RIGHT TO 'WOKE'

a critical discourse analysis on the discursive trajectory of 'woke'.

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0. Abstract

The objective of this thesis was to uncover the way in which terminology travels and spreads and is rearticulated by opposing forces to use against progressivism. This paper analyzed the trajectory of the word 'woke' using the qualitative research method known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) and a framework inspired by Foucault, Bourdieu and Hall. This discourse was traced from the United States, to the United Kingdom, to the Netherlands. Its primary findings are that 1) the strategic appropriation of antiracist language travels along key nodes through public discourse; 2) these key nodes are powerful by way of their association with (in)formal networks and institutions, thus functioning as amplifiers of discourse, which in turn plays a key role in the calibration of meaning and political alignment; 3) this calibration of meaning and political alignment happens through these public discourses, creating a coherent position out of opposition to 'woke' from what struggled to politically align before 'woke' was successfully appropriated. Despite this thesis' limitations, it provides a potential framework to analyze this phenomenon, as well as a starting point for further and more elaborate analysis of this topic.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, discursive ecologies, linguistic appropriation, transnational nationalism, woke*

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1. Introduction

Over the course of a decade, 'woke' has been placed front and center in public discourse and on political agendas. It has transcended the mainstream in the United States, most notably the Black Lives Matter movement's calls to 'stay woke' and ex-president Donald Trump's ironic, derisive use of the term. Now, 'woke' is used so widely across the continent(s) that important political figures such as the new French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati insist that "wokism is censorship" to France's right-wing CNews and even public persons whose careers seem to have little do with politics such as Dutch ESPN-presenter Jan Joost van Gangelen's jokes about "putting on his 'woke' hat" to apologize for incorrect pronunciation of Japanese players' names (Europe 1, 2024, 7:05; de Telegraaf, 2024, 0:15). The widespread use of 'woke' in politics and media has in turn made it a part of daily conversation.

The word itself, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) for awareness and vigilance regarding oppression, predates even the 1954–1968 Civil Rights Movement, at least through word of mouth (OED, 2024; Matheis, 2018'). Its history is that of revolution through literal and figurative awakenings to oppression (Kelley, 2021; Benjamin, 1999). Woke's introduction into the global public consciousness, beyond the United States, began with the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter, 2022; Romano, 2020). After the publicly scrutinized murder of George Floyd by two white police officers, activists and sympathizers used it as a call to action and awareness (Grant, 2016). However, as a part of its introduction into the common vernacular, 'woke' underwent a semantic drift known as pejoration to the point that it is considered derogatory (OECD, 2024). It has become closely associated with 'cancel culture', as well as 'critical race theory' and 'political correctness', which have undergone a trajectory comparable to that of 'woke' (Davies & MacRae, 2023; Filmer & Vignozzi, 2022; Romano, 2020).

Moreover, not only are politicians using 'anti-woke' terminology to garner attention and votes, but the term is also a very literal part of some right-wing policy and legislation. Most notably Ron DeSantis' only partially enforced 'Stop WOKE Act' in Florida, intentionally appropriating this terminology and its acquired negative connotations to actively further a politically conservative agenda (Reilly, 2022). Despite 'woke's prevalence and concentration in social and political discourse from the United States, the term has gone on a transatlantic journey: it has made its way into news cycles, comment sections and the mouths of political figures across the world (Davies & Macrae, 2023; Europa 1, 2024; Filmer & Vignozzi, 2022; de Telegraaf, 2024).

This journey shows that 'woke' is not a term with a set definition that has changed over time: this is a term that is defined differently by several groups, whose current mainstream character has been constructed over time by specific groups. Gaining further understanding of this trajectory should present essential insights in the construction of social norms and ideals through viral language to the point of affecting contemporary discourse and even politics. As such, the research question posed in this thesis is the following: "How does the strategic appropriation of antiracist language travel?"

This thesis is aimed at analyzing the trajectory of the word 'woke' as a discursive object, using the qualitative research method known as critical discourse analysis, inspired specifically by Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Stuart Hall. Broadly speaking, critical discourse analysis is characterized by understanding discourse as intrinsically related to, affected by, and expressions of, power relations (Wickham & Kendall, 1999, p.42-48). The theoretical framework expands upon the travel of discourse, the specifics of 'woke', and how this reproduces hierarchies. This is followed by an analysis of 'woke's changing trajectory across discursive actors and ecologies, using the described methodology. Finally, the conclusion answers the research question and reflects on the thesis itself.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Travel of discourse

In 'Traveling Theory' from *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Saïd (1983) writes about the travel of theory in the specific context of the social sciences. On one hand this is shaped by 'conditions of acceptance', which refer to conditions that are more or less the same or more fruitful than the context in which the theory was originally formed, wherein influential actors with a wide reach may play an important role. On the other hand it is shaped by 'resistances', whereby certain aspects of theory might require change or omission, if it is accepted at all. In his work on imaginative geography, Frank (2009) makes the explicit connection between Edward Saïd's 1983 *Traveling Theory* and *Travelling Concepts* by Mieke Bal (2002), though he notes Bal does not mention Saïd by name – perhaps an example of this phenomenon in and of itself. Concepts, or "shorthand theories" (p. 23), travel "between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities" (Bal, 2002, p. 24). Moreover the meaning, reach and operational value changes between disciplines, individual scholars, and so forth. Bal insists that the way a theory or concept changes because of its travel, needs to be assessed before, during and after each 'trip'. Thus, it should be investigated "whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength" and "whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation" (Saïd, 1983, p. 226). Where Saïd is concerned with what makes fertile ground for fleshed-out theories within social science such as time and place, Bal highlights smaller concepts as shorthand theories that are (mis)translated across and beyond disciplines with more ease than larger theories (Frank, 2009). In the context of Bal and Saïd's work, these are primarily academic concepts – or at least, ones with academic beginnings. Academia is one of many fields: a social space with its own rules, hierarchies and actors who compete for various

forms of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). If a concept travels and undergoes a process of differentiation even within a field, it might change even further if it travels beyond its original fields – like how 'woke' traveled beyond its original community-specific, activist and cultural fields.

These changing contexts, these conditions of acceptance and resistances, take place in the realm of discursive ecology, which is "an interleaving of formal, structural, functional, cognitive and cultural constituents" (Russel, 2019, p. 53). The realm of discursive ecology has three major aspects: 1) the linguistic aspect, the knowledge language and symbolic functions; 2) the cognitive aspect, the knowledge of truths, facts and realities held by discursive actors (regardless of whether or not these are shared by the other person[s]); 3) the cultural aspect, or the knowledge of categories and contents as dispersed among and directed to individuals and communities to reflect cognitive reality. That is to say they emerge from and are aimed at cultural environments, and are manifested "through the situated, concrete, but highly variable forms and structures shared by members of this environment" (p. 52). In simpler terms, discourse is subjected to and shaped by complex social and physical structures, which in the context of conditions of acceptance and resistances means that some communities (both in the physical and social sense) are more likely to meet the conditions of acceptance than others. This extends beyond theories in the social sciences, as specified in Saïd's essay, and into a more general travel of discourse of concepts through social environments – that is, discursive ecologies. Concepts are not linguistically isolated but require an ecology to function and flourish.

