family-oriented gender politics of the European far right in general (see e.g., Akkerman 2015). At the same time, there has been a recent uptake of illiberal anti-gender narratives by the Dutch far right, notably by the party Forum for Democracy (FvD). Based on a qualitative content analysis of the FvD’s political mobilization on gender, this article shows how the FvD mobilizes against existing epistemic institutions by arguing that they produce and spread knowledge about gender that is not only “false” but in fact dangerous, especially to children. Such claims are then discursively connected to what the party considers fundamental threats to Dutch (and Western) society, captured in conspiratorial notions of “gender madness,” “transgender ideology,” and, importantly, “woke.” Simultaneously, the party institutionalizes their own gender politics through the establishment of alternative epistemic institutions, including an elementary school and a publishing house. Rather than framing far-right knowledge production as fundamentally “post-truth” or anti-science, I argue that far-right actors produce a pseudoscientific blend of conspiracy theories, scientific language, and supposed expertise to promote their ideological positioning on the topic of gender (see also Giorgi and Eslen-Ziya2022, 4; Ylä-Anttila2018). Overall, this article details how a group of self-proclaimed far-right “alternative intellectuals” have managed to carve out an epistemic niche that operates alongside the mainstream. The findings highlight the need to pay close attention to the ways in which far-right actors may attempt to institutionalize their illiberal politics through the establishment of educational and knowledge-producing entities.

Theoretical Framework: The Epistemic War on “Woke”

Anti-Gender Mobilization and the Far Right in Europe

The term “anti-gender” mobilization has been employed by scholars to refer to collective agitation against a range of political issues, including reproductive rights, the rights of LGBTQI+ communities, sex education, and gender inclusive teaching in schools (Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Kuhar and Zobec 2017; Norocel and Băluță 2021; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Verloo 2018a). Even though manifestations of such anti-gender campaigns can vary across national contexts in terms of focus, size, actors, and the terminology that is used, actors in the anti-gender network understand “gender,” and related constructions such as “gender ideology” and “gender theory” as undesirable deviance from what they see as biologically determined, essentialist, and binary categories of male and female sex (Norocel 2024, 293; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, 8). Recently, such ideological positions have culminated in increasing mobilization against the visibility and rights of trans, gender diverse, and intersex people, engaging new and old actors, including the far right, but also some self-proclaimed liberal or feminist actors (Ahmed 2021; Bassi and LaFleur 2022; Cabral Grinspan et al., 2023; Gill-Peterson 2024). Rather than thinking of instances of anti-gender mobilization as “single-issue attacks on feminists, or LGBT people”, Stein (2023, 1341) argues the spectrum of anti-gender mobilization should instead be understood as “attacks on democracy,” and therefore as posing a serious challenge to liberal democratic rights and institutions (see also Engebretsen 2022).

While recognizing the diverse range of actors engaged in anti-gender mobilization, this article focuses specifically on the ways in which anti-gender discourse is instrumentalized by actors on the *far right*. In doing so, I utilize Pirro’s (2023) “umbrella concept” of the far right as collective actors whose key ideology consists of nativism and authoritarianism, and whose relationship to democracy may vary from illiberal democratic (radical) to anti-democratic (extreme) (Mudde 2010). Due to distinct histories and political objectives, scholars have argued that it is important to avoid viewing far right and anti-gender actors as “two faces of the same coin” (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, 13). Previous work has, for instance, shown variation in the gender politics of populist radical right parties in Western Europe, ranging from traditional conservative views to more liberal positions (Akkerman 2015; de Lange and Mügge 2015). In particular, “right wing populists do not necessarily oppose gender and sexual equality” (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, 13) in the way that other actors within the broader anti-gender network might.

Broadly speaking, far-right party positions on gender fall into two categories: either a focus on conservative family politics, or the expression of more liberal views on the position of women and LGBTQI+ communities (Norocel and Giorgi 2022, 418). The latter is often directly connected to the topic of immigration, or Islam, in which liberal positions on gender are instrumentalized by far-right parties as support for their nativist anti-immigration and anti-Islam agendas (Akkerman 2015; Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; de Lange and Mügge 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015). These kinds of discourses centered around narratives of “saving women” and “saving gays” (Bracke 2012) are also encapsulated in the

terms “femonationalism” (Farris 2017) and “homonationalism” (Puar 2007) and indicate a discursive shift towards what Moffitt (2017) calls “liberal illiberalism” (see also Halikiopoulou, Mock, and Vasilopoulou 2013). In fact, scholars have found that an increasing proportion of voters for populist radical-right parties are so-called “sexually modern nativists” (Lancaster 2020; Spierings, Lubbers, and Zaslove, 2017) who combine nativist views with more liberal attitudes on issues related to gender.

When far-right parties do express support for conservative family politics and form alliances with actors who seek to erode women’s and LGBTQI+ rights, this aligns them much more with “anti-gender campaigns.” Kemper (2016) conceptualizes these traditionalist ideological views on gender as “familialism,” referring to “a political demand that presupposes a strictly standardized image of a ‘functioning family’ as the ‘foundation of the nation’” (13). Familialism not only presents a traditionalist and exclusively heteronormative understanding of “family,” but also promotes a connection between “family” and “nation” that emphasizes the need for sustaining the national population (Kemper 2016, 60–61), which speaks directly to the nativism of the far right. Within contemporary European societies, however, far-right actors might strategically downplay more traditional or controversial positions on gender issues (de Lange and Mügge 2015, 74), choosing instead to “soften’ their radical rhetoric and try to appear as a more standard competitor in the party system” (Erzeel and Rashkova 2017, 816). This article focuses on the growing engagement of the far-right parties in forms of anti-gender mobilization, specifically scrutinizing far-right discursive constructions of *knowledge* about gender.

The Far Right and Alternative Knowledge Production

A long tradition of social constructivist scholarship has emphasized that the production of “knowledge” and “truth” is intricately connected to social power (Berger and Luckmann 1966). For instance, Foucauldian analyses of “regimes of truth” may be, and often have been, effectively used to critique existing systems of knowledge and truth that reproduce structures of inequality and domination (Foucault 1980, as cited in Reyna and Schiller 1998, 337). Conversely, this article engages with critique on regimes of truth within liberal democratic societies expressed by far-right actors with distinctly *illiberal* aims, who weaponize a language of self-victimization and oppression (see also Tebaldi 2021, 211) in their opposition to sites of knowledge production, regularly using deeply conspiratorial tropes such as “gender ideology” to denote the alleged powerful influence of global elites.

