

REGRESSIVE LEFT

An examination of the regressive left discourse in the period 2012-2017.

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I. General Introduction

1.1 Religion in a *digital* society

While the contexts and actors have transformed over time, public and scholarly debate on the 'desired' place of religion in society is arguably one of the oldest continuous topics of debate since the classical era. The passing of time has witnessed social changes that led to a widening of debate participation amongst the wider population, globalisation contributed to a multiplicity of new (or old) ideas, and technological advancements have improved our means of information exchange: the Agora has been traded for Facebook, and letter-exchanges for Twitter tweets. The inception of the internet, and the rise of social media in the last decade, have further accelerated and moved the debate in the spheres of the *digital* public domain. In this domain a multitude of divergent actors from all over the world, with different cultural and religious backgrounds, collide and engage in debate. Wherever debate occurs, especially in the digital arena, *conflict* is often just around the corner.

Debate on the place of religion in (Western) society is presently dominated by topics like Islam(ism), multiculturalism, religious violence, immigration, and identity politics. Various authors and commentators have argued that the way 'we talk' about these topics has become increasingly more direct, blunt, harsh, hard, and dividing since the early 1990s onwards, and the respective views held in many cases more dogmatic and radical.¹ What is apparent, both in the public perception, but also supported by research, is that both public and political opinions on the topics discussed above are becoming more strongly polarized, reinforcing but also redefining the idea of a fundamental political left-right dichotomy on socio-cultural themes.²

The process of polarization is well exemplified in the significant rise of right-wing - often labelled populist - parties that are critical of multiculturalism, immigration, and Islam(ism), for the sake of 'defending' national identities and values throughout Europe (e.g. Front National in France and the United Kingdom Independence Party).³ More recently in the United States, similar sentiments have gained greater popular support, of which the 2016 electoral victory by current US president Donald Trump is a striking illustration.⁴ Supporters and voters of the earlier mentioned parties and similar political movements, often consisting of a significant group of adherents dissatisfied with traditional 'mainstream' parties, form a strong 'vocal presence' in society denouncing and criticizing political opponents, 'the establishment', or more generally 'the left'.⁵

In the wake of the *digitalization* and contemporary *polarization* of the public debate on the place of religion in society, the term 'regressive left' has in recent years been adopted as a political epithet to

¹ Prins, B., "The nerve to break taboos: new realism in the Dutch discourse on multiculturalism". *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 3 (2002): 363-379; Scrivens, R., "Understanding The Collective Identity of Radical Right Online: A Mixed-Methods Approach", PhD diss. (University of Ontario, 2017); Thorbjørnsrud, K., "Immigration critique: moral boundaries, silence and polarization", in: Midtbøen, A.H., K. Steen-Johnsen, and K. Thorbjørnsrud (eds.), *Boundary Struggles: contestations of free speech in the Norwegian public sphere*, (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2017) 257-290.

² Thorbjørnsrud, "Immigration critique"; Gentzkow, M., "Polarization in 2016", *Toulouse Network for Information Technology Whitepaper* (2016): 1-23, <http://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/PolarizationIn2016.pdf> (last accessed November 29th, 2018); Edsall, T.B., "What Motivates Voters More Than Loyalty? Loathing", *New York Times*, 01-03-2018, <https://nyti.ms/2FK3GAA> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

³ Davis, L., and S. S. Deole, "Immigration and the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Europe", *Ifo DICE report* 15 (2017): 10-15.

⁴ Kefford, G., and S. Ratcliff, "Republicans and Democrats are more polarized on immigration than parties in the U.K. or Australia. Here's why", *Washington Post*, 16-08-2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/08/16/republicans-and-democrats-are-more-polarized-on-immigration-than-parties-in-the-u-k-or-australia-heres-why/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.72413c5fb3b (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

⁵ Gentzkow, "Polarization in 2016"; Bloom, P., "With mainstream politics seemingly devoid of answers, many vote for the previously unthinkable", in: Lilleker, D., D. Jackson, E. Thorsen, and A. Veneti (eds.), *US Election Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign. Early reflections from leading academics*, (Poole: CSJCC Bournemouth University, 2016) 100-101.

denounce 'the left' in regard to their attitudes towards Islam(ism), multiculturalism, and immigration. The primary focus of this thesis is examining the development of the discourse on the 'regressive left', and establishing how the term has become part of the 'digital' vocabulary of right-wing groups and individuals. The origins of the term are, somewhat ironically, not to be found in the right corner of the political spectrum where it is now often frequented. Rather, its origins can be traced to the biography of a former Islamist, now self-proclaimed liberal, and still practicing Muslim.

1.2 A radical idea

The term 'regressive left' is commonly attributed to Maajid Nawaz, who coined the term in his 2012 autobiography *Radical*.⁶ In this autobiography Nawaz reflects on his experiences as a former Islamist and conveys a message of warning in regard to 'Western' and 'liberal' attitudes towards Islam(ism). Nawaz used the term 'regressive left' to describe "some on the left"⁷ in the United Kingdom who turn a blind eye to Islamism out of naivety, or who cooperate with Islamists against shared political enemies. In the wake of *Radical*, the term 'regressive left' was adopted and expanded upon by various prominent commentators on the place of religion in society, and gained traction on social-media amongst a diverse user-base.⁸ Notably Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, both associated with the 'New Atheist' movement, have employed the term to criticize a supposed trend of increasing political correctness towards religious orthodoxy or conservatism (thus widening the definition beyond Islamism), bearing a warning against defending religions for the sake of not offending people.⁹

Fast forwarding to 2018, the term 'regressive left' is no longer used exclusively to criticize 'some on the left' and their supposed naivety or 'political correctness' in regard to Islamism or other extreme manifestations of religion. Rather, captured in the hashtag #RegressiveLeft, the term appears to have transformed into a popular online buzz-word, often used as slur, criticizing the views and attitudes of the political left or 'liberals' at large. The usage of 'regressive left' in the current discourse is far from consistent and has become associated with a mishmash of themes like multiculturalism, (restricting) freedom-of-speech, identity politics, and feminism.¹⁰ With a change in usage and implied meaning came a new group of users, including a userbase situated firmly on the far-right-end of the political spectrum.¹¹ The term 'regressive left' is now frequented by 'alternative' media-personalities like Milo

⁶ Nawaz, M., *Radical* (London: WH Allen, 2013).

⁷ Ibidem, page 316.

⁸ See for example Beck, C., "Sam Harris unloads on the regressive left", *Splice Today*, 2015, <https://www.splicetoday.com/politics-and-media/sam-harris-unloads-on-the-regressive-left> (Last accessed November 29th, 2018); Bernstein, J., "The Rise of the #Regressiveleft hashtag: what the alt-right's newest explosively popular hashtag is all about", *Buzzfeed News*, 2016, https://www.buzzfeed.com/josephbernstein/the-rise-of-the-regressiveleft-hashtag?utm_term=.dh49kvdeO#.wh02MydpK (Last accessed November 29th, 2018); Howell, K., 'Bill Maher: Richard Dawkins blast regressive liberals giving free pass to Islam', *The Washington Times*, October 3, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/3/bill-maher-richard-dawkins-blast-regressive-libera/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018); and Worthing, J., 'To hell with their culture: Richard Dawkins in extraordinary blast at Muslims', *Daily Express (London)*, November 30, 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/611231/Richard-Dawkins-in-extraordinary-blast-at-Muslims-To-hell-with-their-culture> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

⁹ Harris, S., "Head-in-the-sand-liberals", *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 2006, <http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/the-end-of-liberalism> (last accessed November 29th, 2017); For Richard Dawkins, see for example: <https://twitter.com/richarddawkins/status/674477682277486594>.

¹⁰ See for example White, J., "There is no regressive left", *Counterpunch.org*, April 18, 2017, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/04/18/there-is-no-regressive-left/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018); and the twitter page dedicated to the #RegressiveLeft: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/regressiveleft>.

¹¹ Robinson, E., *The language of progressive politics in modern Britain*. E-book. (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2017), page 259; Krisht, H., "In defense of the term Regressive Left", *The Ex-Muslim*, 04-05-2016, <https://www.theexmuslim.com/2016/05/04/theres-no-thing-regressive-left/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

Yiannopoulos¹², and has been increasingly associated with the ‘alt-right’ movement in their wider critique on contemporary ‘liberal’ views and in opposition to groups that advocate social progress.¹³

1.3 Challenges in the current discourse

While the ‘regressive left’ discourse holds a clear social and political relevance, it has thus far received little to none academic attention. This observation is remarkable, especially given the intersection of the ‘regressive left’ discourse with major themes in public, political, and academic debates in the US and Europe (e.g. multiculturalism, immigration, and religious violence). In light of the developments discussed earlier in this introduction, it is striking that the discourse appears to have been overlooked, or possibly ignored. The latter option, if applicable, might be attributed to a lack of credibility or negative connotations surrounding the term and (some) users in more recent years. This apparent hiatus in *the study of religion in today’s society*, and thus a lack of a pre-existing body of literature and theory to draw from, poses two distinct challenges in this thesis that need to be addressed before a meaningful examination of the ‘regressive left’ discourse can take place.

The first challenge is establishing a methodological framework suitable for the analysis of a distinctly ‘digital’ discourse that can serve as the foundation of this thesis research. How does one examine a discourse like the discourse on ‘regressive left’? While significant contributions have been made by various authors in establishing methodologies and developing methods suitable to examine and analyse discourses ‘online’, no proverbial ‘off-the-shelf’ framework exists that is well suited to the discourse under scrutiny. In the chapter ‘methodology’ a hybrid research approach is proposed that provides the flexibility and scalability necessary for a meaningful analysis of the ‘regressive left’ discourse.

A second challenge is establishing a theoretical framework that can serve as the contextual vantage point from where further inquiry into the ‘regressive left’ discourse can take place. Deconstructing what the *a priori* assumptions underlying the concept ‘regressive left’ are (e.g. what is the meaning of ‘left’ in ‘regressive left’), and what the conceptual premises and key theoretical concepts are that form the foundation of the term (i.e. what critique is implied in ‘regressive left’), are focal points in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Now that some of the methodological and theoretical difficulties in conducting research on the ‘regressive left’ discourse have been provisionally established, I wish to return to the primary issue inherent to the discourse in its current shape. The usage of ‘regressive left’ in the current discourse is not coherent and open to many divergent (controversial) interpretations, meanings, and ideas, that are all captured under a single banner. Use of the term in an ‘insulting’ and haphazard manner, paired with increasingly more controversial users, has arguably led to a severe depreciation of the term.¹⁴ Both the term and its users currently risk being marginalized and not taken seriously, possibly obscuring some of the more nuanced critiques implied with ‘regressive left’ (e.g. Nawaz).

1.4 Research aims, constraints, and questions

In this thesis I aim to analyse the ‘regressive left’ discourse to make the discourse more (academically) accessible, and to enable underlying ideas and critiques (that can now easily be dismissed or treated with a certain nonchalance) to be properly debated. The critical challenge in this regard is to discern relevant actors, topics, themes, and discursive events that shape and inform the discourse in order to better understand how the term ‘regressive left’ has (d)evolved from Nawaz’s use to an almost

¹² BBC, “Milo Yiannopoulos: Who is the alt-right writer and provocateur”, *BBC.com*, 21-02-2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39026870> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹³ Krisht, “In defense of the term Regressive Left”; Rubin, D., “Paul Joseph Watson on Black Lives Matter, Regressive Left, and Immigration”, *The Rubin Report*, 07-04-2016, <https://youtu.be/VgLYqt-fcM> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹⁴ White, J., “There is no regressive left”.

reproachful term captured in its own hashtag. Incidentally, I hope to provide a compact overview of the 'regressive left' discourse as a possible foundation for future, more extensive and in-depth, research.

In line with definitions as provided by Jäger¹⁵, Hjelm¹⁶, and von Stuckrad¹⁷ regarding discourse and the analysis hereof, I define 'discourse' as the organization of knowledge and meanings pertaining a given topic. In his article, *Discursive Study of Religion*¹⁸, von Stuckrad refers to the discourse 'religion' as "(...) *the societal organization of knowledge about religion*".¹⁹ Similarly, I define the 'regressive left discourse' as the societal organization of knowledge about the 'regressive left'. A discourse analysis as conducted in this thesis may then be referred to as the study of communication, knowledge, and meaning inherent to a given discourse, in this case the 'regressive left discourse'.²⁰

I deem some additional contextual demarcation of the research design a necessity before addressing the research questions driving this thesis. Based on a preliminary literature review, and familiarity of the author with historical developments within certain geographical contexts, the examination of the 'regressive left' discourse will be predominantly confined to the United States and the United Kingdom (most of the reviewed literature and data originates from these two countries). The research period has been limited to exactly five years, in the period from January 1st 2012, to December 31st 2017.

Bearing the aims and constraints discussed above in mind, the central research question guiding this thesis is: *How has the 'regressive left' discourse in the United States and United Kingdom developed since the publication of Maajid Nawaz's 2012 book Radical?*

To come to a meaningful answer to this primary research question, I deem it necessary to first examine the following sub-questions to better grasp the variables underlying the development of the 'regressive left' discourse:

- I. *What are the main developments in the usage of the term 'regressive left' and in the constellation of actors in the 'regressive left' discourse?*
- II. *Which topics and themes are associated with 'regressive left', and what are the main developments in these associations?*
- III. *Are there discursive events that can be distinguished in the 'regressive left' discourse and, if so, how have these events transformed the discourse?*

Now that the principal aims, constraints, and research questions of this thesis are established, the following chapter (II) will be dedicated to constructing a methodological framework that will facilitate the operationalization of the research questions posed. The current state of existing literature on the 'regressive left' and key-concepts that are of great significance in understanding the 'regressive left' discourse will be discussed in chapter III (theoretical framework). Findings following the analysis of sub-questions will be discussed and reflected upon successively in dedicated chapters (chapters IV, V, and VI).

¹⁵ Jäger, S., "Discourse and knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis", trans. I. Bünger and R. Tonks, in: Wodak, R., and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2001) 32-63, page 33-37, 46.

¹⁶ Hjelm, T., "Discourse analysis", in: Stausberg, M., and S. Engler (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion*, (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2011) 134-150, page 134-136.

¹⁷ Stuckrad, von, K., "Discursive Study of Religion: Approaches, Definitions, Implications", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 25 (2013): 5-25, page 15-17.

¹⁸ Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion".

¹⁹ Ibidem, page 17.

²⁰ Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 33; Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion", page 15.

II. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This research is conducted in the methodological tradition of discourse analysis, that is theoretically rooted in post-colonial theory and constructivism. In opposition to universalist approaches of the early twentieth century, constructivist approaches emphasize the context-dependent and relativist nature of knowledge and truth, and focus on meaning-making processes within society.²¹ From its origins in philosophy of language and linguistics (notably the works of Wittgenstein²² and Saussure²³), discourse analysis has branched out into divergent multi-disciplinarily methodological traditions,²⁴ ranging from more micro psychological actor-oriented approaches (e.g. Edwards²⁵, Potter & Wetherell²⁶, Habermas²⁷, or Ten Have²⁸), that focus on social interaction on a more conversational level, to more macro societal oriented approaches (e.g. Foucault²⁹, Van Dijk³⁰, or Laclau & Mouffe³¹), that focus on the role of power and institutions in the construction of knowledge.³² The main methodological framework of this research is based on elements of different (critical) discourse analysis traditions, as advocated by Foucault, Fairclough, Wodak, and von Stuckrad, complemented by elements of the research approaches and methods of Jäger and Törnberg and Törnberg.³³ A multi-perspectival methodology is commonly used in discourse analysis and allows for a research design that is properly tailored to the research questions.³⁴

²¹ Jorgensen, M., and L.J. Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), page 5, 8-9; Marvasti, A.B., *Qualitative research in sociology: An introduction* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), page 4-5; Stuckrad, Von, K., "Reflections on the limits of reflection: An invitation to the discursive study of religion", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 156-169, page 158-159; Berg, van den, H., "Discoursanalyse", *KWALON* 26 (2004): 29-39, page 34.

²² Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 134-136.

²³ Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 29, 35-37; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 1-2, 10.

²⁴ Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 134-136; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 29, 35-37; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 1-2, 10; Wodak and Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis", page 1.

²⁵ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 96-97.

²⁶ Idem. ; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 33, 35.

²⁷ Marvasti, *Qualitative research in sociology*, page 110-111; Wall, J.D., B.C. Stahl, and A.F. Salam, "Critical discourse analysis as a review methodology: An empirical example", *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 37 (2015): 257-285, page 260-261.

²⁸ Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 33, 35.

²⁹ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 12-14; Marvasti, *Qualitative research in sociology*, page 110-111; Wall, Stahl, and Salam, "Critical discourse analysis as a review methodology", page 260-261.

³⁰ Dijk, van, T.A., "Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis", *Japanese discourse* 1 (1995): 17-27; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 33, 35.

³¹ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 7-8; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 33, 35.

³² Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 33, 35; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 1-2, 7-8; Wodak and Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis", page 21; Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 136, 140-143.

³³ Foucault, M., *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan. 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Fairclough, N., *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language*. 2nd ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013); Wodak, R., and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2001); Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge"; Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion"; Törnberg, A., and P. Törnberg, "Muslims in social media discourse: combining topic modelling and critical discourse analysis". *Discourse, Context and Media* 13 (2016): 132-142.

³⁴ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 4, 76, 153-154; Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 142.

2.2 Methodological framework

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a school of thought that developed in the late 1980s, inspired by Foucault's work on discourse analysis.³⁵ Foucault's book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*³⁶ augmented discourse analysis from being centred around linguistic theory to a more socio-political approach, devised to examine the construction and institutionalization of knowledge and 'truth'.³⁷ Foucault's main interest lays in uncovering the genealogy of ideas and knowledge, with a special interest in the relation between power structures and language.³⁸ In line with the work of Foucault, from a CDA perspective, language is seen as a social practice that conveys power.³⁹ CDA is grounded in 'critical theory'; a research perspective that stresses the contribution researchers ought to make to society by providing social critiques and working towards affecting social change.⁴⁰ As Gee argues in his *Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, discourse analysis must "contribute, in terms of understanding and intervention, to important issues and problems in some area that interests and motivates us as global citizens."⁴¹ In the current climate of polarization of politics and society on hot-button topics like multiculturalism, freedom of speech, and the place of religion in society (particularly in regard to the role of Islam in society), there exists a significant risk of marginalization of minority voices and the obscuring of more nuanced opinions. One of the aims of this research is to contribute to a more meaningful and constructive dialogue on socio-political themes that are of (increasing) significance and importance in the 'Western' world.

Two of the founding figures that established the CDA tradition are Wodak and Fairclough.⁴² Wodak's approach to discourse analysis (the discourse-historical approach, DHA) has a strong historical component.⁴³ By including the socio-historical context of discourses in her analysis, Wodak tries to discover the genealogy of political discourse.⁴⁴ In line with the DHA as introduced by Wodak, the genealogy of the 'regressive left' discourse is determined by focussing on the historical development of the discourse while incorporating the wider socio-political context in which the discourse developed. Similar to both Foucault and Wodak, von Stuckrad is interested in the broader socio-

³⁵ Wodak and Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis", page 3-5, 10; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 12-14; Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 136; Wall, Stahl, and Salam, "Critical discourse analysis as a review methodology", page 261.

³⁶ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*.

³⁷ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*; Wall, Stahl, and Salam, "Critical discourse analysis as a review methodology", page 261; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 12-13.

³⁸ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 12-14.

³⁹ Janks, "Critical discourse analysis as a research tool", page 329; Gee, *An introduction to discourse analysis*, page 9-10, 68-69; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 63-64; Wodak and Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis", page 5.

⁴⁰ Janks, "Critical discourse analysis as a research tool", page 329, 331; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 33; Dijk, "Aims of Critical Discourse Analysis", page 17-19; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 2, 63-64; Wodak, "What CDA is about", page 10; Meyer, "Between theory, method, and politics", page 15; Wodak and Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis", page 3, 6-9; Gee, *An introduction to discourse analysis*, page 9-10, 68-69.

⁴¹ Gee, *An introduction to discourse analysis*, page 12.

⁴² Smith, P.H., *Platforms of memory: Social media and digital memory work*. Groningen: University of Groningen, 2018. Page 87; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 60-62; Wodak, "What CDA is about", page 4.

⁴³ Wodak, R., "The discourse-historical approach", in: Wodak, R., and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2001), 63-94; Reisigl, M., and R. Wodak. "The discourse-historical approach (DHA)", in: Wodak, R., and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2009), 87-121; Reisigl, M., "The discourse-historical approach", in: Flowerdew, J., and J.E. Richardson (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2018), 44-59.

⁴⁴ Wodak, "The discourse-historical approach", page 63-94.

historical context of discourses and in the reconstruction of their genealogy, with a focus on the discursive study of religion.⁴⁵

Fairclough, one of the founding fathers of CDA, focuses on analysing the exercise of power through language use by the mass media and its effect on politics.⁴⁶ One of the main conceptual premises adopted from Fairclough in this thesis is that of *critical realism*.⁴⁷ While the methodological approach of this research adheres to constructivism in the sense of how discourses are both shaped by social reality and shape social reality in return, holding too rigidly to constructivism may lead to over-relativizing and the suggestion that there exists no objective (ontological) reality outside the discursive, social (epistemological) reality.⁴⁸ This form of over-relativizing denounces any interpretation beyond the context-bound actor-experience, and may rule out any form of 'etic' interpretation (interpretation of the observer, or outsider's perspective) of 'emic' data (experience of the context-bound actor, or insider's perspective).⁴⁹ Instead, this research is designed in line with a more critical-realist approach to constructivism equivalent to Fairclough's interpretation of critical realism.⁵⁰ Discourse analysis through the lens of critical realism focusses on the duality between ontology and epistemology, where reality is perceived to exist of an ontological natural (physical) reality, and an epistemological social (constructed) reality; through discourse meaning is constructed about both realities.⁵¹

Concluding, in line with the CDA tradition and in particular the works of Foucault, Wodak, and von Stuckrad, that can be placed within the more macro societal-oriented discourse approaches and are characterised by a shared focus on the historical, social, and political development of discourses, the historical development of the 'regressive left' is included in this research and the 'regressive left' is examined within its broader socio-political context.⁵²

2.3 Research approach and methods

The more empirical part of this research design is inspired by specific elements of critical discourse analysis as understood by Jäger. In addition, the work of Törnberg and Törnberg on *topic modelling* was used to translate the methodological framework into a wieldier and more practical research approach.⁵³

⁴⁵ Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion", page 15, 19.

⁴⁶ Wodak, "What CDA is about", page 6; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 61-62, 64.

⁴⁷ Fairclough, N., "Peripheral Vision. Discourse analysis in organization studies: the case for critical realism." *Organization Studies* 26: 915-939, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605054610> (Website last accessed November 29th, 2018).

⁴⁸ Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 33-34, 38-46; Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 134-136; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 30; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 61; Marvasti, *Qualitative research in sociology*, page 107-108.

⁴⁹ Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 34, 36; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 35; Eriksen, T.H., *Small Places Large Issues: an Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*. 3rd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2010), page 39-40.

⁵⁰ Fairclough, "Peripheral Vision"; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 196-197.

⁵¹ Fairclough, "Peripheral Vision", page 915-917, 922; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 35.

⁵² Janks, "Critical discourse analysis as a research tool", page 329; Wodak and Meyer, "Critical discourse analysis", page 5, 20-21; Smith, *Platforms of memory*, page 88; Meyer, "Between theory, method, and politics", page 15; Berg, "Discoursanalyse", page 36; Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 62-63; Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion", page 19.

⁵³ Törnberg and Törnberg, "Muslims in social media discourse".