How discourse travels, then, is through text and networks of people and their discursive ecologies: through persons with symbolic capital and institutions with authority, their audiences and communities (Bourdieu, 1991). In turn, those audiences and communities have their own individual struggles that situate them in a particular context and community of

people. Between literal physical travel and technologies that allow instant and extensive communication across the world, these communities may be situated anywhere. If their context and community meets enough conditions of acceptance, especially if it can attach itself to existing discourse in a community, a discourse will take root and spread organically. This spread may depend on the size and symbolic capital of the community itself or the individual members of that community. It is the elaborate interconnected networks through which the discourse (text) travels, with the help of influential figures with symbolic capital, into discursive ecologies.

A notable institution in the travel of concepts is the media, particularly news media. The text, in this context, is not always a literal text and can instead be the message as encoded and/or decoded. In Stuart Hall's 1973 Encoding/Decoding model, there are two major aspects to the process of sending and receiving a message. Encoding refers to producing the message through coded meanings, wherein the sender uses verbal and non-verbal communication to achieve a specific kind of understanding in the intended audience. Decoding refers to how the intended audience will actually understand and interpret the message, by translating the coded meanings, whereby audiences are unlikely to interpret messages exactly as intended. In the context of discourse, there are four stages: 1) the production of the message, where meaning is encoded; 2) the circulation of the message, including audience feedback and resulting adjustments made to the message; 3) the use of the message, whereby it must yield "meaningful discourse" by active recipients who engage with and discuss the message with others (p. 3); 4) the reproduction of the message, after the audience has interpreted and internalized it, which in some cases may even lead to direct action. This may be applied beyond the scope of television. An example can be found under the subsequent subheading, *2.2.2 'Woke' and the war of position*, which makes a brief mention of an analysis of British news media headlines, differentiated by the newspapers' positions on the political spectrum (Filmer & Vignozzi,

2022). The encoding of these newspapers, their intended message, was dependent on their audiences and feedbacks, which is why they differed in execution and implied message, and why the reproduction might differ in intensity and consequences on different sides of the political spectrum (neutral information on, versus derogatory calls to rally against, 'woke').

The travel from the United States to Europe is of particular interest. The ocean between them provides several thousand kilometers of physical distance, but the two sides of the Atlantic are bound together by people, partnerships, politics and a shared history. The US and EU share value systems that draw not only upon Christianity but are influenced by Greek and Roman thought, intended separation between secular and spiritual hierarchies, rule of law, a preference for individualism, privatization, capitalism and, as a result, a propensity for neoliberalism (Huntington & Jervis, 1997). This is no coincidence: the United States as an imperialist, colonial project is European in origin and despite some historical friction and the declaration of independence, the two have never been entirely separate. To suggest US-American discourses such as 'woke' and its implications are foreign or invasive and have no place in European discursive ecologies, then, makes no sense. Moreover, 'woke' conceptualized as extremist, virtue-signaling US-American discourse and the 'anti-woke' sentiments that follow, is paradoxical in nature: the 'anti-woke' side of the discursive coin is arguably more U.S.-American than 'woke' itself, as 'anti-woke' is the colonial reaction to the colonized's call to awareness and action, as will be clarified in *2.3 Reproducing hierarchies* with the help of Fanon.

2.2 'Woke' and the war of position waged through politics and (social) media

2.2.1 Context on 'woke'

To understand 'woke', its semantic journey must be understood. The concept of 'awakening', particularly to realizations of oppression, is a part of a long-standing and historical revolutionary tradition. Robin D.G. Kelley (2022) writes that the dream state is an important tool for envisioning revolutionary change. In the tradition of Surrealism, an art and cultural movement that gained prominence among African communities and diaspora, dreaming is a sometimes-absurdist expression of waking life and that a surrealist dream may be less absurd than the waking world. It follows that the world that one needs to be figuratively woken up from is the absurdity of oppression in the real world. Regarding the ability of art to juxtapose past horrors with present exploitation, Walter Benjamin (1999, p. 463) writes that "The moment of awakening would be identical with the 'now of recognizability,' in which things put on their true—surrealist—face". Dreams, then, as a sort of surrealist art, can create comparisons and compositions that may lead to revelations that seem impossible in day to day life, which in turn may lend themselves to historically revolutionary potential. The word itself, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) for awareness and vigilance regarding oppression, predates even the 1954–1968 Civil Rights Movement, at least through word of mouth (OED, 2024; Matheis, 2018). Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey called for Ethiopia and Africa to "wake up!" to fight for freedom in 1926, and Big Bill Broonzy's Just a Dream No. 2 confronted dreaming of equality and waking up to find none in 1939 (Matheis, 2018).

'Woke's introduction into the global public consciousness, beyond the United States, began with the Black Lives Matter movement (Black Lives Matter, 2022; Romano, 2020). After the publicly scrutinized murder of George Floyd by two white police officers, activists and sympathizers used it as a call to action and awareness (Grant, 2016). However, as a part of its introduction into the common vernacular, 'woke' was on the receiving end of an

international mediatized smear campaign and underwent a semantic drift known as pejoration to the point that it is considered derogatory by the English Oxford Dictionary (Filmer & Vignozzi, 2022; OED, 2024). It has become closely associated with 'cancel culture', as well as 'critical race theory' and 'political correctness', which have undergone a trajectory comparable to that of 'woke' (Davies & MacRae, 2023; Filmer & Vignozzi, 2022; Romano, 2020). Critical Race Theory [CRT] is a critical, academic framework that has been twisted and used to institutionally suppress education where it may disagree with or criticize hegemonic whiteness and capitalism, including legislation that bans it in parts of the US (Filimon & Ivănescu, 2023). For instance, in February of 2024, a judge ruled that Riverside County school districts in California may ban CRT despite a request from parents and other plaintiffs to block the prohibition of CRT in schools (Horseman, 2024). 'Political correctness', a closer comparison to 'woke' but less direct in its ties, began as an intercommunal joke among communists in the US with a sense of self-awareness and irony in regard to toeing the party line (George, 1932; Kohl, 1991). It wasn't until later that "neoconservatives" would attempt to compare baseline "anti-sexist and anti-racist education" to the more politically radical "Communist party hard-liners who insisted on the correct 'line'" (Kohl, 1991, p.33).

2.2.2 'Woke' and the war of position

Research into the construction of 'woke' through British news items and articles show that left-wing publications maneuver within the constraints of journalistic discourse and "meta discursive reflections on its acceptations" primarily to question what the word means and how it should be used – with certain distance and with attempted neutrality (Filmer & Vignozzi, 2022). Conversely, the right-wing construct of 'woke', existing mostly in the context of denigrating individuals and institutions perceived as left-wing, is very clear and concise: intolerance, censorship, extremist and virtue-signaling. Opposition to political correctness, then, is an ideological mechanism, because it is used to make animosity towards anti-racism,

among   other   things,   seem   acceptable   and   righteous.