Thus, the theoretical foundations of this article are partially rooted in the growing literature on the nexus between populist and far-right politics and the production and contestation of knowledge (Giorgi and Eslen-Ziya 2022; Ylä-Anttila 2018), as well as literature on conspiracy theories (Barkun 2013; Fenster 2008). Specifically, I scrutinize far-right party narratives on the topic of “gender,” based on an understanding of mobilization against “gender ideology” and its equivalents as a form of alternative knowledge production (Bracke and Paternotte 2016, 144; Kuhar and Zobec 2017; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, 10) aimed

at promoting interpretations of sex/gender that are in line with far-right party positions, while delegitimizing knowledge that is perceived as dangerous and/or oppositional (Korolczuk 2020, 695).¹ This also means that “different types of gender knowledges can exist simultaneously, and even compete with each other” in any given political environment (Korolczuk 2020, 695).

In this article, I build on the work of Verloo (2018b), who grounds her analysis of Dutch far right opposition to gender equality on the importance of political struggles over knowledge and truth. Drawing from Sylvia Walby’s (2009) social complexity theory, which theorizes the interconnected nature of the four domains of the economy, polity, violence, and civil society (see also a more detailed discussion in Verloo 2018c), Verloo (2018b) adds a fifth and separate domain: the episteme, which she defines as “a system that produces and organizes knowledge and truth” (22). In other words, “episteme is the domain whose whole *raison d’être* lies in defining the meaning of life through producing knowledge, truth, and reality” (Paternotte and Verloo 2021, 559), and this domain is situated across various powerful epistemic institutions, including scientific research and education. The politics of knowledge has become an important part of the “illiberal playbook” (Pirro and Stanley 2022) of the far right, in which the delegitimization of institutions of education and knowledge production and the promotion of “a new politics of truth” (Paternotte and Verloo 2021, 556) serve as the foundations of illiberal policymaking. In the ongoing battle over epistemic authority, Paternotte and Verloo (2021) argue that the creation of alternative, “far-right epistemic institutions” (572) constitutes a crucial part of illiberal mobilizations on the issue of gender across Europe. In Korolczuk’s (2020) words, “right-wing populists and religious fundamentalists opposing ‘gender’ seek not only political but also epistemic power” (695).

In the age of “post-truth” politics, far-right knowledge claims can take conspiratorial forms and thus can, in some cases, be fruitfully analyzed through the lens of conspiracy theories, defined by scholars as “the conviction that a secret, omnipotent individual or group covertly controls the political and social order or some part thereof” (Fenster 2008, 1), or as “the belief that an organization made up of individuals or groups was or is acting covertly to achieve some malevolent end” (Barkun 2013, 3). Conspiracy theorists hold a deep distrust towards established epistemic authorities such as the political and academic establishments, and mainstream media channels (Barkun 2013, 7–8), hereby positing conspiracy theories as a form of “counterknowledge,” defined by Ylä-Anttila (2018, 359) as “contestations of epistemic authority by advocating alternative knowledge authorities.” In contesting established epistemic institutions, far-right actors often make stigmatized knowledge claims, which Barkun (2013, 26) defines as “claims to truth that the claimants regard as verified despite the marginalization of those claims by the institutions that conventionally distinguish between knowledge and error – universities, communities of scientific researchers, and the like.”

Scholars have, for example, noted how far-right actors nowadays utilize the work of Antonio Gramsci, as well as the term “Cultural Marxism” in their conspiratorial framing of the alleged coordinated destruction of Western societies by the intellectual left (Miller-Idriss 2020, 123; Paternotte and Verloo 2021;

Ravecca et al. 2023, 43). This positioning of “the left as hegemonic in education,” Tebaldi (2021) argues, “permits the right to advocate for and gain cultural power” (211). In the context of the UK, Davies and MacRae (2023) aptly show how a series of different right-wing campaigns from the 1980s onwards (e.g., against “political correctness” and “Cultural Marxism”) have now culminated in a collective “war on woke,” waged by a network of right-wing politicians and campaigners, educational charities, and think tanks. The resulting “anti-woke” discourse, they argue, “produces an apparent paradox within which the defenders of democracy, rationality and liberal values are using tropes associated with far-right anti-democratic movements” (Davies and MacRae 2023, 35).

Building on this body of scholarship that scrutinizes far-right politics in particular, and processes of knowledge production in an age of contentious truth claims more generally, this article focuses on the ways in which far-right actors target the fields of knowledge production and dissemination (the episteme), in their mobilization against “gender ideology,” and related constructions such as “woke” (Cammaerts 2022; Ergas et al. 2022). First, opposition to academia, particularly disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, has been a consistent feature of European far-right politics and has become amplified over the past years. Far-right anti-intellectualism is characterized by a deep mistrust towards academic institutions which are perceived to be the bulwark of the left (Davies and MacRae 2023, 15; Paternotte and Verloo 2021). Hence, disciplines that produce knowledge associated with progressive politics, such as social scientific research on issues related to race, gender, and immigration, have been the target of far-right mobilization (Engeli 2020, 233; Verloo 2018b, 28).

Actors in the anti-gender movement have attempted or succeeded at defunding research and teaching on gender based on claims that this kind of knowledge is “ideological and unscientific” (Ahrens et al. 2021, 116; see also Korolczuk 2020; Mayer and Sauer 2018), or even dangerous to society (Martinsson 2020; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018). Although there is no clear evidence of a blanket “anti-science” attitude among far-right politicians or their supporters (Ylä-Anttila 2018, 357), scholars have argued that illiberal actors may manipulate academia to their political advantage, while strangling academic freedom and silencing dissenting scholars (Ergas et al. 2022; Szabados 2019). Moreover, research has shown that both right-wing populists and anti-gender activists have moved away from the use of religious arguments to oppose “gender ideology,” opting instead for various combinations of populist rhetoric, “scientific” language, and human rights framing (Engebretsen 2022; Korolczuk 2021; Kuhar 2015; Mayer and Sauer 2017; Stein 2023, 1343; Ylä-Anttila 2018). Martinsson (2020) argues how opposition to “gender ideology” can be flipped in secularized contexts such as Sweden, where gender studies are constructed as a dangerous quasi-religious ideology, and hence as the antithesis to “Swedish” modernity and rationality. Second, mobilization against “gender ideology” is regularly targeted at schools, based on claims that children are being “brainwashed,” “indoctrinated,” or “sexualized”² by educators from a young age (Corredor 2019, 613–614; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 6; Kuhar and Zobec 2017; Stein 2023, 1341). In fact, Kuhar and Zobec (2017, 29) argue that education is one of the most important targets of anti-gender mobilization. Conversely, there has been a relative inattention to the educational policies of far-right parties in Europe (for an exception, see Berg, Jungblut, and Jupskås 2023; Kemper 2016, 47–51).

