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## **Red Scare 2.0: User-Generated Ideology in the Age of Jeremy Corbyn and Social Media**

Christian Fuchs

<369:>

Abstract

This paper asks: How has Jeremy Corbyn been framed in discourses on Twitter in an ideological manner and how have such ideological discourses been challenged? It uses ideology critique as method for the investigation of tweets mentioning Jeremy Corbyn that were collected during the final phase of the Labour Party's 2015 leadership election. The analysis shows how user-generated ideology portrays Jeremy Corbyn by creating discourse topics focused on general scapegoating, the economy, foreign politics, culture and authoritarianism.

**Keywords:** social media, Twitter, Jeremy Corbyn, Labour Party, anti-socialist ideology, Red Scare, redbaiting, socialism

### **1. Introduction**

This paper asks: How has Jeremy Corbyn during the Labour Leadership Election been framed in discourses on Twitter in an ideological manner and how have such ideological discourses been challenged? It uses ideology critique for the investigation of 32,298 tweets mentioning Jeremy Corbyn that were collected in the time period from August 22 until September 13, 2015.

Jeremy Corbyn, Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall were the four candidates for the leadership of the Labour Party after Ed Miliband had stepped down in light of Labour's fruitless attempt to beat the Conservatives in the British 2015 general election. The Labour Party in 2014 changed its electoral process from a system, in which Labour parliamentarians, members and trade unions/affiliated organisations had equal weight to one, in which members and affiliated supporters elect the Labour Party's Leader. Candidates need to be nominated by 15% of Labour's MPs, which meant 35 parliamentarians in 2015. Jeremy Corbyn made <370:> it with 36 nominations only closely to the list of candidates, whereas Burnham achieved 68 nominations, Cooper 59 and Kendall 41. Most of the hustings and rallies with Corbyn were overcrowded, opinion polls predicted his victory, and a movement that especially attracted young people rallied behind him. With more than 550,000 members and supporters, the number of people supporting Labour almost tripled since 2014.

The paper first engages with the concept of ideology that forms the theoretical foundation of the analysis (section 2). It then describes the methodology of Twitter ideology critique adopted in this paper (section 3), sets out some aspects of the history of anti-socialist ideology (section 4), provides an analysis of anti-socialist Twitter ideology in the context of the Jeremy Corbyn leadership campaign (section 5), and

finally draws some conclusions (section 6).

## 2. Theoretical Foundations: Ideology Critique or Ideology Theory?

There are different traditions in ideology critique and theory (Eagleton 1991, Rehmann 2013, Žižek 1994). There is no general agreement among these approaches on how to define ideology. A general distinction is between the line of thought that goes back to Gramsci and the one that goes back to Lukács. It allows us to discern between ideology theory and ideology critique (Fuchs 2015, chapter 3).

Terry Eagleton (1991, chapter 1) maps distinction between general ideology theory and ideology critique clearly by distinguishing six understandings of ideology that range from general meanings on the one end to specific ones on the other: 1) Ideology as the “production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life” (28) (=ideology as culture) (28), 2) ideas and beliefs of “a specific, socially significant group or class” (29) (=ideology as worldview), 3) “the *promotion* and *legitimation* of the interests” of a group “in the face of opposing interests” (29), 4) “the promotion and legitimation of sectoral interests” in the “activities of a dominant social power” (29) (=ideology as dominant worldviews), 5) “ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation” (30), 6) “false or deceptive beliefs [...] arising not from the interests of a dominant class but from the material structure of society as a whole” (30).

Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School have inspired my understanding of ideology (Fuchs 2015, Fuchs 2016a, b). It is therefore close to the fifth and sixth meanings in Eagleton’s classification. By ideology I understand thoughts, practices, ideas, words, concepts, phrases, sentences, texts, belief systems, meanings, representations, artefacts, institutions, systems or combinations thereof that represent and justify one group’s or individual’s power, domination or exploitation of other groups or individuals by misrepresenting, one-dimensionally presenting <371:> or distorting reality in symbolic representations (Fuchs 2015). What is often overlooked is that ideology is not an abstract structure, but that there is ideological labour that produces and reproduces ideologies (Fuchs 2015, chapter 3). Marx speaks of such ideology-producing labour as “the thinkers of the [ruling] class”, its “active, conceptive ideologists”, who based on a division of labour within the ruling class “make the formation of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood” (Marx and Engels 1845, 68).