Invoking 'woke' against major media institutions, particularly those that are not left-aligned, is an explicit attempt to gain control of public discourse and (state) media. There is historical precedent for this: the Nixon administration nationalized the 'liberal media' rhetoric as a part of their plans to dismantle the welfare state and deregulate capital (Major, 2012). This is a 'war of position', which refers to a more complex cultural struggle that occurs over a longer period of time – as opposed to the 'war of maneuver' that refers to a comparatively quick and simple military confrontation (Gramsci, 1971). This 'war of position', often referred to as a 'culture war', may extend into public discourse. The findings of Davies & MacRae (2023) show that this extends beyond news media and opinion columns: British social media users conceptualize 'woke' as opposed to the interests of an implicitly white working class, despite the objective fact that many racialized minorities and immigrants are working class themselves. Legitimate issues, such as the economic disparities that exist in most countries and the resulting poverty, are strategically co-opted by "political elites" to project xenophobic and racist discourse and capitalize on these sentiments (Davies & MacRae, 2023; KhosraviNik, 2017). This is elite capture, which refers to the hijacking of political projects by "elites", or people with a certain amount of capital (Táíwò, 2022). In the context of Táíwò's writing, this is a generalized or even explicitly liberal elite looking to defang potentially radical movements. He posits that this hijacking happens to almost everything in our social world but specifies political movements. This can be connected to Mark Fisher's 2009 conception of capitalist realism, whereby capitalism aims to subsume critiques into itself so that no alternatives remain in cultural (re)production, politics, or economic activity – though Fisher (2022) specifically stresses the importance of creating counternarratives.

This defanging and reproduction cannot work without the aid of the news media. Van Dijk (1995) extrapolates how different factors come together to construct a specific

interpretation of the facts of a political situation in the world, from disinformation campaigns to financial incentives, as news media analyses of 'woke' clearly show (Filmer & Vignozzi, 2022). Social media enables news media by giving it a platform not just for discussion but argument, where communities can be fostered and intercommunal opinion leaders may persuade people and encourage political participation better than friends or journalists or politicians (Weeks et al., 2017). It is a mistake to see social media and echo-chambers as somehow not grounded in real life: Boulianne et al. (2020) found that the primary echo-chambers in the United Kingdom and France took place in part offline, a phenomenon that Valentini et al. (2020) refer to as hybrid echo-systems wherein "'users' online interactions are partially determined by their everyday physical behavior and vice versa".

The media plays a crucial role in protecting and reinforcing whiteness by reproducing racial social systems where "whiteness is valued over other traits", writes Bhoomi K. Thakore (Bonilla-Silva, 2020). If opposition to political correctness, expressed by a disdain for 'woke', is promoting animosity or indifference in the face of anti-racism, its ideological function is to reproduce existing social hierarchies and protect whiteness.

2.3 Reproducing hierarchies and the role of whiteness

The reproduction of our social world happens largely through linguistic relations, in politics and media and conversation. Bourdieu insists there are always relations of symbolic power whereby "meaning is negotiated through a web of historical power relations between the speakers, endowed with a specific social authority and an audience, which recognizes this authority" (1991, p. 143). It is this authority, which may refer to a particular influential person in several social circles as well as politicians and celebrities, that makes some speakers hold more power over language than others. Bourdieu's definition of symbolic power (p. 164), in its invisibility and complicit nature regardless of the (un)awareness of the speakers and writers, implicates all involved. Even those who do not benefit from this domination. An influential

figure in the field of discourse analysis, Fairclough (2013), reinforces this notion on a broader scale: any text is shaped by its sociocultural context, which can be transformative as well as reproductive, which is to say that a text may affect the sociocultural context and potentially even reinforce it. In Black Skin/White Masks, Fanon ([1952] 2008) writes that language is a key element of the man of color's existence for the other, because to speak is to exist for the other. More specifically, Fanon covers the experiences and writings of colonized subjects who wish to assimilate into the colonial culture and language in an attempt to regain the respect they lost in being colonized, or even to develop a sense of superiority and domination over others. Where speaking pidgin functioned as a way for white people to remind Black people of their inferiority in the colonial hierarchies in the time of and preceding Fanon, and it is vital that this is not always intentional (in line with Bourdieu's conception of symbolic power), it is not unlikely that other words and phrases and ways of speaking have come to inhabit this function in time. This character could be attributed to the current mainstream use of 'woke': reproducing existing hierarchies and protecting whiteness.

One of the first scholars to address and define whiteness as a critical aspect of racial inequality is W.E.B Du Bois. Whiteness, according to Du Bois in 1935 (2001), affords white workers a public and psychological wage intended to compensate low (economic) wages and forms the foundation for a political alliance between white workers and capitalists against Black workers. Whiteness then, may be defined as class collaboration, as it creates solidarity between working class white people who stand to gain very little from this endeavor and rich white people who need a large enough base of support to maintain their power. As a historically dominant force, especially in dominantly white countries, whiteness becomes default because other racial categories exist in contrast and opposition to whiteness (Sue, 2004). As such, protecting whiteness does not merely serve to protect racial hierarchies, but primarily economic hierarchies.

Historically, whiteness has held different meanings and implications. This is most obvious in the United States, where several immigrant groups and nationalities have arguably been subsumed into whiteness. Berkovits (2018) summarizes this perspective succinctly:

> "The deconstruction of the supposedly neutral and essentialized category "white" is often arrived at by writing the social history of whiteness: the way Italians, Irish, Russians and other East-European nationalities have become white in the U. S., against the backdrop of the persistent racial discrimination of the black population." (p. 91)

Though Berkovits argues against equivocating Jewishness specifically with whiteness or not-whiteness, due to the extreme variability of scholarly positions even within critical whiteness studies. In the U.S.-American context at least, the example of Irish Americans and Italian Americans being subsumed into whiteness holds up. These are historical examples wherein the definition of what it means to be white widens or narrows to preserve whiteness.

Thakore's emphasis on the media's role in (re)producing the value of whiteness is particularly noticeable where the derisive use of the AAVE-term 'woke', though not always intentionally harmful or racist, acts as a shameful reminder of racialization and that antiracism should be seen as an overly demanding faux pas – comparable to Fanon's explanation of pidgin as racist even without bad intent (Bonilla-Silva, 2020; Fanon, 1952). In doing so, especially in the historical context of the malleable definition of whiteness that Berkovits (2018) makes explicit, new alliances in opposition to antiracism and in alignment with whiteness may be formed.

3. Methods and data

This thesis aims to present a qualitative research design with which to analyze the discursive trajectory of the term 'woke' in a European context, through major defining moments in public

discourse. It will follow the lexical term to trace what meanings are attached to 'woke' in which environments and how this impacts the broader understanding of what the concept of woke is or would be through normalization. As such, this includes searching for quite literal mentions of and discussions on woke, from news articles to specific influencers. The goal of this thesis became locating and analyzing specific moments, settings, participants or points of struggle. Each case requires brief argument and clarification in an attempt to prove its influence, after which the analysis of the content and persons will take place. The research question and the accompanying methods and data may be subject to change and refinement, making this a somewhat iterative project.