Responding to the relative lacuna in the literature concerning the intersection between the far right, gender, and knowledge production, this article specifically applies key insights from scholarly work on the far right in relation to the episteme (Verloo 2018b; Paternotte and Verloo 2021). It analyzes ways in which Dutch far-right discourse about gender is aimed at attacking, delegitimizing, and manipulating epistemic institutions. In addition, it investigates the ways in which the FvD engages in alternative knowledge production about gender, hereby paying specific attention to the establishment of alternative illiberal epistemic institutions in the Dutch context, within the realm of education and knowledge production in schools and universities.

Gender and the Far Right in the Netherlands

Since the early 2000s, populist right-wing politics in the Netherlands have been widely recognized for their claims to support women's and gay rights (de Koster et al. 2014). Both the List Pim Fortuyn³ (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, or LPF), and the Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, or PVV) have been known for their relatively progressive stance on gender equality and gay rights, when compared to other far-right parties in Europe (Akkerman 2015; de Koster et al. 2014; Duina and Carson 2020). At the same time, the Dutch far right tends to oppose policies aimed at promoting gender equality based on their refutation of the existence of any kind of structural gender inequality (see also Bracke 2012, 238), which Verloo (2018b, 25) argues is, in fact, a key example of *opposition* to gender equality. Like other European parties on the far right, any liberal positions on gender expressed by far-right parties are often used in direct support for illiberal anti-immigration, and especially anti-Muslim positions (Akkerman 2015), and thus fall neatly into the framework of femonationalism (Farris 2017) and homonationalism (Puar 2007). The instrumentalization of women's and LGB emancipation for the pursuit of anti-immigration politics is however not unique to the far right, and part of mainstream Dutch political discourses and policy interventions, characterized by "sexual exceptionalism" (Puar 2007, as cited in Bracke 2012, 245) and "homonostalgia" (Wekker 2009; 2016). Regardless of this (superficial) embrace of women's and gay rights, it is also important to note that opposition to the recognition and expansion of legal rights for trans, gender diverse, and intersex people remains prevalent among the center-right of Dutch politics, for instance with regards to gender self-identification (NOS 2024a).

The Dutch parliament currently features three far-right parties: the Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, or PVV), founded and led by Geert Wilders since 2006 (25% of the vote, and the largest party in Dutch parliament and the current coalition government); Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, or FvD), founded and led by Thierry Baudet since 2016 (2% of the vote); and JA21, which split off from the FvD in 2020 and is led by Joost Eerdman (less than 1% of the vote). After a significant electoral victory in the provincial elections of 2019, in which FvD became the largest party, voter support in parliamentary election amounted to 5% (8 seats) in 2021 and 2% (3 seats) in 2023. Although all three parties share a populist, nativist, and authoritarian ideological profile, FvD has radicalized over the past few years (Rooduijn et al. 2023). In the period following

its entry into parliament, FvD has been criticized for openly expressing and condoning racism, sexism, and antisemitism within its ranks, as well as for launching disinformation campaigns and promoting conspiracy theories (de Jonge and Gauffman 2022; van Buuren 2023). Its conspiratorial anti-establishment ethos has also translated into attempts to create “Forumland,” “a (mainly) digital connected parallel society with its own rules, schools, (dating) apps, cryptocurrency, QR-free zones, housing departments, businesses, and entertainment sector” (van Buuren 2023, 95). Hence, Rooduijn et al. (2023) state that FvD is now considered extreme right by country experts.

Chronologically speaking, this article can be seen as an extension of Verloo’s (2018b) analysis of the epistemic mobilization and gender politics of the Dutch far right, which was published shortly after the initial electoral success of FvD, and before their recent extensive campaigning on “gender ideology” and “woke”. Moreover, FvD stands out from its far-right predecessors due to its strategy of establishing parallel organizations and institutions (van Buuren 2023) and its aims to create a mass party with a large membership (de Jonge 2021). At the same time, the party structure is deeply hierarchical and tightly controlled by party leader Baudet (de Jonge 2021). On the political supply side, previous research indicates that FvD followers on social media show higher levels of backlash against feminism, gender diversity, and trans rights, compared to their PVV counterparts (Fiers and Muis 2021, 15). The political profile of the FvD can thus be situated in a social context that has historically been and remains relatively liberal with regards to the politics of gender and sexuality. The FvD also competes with two other far-right parties, one of which, the PVV, recently gained unprecedented electoral success after a long period of mainstreaming and normalization of its ideological position. In comparison, the FvD presents a case of a far-right party that has openly radicalized its position on gender (and other issues), which coincided with a clear drop in the party’s electoral appeal after its earlier electoral success. Overall, the FvD constitutes a case of a party-cum-epistemic entrepreneur riding the wave of far-right mainstreaming (de Jonge and Gauffman 2022), and whose openly extreme and conspiratorial discourse on gender arguably represent a new phase in far-right anti-gender politics in the Netherlands. Moreover, the FvD’s anti-gender mobilization showcases how transnational anti-gender narratives are reproduced in, and adapted to, a context where the mainstream holds relatively liberal views on issues related to gender and sexuality.