My definition presupposes moral realism and socialist praxis: It assumes that humans have the capacity to understand how the world really looks like, what the complex causes of societal problems are, and to deconstruct misrepresentations of these causes. And it is based on the grounded judgement that societies structured by domination and exploitation are politically unacceptable, do not accord to general human interests, should be abolished and replaced by a society that guarantees wealth for all and that benefits all. Such a society is commonly called socialism. Eagleton’s fifth and sixth understanding are based on a distinction between socialism and class societies and the judgement that ideologies want to justify class and dominative societies.

## 3. Methodology

This paper uses ideology critique for studying Twitter. As argued in the previous section, we can generally understand ideology as semiotic structures that justify domination. It often reifies domination by describing it as unchangeable, natural, or best possible state of affairs. It either does not discuss alternatives or declares them to be impossible, utopian, undesirable, or having negative impacts. The method used here is certainly related to critical discourse analysis (CDA) that studies how discourses establish, reproduce and change asymmetric power relations (compare the methods discussed in Wodak and Meyer 2009), but it does not consider itself as a strict application of any form of CDA, but rather as a Marxist ideology critique. Social media such as Twitter are still relatively new, which is one of the reasons why also research about ideologies on social media has remained thus far limited (see: Khosravini 2013). The mainstream in social media research is quantitative big data analysis (for a discussion of this dominant paradigm, see Fuchs 2017, chapter 2), an approach that is very different from ideology critique that wants to understand the structure, context and implications of ideologies. The dominant paradigm of social media positivism has also posed limits for critical research.

The approach of ideology critique I advocate for critical social media analysis follows the following steps: <372:>

- 1) Identify ideological macro-topics.
- 2) Search for tweets that represent these macro-topics.
- 3) Analyse for each macro topic the structure of ideology.
- 4) In this search, watch out for additional macro-topics and associated tweets.
- 5) Analyse how online ideology is related to the broader societal context, i.e the relations of the online-semiotic elements to the broader societal context.
- 6) Identify ways how ideology is or can be challenged on Twitter.

The methodology follows a general two-step approach for semiotic, discursive and ideological critique, in which first a general thematic macro-analysis is conducted that is followed by an in-depth analysis (see Krzyżanowski 2010, 81-89). As *first, preliminary and preparatory step*, I tried to identify ideological macro-discourse topics by analysing the news coverage on Corbyn in the major British national newspapers during the final phase of the Labour leadership election (August 23-September 13, 2015). The analysis focused on digital and online versions of the following newspapers: *Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Star, Daily Telegraph, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Sun, The Times*. These are the major national British newspapers. All articles that mentioned Corbyn in their headline were read daily at around 09:00 a.m. BST. 1681 articles mentioning Corbyn were identified. The task was to identify if discourses were present that tried to negatively frame Jeremy Corbyn. If a discourse-topic was present multiple times (in at least three articles), then it was formulated in the form of an ideal-type statement. Overall, the analysis identified four recurrent ideological discourse topics.

Table 1 identifies one economic, two political and one cultural context of the ideological discourse about Jeremy Corbyn. Also asserted negative consequences of a Corbyn leadership were noted if they were recurring at least three times (see table 2). Very frequently it was noted that Corbyn belongs to the “hard-left”, which was considered as the cause of his left-wing policy suggestions (see also table 2).

The connection between table 1 and table 2 is that table 1 specifies how Jeremy Corbyn is characterised in anti-socialist ideology, whereas table 2 outlines the consequences and implications that representatives of anti-socialist ideology suggest to draw based on certain conditions. In the discourse-historical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, see Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 2009), the characterisation of conditions is called in linguistic terms nomination and predication: Specific identities are constructed by (positive or negative) self-presentation and (positive or negative) other-presentation.

Teun van Dijk (2011) has proposed a scheme called the *Ideological Square* for the analysis of ideologies. He argues that there are four common ideological argumentation strategies: <373:>

- To emphasize positive things about Us (=the in-group).
- To emphasize negative things about Them (=the out-group).
- To de-emphasize negative things about Us.
- To de-emphasize positive things about Them.

“The complex meta-strategy of the ideological square tells us that group members will tend to speak or write positively about their own group, and negatively about those out-groups they define as opponents, competitors or enemies” (van Dijk 2011, 397). Reisigl and Wodak (2009) call the discourse strategy of setting up a Us/Them difference “predication”. Predication is the “discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/processes and actions” as “more or less positively or negatively” (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 94).