Jäger's style of discourse analysis is very critical in nature, and he focuses strongly on topics like power, racism, and right-extremism.⁵⁴ In the introduction it has been stressed that the 'regressive left' discourse, like any discourse, does not exist in isolation. This thesis adheres to the explanation of Jäger (and von Stuckrad) on how discourses (i.e. discourse strands) are interwoven with, and influenced by other discourses (forming 'discursive knots'),⁵⁵ making up the entirety of the "*discursive milling mass*".⁵⁶ A particular element of interest to this thesis in Jäger's work on CDA are *discursive events*: events with profound social impact (and extensive media and public exposure) that change and shape a discourse.⁵⁷ Examples of discursive events are the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York or, as mentioned by Jäger, the 1986 nuclear disaster in Chernobyl.⁵⁸ As part of this research, discursive events have been identified that have impacted the 'regressive left' discourse to gain deeper insight in the 'discursive milling mass' in the 'Jägerian' sense.

One of the main methodological inspirations for this thesis is the article *Muslims in social media discourse* by Törnberg and Törnberg,⁵⁹ who examine the discourse on Muslims and Islam on social media by making use of a combination of CDA and 'topic modelling' (an automated process aimed at identifying patterns (data-clusters) that may indicate key-terms within a discourse).⁶⁰ Through topic modelling, Törnberg and Törnberg investigate the discourse on Islam and Muslims by identifying topics and themes that tend to be used in concordance with 'Islam' and/or 'Muslims'.⁶¹ By mapping changes in these contextual themes and topics, the authors illustrate how the discourse on Islam and Muslims has developed over time.⁶² In line with the work by Törnberg and Törnberg, key topics and themes in the 'regressive left' discourse are identified to examine how the discourse has developed over time.

The analysis of the 'regressive left' discourse in this research is primarily conducted through content and thematic analysis, both established methods within the '(critical) discourse analysis' tradition. By means of coding text, (groups of) actors, topics and themes, and discursive events are identified, and the interrelations between these categories or other patterns of interest are highlighted. Content analysis is a research method that is used to organize, structure, and analyse texts.⁶³ More quantitative oriented content analysis is centred around counting how often specific categories come to the fore.⁶⁴ Qualitative content analysis is a more interpretative process, where the content of text is coded in order to deduce meaning from the text.⁶⁵ By identifying notable actors, topics, themes, and events through coding, content analysis can be used to reveal changes, patterns, differences, and relationships in textual data.⁶⁶ In this thesis both qualitative and quantitative ('quantified' qualitative

⁵⁴ Wodak, "What CDA is about", page 9; Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 32-63.

⁵⁵ Stuckrad, "Discursive Study of Religion", page 16; Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 33, 47-48.

⁵⁶ Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 33.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, page 48-49.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, page 48.

⁵⁹ Törnberg and Törnberg, "Muslims in social media discourse".

⁶⁰ Ibidem, page 132-133.

⁶¹ Ibidem, page 136.

⁶² Idem.

⁶³ Bengtsson, M., "How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis". *NursingPlus Open* 2 (2016): 8-14, page 8, 13; Nelson, C., and R.H. Woods, "Content Analysis", in: Stausberg, M., and S. Engler (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion*, (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2011) 109-120, page 110; Smith, *Platforms of memory*, page 89.

⁶⁴ Bengtsson, "How to plan and perform a qualitative study", page 10; Smith, *Platforms of memory*, page 89; Nelson and Woods, "Content Analysis", page 110.

⁶⁵ Bengtsson, "How to plan and perform a qualitative study", page 8, 10.

⁶⁶ Nelson and Woods, "Content Analysis", page 110-111; Smith, *Platforms of memory*, page 89.

data) approaches to content analysis are used, as will be further discussed in the following subsection. Thematic analysis is a research method, closely related to content analysis (at times considered a sub-branch), that is also frequently employed in discourse analyses.⁶⁷ Thematic analysis is specifically aimed at identifying and categorizing major themes within textual data.⁶⁸ One important methodological consideration is that thematic analysis is an active process of both deduction (searching for specific themes) and induction (discovering themes during analysis) that is guided by a specific research question, perspective, or aim.⁶⁹ For example, during the process of analysis and coding, new themes might emerge and priorly established themes might prove to be irrelevant for the research.⁷⁰ Reflexivity about methodology, research criteria, and the coding process is paramount to ensure the validity, generalizability, and reliability of thematic analysis.⁷¹

2.4 Considerations in data collection, analysis, and interpretation

As described earlier, the 'regressive left' discourse manifests mostly online. Due to a lack of traditional sources, the primary source of data used in the examination of the 'regressive left' discourse are (opiniated) online blogs and news articles originating from the period 2012-2017. All articles have been sampled using the Google search engine according to the procedures and search parameters in appendix II, to ensure a proportional amount of articles for each respective year and increase the representability of the corpus of articles. While social media content was initially considered as a source of data (given the relative high prevalence of the term on social media), online articles as a source of data better fit the research design and intent of this thesis. Articles contain sufficient content density and context to meaningfully code the units of analysis as described above (e.g. actors, topics, themes, events), as opposed to social media content (as a result of platform restrictions, e.g. Twitter-posts restricted to 280 characters). Furthermore, articles are preferred due to the relative ease of availability, accessibility, and searchability without (expensive) third-party software tools as opposed to social media content (that is additionally governed by restrictions on the retrieval of historic social-media content and data in the wake of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal and the new 2018 European privacy laws).

All articles were, after the initial search, 'manually' curated based on several (de)selection criteria to ensure the relevance of the data set (appendix II), eventually leading to a corpus of 158 articles suitable for further analysis. In addition to the qualitative analysis of articles, 'quantified' qualitative data has been generated through coding and counting (e.g. through content analysis) to allow for a more quantitative oriented analysis; this data is complemented by rudimentary quantitative online metric data (i.e. popularity of search-terms) involving the keyword 'regressive left, to allow for the identification of events that are of particular interest to the examination. The literature review provides the basis for the interpretation of the data, by providing contextualisation for the results derived from coding. The analysis process in this research is fluid, in the sense that the initial coding scheme (with pre-set categories) has been adjusted based on emerging data and patterns (emergent categories), and is not separated from other phases of the research but rather intertwined with all steps.⁷² The coding has been conducted using CAQDAS-software (i.e. Atlas.ti).⁷³ To enhance the transparency and reproducibility of this research, the coding scheme and a comprehensive overview

⁶⁷ Braun, V., and V. Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 77-101, page 77-80.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, page 79.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, page 80, 83-84.

⁷⁰ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 124.

⁷¹ Braun and Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology", page 80, 82-83, 95-96.

⁷² Marvasti, *Qualitative research in sociology*, page 82.

⁷³ Bengtsson, "How to plan and perform a qualitative study", page 11-12; Hjelm, "Discourse analysis", page 146.

of the procedures and techniques employed in the software-based coding using Atlas.ti are added as an appendix to this thesis (appendix III and IV).⁷⁴

III. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

In this part of the thesis, attention is diverted to establishing a theoretical framework of existing literature on the 'regressive left', followed by an evaluation of key-concepts that are of great significance in understanding the 'regressive left' discourse and its underlying meta-theoretical assumptions.

3.2 Existing research on the 'regressive left'

The secondary literature study has indicated a scarceness of existing literature on the 'regressive left', with the exception of two book-publications (by Hodgson⁷⁵ and Robinson⁷⁶) and one academic article (by Dulesh⁷⁷) explicitly discussing the 'regressive left'.

Hodgson's 2018 book *Wrong Turnings*⁷⁸ offers a thorough reflection on the evolution of the socio-political 'left', and an appeal on 'the left' to return to its former, Enlightenment-inspired, ideals.⁷⁹ Hodgson uses the term 'regressive left' twice to describe his perception of the left's "*retreat from former ideals*",⁸⁰ and to criticize the tolerance of the 'left' in regard to conservative religious and undemocratic groups, and their reactionary cultural-relativist views. In opposition to 'regressive leftists', Hodgson argues for the left to be "*champion of genuine and complete liberty*".⁸¹

⁷⁴ Bengtsson, "How to plan and perform a qualitative study", page 11-12; Smith, *Platforms of memory*, page 89.

⁷⁵ Hodgson, G.M., *Wrong turnings: how the left got lost* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁷⁶ Robinson, *The language of progressive politics in modern Britain*.

⁷⁷ Dulesh, S., "The Regressive Left and Dialectics", *Humanist Perspectives* 202 (2017): 10-18.

⁷⁸ Hodgson, *Wrong turnings: how the left got lost*.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, especially page xi, 218.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, page xi.

⁸¹ Ibidem, page 218.

In Robinson's 2017 book *The language of progressive politics in modern Britain*,⁸² she examines developments in usage of the term 'progressive' in the UK and in British politics. Robinson scrutinizes the assumption that 'progressive' entails a linear evolutionary process of democratization and modernization, and reflects on the term 'regressive left' as a critique in response to 'un-progressive' attitudes of the supposedly progressive left.⁸³ Robinson offers a brief overview of the development of the 'regressive left', starting at the coining of the term by Nawaz as a critique at the defence of Islamism, followed by the use of the term by Dawkins (amongst others) to criticize dogmatic adherence to cultural-relativism at the expense of Enlightenment-ideals like secularism and free-speech.⁸⁴ Robinson argues 'regressive left' has become an epithet used to denounce cultural-relativist rhetoric, where imperialism and colonialism are often invoked, criticizing Western democratic or liberal values.⁸⁵ Robinson further illustrates how 'regressive left' is increasingly used by right-wing groups as a general critique targeted at arguments voiced in debates on race- and gender equality that are perceived to be limiting the right at freedom-of-speech.⁸⁶

In her article *The Regressive Left and Dialectics*⁸⁷, Dulesh describes the 'regressive left' as an example of the negative consequences of losing "*the dialectic approach to reality*".⁸⁸ Dulesh portrays, mostly by quoting others, the 'regressive left' as uncritical of violent extremism,⁸⁹ as applying double standards that hold 'the West' to impossibly high standards while excusing minority groups based on their cultural affiliation,⁹⁰ as anti-Imperialist and believing 'the West' is evil,⁹¹ as anti-Semitic,⁹² as promoters of multiculturalism and 'political correctness'⁹³, and as an authoritarian and repressive continuation of the 'New Left' and 'left fascism'.⁹⁴ The critiques mentioned by Dulesh provide a point of departure for the examination of themes associated with the 'regressive left' discourse later in this thesis.

In the first two mentioned books the 'regressive left' is cited as a critique that fits in a wider narrative and discourse on leftist politics, with little empiric foundation for the portrayal of 'regressive left'. Similarly, while Dulesh cites a number of commentators and authors, there is no reflection on the veracity of the claims made (i.e. quoting a single individual opposed to a comprehensive analysis), further affirming the necessity of a more comprehensive examination of the discourse.

3.3 Key-concepts in understanding the 'regressive left' discourse

Left

The 'left' in 'regressive left' might be considered a generalisation of a wide range of political or ideological ideas and beliefs associated with political parties, groups, and actors, that self-identify or

⁸² Robinson, *The language of progressive politics in modern Britain*.

⁸³ Ibidem, page 14-15, 25-26, 258-260.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, page 258.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, page 259.

⁸⁶ Idem.

⁸⁷ Dulesh, "The Regressive Left and Dialectics".

⁸⁸ Ibidem, page 16.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, page 10.

⁹⁰ Dulesh, "The Regressive Left and Dialectics", page 11.

⁹¹ Ibidem, page 11, 16.

⁹² Ibidem, page 14.

⁹³ Ibidem, page 13.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, page 10.

are classified by others on the left side of the modern 'left-right' political spectrum.⁹⁵ Simplistically generalized, the 'left' is often perceived to be in favour of a more centralized 'socialist' economy with an emphasis on economic equality, whereas the 'right' is in favour of a decentralized and 'free-market' economy with an emphasis on individualism.⁹⁶ Perhaps the most significant change in the perception of this socio-political left/right dichotomy these last few decades has been the growing prominence of a cultural dimension in addition to the, more archetypal, economic dimension in political views and ideologies.⁹⁷ For example, Kriesi argues that, influenced by increasing globalization, the left/right divide has become more interconnected to attitudes towards cultural identity, immigration, and integration, where political actors with an inward or nationalistic attitude (i.e. the 'right') are opposed by political actors with more outward focused or inter-nationalistic (globalist) attitude (i.e. the 'left').⁹⁸ The cultural component in the perception of the 'left' in 'regressive left' is arguably its defining characteristic.

Regressive

The notion 'regressive' (antonym to 'progressive'⁹⁹) in 'regressive left' can be provisionally defined as: "(..) Characterized by a return to an earlier state or form (..) or less advanced stage of development".¹⁰⁰ In the context of politics this definition translates to a return to an earlier point in time and the politics associated with this point in time; in this regard a degree of overlap may seem to occur between the terms 'regressive' and 'conservative'.¹⁰¹ However, a clear distinction can be made: conservatism might be characterized as the (continuous) adherence to political beliefs perceived to be asynchronous to contemporary society,¹⁰² whereas 'regressive' might be characterized by the adoption of (or return to) beliefs associated with earlier times by an actor who first adhered to more 'modern' views. Opposed to 'conservatism', actors accused of 'regressive' views are often *not* intentionally or explicitly adopting regressive views, but are characterized as 'regressive' by others; mostly by political opponents. The epithet 'regressive left' is also directed at groups and individuals who, despite not adopting 'regressive' views themselves, hold a supposed naïve or tolerant ('facilitating') stance to people, groups, theories, and practices that are ideologically incompatible with, or can be considered threatening to, 'leftist' core-values: implying 'guilt by association'.

Liberalism

The notion of 'liberalism' emerged during the age of Enlightenment, emphasizing the freedom of the individual in relation to both authority and the state (social component), and in trade and commerce (economic component).¹⁰³ In the modern United States, however, 'liberalism' is primarily associated with social-liberalism: placing great emphasis on social justice, (economic) equality, civil rights and liberties, with a decisive role for the government in achieving these ideals.¹⁰⁴ Social-liberalism is a core

⁹⁵ Knutsen, O., "Value orientations, political conflicts and left-right identification: A comparative study", *European Journal of Political Research* 28 (1995): 63-93.

⁹⁶ Greenberg, J., and E. Jonas. "Psychological Motives and Political Orientation - The Left, the Right, and the Rigid: Comment on Jost et al. (2003)", *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (2003): 376-283.

⁹⁷ Kriesi et al., "Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared", *European Journal of Political Research* 45 (2006): 921-956, page 924.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, page 924.

⁹⁹ The Oxford English Dictionary, "regressive", <http://www.oed.com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/view/Entry/161388>.

¹⁰⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary, "regressive", <http://www.oed.com.proxy-ub.rug.nl/view/Entry/161388>.

¹⁰¹ Robinson, *The language of progressive politics in modern Britain*, page 12, 25; Heywood, A., *Key concepts in Politics and International Relations*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), page 46-50.

¹⁰² Heywood, *Key concepts in Politics and International Relations*, page 46-50.

¹⁰³ Hodgson, *Wrong turnings: how the left got lost*, page 221; Heywood, *Key concepts in Politics and International Relations*, page 43-46.

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *The language of progressive politics*, page 14, 45, 68, 243, 248, 256, 285; Heywood, *Key concepts in Politics and International Relations*, page 45-46.

value in US leftist politics since the second half of the 20th century, resulting in ‘left’ (in the American interpretation of the left-right dichotomy) used synonymous to (social) liberals.¹⁰⁵

Despite the above semantic considerations, a near universal core value of liberalism is the notion of ‘free speech’: the right to voice an opinion without fear of discrimination by the state.¹⁰⁶ In both Europe and the US the preservation of *freedom of speech* is a hot-button topic, with increasing socio-political debate on the enforcement of possible limitations on free speech.¹⁰⁷ A commonly voiced critique is that unrestricted freedom of speech may lead (or has led) to a climate where certain groups or individuals are enabled to harass, insult, or marginalize others.¹⁰⁸ Groups, parties, and individuals arguing for such restrictions, or politicians endorsing censorship, are in turn criticized by opponents for the abandonment or betrayal of ‘liberal values’; labelled by some as ‘regressive left’.¹⁰⁹

Secularism

Secularism is founded on the notion that religion must be separated from the state, and is not an institutionalized component of civil/public life but a private matter (guaranteed as *freedom of religion*).¹¹⁰ The implementation of the secular ideal varies greatly per country (e.g. *Laïcité* in France).¹¹¹ While secularism is not a value exclusive to the political left, it may be considered a commonly shared ideal amongst leftist parties and groups who historically championed the idea, pressured for secular-reforms, and contributed to its implementation in many modern states.¹¹² Similarly, while not universal, the general rejection of religion and subversion of religious authority have been common themes throughout the historical development of the political left.¹¹³ As such, ‘secularism’ and a general critique of institutionalized religion can both be considered important - historical - characteristics of the ‘left’. One of the implicit assumptions in ‘regressive left’ is that the ‘left’ is ‘regressing’ from its secular and mostly a-religious origins, by showing ‘excessive’ tolerance or lenience towards certain religious groups (i.e. Islamists).

Multiculturalism

¹⁰⁵ Palmer, J., “Liberalism in Peril”, *Quillette*, 09-08-2017, <https://quillette.com/2017/08/09/liberalism-in-peril> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹⁰⁶ Barendt, E., *Freedom of Speech* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Jansen Reventlow, N., “The Right to Offend, Shock or Disturb, or The Importance of Protecting Unpleasant Speech”, in: Jansen Reventlow, N., J. Penney, A. Johnson, R. Junco, C. Tilton, K. Coyer, N. Dad, et al. (eds.), *Perspectives on Harmful Speech Online: A collection of essays* (Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society Research Publication, 2017), 7-9, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:33746096> (last accessed November 29th, 2018); Volkskrant, de, “Vrijheid van meningsuiting: waar ligt de grens?”, *De Volkskrant*, 15-12-2016, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/vrijheid-van-meningsuiting-waar-ligt-de-grens~b1195c2d/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹⁰⁸ Barendt, *Freedom of Speech*, page 31-32.

¹⁰⁹ Nawaz, *Radical*; Prins, B., *Voorbij de onschuld: het debat over integratie in Nederland*. 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Warner, M., “Secularism”, in: Burgett, B., and G. Hendler (eds.) *Keywords for American cultural studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 220-224; Prins, *Voorbij de onschuld*, page 153-154.

¹¹¹ Cheline-Pont, B. “Legal Secularism in France Today: Between Two Paths”, in: Contreras, J., and R. M. Martinez de Codes (eds.), *Trends of Secularism in a Pluralistic World* (Madrid & Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana & Vervuert, 2017) 281-296, page 281-296.

¹¹² Knippenberg, H., “Secularization in the Netherlands in its historical and geographical dimensions”, *GeoJournal* 45 (1998): 209-220; Knutsen, “Value orientations”, page 63, 66, 68.

¹¹³ Egbert R., P. Achterberg, and D. Houtman. “Are all Socialists Anti-religious? Anti-religiosity and the Socialist Left in 21 Western European Countries (1990-2008)”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 3 (2015): 435-452; Knutsen, “Value orientations”, page 70, 76, 86-87; Knutsen, O., “Expert Judgements of the Left-Right Location of Political Parties: A Comparative Longitudinal Study”, *West European Politics* 21 (1998): 63-94. DOI: [10.1080/01402389808425245](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402389808425245) (last accessed November 29th, 2018), page 65-71; Knippenberg, “Secularization in the Netherlands”.

In contrast to (pre-World War II) colonialist and universalist approaches to culture, cultural relativism developed as an approach that treats all individual cultures as being governed by their own ethics and morality to prevent prejudice and a Western bias.¹¹⁴ Globalisation and increased (labour)-immigration to 'Western' countries (mostly Europe) starting in the 1960s led, in the spirit of cultural relativistic approaches, to the conception of multiculturalism.¹¹⁵ Providing a framework for coexistence of people of different religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds,¹¹⁶ multiculturalism is centred around the belief that all individuals have the right, within the state's existing constitutional framework, to express and maintain their own culture and, often considered 'inseparable', religious beliefs.¹¹⁷ According to nationalist, anti-immigration, groups (both in Europe and the US), national identities have come under pressure by multiculturalism and increased immigration.¹¹⁸

The term 'regressive left' is used by some to criticize 'the left' for their adherence to cultural relativism and the 'advancement' of multiculturalism (and the religious dimension associated with it).¹¹⁹ The basic argument in opposition of multiculturalism in this context is that it supposedly contributes to the recognition or endorsement of 'regressive' cultural or religious groups and values that are out of touch with modern 21st century democratic societies. The 'left' is accused of contributing to this development either because they are blinded or naïve, or because they act out of 'political correctness'; a term further examined in the following sub-section.

Political correctness

As already established in the methodology of this thesis, discourses do not exist in isolation but are rather 'intertwined' with other discourses.¹²⁰ An important steppingstone in understanding and interpreting the 'regressive left' discourse is positioning the discourse within the wider socio-historical context in which it has developed. Some of the main critiques and concerns directed at 'the left' that are now captured by 'regressive left' already existed *avant la lettre*. The current 'regressive left' discourse shows great similarities and overlap with the discourse on 'political correctness' ('PC') that is perceived by critics to be present in media, politics, and academia, and has been ongoing since the early 1990s in both the US and Europe.¹²¹

The term 'political correctness' has been used incidentally prior to the 1990s in a variety of different contexts (e.g. satirically by the New Left of the 1970s), but emerged in a distinctive new way in the 1990s when the term was adopted by US right-wing (Republican) groups and individuals mostly as a pejorative term directed at the 'left' (i.e. Democrats), criticizing their activism for inclusive language

¹¹⁴ Eriksen, *Small Places Large Issues*, page 8-15, 39-40.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, page 293.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, page 293-294.

¹¹⁷ Clark, A. S., and S. M. Hoover, "At the intersection of media, culture, and religion", in: Hoover, S. M., and K. Lundby (eds.), *Rethinking media, religion, and culture*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1997) 15-36.

¹¹⁸ Davis and Deole, "Immigration and the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Europe"; Kefford and Ratcliff, "Republicans and Democrats".

¹¹⁹ Robinson, *The language of progressive politics*, page 258-260; Hodgson, *Wrong turnings: how the left got lost*, page xi, 218; Alvarez Laviada, U., "The Regressive Left Multiculturalism", *Medium.com* weblog, 19-08-2018, <https://medium.com/@ulyssesalvarezlaviada/the-regressive-left-multiculturalism-53b282821b2> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹²⁰ Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", 33, 46.

¹²¹ See for example Cho, S., "Essential politics", *Harvard Latino Law Review* 2 (1997): 433-456; Fairclough, N., "Political correctness: the politics of culture and language", *Discourse Society* 14 (2003): 17-28; Lazere, D., *Why higher education should have a leftist bias* (New York: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2013); Lory, G.C., "Self-censorship in public discourse: a theory of political correctness and related phenomena", *Rationality and Society* 6 (1994): 428-461; Morris, S., "Political correctness", *Journal of Political Economy* 109 (2001): 231-265; Prins, *Voorbij de onschuld*; and Spencer, M.E., "Multiculturalism, political correctness, and the politics of identity", *Sociological Forum* 9 (1994): 547-567.

mostly pertaining to race, gender, and sexual orientation.¹²² This period from the early to late 1990s was characterized by heated public, political and media debate essentially polarizing American society (mostly along Republic/Democrat-lines) on a wide range of issues, by some portrayed as a 'culture war'.¹²³ Activism for 'inclusive language' is mostly founded on the idea that insensitive speech can be 'offensive' (i.e. stereotyping) to members of identity groups that already suffer marginalization in society or are otherwise oppressed, and that inclusive language contributes to the social advancement of these identity groups. Critics, however, argue that such 'politically correct' policies result in the 'policing' of language and consider it an attempt to impose restrictions on freedom of speech.¹²⁴ The US 'culture war' in the 1990s sparked a 'political correctness' discourse that revolved around a dichotomy on the matter of inclusive language, but also resulted in an increased dichotomy on social policies pertaining to these marginalized identity-groups (e.g. 'gay rights').