Discourse as understood in this thesis is characterized by understanding discourse "as intrinsically related to, affected by, and expressions of, power relations" – making critical discourse analysis the best fit (Wickham & Kendall, 1999, p.42-48). Rather than focusing on the discursive alignment and implicit agreements between the different groups with different opinions of 'woke' as is common in strictly Foucauldian analysis, this thesis aims to do something more concrete. The theoretical framework has an eye for discursive power and the way this is mediated through the power dynamics of people and positions, who in larger numbers make up networks and fields. Symbolic capital and the role this plays within social fields, is an extension of these power relations, whereby the network of relevant actors may prove to play a decisive role (Bourdieu, 1992). Another aspect that is increasingly important in the analysis of discourse is borrowed from media studies and analysis, as so much of discourse is enabled by smaller and bigger scale media. Stuart Hall's 1973 Encoding/Decoding model, where applicable, should help make explicit the intended and received message(s) of a piece of text or media. What text does is travel, and in doing so is subject to translation through processes of differing, in line with Saïd (1983) and Bal (2002), even beyond academic fields

and into others, by way of interactions and networks that in turn consist of individuals with varying degrees of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The following table, table 1, is a schematic overview of the previously outlined methodology. It takes the critical discourse analysis approach of discursive tracing as outlined by LeGreco and Tracy (2009) and imbues primarily the analysis with elements and theories previously discussed. First, how the concept and discourse of woke changes as it travels, and is subject to translation through processes of differing, in line with Saïd (1983) and Bal (2002). Second, Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model will offer insights into mediatized messages and their production (1973). Third, Bourdieu's conceptualization of field logics and particularly social capital will support an analysis individuals and their networks, supported by Foucault's notions of power relations and the ability to silence or emphasize certain discourse (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Foucault, 2003). Using these aspects in the analysis will create a better and more in-depth understanding of the travel of the concept of 'woke' and the processes of differing and translation that occur. This thesis will investigate the discursive ecologies, key persons, texts, moments in the development of 'woke' , selecting specific persons, quotes, articles, research, clips – to paint a portrait of decisive moments of change in the discursive trajectory of 'woke'. This methodology is intended to be a part of a cyclical, reiterative process. See table 1 on the following page.

Table 1

Traveling Discourse Methodological Overview

Traveling Discourse Overview	
Phase	Tasks
Phase 1: Research design	- Define the case - Review the literature to outline the research direction
Phase 2: Data management	- Gather data spanning different scales of discourse - Order data chronologically - Read over for emergent themes, issues, persons, communities
Phase 3: Data analysis	- Subject the data to an analysis that involves important aspects of the theoretical framework, such as: > Its travel and processes of differentiation (Saïd, Bal) > Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model to understand the spread of a relevant message; > Bourdieul to locate influential networks in combination with Foucault's notions of power and other aspects of the theoretical framework
Phase 4: Evaluation	- Address theoretical conclusions of the cases - Develop practical implications and recommendations that may apply to other cases

4. Ethics

This thesis will conduct its analysis using exclusively publicly available sources. As such, ethical concerns do not apply as they would in conventional research. As with all research, there will be a significant effort made to interpret and present the data accurately and reference appropriately. Any personal information gleaned from these publicly available sources should not prove relevant to the analysis. Should it prove relevant, measures of anonymization will still be taken. However, since there is no live interaction with human subjects, informed consent does not apply.

5. Analysis

This analysis uses publicly available, accessible online sources as a jumping off point for public discourse and definition. Google Trends is used to determine moments of exceptional public interest, moments wherein the public quite literally finds themselves searching for definitions of and further information on 'woke'. Thus establishing relevant jumping off points and particularly influential timeframes for the widespread use of the term 'woke' in European countries. Though there are many exceptions, most people in the world find themselves using Google, and the goal of this initial establishment of a pattern of interest is to locate broader trends. Even among English-speaking countries where 'woke' is a word beyond the several implications outlined in this paper, trends may be observed along these lines because it cannot reasonably be assumed that the height(s) of the Black Lives Matter movement and comparable news items coincides with unrelated searches for the definition of a widely used verb. The timeframes in question may then be combined with specific news items and persons of interest to locate and analyze key moments in use and perception of the term 'woke' across the political spectrum in European countries.

In short, the first part of this analysis will outline the travel of 'woke' into Europe through the United Kingdom, while the second part of this analysis follows this travel into the Netherlands. Both analyses delineate the persons, networks and institutions that make this travel between countries and into the mainstream possible, then exemplify this using a major news story and the way key figures in key configurations play into the greater narrative surrounding 'woke'.

5.1: From the US to the UK

5.1.1: US context, UK connections

In the United States, the growth of 'woke' has been steady and consistent, with few peaks and valleys, because the modern conceptualization of this term is deeply entwined with Black American culture and struggles, which have slowly and consistently become more visible over time. This can be gleaned from several sources, from vaguely progressive youth-oriented publications such as Teen Vogue updating their 'woke list' to keep young people updated to New York Times articles on trends of "woke TV" and earning one's "woke badge" in particular (Hess, 2016; McNamara, 2017). "He was so bae and woke!" writes Blackmon in 2015, for Buzzfeed. "If 'P.C.' is a taunt from the right, a way of calling out hypersensitivity in political discourse, then 'woke' is a back-pat from the left, a way of affirming the sensitive," writes Hess in 2016, for the New York Times. The earliest derogatory mentions of 'woke' from the many right-wing public figures that will be discussed in this paper seem to be from 2019, from Jordan Peterson's tweet about "another woke one trumpeting racism" and InfoWars articles on how "corporate America has gone woke" (Peterson, 2019; Rectenwald, 2019). At the end of that year The Guardian observed that "[...] 'woke', for example, is now used mockingly for a kind of overrighteous liberalism" (Poole, 2019). Henceforth, key players and institutions in twisting and popularizing 'woke' within and across national borders will be identified.

One avenue of contenting with existing terminology and agreeing to lend it specific meanings within the greater right-wing public of the United States, is by incorporating it into one of several conservative conferences. Founded by the American Conservative Union (ACU) and Young Americans for Freedom in 1974, the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) was inaugurated by Ronald Reagan (Diamond, 1995). It is now the go-to annual political conference for conservatives and elected officials. As a nonprofit, the ACU is lot legally required to share a donor list, but in a 2015 review of CPAC's marketing materials and

found the National Rifle Association (NRA), the One America News Network, and groups by and for conservative activists and politicians, including think tanks, through which politicians donate semi-anonymously – such as Ted Cruz, through the Growth & Freedom Fund (Bykowicz, 2015). In the latter half of 2024, the currently incomplete list of sponsors consists of more of the same: that is, conservative activist groups, CPAC's own centers, conservative Christian banking, right-wing news networks (CPAC, 2024). The alt-right and white supremacy were derided, at least in name, by the executive director of the ACU and organizer of CPAC in 2017: "[the alt-right] despise everything we [conservatives] believe in" (1:28, Wigel & Wagner, 2017). Richard Spencer, self-proclaimed white nationalist, had been able to attend CPAC without issue in preceding years but had become too controversial during the 2016 election and was consequently denied access to CPAC in 2017 (Wigel & Wagner, 2017). The irony, Wigel and Wagner write, is that several conservative organizations and activists, including speakers such as White House Strategist and former CEO of Breitbart News Steve Bannon, have directly and explicitly aligned themselves with the alt-right. However, despite successfully barring Spencer from entry, it seems this may have been a moment of contention for the American right-wing and its path forward, beyond "conservatism" and towards anything in opposition to 'woke', including the extreme and alt-right.