<374:> Arguments can have certain fallacies, whereas the implications are termed topoi. Topoi are “conclusion rules” that “connect the argument of arguments with the conclusion, the claim. As such, they justify the transition from the argument or arguments to the conclusion” (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 75). In our study, this distinction means that we can distinguish between the ideological characterisations and the implications and conclusions that are drawn and suggested for specific practices. Anti-socialist ideology characterises Corbyn in specific ideological ways and then draws conclusions about what should practically be done against him.

| <b>Dimension</b>   | <b>Ideological discourse topics</b>   |
|--|---|
| Economic ideology:<br>Command economy                                      | “Jeremy Corbyn wants to create a centralised, state-bureaucratic economy. Such policies are backwards-oriented and do not work”.  |
| Political ideology of security: Enemy-loving politics                      | “Jeremy Corbyn is a sympathiser of extremists, dictators, terrorists, racists, Islamists, anti-Semites, and communists”.  |
| Political ideology:<br>Politics of disloyalty                              | “Jeremy Corbyn is disloyal and a rebel; he has defied the whip more than 500 times”.  |
| Cultural ideology:<br>Loony-left hippie-culture, lifestyle and personality | “Jeremy Corbyn is a vegetarian hippie, eco-zealot and clown, who dresses badly, is the worst dressed politician, has no style, hates cars, celebrates immigration and multiculturalism. A guy with such a lifestyle is not a proper politician. He enjoyed a privileged life as child and now with his politics of envy wants to deny others wealth and a good life”. |

**Table 1: Ideological topics in the public discourse about Jeremy Corbyn**

| <b>Conditions and Causes</b>   | <b>Implications</b>   |
|--|---|
| “Jeremy Corbyn is a radical, Marxist, socialist, communist, militant, revolutionary left-wing extremist whose politics are outdated and old-fashioned” | “One should hinder Corbyn from becoming Prime Minister”, “One must stop Jeremy Corbyn’s threat to Britain’s national security”, “Jeremy Corbyn will destroy the Labour Party”, “Jeremy Corbyn will be considered unelectable, which will result in an everlasting Tory rule”, “Jeremy Corbyn will destroy the British economy and society”, “Corbyn’s victory will result in a state of violence and chaos” |

**Table 2: Asserted causes and consequences of Jeremy Corbyn’s politics in ideological Corbyn discourses**

The discourse topics, causes and implications were used as foundation for the Twitter discourse analysis. I did not assume that these are the only possible discourses that can be found in the tweets, but was rather actively searching for additional ideological discourse topics.

The British press is traditionally fairly right-wing. A poll conducted by YouGov in the UK, Denmark, Finland, Germany, France, Norway and Sweden confirms that the British to a larger degree perceive their national newspapers as right-wing than citizens in the other six countries (YouGov 2016). The British press described Jeremy Corbyn for example as “the bearded leftie” (*Sun*, 6/9/15), someone who “can hardly see a terrorist without wanting to kiss their butt” (*Sun*, 6/9/15), “Bennism with a beard” (*Times*, 6/9/15), “left-wing nutter” (*Sun*, 7/9/15), “a danger to national security” (*Times*, 7/9/15), “a gormless Marxist who delights in describing as ‘friends’ every possible enemy of this country.” (*Sun*, 9/9/15), “a vegetarian” who “looks halfdead” (*Sun*, 11/9/15), “Casual Corbyn” (*Daily Mail*, 11/9/15), looking like “a

grandfather popping down to the local garden centre for some extra compost” (*Daily Mail*, 11/9/15), “Jez What Do You Look Like Corbyn” (*Sun*, 12/9/15), “Jezbollah” (*Daily Mirror*, 12/9/15), “Jeremy Cor bin-Laden” (*Times*, 13/9/15), “the left’s Duracell Bunny” (*Times*, 13/9/15), “several times winner of the Worst Dressed MP award” (*Independent*, 4/9/15), “malevolent clown” (*Daily Telegraph*, 1/9/15), “Marxist ideologue” (*Daily Telegraph*, 1/9/15), “Deserter rat Jez” (*The Sun*, 2/9/15), “Labour loon” (*Sun*, 2/9/15), “Loony byn” (*Sun*, 31/8/15), someone having “Barmy surplus” (*Sun*, 3/9/15), “Comrade Corbyn” (*Daily Mail*, 5/9/15), “Hard Left class warrior” (*Daily Mail*, 5/9/15), “Sexpot Trot” (*Daily Mail*, 5/9/15), or “vegetarian, eco-zealot” (*Daily Mail*, 5/9/15).