Until the early 2000s, the term 'political correctness' had been mainly used to emphasize perceived attempts to 'police' speech for inclusive language. From this period onwards the term 'political correctness' is also used to imply that certain subjects (i.e. Islam) are 'taboo' and that 'speaking the truth' (free speech) on these subjects is suppressed.¹²⁵ Similar accusations of limiting or suppressing free speech were (and are) topical in Europe (e.g. 'politieke correctheid' in the Netherlands and 'politische Korrektheit' in Germany).¹²⁶ In recent years the 'taboo' interpretation of the term 'political correctness' has arguably been the most dominant. The actuality of the debate was notably highlighted during the US 2016 Presidential campaign with extensive usage of the term by Donald Trump: "*Political correctness is hurting us*".¹²⁷ The principal claim made in this style of usage is that the accused are unwilling to face or discuss certain 'truths' pertaining to certain identity-groups (in this case Muslims) out of political correctness, with perceived detrimental consequences for society.

Usage of the term 'political correctness' is explained by Johnson and Suhr as a strategy of representing opponents in a negative fashion with a positive representation of the person making the accusation (i.e. the accused portrayed as a 'betrayed' of free speech, and the accuser as a 'saviour');¹²⁸ a 'double strategy' that is, according to Van Dijk, common in discourse pertaining to racism and can also be understood as a form of 'othering'.¹²⁹ The extent to which the above perception of 'PC' as a strategy of 'othering', where 'PC' is more a rhetorical instrument than a coherent critique, is applicable to the notion of 'regressive left' is however yet to be determined: the critiques implied in 'political correctness' pertain mostly to language and perceived restrictions on freedom of speech, while the term 'regressive left' instead places great emphasis on *acts* (or inaction).

3.4 Reflection

¹²² Calhoun, C., "Political Correctness", in: Becker, L., and C. Becker (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1337-1340.

¹²³ Buchanan, P., "1992 Republican National Convention Speech", *Buchanan.org blog*, 17-08-1992, <https://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹²⁴ Blankenship, J., "How Language Policing And Hyper-Sensitivity Are Ruining Social Dialogue", *Thought catalogue*, 11-02-2014, <https://thoughtcatalog.com/jessica-blankenship/2014/02/how-language-policing-and-hyper-sensitivity-are-ruining-social-dialogue/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹²⁵ Prins, B., "Het lef om taboes te doorbreken: Nieuw realisme in het Nederlandse discours over multiculturalisme", *Migrantenstudies* 4 (2002): 241-254.

¹²⁶ Idem. ; Johnson, S., and S. Suhr, "From 'political correctness to politische Korrektheit: Discourses of 'PC' in the German Newspaper Die Welt." *Discourse & Society* 14 (2003): 49-68.

¹²⁷ Trump, D., statements on PC during a campaign rally in Iowa, 17-01-2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3J0eyDZOcjk>

¹²⁸ Johnson and Suhr, "From 'Political Correctness to Politische Korrektheit", page 63-64.

¹²⁹ Dijk, van, T. A., "Discourse and the denial of racism", *Discourse & Society* 3 (1992): 87-118, page 89, 98.

In this chapter the limited research already conducted on the 'regressive left' has been established, and additionally a conceptual framework of key-concepts was formulated. In the examination of these key-concepts (left, regressive, liberalism, secularism, multiculturalism, and political correctness) a reoccurring pattern emerged of existing dichotomies in society on a variety of themes and topics. Many of the critiques implied with 'regressive left' can, in a sense, be considered a continuation or extension of socio-political debate on these dichotomies.

IV. Origins and usage of 'regressive left'

4.1 Introduction

The focal point of this chapter is the evolving usage of the term 'regressive left' and the development of the constellation of actors in the discourse. In the first part of this chapter, the origins and chronological development of the term 'regressive left' will be established, followed by a discussion of the type of usage and contexts in which the term is used. The second part consists of an examination of key-actors and their relation to the 'regressive left' discourse.

4.2 History of 'regressive left'

4.2.1 Origins

The primary point of departure in reconstructing the development of the ‘regressive left’ discourse is the autobiography *Radical*,¹³⁰ by ex-Islamist Maajid Nawaz to whom the coining of the term ‘regressive left’ is commonly attributed. In *Radical*, Nawaz only explicitly mentions ‘regressive left’ twice. The first mention occurs when Nawaz is reflecting on the grim consequences of his actions as a recruiter for the Islamist group Hizb al-Tahrir. Nawaz recalls that, at the time, he would hold on to the idea that the end justifies the means:

“Is not winning the war more important than truth? This maxim, I knew, was also subscribed to by some on the left, the **regressive left**. For them, winning against capitalism was far more important than those they chose as allies. (...) I watched as we were ignorantly pandered to by well-meaning liberals and ideologically driven leftists; how we Islamists laughed at their naivety.”¹³¹

Nawaz places great emphasis on the collaboration of the left with Islamists to advance their own ideological agenda, but the ‘regressive left’ is also portrayed as a well-meaning segment of the left naively facilitating Islamists. Nawaz further illustrates his criticism of the ‘regressive left’, while not using the term explicitly, by sharing personal experiences (from his Islamist days) regarding his dealings with ‘the left’ or ‘liberals’ and their attitudes towards Islam(ism). The idea of the ‘regressive left’ as the (unintended) spokespeople for Islamism, either as a result of naivety or as the result of a strict adherence to culture relativistic ideas, is a common theme throughout *Radical*. For example, Nawaz accuses the ‘regressive left’, that he describes as being (mis)guided by a well-meaning cultural-relativist attempt to judge Muslims based on their own ‘authentic culture’, of succumbing to simplistic and patronizing ‘Orientalist’ views towards Islam where Islamists are considered the authentic voices for a fictitious homogenous ‘Muslim community’.¹³² The second and final explicit reference to the ‘regressive left’ Nawaz makes in *Radical* is in relation to ‘Orientalism’: “Among the **regressive left**, the ‘Orientalists’ (...)”.¹³³

Nawaz illustrates how the ‘Orientalist view’ leads to regressive attempts to rationalize suicide bombings by victimizing the perpetrators, insinuating they (Muslim-terrorists) had no other option but to react violently to their ‘suffering’ as ‘victims of society’.¹³⁴ Nawaz deems the tendency amongst the ‘regressive left’ to perceive Muslims in a simplistic and patronizing ‘Orientalist’ fashion, where Islamists are perceived to be the sole representative voice of Muslims, a form of ‘reverse racism’ or a ‘poverty of expectations’ towards Muslims.¹³⁵ Nawaz portrays these ‘Orientalists’ as the uncritical facilitators of Islamism, to the extent that as a rule of thumb: “When we were critical of Islamism, the ‘Orientalists’ got upset”.¹³⁶ He further elaborates on this perception of the ‘Orientalist’ ‘regressive left’ as uncritical by providing examples of how, in his later years as a (former-Islamist) political commentator, he is often the target of verbal attacks by this group for not being considered an ‘authentic’ voice for Muslims.¹³⁷

Contrary to the common citation and crediting of Nawaz for coining the term, there has been sporadic use of ‘regressive left’ prior to the July 2012 publication of *Radical*. The earliest online entry of the term might be dated to May 15th 2009, when an anonymous web-blogger under the pseudonym ‘MAS’

¹³⁰ Nawaz, *Radical*.

¹³¹ Ibidem, page 316-317. Emphasis in bold is added and not part of the original quote.

¹³² Ibidem, page 328.

¹³³ Ibidem, page 341. Emphasis in bold is added and not part of the original quote.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, page 340.

¹³⁵ Ibidem, page 328.

¹³⁶ Nawaz, *Radical*, page 340.

¹³⁷ Ibidem, page 340-341.

on his short-lived, now defunct, weblog *The Regressive Left; From Al to Zen* dedicated several posts to highlighting ‘the flaws in the philosophies of the liberal left’.¹³⁸ In his first ‘manifesto’ post, ‘MAS’ states the following:

“The regressive left (...) those who call themselves progressives, all though maybe unwittingly, hinder the advancement and growth of not just society but the individual. (...) their intentions are good, just misguided.”¹³⁹

Blogger ‘MAS’ implies a certain ‘naivety’ (misguided, according to ‘MAS’) in leftist ideology and politics. In this blog he makes no explicit mention of naivety towards religion (Islam) or multiculturalism, directing his criticism solely at ‘leftist’ thought in the general sense. In the years preceding *Radical*, several other, incidental, mentions of ‘regressive left’ can be traced online. However, in only one instance (apart from the blog by ‘MAS’) it is made explicit what is implied with ‘regressive left’: *“Some are in that part of the left, often in the universities and NGOs, that sees itself as a more progressive elite than those in the party and the state (...). We call this left a regressive left.”*¹⁴⁰ This quotation pertains to concerns of the *Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement* in South Africa in their self-proclaimed struggle against ‘regressive’ leftists ‘elites’ (mostly ‘whites’) who, supposedly, impose their own authoritarian leftist views on the poor masses.

Apart from the two cases discussed above, no other noteworthy use of ‘regressive left’ can be ascertained prior to the release of *Radical* on either online blogs or articles. An advanced search on Twitter for the period March 21st 2006 (inception of Twitter) until July 5th 2012 (release of *Radical*) for the occurrence of the words ‘regressive’ and ‘left’ in a tweet yields 22 results, of which 9 are entirely unrelated. The 13 remainders all appear to relate to UK and/or US politics, however, in none of these cases the writer makes explicit what ‘regressive left’ entails; interestingly none of the tweets suggest a connection between the ‘regressive left’ and Islam(ism). One notable excerpt from the earlier mentioned tweets is a tweet by Nawaz (figure 1), unproviding further context or explanation for the ‘regressive left’ accusation made.



Figure 1

Similar search queries on Facebook and Youtube yield no results for the period up until July 5th 2012. It is, in the context of this thesis, unproductive to devote significant attention to determining whether Nawaz conceived the term without prior (possibly unknowing) exposure to the term. In any case it is evident that there is a degree of overlap in implied meaning with the usage of blogger MAS in regard to the notion of ‘leftist’ *naivety*: which is arguably one of the most distinctive qualification given to the ‘regressive left’ by Nawaz in *Radical*. While the two quotes discussed show use prior to Nawaz’s, due to their isolated context and incidental usage, for all intents and purposes it can be argued that Nawaz coined the term and has been the main contributor to its establishment and the deriving discourse; most later users nearly universally credit the term to Nawaz.

¹³⁸ MAS and Sylvia, “The Regressive Left: from Al to Zen: Flaws in the philosophies of the Liberal Left. Intro”, *blog entry by authors MAS and Sylvia on theregressiveleft.blogspot.com*, 2009, <http://theregressiveleft.blogspot.nl/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

¹³⁹ Idem., Emphasis in bold is added and not part of the original quote.

¹⁴⁰ Nsibande, Z., and S. Zikode, “Serving our Life Sentence in the Shacks”, *Libcom.org*, 16-07-2010, <http://libcom.org/library/serving-our-life-sentence-shacks> (last accessed November 29th, 2018).

The observation, or rather claim, made by Nawaz that ‘some on the left’ are ‘colluding’ with - or taking a naïve stance towards - Islamism is not a new idea in itself. Similar accusations have been made and implied with incidental terms like ‘head-in-the-sand liberals’ (Harris)¹⁴¹ and ‘pro-Islamist left’ (Namazie, Miller)¹⁴² in the years leading up to *Radical*. In essence the term ‘regressive left’ as conceived by Nawaz might be considered a culmination of existing public discourse on the ambiguous relation between ‘the left’ and ‘Islamism’ up until that point in time, flavoured by his own personal experiences in dealing with the (political) left and Islamism.

4.2.2 2012-mid 2015: a discourse in its infancy

The publication of *Radical* (July 2012) did not result in immediate (online) adoption of the term ‘regressive left’ amongst a wide and diverse audience as is now the case, except for incidentally in discussions on Islamism. On social media like Twitter, perhaps bolstered by Nawaz’s online use of the term in 9 original tweets and 11 replies between July 2012-July 2015, the term received marginal interest with only 42 original posts by others (replies and unrelated posts excluded) for this period. A search query for the #RegressiveLeft hashtag in the same period only yields three results. Two of these tweets originate from Twitter-user ‘Jamie Palmer’, who in a November 2013 post explicitly relates #RegressiveLeft to Maajid Nawaz when he comes to the defence of Maajid Nawaz in the context of an interview (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

The examination of the 158 articles, that form the primary source of data in this research, reflects the developments described above: in the first three years following the initial release of *Radical* (July 2012-July 2015) only a handful of online (news/opinion/discussion)-articles explicitly mentioning the ‘regressive left’ appear to have been published, as illustrated in figure 3 (see appendix II for the sampling and (de)selection criteria of articles). Reflecting on these observations, it appears that after the publication of *Radical*, the ‘regressive left’ discourse experienced a hiatus period of circa three years that was relatively uneventful: a discourse in its infancy.

¹⁴¹ Harris head in the sand liberals article

¹⁴² Palmer, J., “The Shame and the Disgrace of the Pro-Islamist Left”, *Quillete*, 06-12-2015, <https://quillete.com/2015/12/06/the-shame-and-the-disgrace-of-the-pro-islamist-left/> (last accessed November 29th, 2018); Miller, J., *Siding with the oppressor: the pro-Islamist left* (London: One Law For All, 2013).

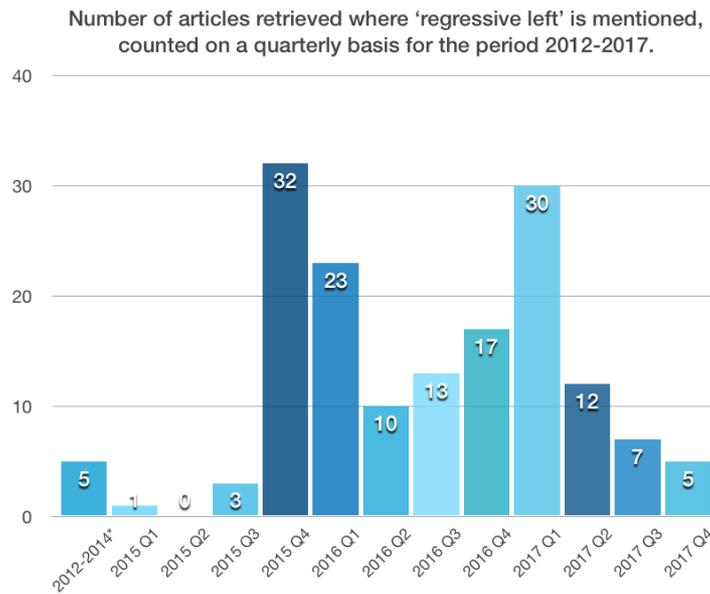


Figure 3

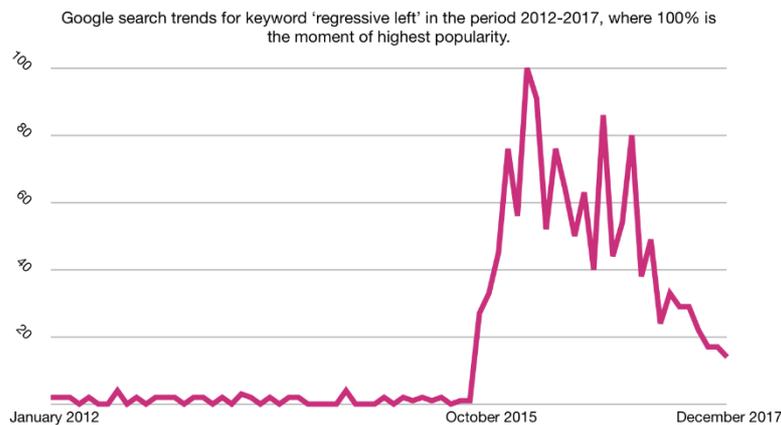


Figure 4

4.2.3 2015-2017: Going mainstream

In the period following the initial 'three-year-hiatus' after the publication of *Radical*, an increase in the online use of the term 'regressive left' is noticeable in online articles (figure 3) and google-search trends (figure 4), starting in the third quarter of 2015. This change is most evident in the 'dramatic' increase in articles involving 'regressive left' in the fourth quarter of 2015, compared to the number of articles in the preceding years. While the context and events that might have contributed to this shift in the discourse will be further examined in chapter VI, the discourse evidently reached a new 'phase' late 2015. The emergence of a new phase in the discourse is not only noticeable in a quantitative sense but also in the type of usage of 'regressive left'. To establish a meaningful insight in the development of the term 'regressive left', all 158 articles have been coded on three parameters pertaining to the usage of the term: (1) attribution of the term to Nawaz, (2) type of usage, and (3) type of context in which the term is used (See appendix III for notes on coding-criteria of parameters).

In regard to the first parameter, *attribution* (explicit reference to Nawaz), there are two underlying assumptions: firstly, that attribution is indicative for a lack of existing reader familiarity with the term, and secondly that attribution implies a connection made with the original usage of the term by Nawaz. Based on these assumptions, the downward trend in attribution visible in figure 5, might be considered an illustration of an increase in acceptance of the term as a familiar or colloquial term, not

requiring further explaining. Furthermore, the decline in attribution is also indicative (see *type of context* later in this section) of increasingly less articles that make an explicit connection with the original context in which Nawaz coined the term: a branching out of the discourse to envelop new contexts.

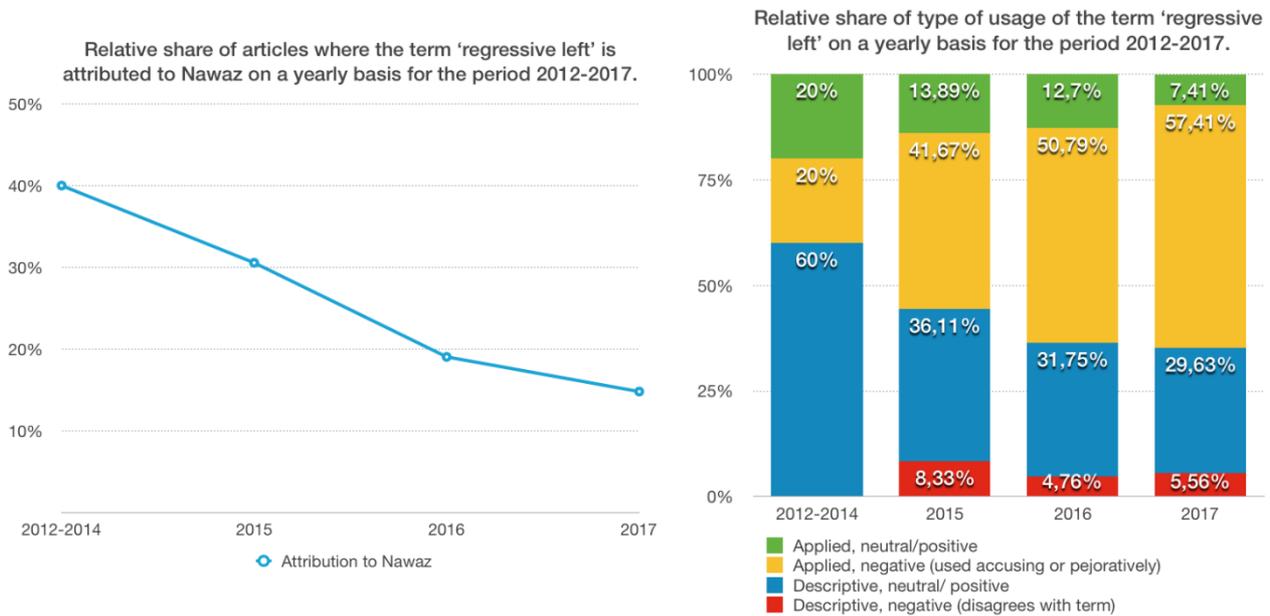


Figure 5 (left) and Figure 6 (right)

The second parameter coded for each article is the *type of usage*, divided in 'descriptive' and 'applied' use of the term, with another subdivision in each category between negative and neutral/positive types of usage (see appendix III for coding criteria). Descriptive usage is characterised by 'observations' made regarding the 'regressive left' as a theoretical concept or societal critique (explaining and describing the term), while applied usage is characterized by a more practical application of the term as a label for individuals and groups that are perceived to be 'regressive left' (putting the term into practice as an accustomed epithet). The relative share of the four 'type of usage' categories in articles for the period 2012-2017 is displayed in figure 6. From this figure, two important observations might be derived. Firstly, that the use of the term has shifted from mostly descriptive to mostly applied. Secondly, that the term has been increasingly more used as an 'applied' negative pejorative term (e.g. 'The 'regressive left' got it all wrong') from a mostly 'descriptive' neutral/positive term (e.g. 'Nawaz uses the term 'regressive left' to describe... '). The nearly 60% share of articles in 2017 where the term has been used in an applied, negative, fashion are arguably also an indication for a decrease in nuance in the application of the term compared to earlier years (a trend affirmed by the parameter *type of context*).

The third and final parameter coded in regard to the usage of the term 'regressive left' is the context in which the term is employed. In the process of coding in a 'fluid' style (incorporating emerging categories into the coding scheme; see methodology) four categories of 'context' emerged: (1) the original/narrow context (Nawaz) with emphasis on Islamism, (2) an expanded context with greater emphasis on religion in general (i.e. Islam), (3) generalized or emerging contexts like feminism or identity politics, and as a remainder, (4) vague, ill-definable or unrelated contexts. The relative share of articles with contexts fitting in one of these categories, in the period 2012-2017, provides a strong visual indication of a significant 'contextual' shift in the usage of the term in the discourse in general (figure 7). From 2012 to 2015 the usage of the term is mostly (initially exclusively) limited to accusations directed at the 'regressive left' in their attitudes towards Islamism (i.e. Nawaz) and Islam

(or religion in general). Within the space of a few years, the term is now employed in a great variety of contexts that are increasingly more detached from, or unrelated to, the original context.

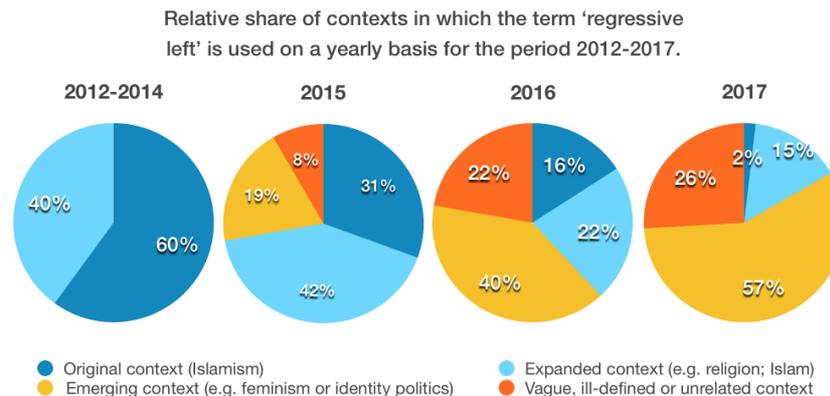


Figure 7

4.2.4 Reflection on attribution, usage, and context

The results from the analysis of the three parameters discussed above corroborate the perceptions and observations discussed in the introduction of this thesis that the discourse underwent a significant transformation, with an increasingly less nuanced and pejorative 'buzzword' use of the term in later years. While the nuances of the respective parameters and their subdividing categories will be further expanded upon later in this thesis (e.g. contents of the discourse and causes of shifts), the general trend of the discourse clearly appears to be a deviation from the original 'Nawazian' usage pertaining mostly to criticism on 'some on the left' and their 'regressive' attitudes towards Islamism, to a greatly expanded discourse with a pejorative usage of the term in a wider range of generalized or emerging contexts (e.g. religion, feminism, and identity politics).

4.3 Actors in the 'regressive left' discourse

Establishing key actors on both sides of the 'regressive left' argument, and the (groups of) actors made part of the argument, can contribute to gaining insight in the proliferation and application of the term 'regressive left' amongst a larger audience. All 158 articles that are part of this analysis have been coded on the occurrence of names of actors (individuals and groups with at least three unique mentions), and mentioned actors have additionally been coded on their perceived affiliation and position in the 'regressive left' discourse. This process of actor-coding (see coding-parameters in appendix III) resulted in four categories of actor-affiliation: (1) Actors mentioned in the articles as explicitly using the term 'regressive left' ('users'), (2) actors labelled as being 'regressive left' (considered 'regressive left'), (3) actors mentioned in direct relation to 'regressive left', without being consistently labelled as either 'user' or 'being regressive left' (actors 'associated with the discourse'), and (4) actors mentioned in a wider contextual relation to 'regressive left', for example in relation to world-events ('neutral' actors). Figure 8 provides an oversight of the most commonly mentioned (individual) actors in the articles, full names, and the predominant designation of their position in the discourse, complemented by a brief introduction to these actors in figure 9 (in order of overall prevalence).