Another example of contention and change can be found within another conservative conference, where further right-wing opinions seem to be developed and tested before taking the main stage at CPAC. The Reclaim Conservative Conference used to discuss primarily religion and occasionally identity politics in 2016. It returned to the US in 2019 as the National Conservatism Conference (NatCon) with keynote speakers ranging from investor Peter Thiel, journalist Tucker Carlson, to US politicians such as Ron DeSantis and Marco Rubio, British MP Daniel Kawczynski, and Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, many of whom would speak at CPAC within the next three years (National Conservatism, n.d.; CPAC, n.d.). NatCon was also

held in Rome and London, in 2019, including American as well as British keynote speakers. These speakers gathered to discuss and tie these issues to libertarianism, political correctness, and woke. This is over a year before CPAC would explicitly address 'woke' in its keynote speeches – referring to it as 'the awokening' amongst each other – and two years before keynote speaker Donald Trump would specifically claim "the socialists, globalists, marxists, communists, who are attacking our civilization, have no idea of the sleeping giant they have awoken" (2022). Rather than listening to the warnings of old-school conservatives and organizers like then-ACU director Dan Schneider, it seems as though the right is in constant conversation with its increasingly online and increasingly radicalized base, as if continually pushing each other further.

These keynote speakers are established right-wing figures with large platforms and interconnected networks. Tucker Carlson, formerly of Fox News, often speaks with Alex Jones of far-right conspiracy theorist 'InfoWars' fame, including text-exchanges discussing what "our lede tonight" should be dating as far back as 2020 (Murdock, 2023). Their content, which might scare off less extremist consumers, are often discussed and highlighted by more approachable figures and content creators. From famous-in-the-US Canadian psychologist and author Jordan Peterson whose books and lectures spread so far and wide some argued him to be the most influential public intellectual in the west in 2018, to atypical American conservative podcaster Joe Rogan who signed 200-250 million dollar contract deals with Spotify as recently as this year (Brooks, 2018; Spangler, 2024). Some of these figures could act as gateways into right-wing radicalism, due to their less extreme reputation. This finds expression on social media, in non-conservative reddit threads where former fans agree that Joe Rogan is "a dumb, goofball who liked to hear cool smart people talk like the rest of us" (OpenUpYerMurderEyes, 2024). People like this become gateways through platforming and edgy humor, in a similar way that (often primarily online) complex webs of communities radicalize people: from

occasional self-aware jokes, to frequent ironic in-jokes, to sincerity and fascist humor (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022). The authors argue that, within these extreme right-wing networks, whether aware of it or not, a figure like Joe Rogan is meant to draw mainstream audiences – particularly those who aren't (yet) heavily politicized – to his more extreme guests and co hosts.

(This comes with the added caveat that even these once perceived as reasonable, apolitical or open-minded figures have, in recent years, been radicalized by their environments to the point of their accessible, gateway-like status coming into question. Several reddit threads detail people losing interest in Joe Rogan because he became too politicized, scaring off casual listeners who were otherwise willing to ignore the occasional extremist association. This is exemplified in the previously referenced comment: "[...] but then he bought into the culture war crap and started to think he was more of an expert than doctors and scientists because he saw shit on Facebook" (OpenUpYerMurderEyes, 2024). The last time Jordan Peterson went viral, it was because he mistook a not safe for work, staged video for "techno-nightmare CCP hell" (Peterson, 2023). However, during the timeline under scrutiny in this paper, their reputations were relatively unscathed by these things.)

The final piece of connective tissue is that these keynote speakers are not only connected by their right-wing ideologies and joint appearances at conservative conferences, but by their employers. Several right-leaning US and UK (and AUS) broadcast news channels and newspapers are or have been owned by 21st Century Fox and Sky Group, which the Murdoch family has had shifting stakes in. Sky News, whose parent company Sky Group was minority-owned by 21st Century Fox up until 2018, broadcasts across country borders with a focus on the UK and AUS. Newspapers like The Times and newspaper tabloids like The Sun remain, as of June 2024, owned by News Corp, another Murdoch family operation. Though a broader right-wing project, 'woke' has been subject to elite capture (Táíwò, 2022). This is the

most prominent, direct tie between the right-wing politics of the US and the UK: news media. It is through news media and social media that these right-wing activists and those who platform them, manage to make radical far-right verbiage available and 'relevant' to a mainstream audience.

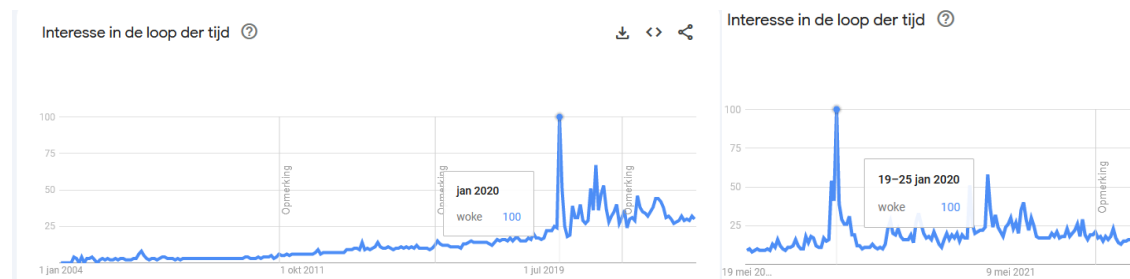*5.1.2: Public discourse in the UK*

Figure 1. Google Trends graphs depicting interest in the search term 'woke', one from 2004-now and one from the past five years (2019-2024), showing a small and slow but steady rise in the UK on Google Search, with a peak in the week of 19-25 January 2020.

It seems unsurprising, then, that the first European country where 'woke' would find fertile soil in the mainstream would be the United Kingdom: because its news cycle has very clear and direct ties to American hegemony via 1) currently and previously Murdoch-owned news media 2) pre-established networks of US-UK right-wing figures, which will be further substantiated in the following paragraph. The peak of UK interest in woke takes place around January 20 of 2020. The associated searches beyond the very basic "what is woke", include "woke culture", "woke news", "woke brigade" and "woke left". This very clearly parrots the meanings and implications as conceptualized by very specific actors and publications from the United States, which can be traced to NatCon and CPAC's keynote speakers and their networks – including former president Donald Trump's claims of "fake news", the oft-discussed "culture war" that Tucker Carlson aims to fight and Jordan Peterson fears the right may be tragically losing, and the "[woke] left" that Fox News covers almost daily (Meeks, 2020). As previously established, this does not mean 'woke' took off in the UK through American influences. Though NatCon has been held in London and CPAC is home to international speakers, though