The *second, main and most time-consuming step* in the research process was the collection and analysis of tweets. I collected data from Twitter with Discovertext during the final phase of the Labour leadership contest. The data gathering was active for 23 days, from August 22 (23:25 BST) until September 13, 2015 (12:35 BST). Corbyn was announced as the winner on September 12 (11:45 BST). Based on the historical examples presented in section 2 and newspaper articles, I identified smear keywords used in anti-socialist discourses. In the data search, I combined the keyword “Corbyn” with such smear words. I collected all tweets during <375:> the search period that satisfied the following logical condition: Corbyn AND (anti-Semite OR anti-Semitic OR chaos OR clown OR commy OR communism OR communist OR loony OR Marx OR Marxist OR pinko OR red OR reds OR socialism OR socialist OR Stalin OR Stalinist OR terrorist OR violent OR violence). These keywords were identified based on smear words used against Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone in the 1980s (Curran, Gaber and Petley 2005; Hollingsworth 1986). The data collection resulted in a total of 32,298 tweets that were exported into a xls-file.

When doing Internet research, it is important to reflect on research ethics. Internet research faces the problem that from an ethical perspective it should not harm users by its analyses. The danger of overdoing Internet research ethics is that it results in a de-facto censorship and ethical prohibition of the critical investigation of ideologies. The British Psychological Society argues that online observation should only take place when and where users “reasonably expect to be observed by strangers” (BPS 2009, 13). It is reasonable to assume that users, who tweet about a political issue such as Jeremy Corbyn during a time of general public attention to Corbyn direct their messages at the public for discussion and therefore also reasonably expect to be observed by strangers such as journalists and researchers. Not revealing the profile names of everyday users, but instead using pseudonyms, seems in this context to therefore be a sufficient ethical measure that I take in this paper.

Table 3 shows the most active and most mentioned users in our dataset. I have anonymised users who use a combination of first and family names as Twitter user names, whereas I indicate the names of general accounts that do not mention specific individuals operating them. 17,954 of the 32,298 tweets (55.6%) were <376:> re-tweets, which indicates that because of its 140-character limit, Twitter is not a medium for discussion, but for sharing information.

| Users with largest no. of tweets | Frequency | Most mentioned users | Frequency |
|----------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| redscarebot                      | 322       | anonymous2 (UKIP     | 723       |

|                                  |     |                |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|----------------|-----|
|                                  |     | supporter)     |     |
| mywoodthorpe                     | 241 | ggreenwald     | 689 |
| ncolewilliams                    | 237 | independent    | 552 |
| houseoftwits                     | 51  | davidschneider | 324 |
| houseoftwitscon                  | 43  | rupertmurdoch  | 323 |
| gcinews                          | 38  | jeremycorbyn   | 311 |
| anotao_news,<br>anotao_nouvelle  | 37  | telegraph      | 284 |
| sunnyherring1                    | 34  | RT_com         | 221 |
| anonymous1<br>(Corbyn-supporter) | 32  | edsbrown       | 215 |
| friedrichhayek                   | 32  | uklabour       | 212 |

**Table 3: Most active and most mentioned users in the Corbyn-dataset**

The most active users were robots (redscarebot, mywoodthorpe), news accounts (ncolewilliams, houseoftwits, houseoftwitscon, anotao\_news, anotao\_nouvelle), right wing lobby-accounts (gcinews, friedrichhayek, sunnyherring1) and a private Corbyn supporter (anonymous1). The most mentioned users (mainly in re-tweets) were a UKIP supporter, accounts of well-known journalists (Glenn Greenwald, the leading journalist in the Snowden-revelations, BBC Newsnight’s Ed Brown), news media accounts (The Independent, The Daily Telegraph, Russia Today, News Corporation’s CEO Rupert Murdoch), and the profiles of comedian David Schneider and politicians (Jeremy Corbyn, Labour Party).

Social media and traditional mass media are not two separate media domains, but are dialectically articulated with each other: Journalists use social media for reaching a broader audience and social media users refer to traditional news media articles. There is intertextuality: Social media texts and traditional news media texts are interconnected. New media dialectically sublimate old media: The continued importance of old media shapes newer media. At the same time, new media shape old media. The ten most mentioned accounts had on average 600 000 followers<sup>i</sup>. The average Twitter user had in 2015 around 200 followers<sup>ii</sup>. The reputation of the mass media, politicians and celebrities allows them to accumulate followers on Twitter and gain high online visibility. Visibility on social media is asymmetrically distributed. In political Twitter discourse, politicians, traditional news media and celebrities have significant influence.