Number of articles where one of the listed actors is mentioned in the period 2012-2017 (minimum of three unique mentions); color indicates position in the discourse.

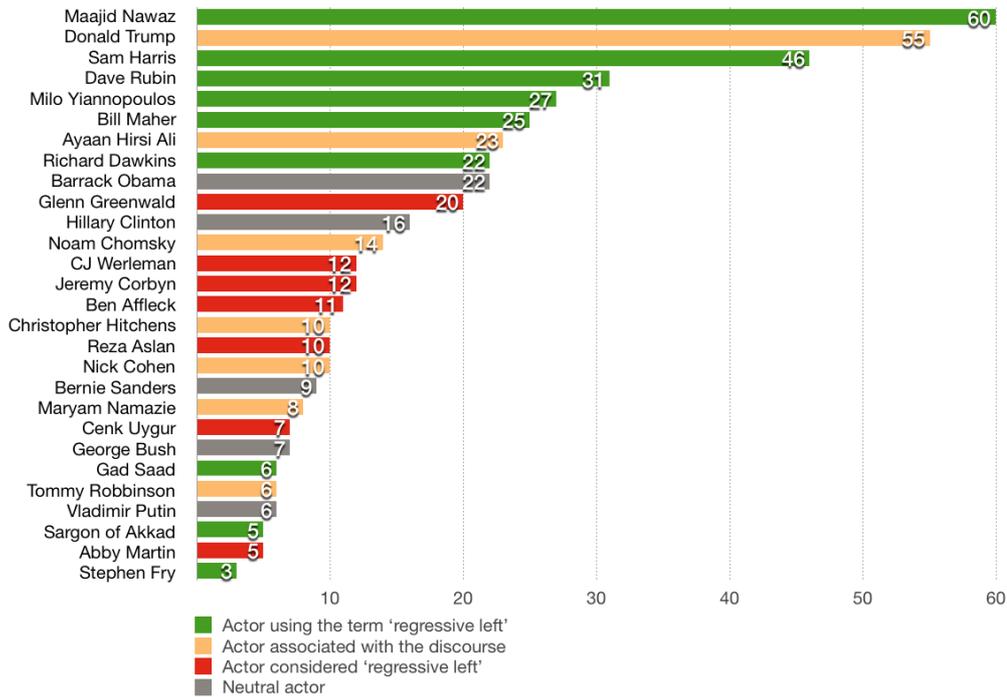


Figure 8 (top) and Figure 9 (bottom)

Name	Short description
Maajid Nawaz	Coiner of the term RL. Former Islamist, Islamism-critic. Founder of <i>Quilliam</i> .
Donald Trump	45 th (current) President of the United States.
Sam Harris	New Atheist and religion critic.
Dave Rubin	Talk show host of <i>The Rubin Report</i> .
Milo Yiannopoulos	Popular political commentator and public speaker. Islam critic. Former editor at Breitbart. Trump supporter. Associated with alt-right.
Bill Maher	Talk show host of <i>Real Time with Bill Maher</i> .
Ayaan Hirsi Ali	Feminist and Islam critic, sometimes mentioned as New Atheist.
Richard Dawkins	New Atheist and religion critic.
Barack Obama	44 th president of the US.
Glenn Greenwald	Journalist, lawyer, writer. Founder of <i>The Intercept</i> .
Hillary Clinton	Former first lady of US, Secretary of State 2009-2013. Democratic Presidential candidate in 2016.
Noam Chomsky	Philosopher and (left-oriented, anti-capitalist) political activist.
CJ Werleman	Journalist and writer. Atheist, but Anti-Harris and anti-New-Atheism.
Jeremy Corbyn	British politician, leader of the Labour Party.
Ben Affleck	Actor, appeared on <i>Real Time with Bill Maher</i> in episode with Harris.
Christopher Hitchens	New Atheist and religion critic.
Reza Aslan	Author, political commentator.
Nick Cohen	Journalist and political commentator, atheist.
Bernie Sanders	Independent American politician and Senator. Democratic candidate in 2016 Presidential campaign.
Maryam Namazie	Human-rights activist and feminist. Spokesperson for One Law For All Campaign.
Cenk Uygur	Founder of <i>Young Turks Network</i> , platform for <i>The Rubin Report</i> , until political disagreement with Rubin and Harris.
George W. Bush	43 rd president of the US. Started the War on Terror.
Gad Saad	Behavioural scientist, atheist, host of YouTube channel <i>The Saad Truth</i> .
Tommy Robinson	Controversial political activist and journalist, Islam critic. Founder of the English Defense League (left EDL in 2013).
Vladimir Putin	President of the Russian Federation.
Sargon of Akkad	Alias of Carl Benjamin, host of YouTube channel <i>Sargon of Akkad</i> . Associated with alt-right (does not agree himself).
Abby Martin	Journalist and presenter, critic of term 'regressive left'.
Stephen Fry	Comedian and actor, atheist religion critic.

4.3.1 Individual actors

Key actors

Unsurprisingly, as coiner of the term, Nawaz is at the top of the list of the most commonly mentioned actors. More surprising, perhaps, is to see President Trump as the second actor on the list (represented in 35% of all articles); associated with the discourse in a neutral manner. Third on the list is New Atheist and religion-critic Harris, who co-authored the book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*¹⁴³ with Nawaz, and has publicly criticized the ‘regressive left’ in his book, on talk shows, and via social media. As a prominent religion-critic and active user of the term ‘regressive left’, it is not surprising to see Harris on the list. Rubin, host of *The Rubin Report*, has become a popular political commentator and defender of the right to free speech and is the fourth most commonly mentioned actor, hosting guests that also appear as actors in the discourse (e.g. Nawaz, Hirsi Ali, Yiannopoulos, Harris, Cohen, and Fry). One of these guests is another actor seen as a user of the term ‘regressive left’: Yiannopoulos, the fifth most mentioned actor (17 % of articles). Yiannopoulos is a popular (and controversial) political commentator and public speaker who, due to his support for Trump and his criticism on the ‘regressive left’, is associated with the alt-right (Yiannopoulos disagrees with this label). Yiannopoulos appeared as a guest on the talk show of the sixth most mentioned actor, Maher, who has discussed the ‘regressive left’ in *Real Time with Bill Maher* with guests such as Nawaz, Harris, and Dawkins, and is mentioned in 16% of all articles.

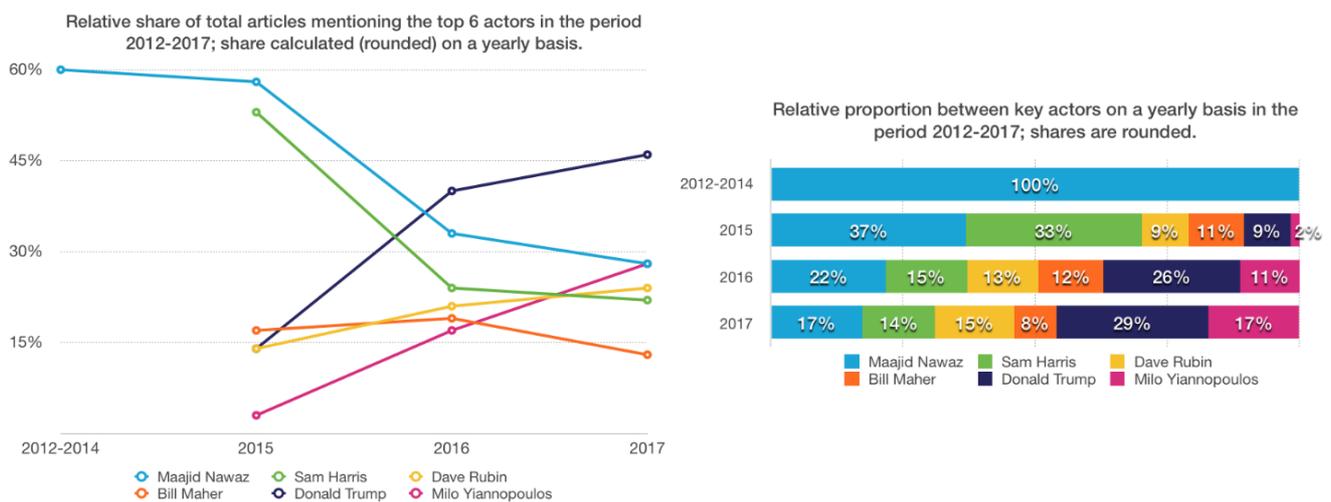


Figure 10 (left) and Figure 11 (right)

Plotting the relative prevalence of these six key-actors over time reveals a striking pattern of declining and emerging actors (figure 10). Both Nawaz and Harris are notably mentioned less in later years, in favour of online media personalities and ‘YouTube stars’ like Rubin and Yiannopoulos. Rubin, and in particular Yiannopoulos, have transformed into key actors associated with the discourse within the space of one-to-two years. On the contrary, ‘traditional’ television talk-show-host Maher has experienced a slight decrease in mentions after initial association with the discourse. While no use of ‘regressive left’ can be attested to Trump, the number of mentions involving Trump has grown to ‘huge’ proportions in the period 2015-2017; nearly half of the 2017 articles connect Trump to the discourse in some capacity. The shift in key-actors, further visualized in figure 11 by displaying the relative proportions between the mentioned actors (articles not including these actors have been excluded) in the period 2012-2017, is also reaffirming the idea that the discourse moved towards new emerging contexts (signified by the increased ‘share’ of Yiannopoulos and Trump), departing from the originally narrow ‘Nawaz-context’, as already established earlier in this chapter.

¹⁴³ Harris and Nawaz, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*.

Other actors associated with the discourse

President Trump is the only political actor explicitly portrayed as an opponent of the ‘regressive left’, other political actors are mentioned in a more neutral fashion predominantly in the context of world events and contemporary (US) politics; signalling the interconnected nature of general political discourse and the ‘regressive left’ discourse. The relevant political actors *in casu* are former US-presidents Bush jr. and Obama, 2016 presidential-candidates Clinton and Sanders, and Russian president Putin, all mentioned in a ‘neutral’ fashion.

Saad and ‘Sargon of Akkad’ both have YouTube channels on which they comment on socio-political affairs, where they have criticized the ‘regressive left’, increasing the popularity of the term. Other actors mentioned in relation to the discourse, mostly due to their existing prominence as authors or commentators in discourse on Islamism or religion are: Hirsi Ali, Dawkins, Chomsky, Hitchens, Cohen, Namazie, and Fry. The association of these actors with the ‘regressive left’ discourse affirms a close interconnection with the wider discourse on the place of religion in society.

Notably, both Hirsi Ali and Namazie are portrayed as ‘victims’ of the ‘regressive left’ for they are perceived to receive unjust treatment on account of ‘turning’ on their religious or ethnic roots, or are otherwise portrayed as ‘inauthentic’ voices; this is a theme that will be further examined in chapter V. Dawkins, Chomsky, Hitchens (deceased), and to a lesser extent Cohen and Fry, are all well-known authors and political commentators with a global audience, often invoked in discourse on religion, culture, or related themes: their presence as mentioned actors in the discourse is as such not unexpected. Some (notably Cohen) consider Chomsky and his views to be synonymous to the ‘regressive left’, but in general Chomsky is discussed in a more objective fashion. Another actor mentioned in relation to ‘regressive left’ is Tommy Robinson, a controversial political activist best known for being the founder of the far-right anti-Islamist English Defence League (EDL). Robinson recently left the movement, and denounced the EDL for holding increasingly extremist views, but is still active in anti-Islamist circles: notably collaborating with Nawaz’s counter-extremism foundation *Quilliam*, explaining his presence in the discourse as reflected in the articles.

Actors considered ‘regressive left’

In several articles the ‘regressive left’ is personified in individuals that are accused of ‘regressive left’ views. Through coding, the following individuals emerged that received a significant amount of unique mentions (at least three articles): Greenwald, Werleman, Corbyn, Affleck, Aslan, Uygur, and Martin. Greenwald and Werleman are both journalists and authors who have been dubbed as ‘regressive’ due to their apologetic attitude towards Islamist extremism¹⁴⁴ and calling New-Atheists ‘racist’ and ‘white supremacist’¹⁴⁵, respectively. Corbyn is the leader of the British Labour-party, who is mentioned in the articles as ‘regressive leftist’ due to his political stance and actions regarding Islamist organizations.¹⁴⁶ Famous actor Ben Affleck is a rather odd addition to the list of actors that are accused of regressive views, but his comments during a confrontation with Harris in an episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher* have resulted in him appearing in 7% of all articles.¹⁴⁷ Aslan is an author and religion scholar who, similarly to Affleck, appeared in *Real Time* and who is mentioned as an example of the ‘regressive left’ due to his statements regarding Islam (‘Islam is the most tolerant religion’¹⁴⁸). Uygur, founder of the US based online *Young Turks Network*, is mentioned as an example of the ‘regressive left’ due to his hostile criticism of Harris (i.e. labelling Harris a bigot¹⁴⁹). Martin is a TV host and journalist, whose

¹⁴⁴ E.g. article number 15 and 43.

¹⁴⁵ E.g. article number 22.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. article number 55.

¹⁴⁷ E.g. article number 31 and 58.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. article number 46 and 62.

¹⁴⁹ E.g. article number 44 and 153.

critique on the term ‘regressive left’ has been perceived as ‘regressive left’ in nature.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, Werleman, Affleck, Uygur, and Martin have all gained prominence in the ‘regressive left’ discourse due to discussions and disagreements with Harris.

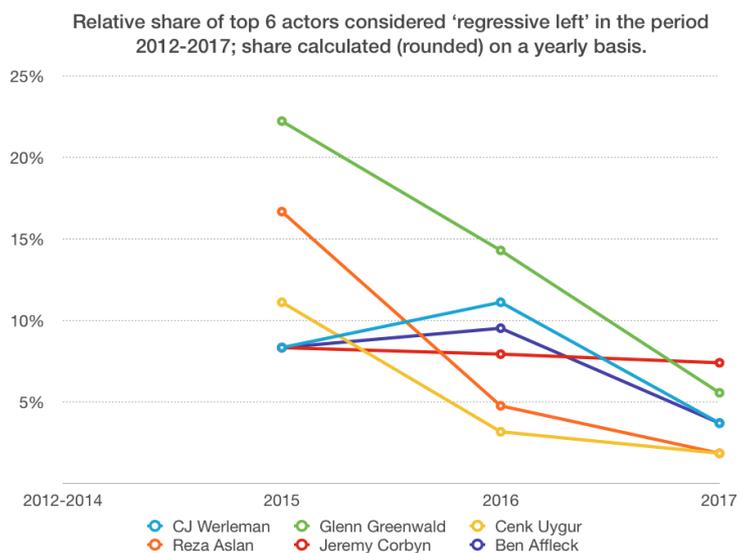


Figure 12

An interesting development in the mentioning of these supposedly ‘regressive left’ individual actors, is that the general trend appears to be a decrease in the ‘personification’ of the regressive left (e.g. figure 12, top six actors considered ‘regressive left’) from 2015 onwards. What might be conjectured from this observation is that in the wake of emerging contexts as earlier discussed, the ‘regressive left’ is increasingly becoming a critique on a wide range of ‘liberal’ or ‘leftist’ politics. This perception, worded as the idea of ‘regressive left’ as a ‘mentality’, is suggested by David Rand in an opinion article in *SecularWorld Magazine*:

“The regressive left is not a well-circumscribed sub-movement within left-wing movements in general. Rather it is a mentality, a collection of attitudes which infects left-wing thought and distorts it in the direction of cultural relativism and tolerance of Islamism.”¹⁵¹

The ‘regressive left’ might thus not only be understood as a group of actors *per se*, but perhaps also as an epithet to criticise a ‘mentality’ within leftist or liberal politics in general. As such, the ‘regressive left’ might be perceived as an ‘ideology’ transcending existing leftist ideological frameworks.

4.3.2 Groups of actors

During the coding phase only two ‘group of actors’ in the discourse were mentioned with notable frequency, the Alt-right and New-Atheists. New Atheism is a term used to describe a group of prominent activist atheists, notably Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris (and sometimes Hirsi Ali). Given the interconnection of the ‘regressive left’ discourse with the broader discourse on the place of religion in society, the prevalence of New-Atheist actors in the ‘regressive left’ discourse is not unsurprising.

¹⁵⁰ E.g. article number 17.

¹⁵¹ Rand, D., “Notes on the Regressive Left”, *Atheistalliance Secular World Magazine*, 18-10-2017, <https://www.atheistalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2q-secular-world-compressed.pdf> (Website last accessed November 26th, 2018), page 20.

New Atheists are predominantly referred to as opponents of the ‘regressive left’, due to their adoption of the term ‘regressive left’ and their critique directed at apologetic behaviour towards religion. The alt-right (alternative right), commonly pitted as opposite to the ‘regressive left’, gained prominence in the wake of the 2016 US presidential election, when a diverse group of right-wing voters, including controversial white nationalists, rallied under the alt-right banner in opposition of the Democratic party.¹⁵² The term ‘regressive left’ has become part of the alt-right’s lexicon as a way to deride the views held by opponents in a pejorative fashion.¹⁵³ This type of usage fits well with the image of the usage of ‘PC’ as a strategy to ‘other’ opponents. What is notably different to ‘regressive left’, is that members of the ‘Alt-Right’ commonly self-identify as such, whereas ‘regressive left’ is an epithet mostly used by opponents. However, both Yiannopoulos and ‘Sargon of Akkad’ have been associated with the alt-right, but repudiate being alt-right themselves. The usage and definition of the ‘alt-right’ is, similarly to the ‘regressive left’, not uniform and heavily contested.

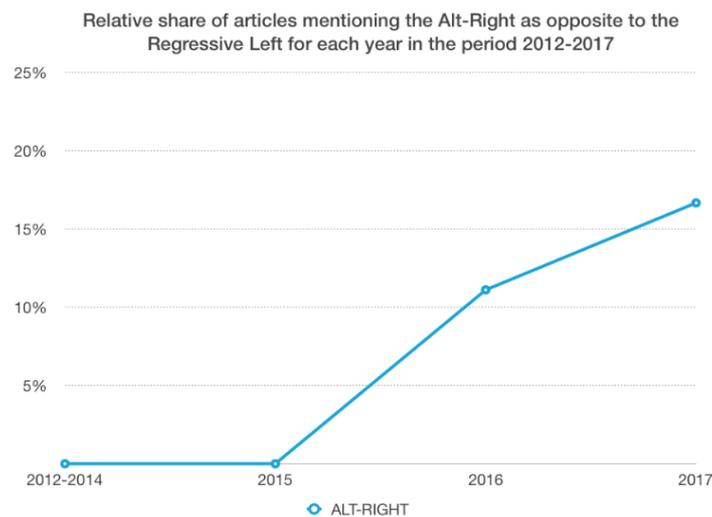


Figure 13

As is visible in figure 13, the alt-right is increasingly connected with the ‘regressive left’ discourse after 2016, but even by 2017 only mentioned in less than 17% of articles. There is also no clear indication of (increasing) affiliation of the authors of the articles with the alt-right (especially when taking into account that the political platform of the alt-right is usually ‘proudly’ embraced). While not conclusive, the examination of the articles thus suggests a more modest role of the alt-right in the discourse than suggested by some commentators (e.g. Bernstein¹⁵⁴), at least in regard to the ‘visibility’ of the alt-right (being explicitly mentioned) within the discourse. However, the trend depicted in figure 13 is illustrative for the expansion of the discourse into new contexts (including contexts involving the alt-right) in general, and correlates with increased pejorative usage of the term (perhaps in part to the ‘credit’ of the alt-right).

4.3.3 Reflection on actors

Concluding the second part of this chapter, three key developments in regard to the constellation of actors can be discerned. Firstly, a decrease of mentions of the initial key actors (e.g. Nawaz and Harris) who are closely associated with the original and expanded context, in favour of actors associated with emerging contexts (e.g. Trump and Yiannopoulos). Secondly, that the presence of several ‘neutral’ actors, mostly prominent commentators on the place of religion in society and politicians, highlights

¹⁵² E.g. article number 94 and 180.

¹⁵³ E.g. article number 153.

¹⁵⁴ Bernstein, “The Rise of the #Regressiveleft hashtag”.

the interconnected nature of the 'regressive left' discourse with other socio-political discourses. Thirdly, that the 'regressive left' is increasingly less personified but rather considered a group of adherents of the same 'regressive' ideology.

V. Developments in themes and topics in the 'regressive left' discourse

5.1 Introduction

Through the interpretative coding-process employed in this thesis, a great number of topical or thematic 'associations' made with the 'regressive left' emerged. By analyzing the development in these associations, and considering how these associations might be explained through further contextualization, a better insight in the development of the discourse might be achieved. Prior to the discussion of the key topics and themes associated with the 'regressive left', a number of 'groups' and terms that came to the fore during the coding process as being synonymous to the 'regressive left' are briefly discussed, serving as a point of departure in the identification of topics and themes later in this chapter.

5.2 Synonyms of 'regressive left'

Besides the labelling of individuals as 'regressive left', in most articles authors provide examples of 'groups' that they consider to be synonymous or a part of the 'regressive left'. During the initial coding-phase it soon became apparent that many 'groups' mentioned in relation to the 'regressive left', instead constitute context-specific synonyms for 'regressive left' or word-plays on the 'regressive left' theme. These synonyms are mostly descriptive and coincidentally highlight particular critiques directed at the 'regressive left', rather than constituting a 'group' in the natural sense of the word. These 'groups' can be divided in four categories: Firstly, synonyms that equate the 'left' in 'regressive left' with 'liberals', for example 'regressive liberals' and 'pseudo-liberals', all conveying a similar idea, namely that 'regressive' liberals are not 'really' liberals. Secondly, synonyms that pertain to a segment of 'the left' considered synonymous to the 'regressive left', for example: authoritarian left, alt-left, and far left. Thirdly, synonyms implying a more nuanced or demarcated critique, for example 'pro-Islamists', 'multiculturalists', 'apologists', or 'post-modernists', pointing towards the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the critiques implied in 'regressive left'. The fourth and last category is composed of slurry/witty terms, for example: 'ostrich brigade', 'generation snowflake', or 'champagne socialists'.

5.3 Identifying topics and themes

All 158 articles subjected to examination have been coded on words or text-fragments, 'capturing' ideas, meanings, strategies, descriptions, and explanations concerning the 'regressive left'. The generated codes have been grouped into topics and themes, the latter of which have been further narrowed down to a set of twenty-five common themes, including a category of 'other' themes that are incidental. Several themes were roughly pre-determined based on the review of secondary literature; others emerged inductively during the coding-process or analysis. Resulting from this approach each individual article can contain multiple topics and themes; when occurring repeatedly in one article they are however only counted once for that article (see appendix III).

5.4 Topics in the 'regressive left' discourse

Inspired by the work of Törnberg and Törnberg, frequently mentioned topics have been coded for further analysis. Developments in discourse-related topics provide insight in the development of the 'regressive left' discourse and the interrelation with other discourses. The distinction between topics and themes, as used in this research, is that the former (topics) constitute self-contained subjects ('talking points') that are discussed in conjuncture with the term 'regressive left' (e.g. 'ISIS' or 'LGBTQ-activism'), whereas the latter (themes) are discourse-bound descriptions or explanations pertaining specifically to the 'regressive left' (e.g. 'caused by fear of being labelled Islamophobic').

Islam

The most common topic coded is, perhaps not surprisingly, Islam (and/or Muslims), featuring in 117 of 158 articles, or ca. 75% of articles, underpinning the close associations between Islam and the critiques implied in 'regressive left'. By plotting the relative share of articles for the period 2012-2017, a trend is visible where the topic Islam is increasingly less discussed (figure 14). This trend fits well in the already established perception of the discourse diverting from its original context towards increasingly more general contexts. Despite the diminishing prominence of this topic in the discourse, Islam remains a salient topic associated with the discourse that is integral to many of the coded themes discussed in the next part of this chapter.