Method: A Qualitative Analysis of the FvD’s Politics of Knowledge

In order to explore the ways in which the FvD discursively constructs knowledge about, and mobilizes against, “gender,” this paper makes use of a qualitative content analysis of their political discourse and activities located throughout a range of different types of online materials, including text, visual imagery, and videos. Thus, the data collection and analysis employed in this article reflect the multimodal communication strategies used by political actors in today’s digital context (Doerr 2017; Pettersson et al. 2023). A purposive sample of online materials posted between January 1 and November 22, 2023 (the latter being the date of the

parliamentary elections) was collected from X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, and the FvD webpage. This timeframe allows for the full capture of the party's campaigns in the run-up to both the provincial elections on March 15, as well as the parliamentary elections on November 22. Data was collected from the main FvD webpage, and from the YouTube and X accounts of the main FvD party, their youth wing JFVD, and the FvD think tank ("scientific bureau") *Renaissance Instituut*.⁴ The sample analyzed in this paper consists of 175 posts on X, 32 articles from the FvD webpage, and 26 YouTube videos (adding up to over 14 hours of video material). This sample was selected based on the criterion that the contents should represent the party's position on gender (including among other topics LGBTQI+ rights, women's emancipation, abortion, and gender roles). For the YouTube videos, this selection was made based on the title and description of the video. Similarly, articles on the FvD webpage were selected based on their titles.

Data was coded by means of a qualitative content analysis informed by the theoretical framework presented in this paper, focusing specifically on how the FvD a) oppose knowledge about gender they disagree with, and b) are engaged in processes of alternative knowledge production about the issue of gender. Data collected from X and the FvD webpage were coded in NVivo 14, where materials were coded at multiple levels, capturing a) whether sections of the material presented either an attack on existing epistemic institutions or b) an active strategy of alternative knowledge production. In addition, materials were inductively coded for the specific discursive construction of enemy images, including so-called "transgender ideology," "Cultural Marxism," "feminism," "gender ideology," "the (extreme) left," and "woke." The analysis of YouTube videos was done by a combination of transcribing and categorizing relevant excerpts, and notetaking of relevant visual and audio elements in relation to the two focal points of the analysis. All quotes presented in the findings section have been translated from Dutch to English by the author. The analysis does not include direct hyperlinks to far-right content, due to ethical considerations to avoid further amplifying its reach. Links to the cited contents are however available on request.

Findings and Discussion

The following sections will present the key findings of this study, focusing first on the ways in which the FvD mobilize against existing epistemic institutions, namely schools and universities, and the ways in which such mobilization is connected to broader conspiratorial narratives about "woke" and "transgender ideology." The second section will then detail the ways in which the FvD seeks to construct its own epistemic niche alongside the Dutch mainstream, through establishing its own epistemic institutions.

Attacking Epistemic Institutions in Particular and "Wokeness" in General

Over the course of 2023, the mobilization of the FvD on the issue of gender took the form of opposition to epistemic institutions, most importantly schools and

academic institutions, discursively connected to what the party considers broad and fundamental threats to Dutch society, encapsulated conspiratorial terminology such as “gender madness,” “transgender ideology,” and “woke.” The FvD has been involved in sustained campaigns against educational policies and teaching materials, especially those aimed at young children. FvD politicians have claimed that children in educational environments are being “indoctrinated” with “woke” or “(trans)gender ideology,” concepts which are repeatedly linked to the alleged premature “sexualization” of children. This discourse became especially apparent in March 2023, in the context of a voluntary project week aimed at supporting elementary schools in providing relational and sexual education (*de Week van de Lentekriebels*). The FvD actively campaigned against this project week, and were subsequently criticized for spreading misinformation about teaching materials distributed to schools in light of this campaign,⁵ for example in this claim made by party leader Thierry Baudet in parliament:

“At thousands of elementary schools in the whole of the Netherlands, children from the age of four are being urged by adults to think about sex changes, anal sex, threesomes, and drag queens. Picture books with illustrations about for example how to give a blow job are also spread, again to children from the age of four. This sexualization of children is wrong and needs to stop. The promotion of sex change to children needs to stop. And the creeping normalization of pedophilia needs to stop” (Baudet, YouTube video published in March 2023).

In this excerpt, Baudet discursively connects misinformation about explicit sexual content being presented to schoolchildren and allegations of pedophilia, to drag queens and gender affirming healthcare, hereby reproducing broader transnational anti-gender narratives concerning the alleged “sexualization” of children, paired with the scapegoating of LGBTQI+ communities. In the same period, the FvD published a range of videos and posts on X that disseminated the same message; namely that young children in Dutch schools are being indoctrinated by alleged “gender madness,” “transgender ideology,” “LGBT propaganda” (and combinations thereof), or simply by “woke,” a term used not only to refer to knowledge about gender and sexuality that the FvD opposes, but a broad self-defined range of issues that the FvD presents as a threat to (young) children (see also Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Kuhar and Zobec 2017). For example, a campaign image published on X in March 2023 depicts a young boy putting his fingers in his ears trying to block out the words behind him: “race, feelings of guilt, woke, victim, LGBTQ+.” The overlaid text states, “No woke indoctrination – it’s possible [*Kan gewoon*]. Vote FvD.”

The materials include a few instances where the FvD’s framing of education about gender and sexuality is combined with overt expressions of disgust, for example through the use of the term “disgusting” or by referring to nausea. Ahmed (2015) argues how such affective speech acts can create a “shared witnessing of the disgusting thing” and hereby generates “a community of those who are bound together through the shared condemnation of a disgusting object

or event” (94). In one episode of the FvD online talk show *Forum Inside*⁶ published in July 2023, FvD parliamentarian Gideon van Meijeren cites teaching advice distributed by the Dutch Transgender Network and describes it as “extremely poisonous,” based on his argument that such teaching materials “deny there is such a thing as difference between men and women”, and therefore lead to “increasingly more children being encouraged to question their sex (“*geslacht*”) from a very young age.”