the Murdochs have a hold on several news sources in the UK, though these right wing figures' networks seems to exist across borders – there are plenty of home-grown far-right activists eager to use these established networks and their own social media savvy to be in conversation with their audiences and push the envelope. UK Action group Hope Not Hate published reports detailing the far-right's online presence (State of Hate 2019, 2020). The 2019 report purports a younger, extreme far-right successfully tapping into malcontent; the 2020 report claims that despite the right's weak position as a party, its ideas have been successfully mainstreamed. Joe Mulhall, senior researcher, shared the following with Bedingfield (2019): "Beyond the fact that many of them adopted social media very early and are sophisticated in their use of it, they speak English, and so can be understood by like-minded activists across the whole of Europe." The report places British-born Milo Yiannopoulos, Paul Joseph Watson, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (Tommy Robinson), Katie Hopkins, and Carl Benjamin (Sargon of Akkad) in the top ten most influential far-right figures online. Despite being separated by the Atlantic Ocean, contact is frequent: Piers Morgan frequently appears on Sky News alongside other conservatives; Milo Yiannopoulos and Jordan Peterson have spoken and argued over the course of at least six years; Carl Benjamin's YouTube channel may have been taken down but he has been consistently platformed to discuss with or about the people in question. The far-right of the US and UK, then, are demonstrably not absolutely separate networks of values or influence: they are intertwined. Instead of being separate networks, they often share stages and platforms and broadcast network appearances.

Ofcom (2020) reports that television is the most-used platform for news in the UK, alongside websites, and that beyond watching BBC One on television, a selection of different newspapers and websites are consumed every day. Prime among them: BBC, Sky News, Channel 4, Daily Mail, Metro and The Sun. At least two of these, as mentioned earlier, are notably conservative. The most widespread, sensationalist news item at the time, covered by

each news source mentioned — which found itself inadvertently attached to American politics, racialization, awareness of privilege, woke, wherein 'woke' plays the role of discarding tradition — was that Harry and Meghan would no longer represent the Queen or the Royal Family and drop their titles. This aligns perfectly with the sudden explosive interest in the term 'woke' in the UK, which would peak a day after Harry and Meghan renounced their titles. Moreover, this association (re)contextualizes 'woke' in the UK as a foreign, American entity looking to disrespect the British nation and its traditions. Though BBC News remained fairly neutral in its reports, oft-consumed Daily Mail and The Sun had a more aggressively sensationalist approach to "Megxit" "ripping through royals like a tornado", including established Piers Morgan congratulating the Queen for telling the couple to "sling their hook" (The Sun, 2020). Publications like The Sun will eagerly platform Piers Morgan, while publications that attempt to remain neutral will not platform counternarratives and avoid making a big deal, functionally 'prohibit' the not-conservative aspects of this discourse in the public eye (Wickham & Kendall, 1999, p.42-48; Foucault, 2003). This news item became a rallying cry for conservatives, particularly those based in the UK, creating an environment wherein they could capitalize on nation-wide news and kneejerk outrage by using their key positions within certain networks or elevating themselves to these positions by seeking media attention (Bourdieu, 1991).

5.1.3: Media framing – "Walmart with a Crown"

Figure 2. The first and largest news item on tabloid The Sun's website on January 19th 2020: an exclusive interview with Meghan Markle's biological father, from the Wayback Machine.

The 'exclusive' news story the Sun boasted was titled 'Walmart with a Crown' and featured Meghan Markle's disappointed, white father, with the pull quotes that "she's not the girl I raised" and that she "cheapened the royals" (The Sun, 2020). The title reinforces a stark difference between cheap US capitalism and the noble UK royal family. This is meant to emotionally affect parents and grandparents who have had, or fear having, tumultuous and disappointing relationships with their children. It actively draws upon fears surrounding shame and family; more than that, the national royal family. The image, too, is meant to evoke a father distanced from their child, now unhappy, worried, aging. It is no coincidence that the Sun's readership skews older, over half of its readers above the age of 35 (Press Gazette, 2023). Assumptions are being made of the audience to incite the most negative possible reaction, specifically to generate outrage. This is what is initially encoded, as the story first broke. The circulation of the message was a part of a country-wide media event with messages coming from all sides, where more neutral and left-leaning publications find themselves in the habit of being drowned out by the brightly colored misinformation found in tabloids. These stories are meant to be bought and garner clicks. To what extent they are meant to spotlight the right-wing activists that have been waiting for this moment to hijack nation-wide discussions to ensure

reinforcement of ideology like this is unsure, but that is the context in which this message circulates. Telegraph columnist Madeline Grant casually refers to the privileged, 'woke' celebrity the couple intends to maintain that she insists deeply aggravates Britain because they expect to be exempt from royal duties while "cashing in on their brand" (0:43), while figures such as Piers Morgan launched into regular anti-woke anti-Meghan Markle tirades live on ITV's Good Morning Britain to the point of eventually being made to leave after a particularly explosive argument in March 2021 (Day, 2020; BBC News, 2021). In their responses, these figures decode the encoded implications and make them explicit, amplified to millions through their respective platforms. These are examples of key positions through institutions, that ensure public discourse maintains its negative character and is repeatedly associated with 'woke'. The range of social media responses is wide: from still celebrating the couple, to those who liked the couple until the association with 'woke', to those who despise the couple and everything associated with them – including 'woke'.

It is the personal offense taken on behalf of the country's pride in its monarchy that provides an absolutely vital condition of acceptance for 'woke' as something worthy of disdain and shame, between geographically dispersed communities (Bal, 2002; Said, 1983). There is little to no hesitation in how the term ought to be used, or whether it holds a positive or negative connotation: in the UK context, the very spread of the term itself is a largely negative association. The meaning is altered slightly, to something with anti-American potential, but its function and opposition to diversity is in essence the same – the linguistic aspect, the cognitive aspect and the cultural aspect are largely similar, possibly due to the continued shared history between the US and the UK (Russel, 2019; Huntington & Jervis, 1997).

5.2: From the US and the UK to NL

5.2.1: Dutch context, UK translation

The Dutch approach to 'woke' (more rarely 'wokisme') is most commonly framed the same way as it is in the UK: as an invasive, foreign, strictly and specifically American entity. What exactly this Americanness threatens is different in each country. The association with the UK is generally less explicit. There is some overlap in production studios and media conglomerates: British multinational television media company ITV Studios, previously referenced as the studio responsible for Good Morning Britain and half a decade of Piers Morgan's career, bought Talpa Media in 2015 and seemed to continue to work with John de Mol until at least 2019 (Smit, 2021). Talpa Network is a major Dutch media conglomerate responsible for many news publications and broadcast channels, playing an inadvertent role in platforming this travel. When the subject of 'woke' comes up in Dutch-language articles, it is UK-based research and population surveys that are referred to (Bhageloe, 2022; Brussen, 2020). In more niche, right-leaning articles, before 'woke' would prove to be a word widely and immediately understood by the Dutch public, Bert Brussen – former web editor of Talpa Network and GeenStijl writer, whose columns and commentary have appeared across news brands – refers to the work of anti-woke comedian and journalist Andrew Doyle as a warrior against "fascist, woke poison" (Brussen, 2020). "In the UK, all leading cultural institutions and universities are in the grip of woke culture," he writes. The framing throughout articles such as these is clear: the United Kingdom is the first battleground of the European cultural struggle with this American concept. And if 'woke' can make its way to the United Kingdom, the Netherlands may be next on the list.