#### **4. Context: Anti-Socialist Ideology**

Anti-socialism is not new, but has accompanied the history of socialist thought and politics. They already existed at the time of Karl Marx: On January 2, 1873, *The Times* published an article in which it portrayed Marx as a totalitarian “autocrat of the [communist] movement”. After Marx’s death, British right-wing media described *Das Kapital* as being “repellent in its cold formalism” and called Marx the “cold and methodical organiser of the International Association of Workers” (*The Morning Post*, March 19, 1883). So anti-socialist ideology here evoked the images of socialism as cold and repellent. *The Times* (January 18, 1919) wrote three <377:> days after Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been assassinated about Luxemburg: “Had power in Germany fallen into her hands, she would have surpassed the reign of terror of the Russian Bolsheviks”. This statement indirectly welcomes her murder.



The so-called Red Scare entailed the public stoking of fears about communism in the United States and attempts to curtail communist activities, especially of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA). There were two phases, one after the October Revolution and one (also known as the “McCarthy era”) in the late 1940s and the 1950s. The Conservative Senator Joseph McCarthy, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and the House Un-American Activities Committee played important roles in the second phase. Suspected members of the CPUSA were prosecuted and jailed for planning to overthrow the US government (Fariello 1995). The trials were often based on mere suspicion (Schrecker 1998).

In the 1980s, right-wing British news media characterised the Labour Party-left and especially the Greater London Council, local London councils, Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn, as the “Loony Left”. The term “Loony Left” “combines two concepts, insanity and left-wing politics, with a subtext that suggests irrational authoritarianism” (Curran, Gaber and Petley 2005, 229; see also Hollingsworth 1986). Also New Labour under Tony Blair took up the discourse of the “old” loony Labour for promoting itself as “new” alternative (Curran, Gaber and Petley 2005, chapter 7). The right-wing press again used the Loony Left-ideology for characterising Ken Livingstone’s London mayoralty in the years 2000-2008. The logical implication of such smear campaigns against those who argue for fairness and equality is the demand for an unfair, unjust, classist, racist, patriarchal society that privileges the rich and powerful. In 2015, *The Sun* characterised Ed Miliband’s father Ralph as Jewish, immigrant Marxist, who hated Britain, in order to try to discredit the son (Stoegner and Wodak 2016). Anti-socialism is an ideology because it tries to ridicule and misrepresent practices and ideas that aim to establish a society that benefits all in order to implement right-wing politics. Anti-socialist ideology has also played a role in the context of Jeremy Corbyn becoming the leader of the Labour Party.

## 5. Analysis

The analysis of the collected tweets showed that five discourse topics could be identified.

<378:>

### 5.1. Anti-Corbyn Hatred: “Jeremy Corbyn is a Lunatic Socialist Pig”

A first category of tweets characterised Jeremy Corbyn negatively in more general terms without drawing conclusions for the economy, politics or culture from such characterisations. Such tweets are pure hatred without any explicitly communicated implications.

RedScareBot is a robot that automatically re-tweets postings that contain keywords such as socialism or communism and inserts short comments. Mywoodthorpe seems to be a robot that re-tweets some of RedScareBot’s postings. RedScareBot says on its Twitter-profile that its name is Robot J. McCarthy. It describes itself the following way: “Joseph McCarthy claimed there were large numbers of Communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers inside the United States federal government and elsewhere”. RedScareBot seems to understand re-tweeting and commenting on left-wing tweets as a form of 21<sup>st</sup> century McCarthyism that uncovers online communism. The robot for

example tweeted:

Muppet brainwashed RT @anonymous #Corbyn: radical socialist or closet conservative? <http://t.co/0fB6Cgy5AN> <http://t.co/VIFTifMRcC> (№1860)

№1860 shows Twitter's intertextuality. It contains links to the Economist article "Jeremy Corbyn: Closet Conservative". Nomination, referencing and predication are discursive strategies for characterising persons or phenomena in specific ways (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 44-56). The cited tweet is a politonym (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 51): It polarises by characterising Corbyn simultaneously as socialist and conservative.