In addition to mobilization against education about gender and sexual diversity at schools, the FvD opposes the alleged ideological indoctrination in universities, which they argue are overrun by “woke” and “cancel culture.” Various episodes of *Forum Inside* focus specifically on FvD’s views on academia and academic freedom. Overall, the discourse of the FvD constructs an image of the university system as coopted by ideological forces (often defined as “woke”), resulting in a pool of like-minded “experts” who purportedly parrot the views of the powerful, and silence dissenting views. Any “freethinking” academics that do remain, are at risk of being accosted and silenced by activist students, according to FvD politicians. Overall, the FvD paints a picture of Dutch academia where discussion and dissent has become impossible, and any form of academic disagreement is stifled by the ideological forces of “woke.” In response to this, talk show guest Paul Cliteur⁷ proposes a way of reorganizing the academic system to combat this undesirable development, while recognizing that in his eyes, woke is already too pervasive that this cannot be realistically implemented:

What is also a bit frightening, is that it is not just the UvA [University of Amsterdam]. At some point I have thought it might actually be good if we get diversity in that sense in the Netherlands, that, well, OK, give the UvA to the wokies. We make it completely woke (...) or Utrecht, or Leiden, doesn’t matter. But there should be—go and make a woke university and let such a woke university compete with a university along the classical standards that Ralf [Ralf Dekker, director of the *Renaissance Instituut*] has put down in a very idealized manner, free discussions and this, everything needs to be discussable. Make such a university too. And then make it possible that these universities compete. But the tricky thing with that woke ideology, it is already so influential, that woke, it flows in via often also international students (...), and all those—that is totally wokefied [*ver-woket*] at the moment. So, there isn’t even some kind of life buoy anywhere, a sort of place where you can still think freely. (*Forum Inside*, February 2023)

It is important to note that the FvD’s discursive mobilization against “woke” in education and academia is connected to broader and deeply conspiratorial discourses about “woke” and “(trans)gender ideology” as American imports and as part of a malicious imperial project that now manifests in the ongoing war in Ukraine, as stated by FvD parliamentarian Freek Jansen in an episode of *Forum Inside* from March 2023:

“All those transgender things, it comes from America - it is - that is why we also call it gender and all those things, it’s not a Dutch word. It comes

straight out of America. This is a cultural export product from America and NATO is the military branch to bring it into the world. They also do this actively, they try to promote this in the countries where they are active, that is, among others, the Netherlands.”

In the episode, Baudet responds to this by stating that in his eyes, Putin represents the “polar opposite of globalism” and that Russia “in many ways stands for the old idea of a nation that is proud of its history, that uses fossil fuels, that wants to be a sovereign country, and therefore does not want to go along in that LGBT story.” Interestingly, the FvD’s mobilization against “woke” and “LGBT ideology” can be linked to developments and narratives circulating in the USA, where strong parallels can be found with, for example, the so-called Don’t Say Gay law that was adopted in Florida in 2022 and further expanded in 2023, which prohibits teaching about gender identity and sexual orientation in schools (ABC News 2023). Simultaneously, the notion of “gender” as an American export product aligns with the FvD’s pro-Russian stance that has been the object of severe parliamentary critique and scrutiny (du Pré 2024) and is reminiscent of the Russian imagination of Europe as “Gayropa” (Foxall 2019).

Overall, the concept of “woke” operates as a container term, or “empty signifier,” similar to the concept of “gender ideology” (Laclau 2006, as discussed by Mayer and Sauer 2018, 23), for a broad range of hostilities and anxieties with regards to gender politics. The fluidity of the term “woke” is also exemplified by the range of ways in which it is used by FvD politicians: as a noun (woke, this/that woke, “wokism”), as an adjective (woke fuss, woke indoctrination, woke propaganda, woke incidents), as a verb (“wokefied,” as mentioned above), and as ways to describe individuals and groups (“wokies,” woke students, being woke, or not being woke enough). As a result, it remains unclear what “woke” entails, as the ways in which it is described may point towards a political movement, an ideology, an individual characteristic, or even a quasi-religious force. This openness thus allows FvD politicians to expand the concept of “woke” in whatever way that fits their political aims, similar to the ways in which “gender ideology” has been utilized as a “multi-purpose enemy” (Kuhar and Zobec 2017, 31), and by connecting the term “woke” to a broad range of *other* developments that the FvD consider undesirable or dangerous. In a similar vein, investigative journalist Casper Thomas (2023) shows that the right wing uptake of the term “woke” in the Dutch parliament since 2020 has been rapid, shifting from “a proud vignette to a sinister signaling word,” and is now commonly used to “express moral panic or as a general collective noun in order to criticize what one does not like (para. 10, translated from Dutch).”

This tendency is clearly found among FvD politicians. In the following conversation, for example, Baudet (somewhat chaotically) connects increasing immigration and the ongoing housing shortage to “woke,” “transgender indoctrination,” environmental regulations concerning nitrogen emissions, and the “clash of cultures:”

Jansen: “And we see the direct consequences [of increasing immigration] in particular on the housing market. If you want to buy a house on your own, well good luck, that’s not possible anymore.”

Baudet: “But that is how it all connects right, because of this you all must have two incomes, and because of that you cannot spend time on raising your children, that is why that woke transgender indoctrination can completely take over those children. The energy bills also need to be paid. It’s actually all one system. Then you go and watch the news for a bit, you do not have time to delve into it, and you think well, nitrogen is probably a problem, whatever. So, it’s actually – it’s immigration that works through – not only the clash of cultures, all of the integration problems, everything it brings about, it works through and it puts a strain on the whole – it disjoins the whole social structure actually.” (*Forum Inside*, March 2023)

Baudet’s ideological bricolage of wide-ranging issues as part of one system speaks to Barkun’s (2013, 3–4) three defining characteristics of a conspiracy theory, namely “nothing happens by accident,” “nothing is as it seems,” and, perhaps most crucially here, “everything is connected.”

Importantly, “woke” and related concepts such as “transgender ideology” are portrayed by the FvD as ideological vehicles of the “globalists,” an amorphous group of powerful actors whom the party considers to be *the* ultimate threat to Western civilization. This is exemplified in the following conversation between Baudet and van Meijeren in an episode of *Forum Inside* from July 2023:

Baudet: “But what is behind this transgender?”

Van Meijeren: “Well in the first place you have that financial interest, because there are indeed people who earn extreme amounts of money from this (...) But this is purely the financial interest, I think that there is also a sociological interest behind this. Namely the destruction of the traditional family, that forms a very strong community in society. Men and women become estranged from one another.”

Baudet: “Definitely. A woman needs a man, and a man needs a woman.”
(...)

Baudet: “But which interests are behind this? Who has an interest, or who have an interest in the patriarchy being destroyed?”

Van Meijeren: “Well I think that if you strive for a world government, or you strive on a smaller scale for a strengthening of your own position of power and want to have much more power and control over a population, that that is easier to realise when people are confused, are individualistic, and no longer have strong family ties.”