However, it would take a little longer for 'woke' to take hold in the Netherlands as it did in the US and the UK, despite classic liberal and talk-show host Lubach releasing a song about 'woke' as early as 2019 – too early for this to take root in the culture outside of more

virulent right-wing persons like Brussen, likely for the same reason Lubach's TV show format mimics that of The Daily Show and Last Week Tonight: following U.S.-American trends before they become relevant in the Dutch context (ArjenLubach, 2019). Before there is a clearly delineated space for the concept within the broader discursive ecology of the country (Russel, 2019). Nonetheless, the song and its framing borrows the U.S.' right wing spin, as it regales a story of a twenty-something psychology student calling whatever she disagrees with fascistic, a U.S. 'liberal arts'-student stereotype. Similarly, right-wing activists like Eva Vlaardingerbroek whose careers took off arguing against COVID-19 lockdowns on Fox News and GB News on which she continues to appear, the same channels that eagerly platformed Tucker Carlson and Piers Morgan for a time, were deemed too extremist too fast and platformed but ultimately derided in national newspapers like de Telegraaf (Dijkstra, 2019). Though even de Telegraaf is also home to reporter Wierd Duk, who considered 'woke' a "culture poisoning our youth" as early as February 18 of 2021 in his Telegraaf podcast 'Het Land van Wierd Duk', the newspaper wouldn't conceive of it as an actively encroaching threat until these conversations came to a head on university campuses later that year, stretching into the next (Burgers & Duk, 2021; Duk, 2022). De Telegraaf, owned by Mediahuis Nederland, is consistently within the top 4 most-read newssources in the Netherlands, online and offline, making it especially relevant in tracking Dutch public discourse (Bakker, 2018; VINEX NMO, 2023). That the concept of 'woke' wouldn't entirely take off in the Netherlands until several years after it was introduced in the US lends credence to the argument that it is the UK that provides the necessary European translation, as suggested by Bal (2002) and Saïd (1983)'s visions on the travel of concepts and theories.
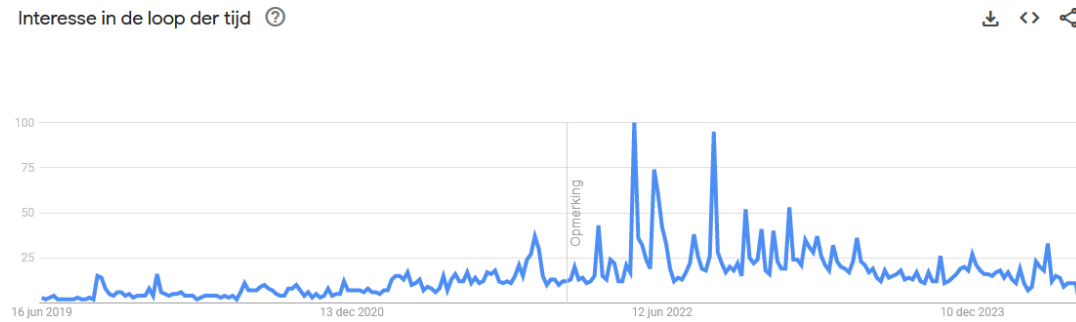
5.2.2: Public discourse in NL

Figure 3. A Google Trends graph depicting the interest in 'woke' over the past five years (2019-2024), showing three major peaks.

The largest peak is between the 24th and 30th of April 2022, the same week that sports journalist and TV personality Johan Derksen blamed the controversy surrounding his sexually inappropriate behavior on 'woke culture'. On April 29th of 2022, Derksen said the following:

> "[...] cancel and woke culture is big and it is against us. It is a powerful movement
>
> that is getting bigger and worse. The only independent program is now in ruins. I
>
> can no longer enjoy being a part of it. I am done with it. This war cannot be won."
>
> (Shownieuws, 02:25, 2022)

Somewhere between 1.3 and 2 million people have watched Derksen say this, according to SBS6 and SKO respectively, while regular viewing figures are around 800,000 (Quekel, 2022). The show's previous record stood at 1.7 million viewers when Derksen compared public figure and storyteller Akwasi to Zwarte Piet, a controversial character often depicted during the Dutch celebration of Sinterklaas using blackface. Compare the previous quote to what Johan Derksen said when he clarified this comparison had been intended as a joke, before 'woke' had become mainstream enough in the Netherlands to enter his vocabulary, from two years prior: "[...] People hate me deeply. But what I didn't realize is that there is a kind of national media-battle with two teams, as [co host Wilfred Genee] has made clear to me. [...] It has turned into a social media war." (Veronica Inside, 56:10, 2020). The conceptualization required for 'woke' to thrive as an element in the cultural-political war of position as articulated by Gramsci (1971) can be found quite literally in this quote from 2020, Derksen simply hadn't yet found the right

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term to align these political frustrations: 'woke'. This implies a fertile grounding for the concept, a similar enough discursive ecology that there is little no process of differentiation needed for its literal or symbolic meaning, because the conditions of acceptance are already there (Bal, 2002; Russel, 2019; Saïd, 1983).

A month later, a documentary series from filmmaker Sahar Meradji was greenlit and announced to begin airing on June 2nd (PowNed, 2022). 'Ik Woke Van Jou' (a pun along the lines of 'I woke you too') and its first episode accounts for the second peak between May 29 and June 4th. Meradji's perspective is that minorities like herself don't feel disadvantaged or disparaged unless activists keep pointing it out, essentially creating problems where there are none. PowNed qualified for becoming a part of the Dutch public broadcasting system and in doing so had to distance itself from its founders, explicitly anti-PC website GeenStijl and internet company Nieuws Media. Until 2018, GeenStijl and Nieuws Media were a part of Mediahuis Nederland (formerly Telegraaf Media Groep), which has an extensive history of collaboration and deals with De Mol's Talpa Network to this day (Goossens, 2018; Hafkamp, 2024). Veronica and SBS6, the channels home to Veronica Inside and Vandaag Inside ("VI") as well as Shownieuws, which have repeatedly employed and platformed Derksen, are also a part of Talpa Network and Mediahuis. Rather than an explicitly conservative point of view akin to that of the Murdoch's News Corporation, it seems Talpa Network is more concerned with its capitalistic endeavors and attempted monopoly of the Dutch media landscape than pushing any specific political agenda (ACM, 2023). However, this analysis is primarily concerned with how public discourse is affected, and it has played a role in spreading this appropriation of 'woke' in the Netherlands, regardless of intentionality.

Later this year, Dilan Yeşilgöz spoke at a HJ Schoo lecture on 12 September, naming woke as one of two primary threats to democracy (Yeşilgöz, 2022, 54:40). This is the news item that aligns with the peak of 11 to 17 September, officially welcoming 'woke' into the

realm of mainstream Dutch electoral politics – no longer limited to old men accused of sexual harassment or college-aged left-leaning activists being thoroughly investigated and now firmly a part of the political agenda, courtesy of the minister of Justice and Safety. Again, 'woke' is invoked in the context of threats and danger, echoing the Gramscian war of position, a politician directly tying this "culture war" to mainstream Dutch politics. A position that was previously associated with pundits just slightly too far right to be widely understood, is now met with wide coverage, direct political involvement, and enough room for mixed reactions as opposed to dismissal.