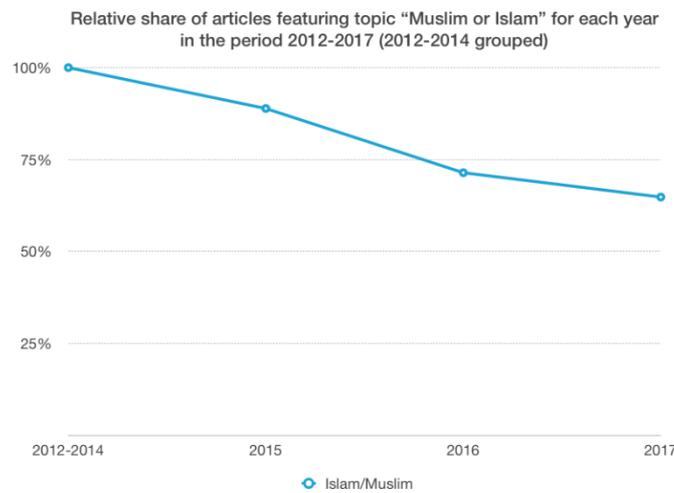


Figure 14

Social activist movements

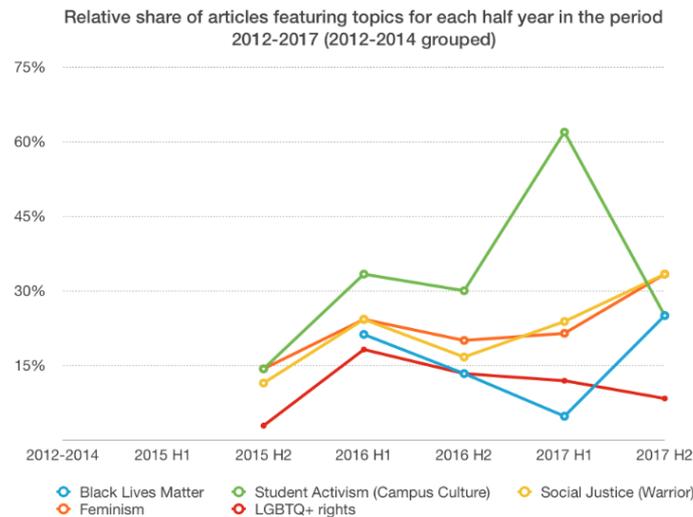
During the coding-process several social activist 'movements' emerged that are mentioned explicitly in relation to the 'regressive left' discourse, and combined constitute a prominent topic of conversation: Black Lives Matter, student activism (campus culture), feminism, activism for LGBT(Q+) rights, and Social Justice (Warriors). The respective movements first emerge in the discourse in late

2015-early 2016, with noticeable differentiation in the relative share of articles mentioning these movements over time (figure 15).

Figure 15

Black Lives Matter

The ‘Black Lives Matter’ (BLM) movement gained international recognition in the wake of protests



against racial profiling and (institutional) discrimination following the successive shootings of several young Afro-American teenagers, and the subsequent trials concerning their deaths. In relation to the ‘regressive left’ discourse, Black Lives Matter activism is at times described as going beyond its original purpose, and becoming increasingly more hostile – a perception that is applicable to most of the other mentioned movements in this overview.¹⁵⁵

Student Activism (US Campus Culture)

The prominently mentioned ‘Student Activism’ is closely associated with the notion of a US ‘campus culture’ characterized by restrictions on ‘free speech’, ‘safe spaces’, ‘trigger-warnings’, and great emphasis on ‘identity politics’; and is also associated with a perceived liberal, post-modernist inspired, bias in academia. Student activism manifests in the discourse predominantly in the following ways: Firstly, as students actively ‘policing’ and monitoring fellow students, professors, and guest-speakers, for dissident views and speech. Secondly, it is portrayed as symptomatic behaviour of the ‘millennials’ generation (i.e. generation snowflake), perceived to be the by-product of educational or wider social-political flaws in Western society, who are detached from ‘real world’ problems forming an elitist ‘clique’.¹⁵⁶

Feminism

Articles where feminism is associated with the ‘regressive left’, can roughly be divided into two categories. Firstly, articles where feminism is highlighted as a modern or progressive value that is threatened by the ‘regressive left’, due to their perceived embrace of groups and views unfriendly or hostile to women. Alternatively, feminism and feminists are considered to be ‘regressive leftist’; especially when the epithet ‘third wave’ is added to feminism, to distinct a new generation of feminist activists who are perceived to hold extremist views on trivial matters, and are accused of marginalizing ‘true’ feminists (i.e. Germaine Greer).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ E.g. article number 88, 104 and 239.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. article number 73 and 106.

¹⁵⁷ E.g. article number 69 and 88.

LGBT(Q+)-rights activism

The topic of LGBT(Q+)-rights activism shows similarity with feminism in regard to a duality in its manifestation in the discourse: In some articles LGBT-rights are considered to be threatened by the 'regressive left', while in others articles LGBT-rights activists are portrayed as a group, or as a social-movement, that is holding regressive views (i.e. limiting free speech) or is marginalizing self-identified LGBT-community-members who adhere to 'wrong' political views (i.e. US Republicans or conservatives as Milo Yiannopoulos).¹⁵⁸

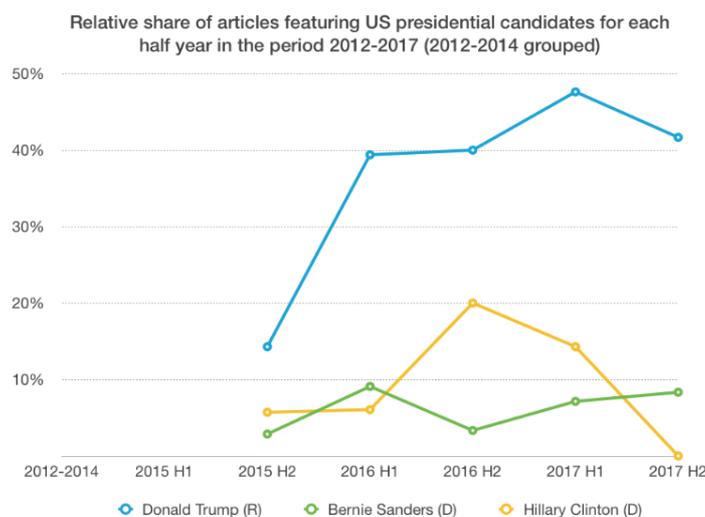
Social Justice Warrior

The pejorative term 'Social Justice Warrior' (SJW) is commonly used in popular online culture to mock or criticize (leftist) activists that attempt to advance social justice for minorities (or 'identity' groups), but are perceived to be more focussed on 'feeling better about themselves'. Opposed to the other examples of social movements cited above, SJW might be considered a generic (pejorative) label used to describe a wide range of social activism (essentially including all of the above examples). The association with SJW suggest a perception of the 'regressive left' as elitist, naïve or misguided, with ambiguous motivations, resulting in regressive views and actions in realizing their goals.¹⁵⁹

Taking into account the perception of these movements as being part of the 'regressive left', something these five topics have in common, besides the attributes already discussed, is that they indicate increased association of social activism with the 'regressive left' but also point towards the 'regressive left' as being defined by its (social) activism.

US 2016 Presidential Election

A topic frequently connected to the 'regressive left' discourse was the 2016 US presidential Election, illustrated (figure 16) by the relative share of articles featuring presidential candidates of this particular election: Republican candidate Trump, and Democrat candidates Sanders and Clinton. The first mentions of the respective nominees occur in the second half of 2015 (early stage of the electoral process), with a steady increase towards the actual election in November 2016, and continued interest towards the inauguration of Trump in January 2017 and onwards. The growth of the topic in late 2015 to early 2016, based on the prominence of the presidential candidates in the discourse, can be considered a possible indicator for a discursive event, as will be further discussed in chapter VI.



¹⁵⁸ E.g. article number 76.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. article number 232.

Figure 16

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

The dramatic expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the wake of the 2011 Syrian civil war, sparking a dramatic refugee crisis both in the region and abroad, paired with international terror-attacks carried out in its name, made ISIS a headline topic that has dominated global news for years. Given the naturally close relation between the 'regressive left' discourse and the discourse on Islam(ism), the occurrence of ISIS as a frequently discussed topic in the 'regressive left'-discourse is understandable (figure 17).

Despite the decreasing territorial foothold of ISIS (in Syria and Iraq) from 2015 onwards, ISIS maintained an obtrusive global presence in the form of international terror-attacks perpetrated in its name in 2015-2017. The dwindling mentions of ISIS in the discourse can thus not be fully explained on account of the decrease of ISIS influence in Syria being reflected in the articles alone; a more plausible explanation is that this topic (like related topics such as Islamism) is eclipsed by emerging topics and themes in the 'regressive left' discourse from 2016 onwards. The assumption made in this regard is that if the discourse would have developed closer to its origins (a critique specifically directed at the left's pandering to Islamism) a greater share of articles involving the topic ISIS could reasonably be expected for the 2016-2017 period; especially considering the term 'regressive left' was coined specifically in the context of Islamist terror and extremism. The prominence of the topic ISIS simultaneously with the initial (quantitative) expansion of the discourse in the last months of 2015 (see chapter 5, figures 3 and 4), is indicative of a close connection between ISIS related events (i.e. terror-attacks) and the increasing popularity of the term 'regressive left', an observation further examined in chapter VI.

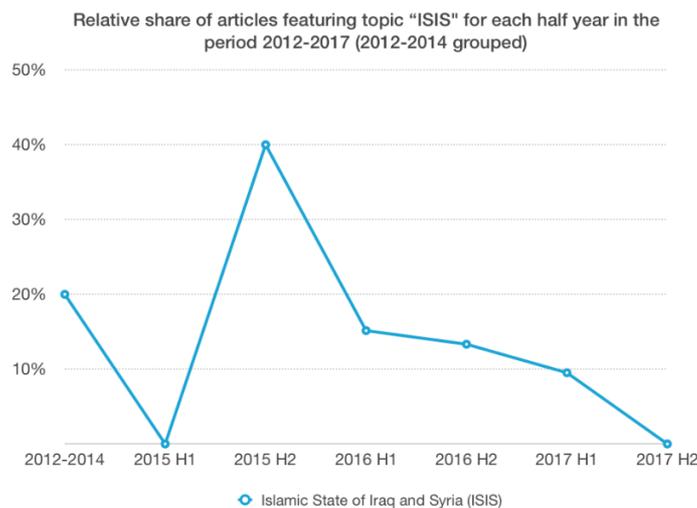


Figure 17¹⁶⁰

5.4.1 Reflection on topics

Concluding the first half of this chapter, three important observations can be made following the examination of synonyms and topics. Firstly, that the synonyms for 'regressive left' are illustrative of

¹⁶⁰ Note: The drop in the chart in the first half of 2015 can be attributed to the limited amount of data for this period and is not representative for the overall development of this topic.

the (negative) perceptions and critiques towards the 'regressive left', and have contributed to the enhancement of the coding on topics and themes. Secondly, that the 'regressive left' is increasingly more associated with social 'activism': the perception of the 'regressive left' as a collection of 'activists' is becoming a defining characteristic. Lastly, that besides the topic of social activism, two topics (US 2016 election and ISIS) emerged as salient topics of interest to the discourse.

5.5 Themes in the 'regressive left' discourse

Coded 'themes' are considered discourse-bound descriptions or explanations pertaining specifically to 'regressive left', grouped into a narrowed down list of twenty-four common themes and a generic category of 'other' themes (figure 18).

Number of articles (out of 158) featuring one of the listed Themes, ranked on prevalence.

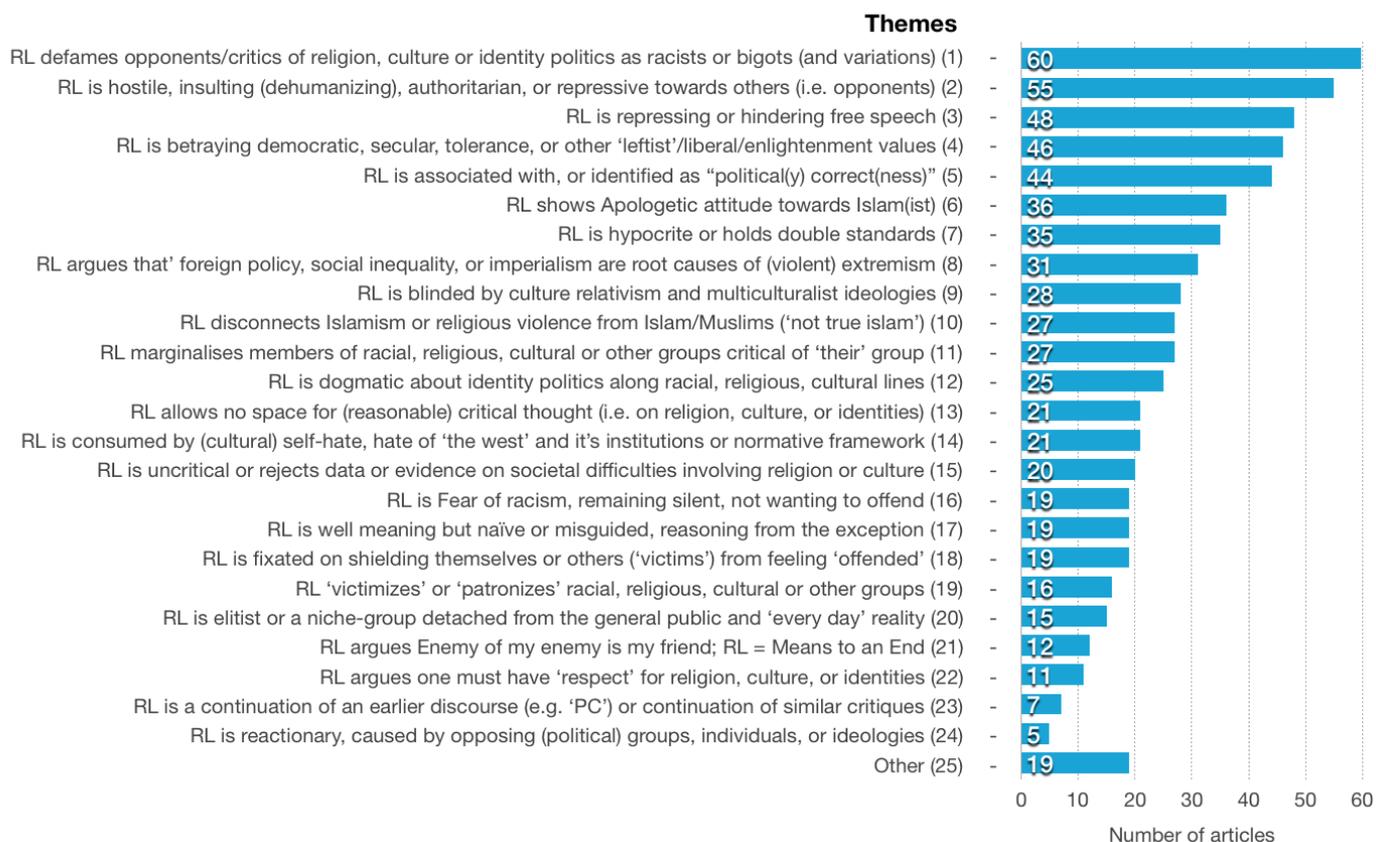


Figure 18

5.5.1 Descriptive and explanatory themes

During the analysis it became apparent that the coded themes can be subdivided into two general categories: one category of (fourteen) more descriptive oriented themes (illustrative of changing perceptions and characterizations of the 'regressive left'), and another category of (ten) more explanatory oriented themes (illustrating assumptions regarding the causes or explanations for the 'regressive left'). For example, an article coded for theme 9, signifies that the article makes mention of cultural relativism or multiculturalism as a cause for regressive views. In the following overview, all themes ('other' excluded) have been sorted per category, ranked by relative share of the theme from highest to lowest, on a yearly basis (numbering reflects prevalence of the theme from figure 18). This approach allows for a comparison between different periods to better understand the thematic development of the discourse as a whole.

Descriptions

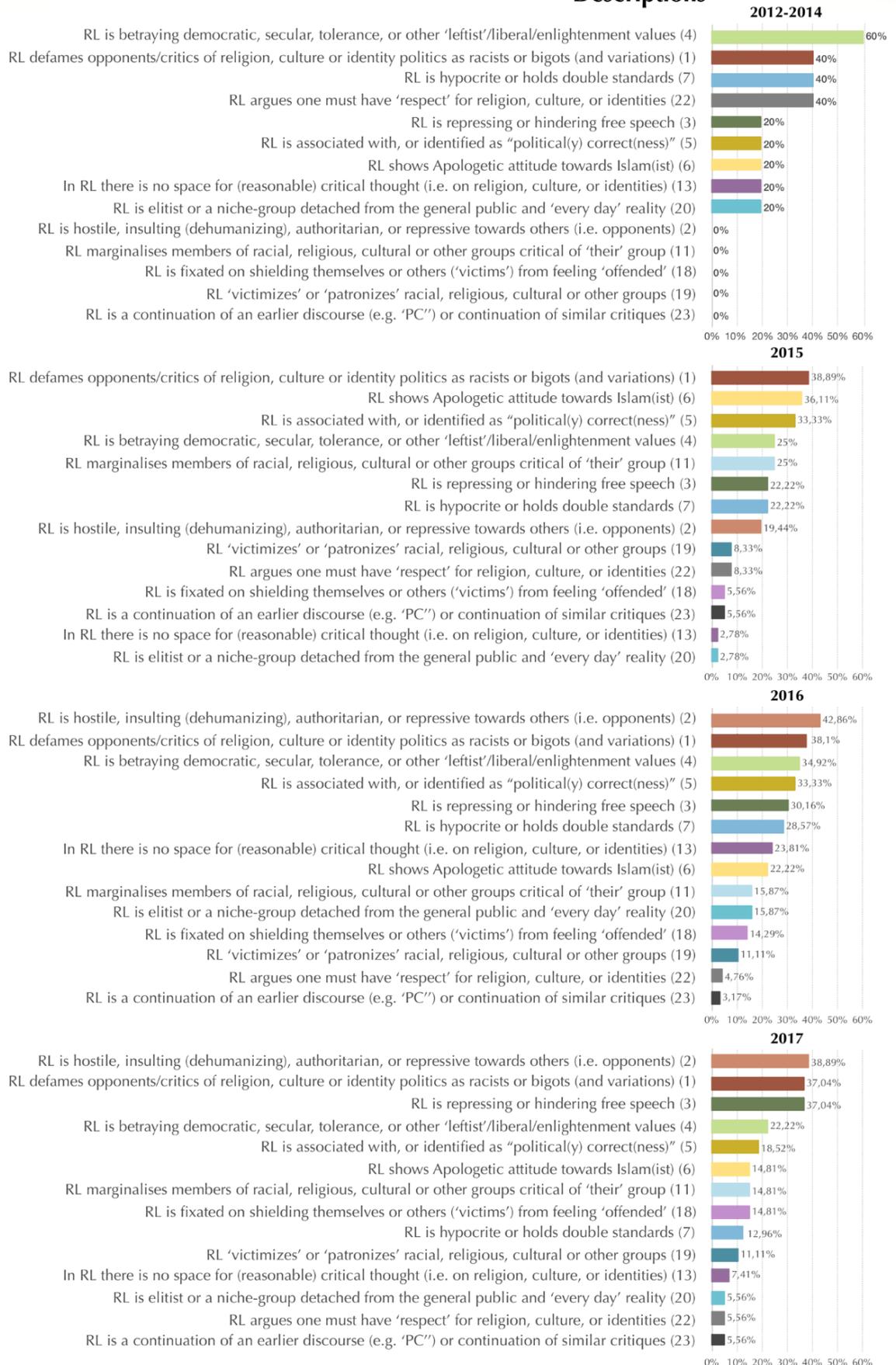


Figure 19

Explanations



Figure 20

Taking into account the differences in sample sizes, two general trends can be observed from comparing the descriptive themes with the explanatory themes. Firstly, that ‘descriptive’ themes form the bulk of the themes present in the articles, in terms of the number of unique themes mentioned (14 versus 10) but also in the relative share of descriptive versus explanatory themes in the totality of themes mentioned in articles (ca. 66% descriptive, 31% explanatory). Secondly, that relatively less themes in the ‘explanation’ category are present in 2017 articles compared to earlier years. This observation indicates that the term and implicit accusations in ‘regressive left’ have become more ‘mainstream’, and no longer requires the same degree of explanation. An alternative explanation, not excluding the above, is that the term ‘regressive left’ is increasingly used in general contexts pejoratively, opposed to being subjected to nuanced examination or critiques: increased ‘claiming’ but not ‘explaining’. The perception of the term ‘regressive left’ being used increasingly more pejoratively in a wider context is in line with earlier observations in chapter IV.

5.5.2 Thematic narratives in the discourse

Cross-comparison of all individual themes is not necessarily productive towards identifying the main thematic trends and developments in the discourse. Instead, all themes will be further examined as part of one of several thematic ‘narratives’, that mostly emerged during the analysis and interpretation of data. In the following overview key narratives identified in the discourse will be further discussed.

The ‘radical activists’ narrative

Reflecting on themes ranking the top of the list in figure 18, the first three themes draw attention to the characterization of the ‘regressive left’ as treating opponents and opposing views unfairly: perceived to manifest through unfounded *ad hominem* attacks (theme 1), the silencing of opposing views through (verbal/physical) intimidation (theme 2), and disregard for freedom of speech (theme 3). The perception that the ‘regressive left’ is supposedly repressing free speech (theme 3) can be affirmed as a key theme considering the significant share of articles featuring this theme. Following these observations it is evident that the ‘regressive left’ is by many not just considered a group that is ‘well meaning, but naïve or misguided’ (i.e. as Nawaz’ portrayal in *Radical*), but is perceived to be actively engaged in the discourse as a group of (extremist) ‘radical activists’ showing considerable combativeness: the ‘*radical activists*’ narrative. This observation corresponds with the perception of the social activist movements discussed in the ‘topics’ segment of this chapter.

What might be deduced from the thematic developments as depicted in figures 19 and 20 is that the labelling of opponents as racists or bigots (theme 1), thus opposition towards opponents through pejorative language, has been a constant theme throughout the discourse while the (perceived) hostility (theme 2) and active repression of free speech (theme 3) by the ‘regressive left’ only qualify as main themes from 2016 onwards. A possible explanation for this trend might be found in a shift in actors using the term further towards the (far)-right side of the political spectrum (e.g. ‘alt-right’). The increased depiction of the ‘regressive left’ as hostile and radical activists might be the result of further polarization between the (far)-right and the ‘regressive left’ in the wake of the 2016 US election that is reflected in the rhetoric (e.g. ‘othering’) and actions (e.g. violent protesting) of both the right and the left. The idea that ‘regressive left’ is reactionary and is caused by opposition of, for example, the (far)-right, is reflected in theme 24. In addition, activism by (US) university students (‘campus culture’), with great emphasis on ‘identity politics’ and opposition towards unbridled freedom of speech (blocking of speakers on campuses), might have contributed to the growth in themes 2 and 3 and thus the development of the ‘*radical activists*’ characterization.