In response to this perceived threat, the FvD presents itself as the only political party that is aware of these ongoing developments, and the only party in the Netherlands that opposes, among other things, “the globalists,” “transgender ideology,” “woke,” measures against climate change, COVID vaccination and pandemic restrictions, and the so-called Great Replacement (“omvolking” in Dutch), a conspiracy theory which has been mainstreamed by far-right leaders across Europe in recent years (Ekman 2022). Such ideas revolving around the notion that the Western/Dutch population is at risk of being replaced through (non-Western) immigration are by no means new and are rooted in the

popularization of the “clash of civilization” thesis by several influential conservative right politicians the 1990s (Oudenampsen 2023). As indicated above, these issues are commonly connected and presented as part of one larger system (or, in other words, as a Foucauldian regime of truth), of which only the FvD and their allies are aware. The extreme right ideology of the party (Rooduijn et al. 2023) has sparked societal criticism, as well as a political proposal to facilitate the banning of openly antidemocratic political parties by the Dutch high court (NOS 2022). In response, the FvD has leant into a narrative of victimization and claims to be the *target* of intolerance, symptomatic of so-called “perpetrator-victim reversal” (Cammaerts 2018, 8):

“We are the most endangered minority of the Netherlands; I am convinced of that. Not the Jews, not the blacks, not the this, not the that, it is the populists, as we are called. We are the most endangered, most persecuted minority of the Netherlands” (Baudet in *Forum Inside*, February 2023).

To summarize, the FvD’s politics of knowledge about gender involves direct opposition to knowledge taught and produced in schools and universities, and attacks those who do not conform to the FvD’s essentialist and binary understanding of gender, through the conspiratorial formulation of terms like “transgender ideology.” At the same time, the FvD’s mobilization on the topic of gender goes far beyond the concrete school and university environments and connects to their broader conspiratorial claims that global powers seek to weaken social ties, destroy the traditional family, and undermine Western societies, by means of spreading “woke” and “transgender ideology” among the Dutch population.

Engagement in Alternative Knowledge Production: Education Without “Gender Madness”

In addition to attacking epistemic institutions, the FvD is also actively engaged in producing alternative epistemic institutions of their own, in which the issue of gender is a recurring theme besides other issues such as climate change policies, national identity, and Dutch colonial history. In doing so, the party’s leading politicians actively construct a self-image of “alternative intellectuals,” or in other words, a group of rebellious right-wing “new Gramscians” (Paternotte and Verloo 2021) who resist the status quo and see the world “for what it really is,” contrary to mainstream politicians, academics, and journalists (see also Tebaldi 2021). Simultaneously, the intellectual framing of the party is steeped in tradition, harking back to an imagined time when academia was still about objectivity and free exploration as opposed to the alleged ongoing indoctrination by left-wing elites, cancel culture and “woke” (see also Cammaerts 2022; Davies and McRae 2023). Oudenampsen’s (2021) work details how Dutch far-right intellectualism is in fact rooted in a conservative intellectual movement and tradition that reaches back to the 1960s. Although the FvD should be understood as an extension of this movement, Oudenampsen (2021) argues, the party also represents a new, and more radical phase of the Dutch institutional far right, for instance by “flirting openly with fascist ideas and racist conspiracy theories” (212).

The intellectual framing of the party is particularly present in episodes of *Forum Inside*, which regularly features critical (former) academics,⁸ and where some discussions include references to scholars such as Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, Carl Jung, Frédéric Bastiat, Plato, and the Frankfurt School. Moreover, the talk show is sprinkled with intellectual “cues” such as references to, and discussions of, works of literature and historical events (of which the latter in some cases amount to counterfactual conspiracy theories, see also Couperus and Tortola 2019). At the start of each episode, the director of the *Renaissance Instituut* Ralf Dekker presents a bottle of white wine for the guests to share during their conversation, which further contributes to the cultivation of an image of “highbrow” cultural intellectualism. The party’s elitist tendencies also show from Baudet’s descriptions of parliamentarians of other political parties as “very dumb” or “idiots” (*sukkels*), or people who “just watch the news every now and then” as “low information people.”

Overall, the FvD’s elitist framing presents an apparent contradiction to their populist claims to oppose the political establishment (often labelled by the FvD as “the cartel parties”) and give power back to the people. Based on the analysis of various episodes of *Forum Inside*, it seems that prominent FvD politicians are not anti-elite *per se*, but rather that they view themselves as the only “real” elitist alternative to the current status quo (see also Ylä-Anttila 2018, 379, on the contradiction between populism and elitist counterknowledge claims). These kinds of narratives thus present a departure from populism as defined by Mudde (2010, 1175), characterized by an ideological framing of society as divided into “two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’”, where “politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale*, i.e. the general will of the people.” Stacey (2022) argues that this apparent contradiction reveals some gaps in the existing literature on populism, notably that “eliteness *per se* is not the crucial trigger” (106), given that many populist radical right politicians have been solidly embedded in the societal elite throughout, and even before, their political careers. The FvD’s complex dance between populist and elitist messaging can instead be understood as an expression of “populist nativism” (Stacey 2022), where the FvD attacks the establishment not because of their elite status, but because they are perceived as “abus[ing] their privilege by perpetuating ideas that undermine national culture” (Stacey 2022, 106) and are therefore considered a threat to the “real” native people.

The framing of the FvD as *the* alternative political and intellectual elite also takes shape in the founding of their own epistemic institutions, including the think tank (“scientific bureau”) called the *Renaissance Instituut*⁹ and the elementary school the *Renaissance School*, the naming of which fits into the party’s broader romanticization of intellectual traditionalism. In their functional typology of political party think tanks, Vande Walle and de Lange (2024, 13–14) classify the *Renaissance Instituut* as a prime example of a ‘Party Promoter’, whose main role is “to disseminate the party ideas to a wider audience,” whilst also strengthening the party apparatus through fostering networks and organizing social events. Moreover, the party runs its own publishing house Amsterdam Books, which offers publications in line with the party’s conspiratorial views on issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, some of which have been (co)authored by Baudet himself. Such side activities (others include the meal

box service *Eerlijk Eten* and the party's own smartphone application) have often been left unreported by the FvD's parliamentarians and have resulted in them being temporarily suspended from parliament, as Dutch MPs are required to report any other roles or sources of income they have, to promote transparency and avoid conflicts of interest (NOS 2023). In addition to the discursive and epistemic work done by such "parallel" institutions, organizations, and companies (Van Buuren 2023), the FvD's side activities also raise important questions concerning the ways in which far-right actors may monetize various ideological exploits to fund their illiberal activism (Leidig 2023).