5.2.3: Media framing – "Johan Derksen's crazy few weeks: 'More important than Putin for three days'"

Figure 4. The first and largest news item on de Telegraaf website on May 20th 2022: an exclusive interview with Johan Derksen, from the Wayback Machine.

On May 20th, 2022, Bert Dijkstra and Wierd Duk publish an interview with Johan Derksen for de Telegraaf, in light of being "thrown out and indirectly accused of rape" – the very first sentence of the article. Derksen, referred to affectionately as The Mustache within the piece, whose "market value" is that he doesn't go along with everyone else because he's "mentally independent" which makes him a potential "social outcast", is painted as a man redeemed by "a public outpouring of support" from "the silent majority". The encoded meaning within this piece is to solidify this support into a grounded, unapologetic yet redemptive interview – there

was no real problem, though his anecdote may have been somewhat sexually inappropriate: it was simply 'wokeness' and virtue-signalling Dutch celebrities who wanted to score 'political correctness' points that made it into a problem, while the silent majority of Dutch people refused to fall for this false 'woke' narrative. The existence of this article is a response to the initial controversy surrounding Derksen in and of itself, and an attempt to steer or control the narrative by the authors, filtered through an oft-consumed and respected institution. The implication of the title seems to be that it is unthinkable that someone like Derksen should receive more media attention than a major player in global politics like Putin. On the contrary, this paper argues that the continuous references to 'wokeness' and cancellation and virtue-signalling do connect this situation to global politics.

Where the UK's version of this narrative was wrapped up in maintaining the institution of the Royal Family exactly as it is, the Dutch narrative seems to be preoccupied with a common refrain that belies the Dutch spirit: "doe maar normaal, dan doe je al gek genoeg" (act normal, that's crazy enough). Don't overreact, be normal, don't be sensitive. What the UK and the Netherlands' narratives surrounding 'woke' have in common, is a distaste for what is perceived as oversensitive Americanized foreign values being enforced upon regular British and Dutch people, who have more urgent personal, social and political problems to address. The push towards a narrative that 'woke' exists in service of a political elite and in opposition to the working class aligns with previous research and theories in this field and remains consistent across country borders (Davies & MacRae, 2023; KhosraviNik, 2017; Táíwò, 2022).

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to uncover the travel, spread and rearticulation of historically revolutionary terminology used to further right-wing goals. Therefore, this thesis posed the question "How does the strategic appropriation of antiracist language travel?" and used 'woke' as a recent expression of this phenomenon. The answer to this question and the argument that this thesis presents is as follows.

Broadly speaking, this phenomenon of travel and rearticulation of antiracist language such as 'woke' begins in the United States as an already transnational phenomenon. The US is the cultural center of the world and its news globally broadcast, particularly in the global north. Crucially, the US-originated and US-based conservative conferences and news institutions that act as the first vestiges of mainstream forums of discussions for far right ideas and rearticulations, have international branches and subsidiaries. It travels through the conservative news media that transcends borders, the affiliated right-wing activists, as well as any institution or individual that platforms them. This way, far-right rearticulation is rendered available to a much larger audience – transforming what might begin as niche discourse into hegemonic notions that needs to be argued against by the people they derogatorily describe. Mainstream audience-friendly talk-show hosts and podcasters end up platforming the right's very intentional use of humor through jokes or their politics through specific guests in the name of fairness and debate. Similarly, right-wing activists may use mainstream trending topics in public discourse to get general audiences to interact with their posts or videos or arguments. These are all tools of potential radicalization. Even if it doesn't work to radicalize anyone, it still exposes them to the right-wing articulation of these concepts and ideas – including the derogatory implications of 'woke'. More concretely, we see the UK and the Netherlands approach 'woke' as an invasive, foreign, 'American' entity. There are national and even racial specificities unique to each country's approach, with greater difference between the US and

Europe, but the political (re)alignment between the countries in their framing of certain stories through a derogatory appropriation of 'woke' is clear.

However, the US is a direct product of, among others, the UK and the Netherlands, and institutions like NATO ensure these countries remain bound together even now. A harsh, dividing line between the United States and Europe is not just ahistorical, but inaccurate to modern-day configurations. Moreover, despite Europe-specific connotations of 'woke' wrapped up in anti-American sentiment, it serves the exact same purpose in the war of position and forging new tides of nationalism. In the 19th century, nationalism involved a lot of transnational collaboration because there was an incentive to discourage class solidarity, especially in light of imperialism and colonialism and the resulting popularity of race science, allowing whiteness to become a reward unto itself, as is exemplified in the theoretical framework by W.E.B. Dubois. A microcosm of this happening today is the global center-right rallying behind Israel, a Judeo-Christian project established by Europe in an attempt to answer 'the Jewish Question'. Even these initially strongly nationalistic, conservative conferences find themselves discussing globalism in terms of white unity and protecting whiteness, while talking down to "globalists" because this has more specific not-white, not-right connotations. That is to say: there exist transnational networks to import and export (white) nationalism and they are being utilized today. The contradiction that seems inherent to "transnational nationalism" is irrelevant to their goals, and may even have a function, as a detail for the (left) opposition to get caught up in arguing against, when making sense is not the point. However, 'woke' also serves the purpose of unison for these points of view that may otherwise seem incongruent, allowing the right to unify and rally against something seemingly coherent and positioned as worth fighting.

Due to constraints of time and length, the research question posed is answered in a limited and succinct manner, providing an answer that could still be elaborated upon. This

could be remedied in further research, become more detail-oriented with a greater scope, or cover the travel between other countries, or cover different moments of travel less focused on the mainstream discourse as this paper was. The methodological framework as detailed in this paper could be used as a tool or a jumping off point for further, similar research.

The final conclusion of this research project is that the strategic appropriation of antiracist language travels along key nodes and networks of institutions and people through public discourse. Certain positions are made powerful through (in)formal networks and institutions and function as amplifiers of discourse, playing a key role in the calibration of meaning and political alignment. It is these instances of public discourse that act as moments of calibration to make political alignment possible, during which the meaning of 'woke' is altered (or its negative meaning is created) and the values of these people, networks and institutions become aligned. This means that 'woke' becomes the connective tissue that binds these subjects together, essentially forcing these topics and specific stances regarding these topics to become a part of the same ideological concept as 'woke'. In this sense, a direct equivalence is created between American actress Meghan Markle's discomfort with racism in the British Royal Family leading to the unprecedented abandoning of the couple's royal titles, and the people accusing Dutch TV personality Johan Derksen of racism and sexual assault. The underlying implication is that pointing out abuse of power is creating something out of nothing and often greatly exaggerated, explaining the current mainstream implications of 'woke'. During these moments of public discourse, figures that are not explicitly right-wing or far-right can act as radicalizing agents depending on their willingness to participate in the discourse, joke about it, or even platform those further right. All this is possible with relative ease, mimicking the transnational (white) nationalism of the 19th century. And so, the United States and the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, despite their overstated differences, continue their political alignment and repeat a chapter in their shared history.

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