The discourse topos of disloyalty that had been identified in the news coverage could not be found in the Twitter dataset. Twitter users did not at all mention that Corbyn defied the whip more than 500 times. This fact does not seem to be relevant for their opinions of Jeremy Corbyn. **General opinions** presented without arguments formed an important discourse topic in the dataset. One general bias that was frequently encountered in this respect was that Corbyn is a "loony" left-winger:

Corbyn is wholly unelectable (as head of Lab in a UK Gen Election). Always will be. Policies are loony. (№5)

the radical extreme left wing lunacy of Jeremy left wing lunacy left wing loony lefty extreme radical Corbyn (№438)

Jeremy extreme left wing lunacy loony idealist Corbyn (№439)

Who is this marxist spouting idiot? (№1046)

a wet handwringing leftie terrorist supporting anti Semite for Prime Minister Corbyn will Drive Brit off a cliff (№242)

<379:>

have you seen this loony Marxist nutter? (№3373)

Labor party should now be referred to as the New Monster Raving Loony Party as Corbyn is an absolute NUTTER. <http://t.co/meNPXTmWns> (№7319)

He is the epitomy of a socialist nutjob. (№10493)

Corbyn is a radical left wing idiot (№17528)

Corbyn is a left wing socialist scumbag. (№20456)

My concern over #Corbyn is that militant wing of the loony left will start believing it has mandate for civil disobedience #JezWeDid (№25729)

Anthroponyms give specific names to humans. Somatisation is a strategy that constructs anthroponyms that characterise humans in terms of their body. One subtype are somatonyms that make references "in terms of the state of health"

(Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 49). The cited examples are somatonyms that characterise Corbyn as mentally ill. Such characterisations not just concern the mental state as part of the human body, but are also pathologonyms (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 52) that try to pathologise Corbyn. All of these characterisations are also an argument *ad hominem*, i.e. “a verbal attack on the antagonist’s personality and character (of her or his credibility, integrity, honest, expertise, competence and so on) instead of argumentatively trying to refute the antagonist’s arguments” (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 72).

Another ideological strategy found in the dataset was the construction of politonyms (=political characterisations; Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 50) that characterised Corbyn by alarmism (“dangerous”), swearing (“bloody”, “satan”, “screwed”, “fraud”, “bastard”, “fuck”), or biologism (“toxic”, “bloody”, “pig”):

Dangerous communist (№1228)

Bloody pinko (№1287)

Corbyn is no threat to Tories as unelectably toxic extremist socialist peacenik (№1593)

Corbyn is satan (№4927)

Roses are red Violets are blue Corbyn is red Labour are screwed (№12328)

socialist pig (№12741).

Jeremy Corbyn ..... A communist fraud..... hope he goes the way of Trotsky  
#Mexico1941 #NeverForget (№15440)

When will everyone realise that #Corbyn is a communist bastard? He's gonna fuck this country up if he gets in power #Labour (№17405),

<380:> Many of these tweets follow the logic that Corbyn is dangerous, lunatic, a scumbag, an idiot, a bastard, a nutjob, a nutter, Satan, a toxic extremist, a radical, a terrorist, or an anti-Semite because he is left-wing. Some tweets simply presented these descriptions of Corbyn as a matter of fact: “Corbyn is satan”, “Corbyn is an absolute NUTTER”, “the New Monster Raving Loony Party”. Others only foreground that he is left-wing and intensify this assessment with negatively connoted adjectives or nouns such as bloody or pig: “Bloody pinko”, “socialist pig”. Other tweets linguistically combined the characterisation of Corbyn as left-wing with the predication that he is crazy or dangerous: “a wet handwringing leftie terrorist supporting anti Semite”, “the radical extreme left wing lunacy of Jeremy left wing lunacy left wing loony lefty extreme radical Corbyn”, “Jeremy extreme left wing lunacy loony idealist Corbyn”, “marxist spouting idiot”, “Dangerous communist, toxic extremist socialist peacenik”, “loony Marxist nutter”, “a socialist nutjob”, “A communist fraud”, “a communist bastard”, “a radical left wing idiot”, “left wing socialist scumbag”.

Such tweets imply that because Corbyn is left-wing, it follows that he is a terrorist,

anti-Semite, radical, extreme, a loony, an idiot, dangerous, toxic, a fraud, a bastard, and a scumbag. The linguistic strategy of such posts is to combine a series of negative terms with the fact that someone is politically left-wing.