The party's epistemic institution that is perhaps the most directly connected to the FvD's gender politics is the establishment of their elementary school, the *Renaissance School*, presented as a school with "no woke indoctrination" or "gender madness." The first *Renaissance School*, located in the city of Almere, was operational from September 2022 to the summer of 2024, and was approved by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education in early 2023 (Algemeen Dagblad 2023b). The FvD announced the closing of the school in early July 2024, as the school had insufficient parental statements of support, which were necessary to receive state funding (NOS 2024b). During the two years of its operation, the Renaissance School was a private school for which parents of pupils were required to pay an enrollment fee. In April 2023, however, the FvD posted on their webpage and on X that the foundation that was officially running the school (the Tocqueville Foundation) had received sufficient donations to offer education at the *Renaissance School* free of charge, which they claim to be "Good news for traditional, woke-free education!" Thus far, it seems that the appeal of the *Renaissance School* remains limited, as Dutch media have reported a total number of 17 pupils attending the school (NOS 2024b). At the same time, the director of the school announced that alternative ways of securing state financing will be explored in the next two years (NOS 2024b). Regardless, I argue that the ideology of the party raises serious concerns about the ideas to which the children who did go to the *Renaissance School* were exposed to. It should also be noted that the relatively easy establishment of schools based on the grounds of diversity of thought and religion is facilitated by the remnants of the Dutch pillarized structure.¹⁰ As such, the specific institutional context of the Netherlands provides pathways for illiberal actors to promote their ideas within the educational system, which the FvD was able to use to its advantage, at least for some time.

Although the school was run by the Tocqueville Foundation and is therefore not *officially* linked to the party, the board of this foundation consists of FvD parliamentarians and is registered at the same address as the FvD party office (Algemeen Dagblad 2023a), and Baudet referred to the *Renaissance School* as "our school" on several occasions in *Forum Inside*. Moreover, the main FvD channel on X posted the following in April 2023, which illustrates how the party did indeed claim the school as its own: "Dutch education is in ruins. But we do not only deliver critique, we also offer an alternative. We have founded our own school. Small-scale quality education, without climate and gender madness. Go to [renaissanceschool.nl](https://www.renaissanceschool.nl) for more information!" In a promotional video published in March 2023, the presentation of the school is sprinkled with references to Dutch culture, featuring images of tulips and windmills, Dutch painters such

as Vincent van Gogh, Johannes Vermeer and Rembrandt van Rijn, and typically Dutch food items such as *kruidnoten*, *beschuit met muisjes*, and *rookworst*.¹¹ The pedagogy of the school is presented by Dekker, who describes it as traditional, using pen and paper (“no digital devices”), and focusing on core skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics, featuring “no modern antics, no enforced gender confusion, but just good basic skills, creative things, cozy (“gezellig”) and educational, and a good foundation for the future.”

In addition to the establishment of the *Renaissance School*, the FvD’s gendered politics of knowledge also extend to their publishing house, which has launched a line of “non-woke” children’s books, announced by Baudet on X in March 2023: “Guaranteed no LGBTQI-propaganda. No shame about our past. No green indoctrination. Order now and be assured that your child(ren) are in good hands!” An episode of *Forum Inside* devotes significant attention to children’s literature, in which Baudet elaborates his position on “modern” children’s books and the aim of Amsterdam Books to provide “appropriate” reading material:

“I have this now – my son is a little too young to be read to, but I really want to do that. I also enjoyed it enormously as a child. And then I think, well shit, when I go to the bookstore, and I get something like – Jantje is gay, and is being bullied and is sorry about the colonialism of his grandparents, and [he] is living climate neutral, and is vegan and these kinds of things. (...) But now we will – or we – you with Amsterdam Books [directed at talk show guest] are working on providing an alternative. So, parents, or people who are watching, they might have children who are five, six, seven, eight or nine years old, this is something – this is responsible to read to your children” (Baudet in *Forum Inside*, June 2023).

Overall, the FvD’s self-portrayal as the only intellectual alternative to the status quo, and their establishment of epistemic institutions that support their ideological position, contribute to the shaping of a silo or “pillar” of their own within Dutch mainstream society, which they perceive as having succumbed to wokeness and globalism (see also van Buuren 2023, on “Forumland” as a parallel society). As such, the FvD is not only creating alternative epistemic institutions, but claim that they seek to build an epistemic niche that operates alongside the Dutch mainstream. The production and dissemination of knowledge about gender is a prominent feature of the FvD’s politics of knowledge, especially when linked to conspiratorial notions of children being “indoctrinated” or “sexualized” by the undefined forces of “woke.”

Conclusion

This paper sought to analyze the ways in which the Dutch far right discursively construct and mobilize against knowledge about “gender,” through an analysis of the FvD’s gender politics as a form of “alternative knowledge production” (Bracke and Paternotte 2016, 144) and based on Verloo’s (2018b) conceptualization of the episteme, and epistemic institutions specifically, as crucial sites of knowledge,

“truth,” and “reality” in the ongoing far-right contestation of gender politics. The analytical focus here is two-fold, exploring the ways in which the party mobilizes against existing epistemic institutions (notably schools and universities), as well as the creation of the party’s own epistemic institutions.

The findings indicate that the FvD mobilizes against existing epistemic institutions based on their claims that mainstream (or “woke”) knowledge about gender and sexuality is not only “false,” but a serious threat, especially to schoolchildren. In doing so, the party makes discursive connections between gender diversity (notably trans people), and the alleged sexualization of children, hereby driving a narrative that vilifies and scapegoats LGBTQI+ minorities. These more concrete claims of “harmful” influences in schools and “woke indoctrination” at universities are also connected to the party’s wider conspiracy theories about leftist forces that seek to control and destroy Western societies (see also Miller-Idriss 2020) where “woke,” “gender madness,” and “transgender ideology” are portrayed as vehicles of powerful global elites. Such deeply conspiratorial narratives about gender are not communicated in isolation but connected to a broader web of conspiracy theories and demographic anxieties concerning the “replacement” of white/European populations (Ekman 2022; Oudenampsen 2023). Overall, the findings presented in this paper illustrate the ways in which far-right actors may combine narratives from the anti-gender movement with far-right ideology in ways that fuse together various strands of conspiratorial thinking. This paper argues that the FvD present themselves as a rebellious but victimized group of “alternative intellectuals,” who seek to establish an epistemic niche which reproduces the party’s anti-gender positions through various media products and provides “non-woke” education to children.