The 'ideology' narrative

In chapter IV, the narrative of 'regressive left' as an 'ideology' was already briefly touched upon in the context of a quote by David Rand who brands the 'regressive left' as a 'mentality'.¹⁶¹ While no explicit examples of the description of the 'regressive left' as an 'ideology' were encountered during the coding of the articles, several of the themes coded suggest a depiction of 'regressive left' as synonymous to an unwavering adherence to a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and ideals: an ideology. Some of the (perceived) contents of these worldviews and morals are in part made explicit in themes 9 ('Blinded by cultural relativism and multiculturalism'), 12 ('Dogmatic about identity politics'), and 14 ('Cultural and normative self-hatred'). The critical assumption made by authors using these themes as a description is that the ideas and beliefs captured in these themes are perceived unequivocally 'true' and are no longer subjected to reasonable criticism or examining of evidence (theme 15) by the 'regressive left': initial ideals are replaced by dogmas. The supposed authoritarian and repressive tendencies of the 'regressive left' (theme 2) - as 'imposing' their world view - further contributes to a portrayal of the 'regressive left' as a group of radical ideologues that is detached from the 'real' world (theme 20). Paired with the 'radical activists' narrative discussed above, an image emerges of the 'regressive left' being increasingly perceived as a 'mob on the loose'. In turn, this perception can be interpreted as a form of dehumanization or 'othering' of the 'regressive left' by its critics (ironically identical to the accusations in theme 2), leading to a climate of increased discourse 'escalation' and polarization.

The 'victim' narrative

The perception of the world as consisting of 'oppressors' and 'oppressed' is a reoccurring theme in (predominantly) leftist politics, stemming from 19th century Marxist worldviews, that is still highly topical in today's globalized world. In the 'regressive left' discourse the oppressor-oppressed dichotomy is especially visible in themes that pertain to the idea of 'victims' or 'victimhood'. This 'victim narrative' manifests in two distinct ways in the discourse.

Firstly, as the narrative that 'members' of certain racial, religious, cultural, or other identity-groups (e.g. 'Muslims' or 'LGBT folk') are perceived as (societal) 'victims' by the 'regressive left', and are in need of 'sheltering' from feeling offended and/or otherwise entitled to 'special' or 'preferential' treatment on the merit of their 'oppressed minority' status (themes 6 and 18). This notion of oppression is not only limited to the current societal context (i.e. discrimination), but is also placed in a wider historical framework of 'oppression' of minorities through Western foreign policy and imperialism (theme 8). According to critics of the 'regressive left' the moral indemnity resulting from current and historical oppression is one of the factors contributing to apologetic attitudes towards extremists (i.e. Islamists) who are perceived as 'victims' (theme 6). Several commentators have criticized such 'special' treatment (often with the best intentions) as form of patronizing behaviour (theme 19) that is 'creating' unsolicited victims, or argue against the notion of 'victimhood' altogether. This critique is well embodied in what Nawaz calls 'racism of low expectations':¹⁶² as if the perceived 'victim' is incapable of being anything other than a victim.

The second manifestation of the 'victim' narrative comes in the form of the perception that the views and actions of the 'regressive left' result in oppression of others: the 'victims' of the 'regressive left'. This second 'victim' narrative is best embodied in theme 11, coded on instances where the 'regressive left' is perceived to marginalize 'members' of identity groups with dissident views; for example instances where Nawaz's criticism of Islamism is being rebuked by calling him a porch monkey – not a 'true' member of 'his' group. Similarly the hostility towards, and repression of, opposing views in

¹⁶¹ Rand, D., "Notes on the Regressive Left", *Atheist Alliance Secular World Magazine*, 18-10-2017, <https://www.atheistalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2q-secular-world-compressed.pdf> (Website last accessed November 26th, 2018).

¹⁶² Article number 18.

general is perceived as a process that is creating victims of ‘regressive leftism’. These ‘victims’ of the ‘regressive left’ are not limited to ‘usual suspects’ (e.g. conservative Republicans), but also extend to ‘leftist’ individuals who do not subscribe to some of the more ‘extreme’ views held by the ‘regressive left’.

The main development in the associated themes of the ‘victim’ narrative is that the ‘regressive left’ is increasingly more accused of misguided ‘overprotection’ of minorities. At first the protective attitude manifested through apologetic views, but since 2016 this protectiveness is increasingly more derived from (unsolicited) identity labels, omitting any form of further explanation why individuals/groups need protecting other than for the sake of possible ‘offense’ towards their minority identity (e.g. Muslims need to be sheltered from criticism of Islam). This latter observation is in line with the earlier established decrease in explanatory themes over time; and is illustrated by the share increase of themes 18 and 19, and the decreasing share of themes 6 and 8.

The ‘pandering to Islamism’ narrative

One of the most continuous narratives that can be distinguished in the discourse is the ‘pandering to Islamism’ narrative, closely corresponding with the personal narrative of Nawaz as described in *Radical*. In the ‘pandering to Islamism’ narrative, the ‘regressive left’ is depicted as well meaning, but naïve leftist liberals (theme 17), who pander to Islamism out of fear of racism (16) or ‘moral’ guilt (theme 8), are apologetic towards perpetrators of religious violence (theme 16), but also show ideological pragmatism in forging (political) alliances with Islamists (theme 21). The only theme in the *pandering to Islamism* narrative that is a clear break with the narrative in *Radical* is theme 10 (RL disconnects Islamism/religious violence from Islam/Muslims). Nawaz is one of the proponents of a sharp distinction between Islamism and Islam, and in *Radical* he often berates ‘the left’ for failing to make the distinction between the Islamist ‘political ideology’ and Islam and the Muslim community in general. Ironically enough, one of the prevalent critiques by later commentators on the ‘regressive left’ is that the ‘regressive left’ entirely disconnects Islamism and religious violence (terror) from Islam (i.e. extremist interpretations of the Quran are not ‘true’ Islam); in a way taking the nuance addressed by Nawaz between Islamism and Islam too far (from distinction to disconnection). Following this line of reasoning, Nawaz himself would, ironically, have to be partly implicated as ‘regressive’ because of his views on Islam and Islamism.

The ‘pandering to Islamism’ narrative has lost salience over time, to the extent that by 2017 all ‘original’ themes are mentioned in less than 15% of the 2017 articles. Furthermore, all themes in this narrative are explanatory in nature except theme 6: the decreasing prominence of this narrative reaffirms the earlier observation of decreasing explanation (and nuance) of the critiques implied in ‘regressive left’ over time. Despite the declining prominence of the ‘pandering to Islamism’ narrative, Islam (and Muslims) remains a continued topic of importance in the discourse, as established earlier. The decline in the ‘pandering to Islamism’ narrative is corroborating the earlier established ‘departure’ from the original context of the discourse to new emerging contexts. While Islam thus remains a salient topic in a more generalized sense, more nuanced explanations and critiques in the ‘regressive left’s’ dealings with Islamism appear to have been replaced by generic critiques towards Islam as a monolithic culture and religion; the latter was most certainly not implied when Nawaz first coined the term.

The ‘betrayers of liberalism’ narrative

In the theoretical framework three key concepts – liberalism, secularism, and multiculturalism, underlying ‘regressive left’ were established as holding great significance, because they embody some of the *a priori* assumptions that are implied in ‘regressive left’ accusations. The ‘left’ implied in ‘regressive left’ is constructed around the axiom that liberalism and secularism are values inherent to leftist politics. An example of an *a priori* assumption is that with the epithet ‘regressive’, the accused

'left(ist)' actor or group is considered to be 'regressing' from political positions they 'ought' to have (i.e. what 'leftism' or 'liberalism' constitutes). A prominent narrative in the discourse dealing with such assumptions and accusations is the *'betrayers of liberalism'* narrative, that emerged during coding through a variety of themes but is also explicitly mentioned as a theme in 46 of 158 (ca. 29%) articles in total (theme 4).

The narrative manifests through several themes. For example, theme 3 ('RL is repressing or hindering free speech'), based on the assumption that freedom of speech (a key value in liberalism) is an inalienable value inherent to 'true' leftism. Closely related to this theme is theme 22 ('RL argues one must have 'respect' for religion, culture, or identities'). While a 'leftist' position of respect towards religion, culture, or identities is not necessarily 'regressive' per se, compelling others to 'have respect' (theme 22, e.g. adjusting their views or language) through oppressive actions or the rejection of all forms of (reasonable) critical thought on religion, culture or identities (theme 13), can be understood as a form of 'regressing' from liberal values. In the case of theme 13 the idea of the betrayal of 'Enlightenment values' comes to the fore, based on the assumption that rational and critical thought are important maxims in leftist ideologies. In several articles this accusation is further illustrated by mentions of the 'regressive left' as uncritical, and rejecting data or evidence on societal difficulties involving religion or culture (theme 15). As established in the theoretical framework, secularism is a concept that is closely related to liberalism and can, in a general sense, equally be perceived to constitute a core 'leftist' value. Following this line of reasoning, the accusation of special or preferential treatment of a (minority) religion like Islam while (majority) 'Judeo-Christian' religions are subjected to criticism (theme 7; 'RL is hypocrite or holds double standards') seems at odds with traditional secular values and the (historically) mostly critical attitudes towards organized religion in general. The concept of 'multiculturalism' is by some commentators also portrayed as at odds with liberalism, and by proxy 'true' leftist politics, based on the perception that cultural relativism and multiculturalism are 'sheltering' or facilitating illiberal groups and ideas, or that the 'regressive left' is not critical of data and evidence involving cultural groups: 'blinded by cultural relativism and multiculturalism' (themes 9).

In a general sense the themes underlying the *'betrayers of liberalism'* narrative are mostly (themes 4, 7, 9, 13, 15) showing considerable stability in their prominence in mentioning over time, with the exception of increasing prominence of theme 3 (already contextualized earlier in this chapter) and decrease of mentions pertaining to theme 22. The decrease of the latter (theme 22: 'must have 'respect' for religion, culture, or identities') might be explained by a shift in the perception of the 'regressive left' over time from mostly admonishing critics of certain identity-groups for their views, to increasingly trying to silence critics and dissidents. The relative stability of the narrative, and its underlying themes, might be attributed to the variety of contexts in which the narrative is employed: ranging from the context of Nawaz, to the perceived *'betrayal of liberalism'* by student activists in the form of the banning of conservative speakers.

The 'political correctness' narrative

In the theoretical framework similarities between the 'regressive left' discourse and discourse on 'political correctness' were already established; this relation was coded through theme 5: 'regressive left' as associated with, or identified as, political(ly) correct(ness). The presence of this theme in 28% of all articles indicates an explicit connection between the two discourses. Only in one article, however, the 'regressive left' was explicitly referred to as a continuation of critiques directed at 'political correctness' in society (coded via theme 23): *"On the left the politically correct movement of the 1980s and 1990s, based largely in universities, has evolved into what is often called, by opponents,*

the regressive left".¹⁶³ In about half the instances where 'political correctness' is mentioned in the articles it refers to a sort of behavioural trait of the 'regressive left' (e.g. 'regressive left' as employing political correct language). In the other half, 'political correctness' is described more as a character trait of 'the left' that dictates ideas and actions of 'others' (e.g. the 'regressive left' as the result of societal 'political correctness'-dogma's). The manner of speaking regarding 'political correctness' within the 'regressive left' discourse, corresponds with the *'ideology'* narrative, and is often related directly to a broader societal trend of cultural relativism, multiculturalism, and identity politics. 'regressive leftism' is seen as the result of a broader dogmatic, leftist, ideology where 'political correctness' has become the norm. Many of the themes coded in regard to the 'regressive left' thematic narratives (e.g. themes 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, and 14) show significant similarity to the earlier critiques described in the articles and coded through theme 23. In the 'regressive left' discourse, political correctness and political correct behaviour are thus seen as the cultural norm and 'regressive left' as either the result of this norm, or as the group actively enforcing this norm.

5.5.3 Reflection on themes

In regard to thematic developments, three important observations can be made. Firstly, that descriptive themes take increasing precedence over explanatory themes: increased 'claiming' but not 'explaining' in the usage of the term 'regressive left'. Secondly, that six thematic narratives can be distinguished by which coded themes might be interpreted, as such these narratives contribute to a better insight in the development (e.g. decline or emergence) of themes in the discourse. Thirdly, that the examination of themes and thematic narratives has reaffirmed the importance of the key-concepts established in the theoretical framework in understanding the assumptions the 'regressive left' is founded on.

¹⁶³ Article 94: Webber, P., "Standing up to Trump, Le Pen and Putin", *Inroads*, 23-11-2016, <http://inroadsjournal.ca/standing-up-to-trump-le-pen-and-putin/> (Website last accessed November 26th, 2018).

VI. Discursive events

6.1 Introduction

The focal point of this chapter is identifying discursive events in the 'regressive left' discourse, to gain a better understanding of the formation and development of the discourse over the course of five years. In the first part of this chapter, the theoretical foundations of the notion 'discursive events' will be further established and the approach to discursive events in the context of this research will be explained. By drawing from theory, and indicators for events already observed earlier in the examination, an attempt will be made to identify discursive events in the 'regressive left' discourse.

6.2 Discursive events: theory and practice

Theoretical foundations

In chapter II (methodology), the 9/11 terror attacks on New York and Jäger's example of the nuclear incident at Chernobyl were cited as two events that have shaped and influenced (global) discourse. But what exactly is an 'event'? Foucault described events as "(...) *neither substance, nor accident, nor quality nor process; (...) not corporeal*",¹⁶⁴ illustrating the difficulty in grasping the meaning of the concept 'event'. Historically, the notion of 'events' received attention in social sciences from both a philosophical perspective (ontological and metaphysical status of 'events'), and a historical perspective (effects of 'events' on history and development of society).¹⁶⁵ In response to the emphasis on the continuous structure and general patterns in this structure, resulting in a perceived dismissal of the change and transformation of the event itself¹⁶⁶, a new approach to historical/cultural structure and change was developed where attention is mainly directed at ruptures in structure (e.g. change, discontinuity, cultural transformation, revolution, event).¹⁶⁷ Noteworthy examples of critics who have adopted this new approach are Foucault, who developed an 'archaeology of knowledge' "(...) *not to overcome differences, but to analyse them*"¹⁶⁸, and Sahlins, who developed a theory of history and cultural change based on the relation between structure and event¹⁶⁹.

My understanding of 'events' in the context of this thesis is inspired by the structuralist definition of Sahlins,¹⁷⁰ who defined 'events' as a "*transformation of structure*"¹⁷¹, and the definition provided by Sewell in his discussion of the theory of event of Sahlins: "(...) *events should be understood as happenings that transform structures. The reason that events constitute what historians call turning points is that they somehow change the structures that govern human conduct.*"¹⁷² While there is great variation in approaches (and terminology) to 'events', in general, events can be understood as happenings (e.g. ruptures, discontinuities, revolutions) that transform (e.g. change, affect) the

¹⁶⁴ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, page 231.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem, page 3-6

¹⁶⁶ Idem. ; Sewell, W.H., "A theory of the event: Mashall Sahlins's possible theory of history", in: Sewell, W.H., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005) 197-224, page 197-199.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, 3-5, 174-177; Sahlins, M., *Islands of History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), page vii; Widder, N., "Foucault and the event", *International Political Sociology* 2 (2008): 276-277, page 276; Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 218.

¹⁶⁸ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, page 171.

¹⁶⁹ Sahlins, *Islands of History*.

¹⁷⁰ Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 198-199; Sahlins, *Islands of History*, page xiv.

¹⁷¹ Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 199; Sahlins, *Islands of History*, page xiv.

¹⁷² Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 218.

structure to which they belong. Within discourse analysis, the term 'event' is often used to stress how language must be seen as 'communicative event', or 'discursive event'; where every statement is treated as a form of social action.¹⁷³ Like every event, communicative statements (e.g. communicative events or discursive events) are about continuity and difference¹⁷⁴, where "every communicative event functions as a form of social practice in reproducing or challenging the order of discourse".¹⁷⁵

Distinguishing events from Events

The critical question following the above observations is whether every communicative/discursive event can be interpreted as 'historical event', or an 'event' in the sense of Jäger or Sahlins. The answer to this question is complicated by diffuse use of terminology in event-studies, however, some distinction can still be recognized: Jäger argues that a 'discursive event' can be distinguished from other events¹⁷⁶, and Sahlins argues that 'events' can be distinguished from 'uneventful' happenings.¹⁷⁷ A distinction that might provide useful in recognizing 'events' that have influenced and shaped the 'regressive left' discourse can be derived from Tang's article *Toward a really temporalized theory of event*.¹⁷⁸ Based on his evaluation of both Luhmann's and Sewell's theories regarding events, Tang proposes to distinguish between events and (capitalized) Events. More common happenings that do *not* necessarily result in a rupture from structure are classified as *events* by Tang, while more rare happenings that impact and transform a structure are classified as *Events*.¹⁷⁹ Hence, whether or not a 'happening' is deserving of the label 'Event' is to a large extent determined by the effect it has on the larger structure.¹⁸⁰ The main difficulty in this regard lies in determining when the effect on, or transformation of, the structure caused by the happening is sufficient for the happening to classify as an Event. As Sahlins phrases it: "The event is a happening interpreted – and interpretations vary."¹⁸¹ An example by Sewell illustrates the dependency on the perspective of the observer and the larger structure in recognizing Events:¹⁸² a divorce is a happening that transforms the family structure of the divorced couple ('Event' in Tang's terms), but is an implementation or reproduction of structure in the judicial marriage system in the United States ('event' in Tang's terms).¹⁸³

Identifying discursive events

Both Sewell and Foucault stress that each happening can be either an implementation or transformation of structure. While neither of them explicitly made a distinction between event and Event, they both emphasize that the 'eventfulness' of any given event is determined by the structural change it brings about.¹⁸⁴ In his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*¹⁸⁵, Foucault distinguishes between four different levels of event: (1) every statement is an event, (2) statements that affect little

¹⁷³ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 67-70; Wodak, "What CDA is about", page 2, 6; Meyer, "Between theory, method, and politics", page 20, 25; Dijk, van, T.A., "Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity", in: Wodak, R., and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2001) 95-120, page 98; Widder, "Foucault and the event", page 276; Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, page 28.

¹⁷⁴ Widder, "Foucault and the event", page 276-277; Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, page 28.

¹⁷⁵ Jorgensen and Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, page 70.

¹⁷⁶ Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 48.

¹⁷⁷ Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 199.

¹⁷⁸ Tang, C. C., "Toward a really temporalized theory of event: A Luhmannian critique and reconstruction of Sewell's logics of history", *Social Science Information* 52 (2013): 34-61.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem, page 43; Jäger, "Discourse and knowledge", page 48.

¹⁸⁰ Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 199.

¹⁸¹ Sahlins, *Islands of History*, page 153.

¹⁸² Tang, "Toward a really temporalized theory of event", page 43.

¹⁸³ Sewell, "A theory of the event", page 210-211.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem, page 218; Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, page 171-172, 174.

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*.

alterations or transformations on the structure, (3) statements that affect new rules on the basis of the rules that are already in operation, and (4) “the substitution of one discursive formation for another”.¹⁸⁶ Seen through the perspective of the event/Event distinction of Tang, three of the four levels Foucault distinguishes would probably take place on the level of events, since neither of these are a complete transformation of structure, while only the last level would be classified as Event. Dependent on the perspective of the observer and the broader structure one relates the happening to, the levels of Foucault can provide a helpful tool in distinguishing events and Events in a discourse.

6.3 Discursive events in the ‘regressive left’ discourse

To identify events/Events in the ‘regressive left’ discourse, all articles have been coded on mentions of happenings. To determine which happenings classify as ‘transformations of structure’, the happenings have been compared to quantitative fluctuations in the popularity of the key-word ‘regressive left’ on Google Search and the number of articles over time, both indicators of the overall prevalence of ‘regressive left’. Additionally, the happenings mentioned in the articles and the quantitative fluctuations over time have been compared with qualitative transformations in the discourse (e.g. contextual developments, emerging actors or topics, thematic shifts). Inspired by Foucault’s layered approach, events/Events are classified in one of four levels. By identifying possible events/Events, I hope to gain a better understanding of some of the contextual, actor-related, topical, and thematic developments as described in the previous chapters.

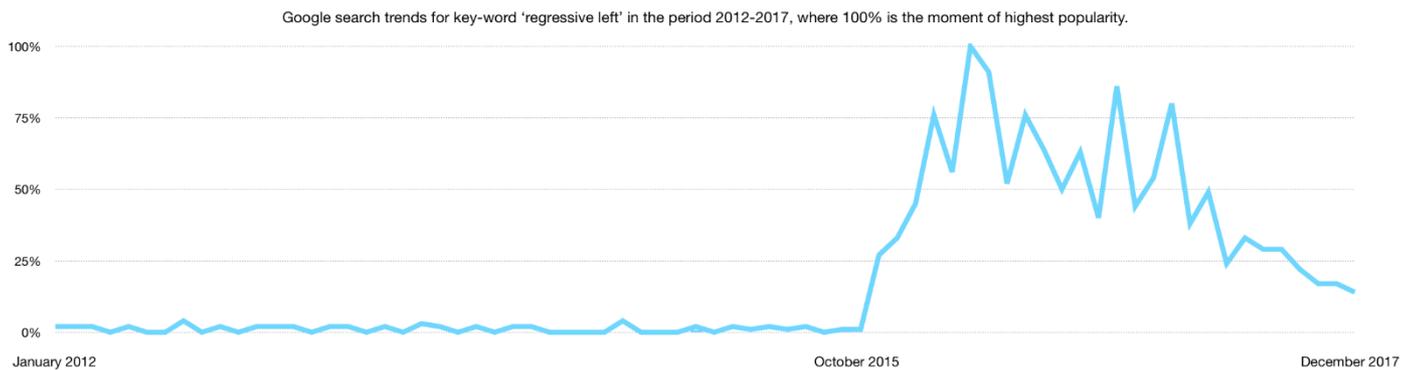
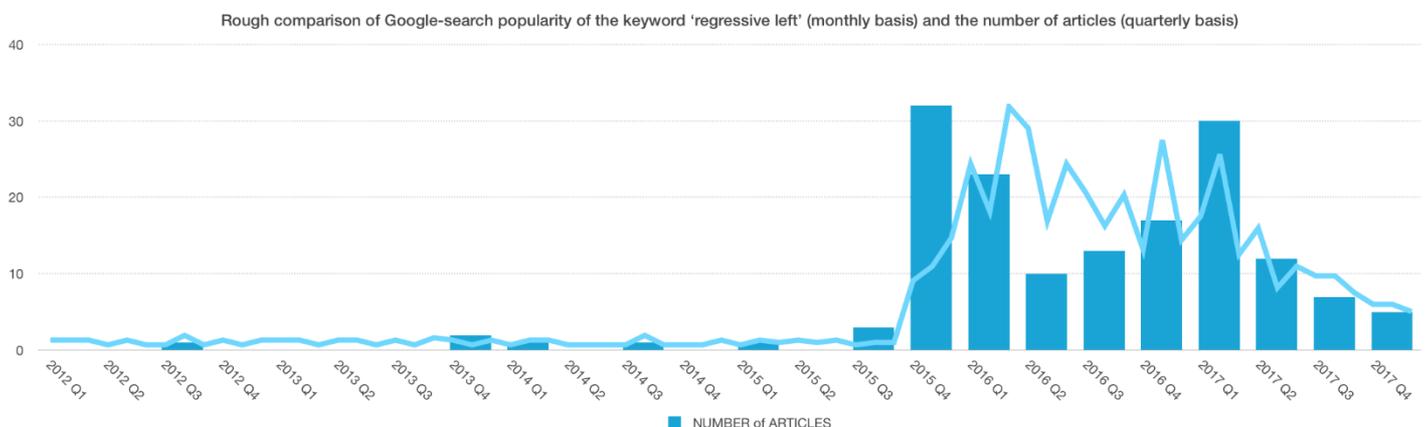


Figure 21



¹⁸⁶ Ibidem, page 171.

Figure 22

In figure 21, the Google-search popularity of the key-word 'regressive left' is depicted for the period 2012-2017, showing fluctuation in the search-popularity of the term. By cross-comparing the Google-search popularity of the key-word 'regressive left' with the number of articles from 2012-2017 (figure 22), it can be observed that the 'regressive left' discourse entered a new phase in October 2015 after an initial hiatus between 2012-mid 2015. The search popularity further increases towards a 'peak' moment in March 2016. While the 'article popularity' of the 'regressive left' had already experienced its peak in the last quarter of 2015, the large share of articles published in the first quarter of 2016 corroborates the notion of a relative 'popular' time for the public reach of the 'regressive left' discourse in the beginning of 2016. Both the number of articles and the search-results indicate another 'peak'-moment in February 2017; after this moment the overall popularity of the 'regressive left', both as search key-word and as reflected by the number of articles, slowly decreases. When reflecting on dates and happenings that are explicitly mentioned in the articles, and on the qualitative transformations as have been discussed in the previous chapters, the 'peak' moments described above can serve as a guideline in identifying 'turning points' in the discourse that might be indicative of events/Events.

Level one events

In line with Foucault's definition, level one events in the 'regressive left' discourse are events that do not change the structure of the discourse. In a manner of speaking, these events are the least 'eventful'. However, without a large amount of level one events, this research would not have been feasible. In line with the 'communicative events' and 'Foucauldian' first level events, every article, tweet, and interview that is reflected in this research can be described as a first level event (of course, with the exclusion of those that qualify as a 'higher' level event). While these events did not change the overall structure of the discourse and had no 'transformative' impact, these first level events have played a part in the overall visibility and popularization of the 'regressive left' discourse.

Level two events

Second level events result in small (but discernible) changes that have no full 'transformative' character, but do make small alterations that affect the structure of the discourse. Arguably the most notable quantitative change in the 'regressive left' discourse is the sharp increase in searches and articles in October 2015 (figure 21 and 22), more than three years after the publication of *Radical*. This quantitative change correlates with a qualitative change that has been discussed in chapter IV. In the examination of actors, Harris, Rubin, Yiannopoulos, and Maher were established as key actors ('term-users') that 'emerge' in late 2015. When comparing the sudden increase in searches and articles and the 'appearance' of 'users' of the term 'regressive left' with happenings mentioned in the articles, a series of 'level two' events can be identified.

In September 2015, *The Rubin Report* started at ORA.tv after Rubin had a fall-out with Uygur of the *Young Turks Network* following Uygur's disagreements with Harris regarding Islam and the position of 'the left'.¹⁸⁷ When he started at ORA.tv, Rubin's first series of episodes hosted guests like Hirsi Ali, Nawaz, and Harris, and dedicated significant attention to the 'regressive left'.¹⁸⁸ With Harris, Rubin reflected on an episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher* (that had aired in October 2014) where Harris was called 'racist' and 'gross' by Ben Affleck due to his comments on Islam.¹⁸⁹ In this same time span (October 2015), Richard Dawkins appeared as a guest on *Real Time with Bill Maher*, to comment on

¹⁸⁷ E.g. article number 15, 44, 90, and 153.

¹⁸⁸ E.g. article number 81 and 168.

¹⁸⁹ E.g. article number 58, 64 and 66.

religion and apologetic approaches towards Islamism.¹⁹⁰ The series of episodes of *The Rubin Report* and *Real Time with Bill Maher* arguably resulted in a significant increase in articles and searches on the ‘regressive left’, as well as in the appearance of certain actors in the discourse (e.g. Rubin, Maher, Harris, Dawkins, and Hirsi Ali). The significant representation of both Harris and Nawaz in over 50% of the articles in 2015 (figure 10) might be attributed to the release of their co-authored book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*, that was published in October 2015.¹⁹¹ All things combined, several happenings of relevance to the ‘regressive left’ discourse occurred in October 2015 that might explain the sudden increase in articles and searches, and the ‘appearance’ of several actors in the discourse. What sets these happenings apart as ‘second level’ events, however, is not their shared impact on the ‘popularity’ of the term ‘regressive left’, but their (small, but significant) impact on the structure of the discourse.

As already established, the usage, context, actors, topics, and themes in the ‘regressive left’ discourse have all changed from the publication of *Radical* to 2017. As illustrated in figure 7, in 2015, the term ‘regressive left’ was used predominantly in a broader context of religion and Islam (as opposed to Islamism and religious extremism), and in over 25% of the articles the context was even broader (e.g. topics like feminism, identity-politics, or vague and ill-defined contexts). Also, the usage of the term shifted from predominantly descriptive to predominantly applied (figure 6), and the topical interest in ‘Islam/Muslims’ peaked in the last half year of 2015 (figure 14). The most popular themes coded in 2015 (illustrated in figure 18) are themes 1, 5, 6, 8, and 10, and mostly correspond with the ‘*pandering to Islamism*’ narrative. In 2015, an overall shift is noticeable in the ‘regressive left’ discourse, from a context of Islamism and religious extremism specifically, to a broader context of Islam and religion-critiques in general. This development fits with the discussions of the ‘regressive left’ by Rubin, Maher, and their guests (e.g. ‘New Atheists’ Dawkins and Harris, Nawaz, Hirsi Ali), and by Nawaz and Harris in their book. Reactions of the public on these happenings (the talk-show episodes and the book), for example on social media or in articles, may have further contributed to the overall transformation of the ‘regressive left’ towards a more visible, and more generalized, discourse. While none of the particular happenings described above have thus completely altered the fabric of the discourse, combined they have resulted in a small transformation in the discourse. As such, these happenings can be regarded as ‘level two’ events within the ‘regressive left’ discourse.

Level three events

‘Level three’ events have a big impact on the ‘regressive left’ discourse, resulting in significant change (i.e. resulting in transformation of structure). Based on happenings mentioned in the articles compared with qualitative and quantitative developments over time, two ‘level three’ events can be distinguished, of which the first is, of course, the publication of Nawaz’s autobiography *Radical*. Although Nawaz may not be the ‘inventor’ of the term ‘regressive left’ or the criticism that is implied with it, he is generally credited as the coiner of the term and his book has functioned as a catalyst in others adopting the term ‘regressive left’. The narrative regarding the ‘regressive left’ as set out in *Radical* has been the main blueprint for many of the critiques directed at the ‘regressive left’ in later years, and in many ways the publishing of *Radical* might be seen as the ‘starting point’ of the ‘regressive left’ discourse.¹⁹² Nawaz is the most frequently mentioned actor in the articles (38% of all articles mention Nawaz), and although the presence of both him as an actor and of the thematic narrative that corresponds closest with his description of the ‘regressive left’ in *Radical* (i.e. the ‘*pandering to Islamism*’ narrative) decline in prevalence over time, Nawaz remains tightly connected with the discourse until the end of 2017.

¹⁹⁰ E.g. article number 31 and 114.

¹⁹¹ E.g. article number 19 and 148.

¹⁹² E.g. article number 62 and 98.

The second 'level three' event can be discerned by examining the number of searches and articles, that illustrate a sharp increase of public attention for the 'regressive left' in February 2017. The timeframe of this quantitative increase indicates the Berkeley-protests directed at Milo Yiannopoulos in the beginning of February 2017 as event,¹⁹³ which is corroborated by several qualitative changes in the 'regressive left' discourse. Yiannopoulos already gained attention in the articles criticizing the 'regressive left' in his function as editor of *Breitbart*,¹⁹⁴ as outspoken supporter for Trump,¹⁹⁵ and due to him being banned from Twitter in July 2016.¹⁹⁶ It is only in 2017, however, that Yiannopoulos manages to 'upstage' many of the dominant actors in the discourse (i.e. Rubin, Maher, Harris, and 'tied' with Nawaz) and his prevalence in the discourse significantly increases. In 2017, as already illustrated in chapters IV and V, the discourse transforms significantly. The term 'regressive left' is significantly less attributed to Nawaz (from 30% in 2015 to 15% in 2017), and increasingly applied in a pejorative fashion (from 42% in 2015 to 57% in 2017). Concurrently, the context in which the term is used changes over time towards 'emerging' contexts (e.g. feminism, identity politics) and vague or ill-defined contexts (from 27% in 2015 to 83% of articles in 2017). As an actor-group, the 'alt-right' manifests in the discourse (from 0% in 2015 to 17% in 2017). These developments in the usage of the term 'regressive left' are accompanied by topical and thematic developments. Student activism (campus culture) gains increased prevalence in 2017 (from 14% in 2015 to 54% in 2017), and explanatory themes decrease significantly. While the '*pandering to Islamism*' narrative loses in salience, the '*radical activists*' narrative experiences a sharp increase in 2017, and the '*victim*' narrative becomes more centred on the 'regressive left' as 'patronizing over-protectors'.

While none of the developments described above might be indicative of a transformative event in isolation, combined they illustrate an overall transformation of the discourse. When relating these developments to the Berkeley protests against Yiannopoulos, much of the described transformation can be explained. Escalated protests of student-activists aimed at preventing an invited speaker (i.e. Milo Yiannopoulos) from speaking at the Berkeley campus of the University of California due to the 'offensiveness' of his speeches certainly corresponds to a large extent with the increased emphasis on hostile student-activism, repression of free speech, and increased perceptions of the 'regressive left' as patronizing and over-protective. The Berkeley protests directed at Yiannopoulos are classified as a 'third level' event due to the large quantitative impact, but more so due to the large transformative (qualitative) impact of the protests on the 'regressive left' discourse.

Level four Events

It has been stressed earlier in this thesis that the 'regressive left' discourse does not exist in isolation, but interacts with many other discourses and can be seen as part of the wider discourse on the place of religion in society (in many countries predominantly focussed on Islam). While the events of level 1-3 specifically pertain to the structure of the 'regressive left' discourse, 'level four' Events are transformative events that not only impact the 'regressive left' discourse, but are also transformative in society in a broader sense.

One easily recognizable 'fourth level' Event is the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Being referred to in 35% of all articles, the candidacy and following election of Trump have resulted in him surpassing Nawaz as the most prevalent actor in the discourse in both 2016 (mentioned in 40% of articles) and 2017 (mentioned in 46% of articles). The presidential elections have already been introduced as topic of interest when commenting on Trump and his fellow candidates in the 'actor-section' and 'topic-section' of this thesis. Although nowhere near as 'visible' as Trump, both Clinton

¹⁹³ E.g. article number 124, 126, and 142.

¹⁹⁴ E.g. article number 75 and 110.

¹⁹⁵ E.g. article number 105 and 151.

¹⁹⁶ E.g. article number 70 and 117.

(10% of articles) and Sanders (less than 6% of articles) were established as neutral actors in the discourse. When reflecting on quantitative changes in the number of searches and articles, the months of the election (November 2016) and inauguration (January 2017) stand out as moments of high public interest in the 'regressive left'.

While the 2016 election has, perhaps, not had the greatest 'direct' impact on the 'regressive left' discourse, it had a 'huge' impact on public political debate in general and on discourses interacting with the 'regressive left' discourse. The 'level three' event regarding the Berkeley protests directed at Yiannopoulos, for example, is strongly intertwined with public opinion on the election of Trump as president. The election can be considered a catalyst for the emergence of radical social activist movements on both the right (supporting Trump) and left (opposing Trump) side of the political spectrum. A notable example is the alt-right movement that supported Trump. Yiannopoulos publicly framed Trump as opposite to the 'regressive left', thereby increasing polarization between left- and right-oriented activists. While Yiannopoulos is an individual surrounded by controversy, his association with Trump and the alt-right can be seen to have further incited the protests against Yiannopoulos' speech at Berkeley by left-oriented student-activists.

The impact of the 2016 election can also be found in the increase in focus on the (perceived) repression of free speech within the 'regressive left' discourse. During the campaign of Trump, and continued after his election, much public emphasis has been placed on the controversial debating style of Trump. His manner of speech has been described as populist, hateful or harmful towards minority groups, and he has been criticized for his 'ad hominem' attacks.¹⁹⁷ Trump's manner of speaking resulted in reinvigorated social debate on the normative framework of language (e.g. what is 'acceptable' language in both politics and wider society). This debate was spurred on by Trump's accusations of 'political correctness' directed at his opponents and the political establishment in general.¹⁹⁸ Following the above observations, it is well conceivable that with a less controversial US election, the 'regressive left' discourse would not have experienced the same degree of public interest and high profile debating. The initial emergence of the discourse in late 2015, following the book release of *Future of Tolerance* and high profile interviews on *The Rubin Report* and *Real Time* created momentum for the term to be adopted as a critique within general political discourse and later as 'rhetorical weapon' used by (far)-right groups and individuals to frame opponents (i.e. 'the left') in the 2016 election.

The interconnectedness of the 'regressive left' discourse with the wider discourse on the place of religion in society is discernible in many elements of the 'regressive left' discourse: its origins in the biography of a former Islamist extremist, the actors participating in the discourse (Islam- and religion-critics), the topics prevalent in the discourse (i.e. 'Islam/Muslims'), and most notably, in many of the thematic descriptions and explanations pertaining to the 'regressive left'. The last Event to be discussed can be said to have impacted all these elements, although 'measuring' exactly how much and in which ways is a task far too grand and complex for the scope of this thesis. For the last years, the Syrian civil war and following rise of ISIS have been a main force in public debate on religion (and Islam in specific), immigration and refugees, religious extremism, and religious violence (terror). The direct impact on the 'regressive left' discourse can be discerned in references to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January of 2015 (25% of all articles in 2015) and the Paris Attacks in November that same year (14% of all articles in 2015). Indirectly, the Syrian civil war and following rise of ISIS 'Event' might be expected to have influenced the scope, proliferation, and actors of the 'regressive left' discourse, as well as the substance ('what is being said') of the discourse. As an Event that has impacted the wider discussion on the place of religion in society, the Syrian civil war and the following rise of ISIS

¹⁹⁷ E.g. article number 25, 74, and 92.

¹⁹⁸ E.g. article number 58, 68, 138 and 237.

can be expected to have altered the very 'fabric' of the 'regressive left' discourse, even though the manifestation of the Event within the discourse is not directly discernible at first glance.

6.4 Reflection

Concluding the examination of discursive events, several observations can be made. Discursive events can be discerned on four different levels, each with different degrees of impact on the discourse, by means of comparing qualitative and quantitative transformations in the structure of discourse. Most events in the discourse can be understood as level one events, having no discernible impact on the structure of the discourse, other than its popularisation. The examination of level two events, those with a small impact on the structure of discourse, helped to provide an explanation for the expansion of the discourse from its narrow (Islamist) to a more expanded (religion) context. Additionally, two level three events, the publishing of *Radical* and the Berkeley protests, have been discerned as causing an extensive impact on the structure of the discourse. Finally, the US 2016 presidential election and the rise of ISIS came to the fore as 'Events' that have altered the 'fabric' of the discourse.

Conclusion

By drawing from established methodological traditions and research approaches, a solid foundation was constructed that allowed for a comprehensive investigation of the 'regressive left' discourse. Several key-concepts (liberalism, secularism, and multiculturalism) were identified as holding great relevance to the discourse, and 'political correctness' has been established as a formative 'predecessor' to (and reoccurring theme in) the 'regressive left' discourse, yet with distinct differences and nuances. It can be ascertained that the usage of the term 'regressive left' initially pertained predominantly to its original (descriptive) usage by Nawaz in the context of Islamism, and has shifted to increasingly more pejorative usage unrelated to Nawaz in the context of new and emerging themes like 'identity politics'. The main development in the constellation of actors is a noticeable decrease in actors associated with the original and expanded context (Nawaz and Harris), in favour of actors associated with emerging contexts (Trump and Yiannopoulos). Actors considered 'regressive left' are increasingly perceived as a generic group of social activists adhering to the same 'regressive' ideology. It can be ascertained that the 'regressive left' discourse is manifesting through various thematic narratives, six of which could be identified in this analysis. The developments in themes further affirms the emergence of new contexts and perceptions of the regressive left, where less effort is made to explain the critique implied in 'regressive left'. Several events with varying degrees of impact (levels one-to-three) on the structure of the discourse came to the fore, notably the publishing of *Radical* and the Berkeley protests, however, the US 2016 election and rise of ISIS have been established as having the greatest 'structural' impact on the discourse. The identification and analysis of these 'events' provided an explanation for the transformation of the discourse from a narrow to more expanded context, and further contextualized the role of several discourse-actors.

Concluding this thesis, based on the outcomes of the analysis, a substantiated answer to the principle research question - *How has the 'regressive left' discourse in the United States and United Kingdom developed since the publication of Maajid Nawaz's 2012 book Radical?* – can be formulated. The discourse has, sparked by Nawaz, developed in the period 2012-2017 from a critique on the left's dealings with Islamism in the UK to a globalized (digital) socio-political debate on a wide range of social issues that are very topical in both countries. The perception voiced by some commentators that the term 'regressive left' has been absorbed by fringe groups (i.e. the alt-right), cannot be supported based on this analysis. What can however be ascertained is that, in part due to such groups, the term is indeed used increasingly in a generic pejorative fashion: losing a lot of its value as coherent critique. Nevertheless, 'regressive left' cannot be discarded on the grounds of misappropriation or perceived

'name-calling' by some of its users. At the foundation of 'regressive left' lies a honest warning for the ambiguous views and actions by some who claim to protect groups and individuals from marginalization and oppression, but lose themselves in this ideal at the expense of not only their opponents but also fellow idealist with less extreme views. Individuals with dissident views towards 'their' identity group are now at risk of being oppressed by those who claim to be their liberators: Does the end justify the means, even if that implies compromising on liberal values? The term 'regressive left' is holding up a self-reflective mirror with exactly that question in view, offering a unique reflexive perspective in discourse on the place of religion in society not only in academia but also in society as a whole.

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Appendix I: Article list¹⁹⁹

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Appendix II: Search parameters and (de)selection criteria articles

As established in the methodology of this thesis, the primary source of data used in this thesis were online web articles, retrieved using the Google search-engine. The choice for web-articles has been based on the availability, accessibility and searchability of web articles using Google-search, opposed to other forms of content (i.e. social media content). The representability of the corpus of articles used in the analysis is founded on the following three assumptions: Firstly, that due to the algorithms employed by Google, the results from the query put priority on sources that originate from established online news-websites or blogs with high user traffic. While this does not guarantee the quality of the source, a larger user/reader-base of a website does contribute to the representability of the author and source as a impactful discourse contribution (i.e. an opinion article read by many thousands as a more meaningful source to investigate the discourse opposed to, for example, a single blog post on a fringe blog with little user traffic). Secondly, that the ratio between total Google-search results for each year (including search-'hits' that turn out to be un-related to the 'regressive left') and the number of results that are actually related to the 'regressive left' (and thus considered for selection) is indicative for the yearly development in online proliferation of the 'regressive left' discourse (e.g. the more 'related' content versus 'unrelated' content the more 'popular'/'visible' the discourse). The 'representability' of the 'procurement' procedure of articles via Google is supported by the overlap between Google-trends 'popularity' of the key-word 'regressive left' with the absolute number of articles selected for each year on a quarterly basis (see figure 22). Thirdly, that by using a standardized article 'procurement' procedure for each of the years under examination, not only representability but also reproducibility is enhanced.

To avoid a 'search-bubble' (biased results based on previous web-activity) measures were taken to increase the neutrality of the search by using the safari browser in 'private' mode, while not incorporating regional/location data or previous search history – thus a 'blank slate' search query using the following settings:

Operating System and Browser

Operating System: macOS Mojave, Version 10.14.1

Browser: Safari, Version 12.0.1 (14606.2.104.1.1)

Browser Settings: Default, private window mode

Browser cache/history: Cleared

VPN: No

Search engine: Google.com

Google Search settings:

Search customization: Signed-out search activity is off

Results per page: 100

Region setting: United States

Google Advanced search settings

This exact word or phrase: Regressive Left (search not capital sensitive)

Language: English

Region: Any region

Last update: Anytime

Terms appearing: Anywhere in the page

SafeSearch: Show most relevant results

File type: Any format

Usage rights: Not filtered by license

Filter date: sequentially 2012-2012, 2013-2013, 2014-2014, 2015-2015, 2016-2016, 2017-2017

While the above procedure does not guarantee non-biased search results, reproducing the search settings from a Dutch IP address with a similar system/browser-configuration should yield similar results (verified using VPN). The nature of non-specialist search-engines like Google is that only the most ‘relevant’ results are displayed to the searcher, which only constitute a fraction of the total amount of locations found on the internet where the search-keyword is present in the content of a website. In the case of the keyword ‘regressive left’ on average circa 75-125 results were displayed per year out of several thousand ‘hits’. These results were in turn ‘manually’ curated, by examining each page in the search results individually for the key word ‘regressive left’ and filtering out results that were auto-generated content based on the search-query; sometimes near indistinguishable from genuine articles. Additionally, results that had a lack of suitable (sizable) content, no contextual or geographical overlap with the ‘regressive left’ discourse (as established during the review of literature) were additionally filtered out. The most important (de)selection criteria used were:

- Article is written in English
- Articles contains a sizable body of text
- ‘Regressive left’ needs to be mentioned explicitly in text
- No forum posts and comments
- No ‘encyclopaedic’ articles that are the result of crowdsourcing (e.g. Wikipedia)
- ‘Regressive left’ needs to be featured in the body of the main article (e.g. not just comments mentioning ‘regressive left’ under (unrelated) articles)
- No announcements/advertisements for other forms of content (web-vlog or podcast), unless it is a critical review offering original insights/perspective
- Year of publishing of the article corresponds with the search-dates in the query

Search/article data	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of Google-search results displayed	43	71	101	80	104	95
Number of articles collected during search phase	4	5	3	40	64	58
Number of articles deselected during analysis	3	3	1	4	1	4
Total number of articles used in analysis for year	1	2	2	36	63	54
Share of total search results used in analysis	2,33%	2,82%	1,98%	45,00%	60,58%	56,84%

As visible in the above table, the majority of search results in the period 2012-2014 were irrelevant to the examination. In nearly all cases the presence of ‘regressive left’ on the webpage was the result of ‘dynamic content’ (user-information or comments added later that feature ‘regressive left’, for example an article from 2012 with a comment from 2015) or ‘generated content’ (websites that appear to meet the search criteria but consist of generated (fake) text).