The implications of these findings first highlight the important yet under-explored far-right strategy of not only dismantling existing epistemic institutions, but also establishing epistemic institutions of their own (Paternotte and Verloo 2021, 572). Whereas academic scrutiny of far-right alternative media and other forms of digital communication has quickly expanded over the past decade (see e.g., Haanshuus and Ihlebæk 2021; Holt 2019; Jasser et al. 2023), the findings of this paper indicate a need for continued inquiry into the ways in which far-right knowledge production and dissemination may be institutionalized, especially in the form of education. We have seen far-reaching effects of such far-right anti-gender politics of knowledge in Central and Eastern Europe, where the academic freedom of gender scholars has been stifled and women’s and LGBTQI+ rights have been put under severe pressure by illiberal governments (Ergas et al. 2022; Grzebalska and Petó 2018). However, less far-reaching, but nonetheless concerning effects of far-right anti-gender politics can also be found in North-western Europe, for example in Sweden (Martinsson 2020), Germany (Kemper 2016) and indeed, the Netherlands. Notably, this paper illustrates how even a relatively small far-right party (at least in terms of political representation) can succeed in institutionalizing anti-gender politics within the domain of the episteme, in a broader cultural context that is generally understood as relatively liberal with regards to women’s and gay rights.

Second, this paper contributes to the existing literature on the gender politics of the far right by highlighting the need to pay close attention to the flexible use

of conspiracy theories (Barkun 2013; Fenster 2008) in its ideological positioning. As this article has shown, the FvD combines its anti-gender positions with a range of other political issues into one unified enemy image, most aptly summarized in the label “woke.” This underscores the need to pay close attention to the ways in which far-right positions on gender, race, immigration, climate, and healthcare may be presented as inherently connected to potential voters and supporters, potentially paving the way for the spread of conspiracy theories and radicalization. A full analysis of the ideological bricolage embedded in the FvD’s conspiratorial rhetoric is beyond the scope of this article but presents an important avenue for future research.

Finally, the FvD’s attempts to create alternative epistemic institutions should not detract attention from the fact that the party’s racist and conspiratorial views have been covered extensively in the mainstream media, often without sufficient reflection or pushback (de Jonge and Gaufman 2022), contrary to the party’s self-portrayal as a victimized, ignored, and silenced minority. This raises concerns with regards to the mainstreaming of the FvD’s discourse on gender (as well as many other issues), notably with regards to their claims that *any* information about gender diversity and LGBTQI+ communities is harmful to children, as well as the party’s vilification of trans and gender diverse people. It is also important to note that alarmist discourse around the term “woke” is already by no means unique to the far right, as shown by Cammaerts (2022) and Davies and McRae (2023) in the British context. In the Netherlands too, “anti-woke” is increasingly picked up by the conservative right (Thomas 2023). Thus, this indicates that the potential electoral appeal of “anti-woke” politics might further expand through the continuing normalization of such views within the political mainstream.

In the aftermath of the far-right victory of the PVV in the parliamentary elections of 2023, the simultaneous radicalization and inclusion of the FvD in the Dutch political sphere may not only lead to the further spread and normalization of their extreme right positions (Cammaerts 2018; de Jonge and Gaufman 2022) but may also contribute to a broader and problematic perception of Wilders’ nativist, authoritarian, and populist politics as moderate by comparison. It is worth noting here, that Wilders has previously referred to teaching about gender diversity as putting “craziness” (*gekkigheid*) in the heads of children, which he claims is just one component of the alleged “woke dictatorship” (House of Representatives of the Netherlands 2021). Now that the PVV is the largest party in government, it is particularly concerning that the new administrative agenda (*Regeerprogramma* 2024) states that “we aim for neutral and age-appropriate goals in primary and secondary education, for instance concerning relational and sexual education.” Such statements not only create potential to crack down on gender inclusive teaching under the guise of “political neutrality,” but also give room for governmental actors to define and police what is acceptable “knowledge” and “truth” about gender.

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Notes

1. It should be noted however, that far-right positions on gender have been, and still remain, informed by cis- and heteronormative societal standards (Sedgwick 1990). As such, this complicates the “alternativeness” of far-right alternative knowledge production about gender.
2. What is often meant by “sexualization” by anti-gender movements is any exposure to knowledge about gender and/or sexuality in educational settings (with the exception of the affirmation of traditional and heteronormative gender roles).
3. List Pim Fortuyn was led by the late Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002. The party was dissolved in 2008.
4. Data collection and analysis was focused on the statements of prominent public persons such as far-right parliamentarians and pundits, who have chosen to disseminate their views to a large online audience. Data was collected only from official political party communication channels, which are patently public sources that are open to all.
5. For instance, as discussed by public broadcaster KRO-NCRV (2023). See also the answers to Baudet’s parliamentary questions posed to the Minister of Education on March 29, 2023 (Rijksoverheid, 2023).
6. *Forum Inside* is hosted by Thierry Baudet and Ralf Dekker and is published on the main party YouTube channel.
7. Cliteur has fulfilled various roles within FvD over the years (most notably as an FvD representative in the Dutch Senate), in addition to being Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Law at Leiden University and party leader Thierry Baudet’s former mentor.
8. Including various FvD parliamentarians.
9. For a more detailed discussion of the Renaissance Instituut, see Vande Walle and de Lange (2024, 13–14).
10. In the first half of the 20th century, Dutch society was organized in so-called pillars, in which the lives of distinct groups (e.g., Protestants, Catholics, socialists, and liberals) were largely segregated and organized into separate political parties, schools, media organizations, trade unions, and leisure clubs (Lijphart 1968). As a result, people generally had limited contact with those outside of their pillar. In the 1960s and 1970s the pillarized system largely broke down.
11. *Kruidnoten* are small seasonal spiced biscuits, usually consumed round *Sinterklaas* on the 5th of December; *beschuit met muisjes* are round, dry, bread-like crackers with a layer of butter and dyed sugar-coated anise seeds on top, typically served at the birth of a child; and *rookworst* is a type of smoked sausage.

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