Selected articles were individually download as .pdf articles in the Safari browser ‘reader’ mode (filters irrelevant elements of webpages), and were catalogued in a separate excel file featuring the name/author/platform/date/url of the article. This procedure was repeated for all years between 2012-2017 (174 articles in total). After the initial collection of articles was completed, articles were imported into Atlas.ti in the order of year and rank in the search results, and then automatically assigned a number that served as the article indicator. During coding, several articles were again deselected after closer examination, when it became clear they lacked contextual or geographical overlap with the ‘regressive left’ discourse in the US and UK and only pertained to isolated contexts (that after thorough review indicate no overlap or interplay with the ‘regressive left’ discourse under examination), or otherwise lacked relevant content suitable for analysis (16 articles deselected, 158 remaining articles). The articles that were deselected during the analysis phase (numbers correspond with the automated numbering of articles imported in Atlas.ti.):

2. Regional Context: South Africa
2012: Collectivism vs. Individualism | Abahlali baseMjondolo
<http://abahlali.org/node/8726/>
4. Regional Context: South Africa
2012: The politics of human dignity | Pambazuka News
<https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/politics-human-dignity>
5. Regional Context: India
2012: In opposing FDI and reforms, BJP is throwing the UPA a lifeline - Firstpost
<https://www.firstpost.com/politics/in-opposing-fdi-and-reforms-bjp-is-throwing-the-upa-a-life-saver-456619.html>
7. Lack of context, use of RL without any relation to the discourse.
2013: Reaction to the Ohio Republican Party Chairman Vote – Cincinnati Tea Party
<http://cincinnatiteaparty.org/reaction-to-the-ohio-republican-party-chairman-vote/>
8. Relevant to the discourse but no explicit mention of ‘regressive left’
2013: Siding with the oppressor/ the pro-Islamist left - Maryam Namazie
<https://libcom.org/forums/general/siding-oppressor-pro-islamist-left-maryam-namazie-17082013>
9. Regional Context: South Africa
2013: The Dignity of the Poor is Vandalized from Many Quarters | Harvard International Review
<http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=3068>
13. Regional context: south Africa
2014: Knowledge practices in Abahlali baseMjondolo - Gerard Gill
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Interface-6-1-Gill.pdf>
30. Regional context: Israel, articles lacks context; use of ‘regressive left’ is unrelated to the discourse.
2015: Isaiah Silver and the Strange Crimes of Israeli Anthropologists | Anthropologists for Dialogue on Israel/Palestine
<https://anthrodialogue.wordpress.com/2015/10/28/isaiah-silver-and-the-strange-crimes-of-israeli-anthropologists/>
38. Comment on podcast, only an announcement!
2015: Peter Boghossian on “the regressive left” « Why Evolution Is True
<https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2015/11/04/peter-boghossian-on-the-regressive-left/>
51. Regional context: Canada, Urban planning. Holds no relevance to ‘regressive left’ discourse
2015: The Interview/ Richard Florida and the Future of Toronto | Urban Toronto
<http://urbantoronto.ca/news/2015/12/interview-richard-florida-and-future-toronto>
54. Comment on Video-Interview, not an article
2015: Welcome to the End of My Patience | Sam Harris
<https://samharris.org/welcome-to-the-end-of-my-patience/>
121. Regional context: Australia. Article lacks substance.
2016: XYZ vs AGE (part 1)/ Regressive Left Run For Cover - XYZ
<https://www.xyz.net.au/xyz-vs-age-part-1-regressive-left-run-for-cover/>

149. No explicit mentioning of 'regressive left' in article, only in tag webpage
2017: MSM — Main Stream Maajid – Regressive Left Media – Medium
https://medium.com/@Reg_Left_Media/msm-main-stream-maajid-4f008362f345

132. Intro biography on Dave Rubin, no relevant info on 'regressive left'; lacks context
2017: Dave Rubin - LibertyCon
<https://www.libertycon.com/profiles/dave-rubin/>

135. Announcement Podcast/episode, lack of context.
2017: Episode 199 – Potpourri | The Legion of Reason
<http://www.legionofreason.com/episode-199-potpourri/>

156. Incomplete article, PAYWALL.
2017: Regressive Left tolerate Islamist bigotry | Herald Sun
<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/rita-panahi/regressive-left-tolerate-islamist-bigotry/news-story/34ec10b03b49d164878600af1a9bfac2>

Appendix III: Coding Sheet

This coding sheet went through several iterations, of which the overview presented below is the final outcome. In this coding-sheet, the coding-categories are signified with a capitalized letter and the number following the letter constitutes an unique code-entry for that coding category. Most of the code-entries were initially left blank, and were only 'filled in' during analysis (e.g. code-entries of coding-category 'G', G1-G.. coded on names emerging as being labelled 'regressive left'). Due to mid- and post-analysis alterations, some coding-categories were adjusted or added later and received a letter breaking with the alphabetical order (e.g. Q, T, Z). The concept code-sheet was drafted by the coding of 5 random articles for each of the years in the analysis, to 'test' the applicability and limitations of the code-sheet and to incorporate new insights and ideas. These articles have in a later stage been re-coded using the current coding scheme. An important consideration in understanding the formation of the code sheet is the approach to coding each article: every word, collection of words, sentence, or text segment that was deemed of interest for this research (based on the main and sub-research questions), was initially marked. Whenever a suitable Letter-code was already present the respective word, collection of words, sentence, or text segment was coded accordingly, or a temporary code was assigned. Only codes that are relevant and re-occurring in the articles were then assigned a new letter-code.

Usage

Attribution

A1 Term attributed to Nawaz

A2 Term not attributed to Nawaz

The attribution of the term 'regressive left' to Nawaz has been coded in each article. Every article is classified as either A1 or A2. The primary criteria to assign A1 is the explicit mentioning of the name 'Nawaz' as related to the conception or origin of 'regressive left'. There were no 'grey-area' cases in this regard.

Type of usage

B1 Descriptive ("Nawaz coined the term RL in 2012"); mostly general explanations

B1A Positive/neutral

B1B Negative (disagrees with the term)

B2 Applied ("feminists are very RL"); mostly aimed at groups and individuals

B2A Positive/neutral

B2B Negative (pejoratively or used accusingly)

Articles have been coded on type of usage of the term 'regressive left', as either 'descriptive' or 'applied' use of the term, with another subdivision in each category between negative and neutral/positive types of usage. Descriptive usage is characterised by 'observations' made regarding the 'regressive left' as a theoretical concept or societal critique (explaining and describing the term), while applied usage is characterized by a more practical application of the term as a label for individuals and groups that are deemed to be 'regressive left' (putting the term into practice as an accustomed epithet).

Each article was only assigned one B-code; in cases where descriptive and applied (and/or positive/neutral and negative usage) co-occurred in an article, the 'predominant' and relevant usage was coded according to the interpretation of the researcher. For example, in articles with a 'satirical' tone as a style-figure at times the 'regressive left' is at first described in a positive manner, while the author is later being critical of the 'regressive left' while using the term in a more applied manner. In this example the article would initially be coded for both B1A and B2B, and after a critical evaluation

one of either codes was chosen as the most representative for the opinions and ideas expressed by the author. These type of situations were however not very common (and mostly occurred in the form of descriptive articles that reference to incidental 'applied' usage). Also the usage of the term by the article-author was coded as prevalent to any examples of usage in quotes by others.

Type of Context

- C1** Original context (Islamism) e.g. context of Nawaz
- C2** Expanded context (religion/Islam) e.g. context of New Atheists
- C3** Emerging context (e.g. feminism or identity politics)
- C4** Vague, ill-defined, or unrelated context

The type of context in which the term 'regressive left' was used, was coded for each given article. Most articles could be relatively easily coded on one of the above contexts: in situations where more than one type of context occurred, the predominant context was selected as the representative context by the observer.

Actors

Individual actors

- Q0** Other
- Q1** Maajid Nawaz
- Q2** Sam Harris
- Q3** Dave Rubin
- Q4** Bill Maher
- Q5** Richard Dawkins
- Q6** Milo Yiannopoulos
- Q7** Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- Q8** Christopher Hitchens
- Q9** Donald Trump
- Q10** Noam Chomsky
- Q11** CJ Werleman
- Q12** Glenn Greenwald
- Q13** Cenk Uygur
- Q14** Reza Aslan
- Q15** Nick Cohen
- Q16** Maryam Namazie
- Q17** Stephen Fry
- Q18** Sargon of Akkad
- Q19** Gad Saad
- Q20** Abby Martin
- Q21** Bernie Sanders
- Q22** Jeremy Corbyn
- Q23** George Bush (jr.)
- Q24** Barrack Obama
- Q25** Hillary Clinton
- Q26** Ben Affleck
- Q27** Tommy Robinson
- Q28** Vladimir Putin

All names of individuals mentioned in articles were initially marked and coded on their surname. Individuals that occurred in more than three articles received a unique Q-code identifier that was then retro-actively applied and used in all future mentions of that individual (in many cases individuals were

first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique Q-code). Articles can mention multiple individuals, and thus be assigned multiple Q-codes. Each unique Q-code is, however, only used once per article, with the exception of Q0 (e.g. if an article mentions Trump 5 times, the article will be coded 'Q9' only once). This category was adjusted several times based on emerging patterns. The final current Q-version of this list is based on final results, and supersedes all placeholder (i.e. surname) codes assigned to individuals.

Considered 'users' of the term 'regressive left'

- E0** Other
- E1** Nawaz
- E2** Harris
- E3** Rubin
- E4** Maher
- E5** Dawkins
- E6** Yiannopoulos
- E7** Hirsi Ali
- E8** Sargon of Akkad
- E9** Alt-right
- E10** Stephen Fry
- E11** Nick Cohen
- E12** Matt Teitelbaum
- E13** Gad Saad

In every article where an individual/group is portrayed or quoted as an 'user' of the term 'regressive left' this individual/group was coded on one of the above E-codes (in many cases first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique E-code). The results from this coding category were later compared with the other forms of mentioning of the respective actors, in order to assess whether their depiction as users of the term is representative (and accurate) of their position in the discourse or an isolated occurrence. Articles can mention multiple 'users', and thus be assigned multiple E-codes. Each unique E-code is, however, only used once per article (with the exception of E0).

Which groups are designated as part of (or synonymous) the RL

- F0** Other
- F1** Liberals
- F2** Black Lives Matter (BLM)
- F3** Social Justice Warriors (SJW)
- F4** Feminists
- F5** Pro-Islamist left
- F6** Antifa
- F7** The left
- F8** Progressive left/liberals
- F9** Liberal left/far left liberals
- F10** Multiculturalists
- F11** Apologists
- F12** Post-modern left
- F13** Social liberals
- F14** Liberal apologetics
- F15** Student(s) (activists)
- F16** Far left
- F17** Modern left
- F18** Alt-left

- F19** Thought-police
- F20** Pseudo-liberal/left
- F21** Cultural authoritarians
- F22** Chomskyan left
- F23** White liberals
- F24** Cultural left

In every article where a 'group' is designated as part of (or synonymous to) the 'regressive left' this group/synonym was coded on one of the above F-codes (in many cases first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique F-code). This category of codes proved useful to provide illustrations of synonyms for the 'regressive left', but also have contributed to the identification of topics and themes. Articles can mention multiple groups designated as 'regressive left' or as synonymous to 'regressive left', and thus be assigned multiple F-codes. Each unique F-code is, however, only used once per article (with the exception of F0).

Explicitly mentioned individuals/groups as opposite to RL

- G0** Other
- G1** Alt-right
- G2** Liberal right
- G3** Donald Trump
- G4** New Atheists
- G5** Richard Dawkins
- G6** True liberals/classical liberals
- G7** Dave Rubin
- G8** Genuine liberal left
- G9** Bill Maher
- G10** Milo Yiannopoulos
- G11** Sargon of Akkad
- G12** Maajid Nawaz
- G13** Sam Harris

In every article where an individual/group is portrayed or quoted as opposite to (or opponent of) the 'regressive left' this individual/group was coded on one of the above G-codes (in many cases first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique G-code). The results from this coding category were later compared with the other forms of mentioning of the respective actors, in order to assess whether their depiction as opposite to the 'regressive left' is representative (and accurate) of their position in the discourse or an isolated occurrence. Articles can mention multiple individuals/groups as opposite to 'regressive left', and thus be assigned multiple G-codes. Each unique G-code is, however, only used once per article (with the exception of G0).

Individuals/groups associated with the RL discourse

- H0** Other
- H1** Trump
- H2** Noam Chomsky
- H3** Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- H4** Richard Dawkins
- H5** see Y1
- H6** Gad Saad
- H7** Dave Rubin
- H8** Milo Yiannopoulos
- H9** see Y8

- H10** Stephen Fry
- H11** Christopher Hitchens
- H12** Maryam Namazie
- H13** Tommy Robinson
- H14** Nick Cohen

- Y0** Other
- Y1** New-Atheists
- Y2** Alt-right
- Y3** BLM
- Y4** Democrats
- Y5** Republicans
- Y6** Labour party
- Y7** Conservatives
- Y8** Student Activists/Student campus culture

In every article where an individual/group is associated with the 'regressive left' discourse (actor/group mentioned in direct relation to regressive left with the exclusion of references to these actors/groups as 'user' of the term or 'being regressive left') this individual/group was coded on one of the above H (individuals) or Y-codes (groups). In many cases individuals/groups were first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique H/Y-code. The results from this coding category were later compared with the other forms of mentioning of the respective actors, in order to assess whether their association (direct relation) with the discourse is representative (and accurate) of their position in the discourse or an isolated occurrence. Articles can mention multiple individuals/groups associated with the discourse, and thus be assigned multiple H and Y-codes. Each unique H and Y-code is, however, only used once per article (with the exception of H0 and Y0).

Who (individual) is/are designated as part of (or synonymous) the RL

- I0** Other
- I1** Glenn Greenwald
- I2** CJ Werleman
- I3** Jeremy Corbyn
- I4** Ben Affleck
- I5** Reza Aslan
- I6** Cenk Uygur
- I7** Abby Martin
- I8** Noam Chomsky
- I9** Hillary Clinton
- I10** Bernie Sanders

In every article where a 'individual' is designated as part of (or synonymous to) the 'regressive left' this 'individual actor' was coded on one of the above I-codes (in many cases first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique I-code). The results from this coding category were later compared with the other forms of mentioning of the respective actors, in order to assess whether their depiction as being 'regressive left' is representative (and accurate) of their position in the discourse or an isolated occurrence. Articles can mention multiple actors designated as 'regressive left', and thus be assigned multiple I-codes. Each unique I-code is, however, only used once per article (with the exception of I0).

Platforms

- X0** Other
- X1** Guardian
- X2** Salon
- X3** Twitter
- X4** Facebook
- X5** Youtube
- X6** Breitbart
- X7** Quilliam
- X8** Rubin Report
- X9** Real Time
- X10** Huffington Post
- X11** The Intercept
- X12** The New York Times
- X13** BuzzFeed

All media platforms mentioned in the articles were assigned one of the above X-codes (in many cases first assigned to 'other' and later assigned a unique X-code). The purpose of coding this category was to ease the identification of discourse events and the interpretation of actor positions in the discourse. Platform analysis was initially considered as a core component of the research design, but this idea was later abandoned due to the scope, research aims, and research questions of this thesis. Articles can mention multiple platforms, and thus be assigned multiple X-codes. Each unique X-code is, however, only used once per article (with the exception of X0).

Topics and Themes

Topics

K (K-codes superseded by T-codes)

Possible topics were initially coded through codes K1-K... A preliminary list of coded topics for example included: LGBTQ, BLM, Islam, Islamist, multiculturalism, democracy, liberalism, US Trump campaign/election/presidency, ISIS, Brexit, refugee crisis, US Muslim ban, political correctness, religious violence/terror, and identity politics. The list has been altered throughout the research, and was ultimately 'captured' by codes T0-T8, as depicted and explained below.

- T0** Other
- T1** BLM
- T2** unassigned/expired
- T3** Student Activism/campus culture
- T4** LGBTQ+
- T5** SJW
- T6** Feminists
- T7** Islam/Muslims
- T8** unassigned/expired
- T9** ISIS
- T10** 2016 US presidential election

The coding of topics went through iterative phases, where the bulk of topics in the articles were coded as K, but eventually superseded by a list of relevant and reoccurring codes (minimum of five times), coded 'T'. Additionally, some of the coded ideas/concepts/events listed under 'K' were eventually incorporated in the coding of themes under code 'L' (see below) and thus excluded from the 'topic'-category (e.g. identity politics was later incorporated in 'theme L13'). Each individual article can contain multiple topics; when occurring repeatedly in one article they are however only counted once

for that article. In this research topics constitute self-contained subjects ('talking points') that are discussed in conjuncture with the term 'regressive left'.

Themes

L0 Other

L1 RL shows Apologetic attitude towards Islam(ist)

L2 RL is Fear of racism, remaining silent, not wanting to offend

L3 RL argues Enemy of my enemy is my friend; RL = Means to an End

L4 RL is blinded by culture relativism and multiculturalist ideologies

L5 RL is hostile, insulting (dehumanizing), authoritarian, or repressive towards others (i.e. opponents)

L6 RL is well meaning but naive or misguided, reasoning from the exception

L7 RL disconnects Islamism or religious violence from Islam/Muslims

L8 RL argues that' foreign policy, social inequality, or imperialism are root causes of (violent) extremism

L9 RL is uncritical or rejects data or evidence on societal difficulties involving religion or culture

L10 RL is repressing or hindering free speech

L11 RL is associated with, or identified as "political(y) correct(ness)"

L12 RL is betraying democratic, secular, tolerance, or other 'leftist'/liberal/Enlightenment values

L13 RL is dogmatic about identity politics along racial, religious, cultural lines

L14 Not assigned/expired

L15 RL is a continuation of an earlier discourse (e.g. 'PC') or continuation of similar critiques

L16 RL defames opponents/critics of religion, culture or identity politics as racists or bigots (and variations)

L17 RL is elitist or a niche-group detached from the general public and 'every day' reality

L18 RL argues one must have 'respect' for religion, culture, or identities

L19 In RL there is no space for (reasonable) critical thought (i.e. on religion, culture, or identities)

L20 Not assigned/expired

L21 NOT INCLUDED AS THEME: 'Neutral' observation made: No nuanced distinction between Islamism/Islam

L22 RL is hypocrite or holds double standards

L23 RL is fixated on shielding themselves or others ('victims') from feeling 'offended'

L24 RL 'victimizes' or 'patronizes' racial, religious, cultural or other groups

L25 RL marginalizes members of racial, religious, cultural or other groups critical of 'their' group

L26 RL is consumed by (cultural) self-hate, hate of 'the west' and it's institutions or normative framework

L27 RL is reactionary, caused by opposing (political) groups, individuals, or ideologies

In this research, themes are considered discourse-bound descriptions or explanations pertaining specifically to the 'regressive left'. While some of the themes listed were broadly formulated before commencing with the initial coding phase, almost all themes have been adjusted slightly, or have been expanded upon, during coding in order to incorporate emerging themes. Each individual article can contain multiple themes; when occurring repeatedly in one article they are however only counted once for that article. L21 was initially coded as a theme, but later deemed incompatible with the other themes since it does not capture a perception/reflection on 'regressive left' by the author or quoted individual in an article, but is rather a reflection made by the observer. Instead code L21 was used to enhance the interpretation of the position of Islamism and Islam (and the distinction between the two) in the discourse.

Events

M. Moment of publishing of article: Date/Month/Year (header)

Not coded in Atlas.ti; catalogued in a separate excel 'article list' that was later used to identify events in the 'regressive left' discourse. A rough overview of publications on a quarterly basis is depicted in this thesis in figure 3.

Reference to an event in article

Z0 other

- Z1** Charlie Hebdo attack
- Z2** Paris attack
- Z3** SPLC-list
- Z4** Twitter ban Yiannopoulos
- Z5** Berkeley-protests
- Z6** Real Time episode with Affleck
- Z7** Rubin Report episode with Harris
- Z8** Dawkins tweet
- Z9** Radical published
- Z10** Future of Tolerance published
- Z11** US presidential elections of 2016
- Z12** Muslim Ban US
- Z13** Salon interview with Harris
- Z14** Rubin disagreement with Uygur
- Z15** Real Time episode with Dawkins
- Z16** War in Syria/Rise of ISIS

All mentions of happenings and dates in the articles were originally assigned an unique 'N'-code. This initial list of N-codes was later narrowed down based on prevalence and relevance of the coded events (at least three unique mentions, and deemed relevant for understanding the development of the 'regressive left' discourse) and captured in the list of Z-codes depicted above. Each individual article can contain multiple events; when occurring repeatedly in one article they are however only counted once for that article.

Type of article

- P0** Other
- P1** News article
- P2** Opinion article
- P3** Critical reflection/review/response/discussion article
- P4** Informative/encyclopaedic article
- P5** Satiric/amusement article
- P6** Academic (sourced) article
- P7** Reflection on specific event/interview/publication

Each article was assigned one of the above P-codes based on the type of article. The 'type of article' category of codes has not been presented separately in the thesis, but has been guiding in the interpretation of other codes (e.g. type of usage can be ambiguous in satirical articles).

Appendix IV: List of Figures

Figure 1 Tweet by Maajid Nawaz (on December 31st 2011); first twitter use of 'regressive left' by Nawaz. Retrieved from twitter.com, source: <https://twitter.com/MaajidNawaz/status/153088974175481856>

Figure 2 Tweets by Jamie Palmer (September 9th 2012, and November 5th 2013); first attested use of the #RegressiveLeft hashtag. Retrieved from twitter.com. Modified. Retrieved from twitter.com, sources: <https://twitter.com/j4mi3p/status/244848587085856772> (September 9th 2012) <https://twitter.com/j4mi3p/status/397758839438979072> (November 5th 2013)

Figure 3 Number of articles retrieved where 'regressive left' is mentioned, counted on a quarterly basis for the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 are grouped). Own creation based on the count of articles sorted on date (quarter) of publishing (as catalogued during the collection phase).

Figure 4 Google search trends for keyword 'regressive left' in the period 2012-2017, where 100% is the moment of highest popularity. Source: <https://trends.google.com>. Search popularity for keyword 'Regressive Left' between 01-01-2012 and 31-12-2017 in region 'worldwide'; raw data imported as CSV and later converted to the graph in figure 4.

Figure 5 Relative share of articles where the term 'regressive left' is attributed to Nawaz on a yearly basis for the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). The line graph is based on the share of articles coded on code A1 (see appendix III).

Figure 6 Relative share of type of usage of the term 'regressive left' on a yearly basis for the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). The diagram is based on the relative share of articles coded on codes B1A, B1B, B2A, and B2B for each respective year (see appendix III).

Figure 7 Relative share of contexts in which the term 'regressive left' is used on a yearly basis for the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). The pie charts are based on the relative share of articles coded on codes C1, C2, C3, and C4 for each respective year (see appendix III).

Figure 8 Number of articles where one of the listed actors is mentioned in the period 2012-2017 (minimum of three unique mentions); colour indicates position in the discourse. Horizontal column chart based on code-groups E, G, H, I, and Q. The number of mentions is based on code Q, position of the actor in the discourse is based on codes E, G, H, and I (see appendix III).

Figure 9 Brief introduction to actors. Figure 9 is based on biographical information cited in articles, complemented by personal websites/social media of the respective actors, and Wikipedia biographs.

Figure 10 Relative share of total articles mentioning the top six actors in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped); share calculated (rounded) on a yearly basis. Based on the six most prevalent actors coded with Q-codes (see appendix III).

Figure 11 Relative proportion between key-actors on a yearly basis in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped); shares are rounded. Based on the relative proportion of the six most prevalent actors coded with Q-codes relative to each other (see appendix III). The number of mentions of each of the six actors for a given year was divided by the total number of mentions of all six actors for that same year: resulting in the relative proportion/share between the six actors on a yearly basis. What must be taken into account is that each individual article can contain multiple actors; when occurring repeatedly in one article they are however only counted once for that article.

Figure 12 Relative share of the top six mentioned actors considered ‘regressive left’ in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped); share calculated (rounded) on a yearly basis. Based on the six most prevalent actors coded with I-codes (see appendix III).

Figure 13 Relative share of articles mentioning the alt-right as opposite to the ‘regressive left’ for each year in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). Based on codes E9, G1, Y2 (see appendix III).

Figure 14 Relative share of articles featuring topic ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islam’ for each year in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). Based on code T7 (see appendix III).

Figure 15 Relative share of articles featuring topics for each half year in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). Based on codes T1, T3, T4, T5, and T6 (see appendix III).

Figure 16 Relative share of articles featuring US presidential candidates for each half year in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). Based on codes Q9, Q21, Q25 (see appendix III).

Figure 17 Relative share of articles featuring topic ‘ISIS’ for each half year in the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped). Based on code T9 (see appendix III).

Figure 18 Number of articles (out of 158) featuring one of the listed themes, ranked on prevalence (with corresponding numbering according to prevalence). Based on code-group L, excluding L14, L20, and L21 (see appendix III).

Figure 19 Figure 19 consists of themes that are considered ‘descriptive’, based on the following themes coded: L1, L5, L10, L11, L12, L15, L16, L17, L18, L19, L22, L23, L24, and L25 (see appendix III). The horizontal column chart is plotted on a yearly basis for the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped), and depicts the share of articles per year featuring each of the ‘descriptive’ themes. The numbering in the chart corresponds with the ranking of the theme in the overall prevalence of themes as depicted in figure 18.

Figure 20 Figure 20 consists of themes that are considered ‘explanatory’, based on the following themes coded: L2, L3, L4, L6, L7, L8, L9, L13, L14, and L27 (see appendix III). The horizontal column chart is plotted on a yearly basis for the period 2012-2017 (2012-2014 grouped), and depicts the share of articles per year featuring each of the ‘explanatory’ themes. The numbering in the chart corresponds with the ranking of the theme in the overall prevalence of themes as depicted in figure 18.

Figure 21 Google-search trends for keyword ‘regressive left’ in the period 2012-2017, where 100% is the moment of highest popularity. Source: <https://trends.google.com>. Search popularity for keyword ‘Regressive Left’ between 01-01-2012 and 31-12-2017 in region ‘worldwide’; raw data imported as CSV and later converted to the graph in figure 21.

Figure 22 Combination (overlay) of figures 3 and 4, illustrating the comparison of Google-search popularity of the keyword ‘regressive left’ with the number of articles from 2012-2017 on a quarterly basis (see figure 3 and 4 for details of data).