In the examples set out above, right-wing Twitter users try to strengthen their own identity and its representation by emphasizing negative aspects about their enemy, namely the Left symbolized by Jeremy Corbyn. They discursively qualify Corbyn in particular and socialism in general in negative terms by using negative predicates in order to justify right-wing ideology. It is likely that those making such attacks on Corbyn want to imply that being conservative, right-wing, and right-wing extremist is natural, appropriate and the right-thing-to-do, whereas questioning and opposing these ideologies is seen as crazy. Such discursive strategies are ideological because they aim to distort the public's perception of socialism by not characterising its actual contents, but ridiculing, negatively framing and swearing at it.

Some postings went one step further and made statements about the assumed implications of Corbyn's leadership. The argument was that if Britain were ruled by Corbyn, this would result in violence and a breakdown: "civil disobedience", "He's gonna fuck this country up", "Corbyn will Drive Brit off a cliff". A statement comparable to the latter formulation could around the same time also be found in an article written by Tony Blair (2015) in the *Guardian* about Corbyn: "The party is walking eyes shut, arms outstretched, over the cliff's edge to the jagged rocks below".

Other tweets said that with a left-wing leader, the Labour Party would be unelectable and destroy itself: "red Labour are screwed", "unelectable as PM; just look <381:> @Foot, Kinnock, Ed Miliband". Such statements imply that Britons are naturally conservative, despise the idea of a socialist democracy, and love to live in a society with high levels of inequality. They assume that socialism is naturally bad and capitalism naturally good. Single tweets even expressed the wish that Corbyn is killed because he is left-wing: "hope he goes the way of Trotsky #Mexico1941". The Stalinist agent Ramón Mercader assassinated Leon Trotsky on August 20, 1940. Although the tweet indicates the wrong year, it is clear that it refers to Trotsky's assassination and thereby indirectly calls for killing Jeremy Corbyn. Another user linked to the fiction story "Prime Minister Corbyn... and the 1,000 days that destroyed Britain" (*Daily Mail*, Aug 22, 2015) and commented: "Loony leftie, he should be arrested" (№638). Calls for direct violence were not limited to Twitter. The *Independent* reported that a senior British Army general said that the Army "would not allow a prime minister to jeopardise the security of this country and I think people would use whatever means possible, fair or foul to prevent that" (Mortimer 2015).

Some of these tweets were intertextual in nature. One included for example a link to the Daily Express-article "Jeremy Corbyn 'to BLOCK Britain from attacking Islamic State if he becomes Labour leader'" (September 5, 2015). 371 of the dataset's tweets contained links to the press agency Reuters' online article "Karl Marx admirer Corbyn rides socialist wave to lead Britain's Labour Party" (Sep 12, 2015). Most of them only contained a link and the article-title. The headline itself communicates nothing about Corbyn's policies, but foregrounds that he is a Marxist. Similarly the article does not discuss any of Corbyn's policy suggestions in detail, but stresses he is a vegetarian, an admirer of Marx, Chavez, that he is "hard-left", etc. The popularity of this headline on Twitter shows that general, sensationalist statements well suit right-

wing online discourse that is expressed in 140 characters.

The sensationalist right-wing anti-Corbyn Twitter-discourse was not simply accepted, but contested. There were various strategies that Corbyn supporters have used for challenged anti-socialist ideology online. One is that they associated Corbyn with positive general characteristics: “What's weird is I don't find #Corbyn at all ‘radical’ or ‘hard left’. He seems to be about common sense and decency and so very normal/nice” (№422), “he is sensible, clear, knowledgeable & decent” (№606), “In my view he just preaches common sense” (№22591), “Just normal” (№28373). The negative scapegoating of Corbyn is opposed by associating positive terms with him and presenting him as someone who understands everyday people’s concerns and is one of them. A second strategy was to use the strategy of discursive dialectical reversal (see Žižek 2014 and Fuchs 2014 for a discussion of this concept): “Surely extremism is: -Welfare cuts -Bedroom tax -Iraq war -Trident -Zero hours contracts” (№1175), “Iain Duncan Smith schemes to <382:> force one million more on sickness benefits into work. But Jeremy Corbyn is the extremist” (№1620), “Jeremy Corbyn: Saving us from the loony right!” (№3772), “If Corbyn is a communist then you and Cameron are Nazis” (№216).

The argument made in this strategy is that not Corbyn, but the Tories are extremist, radical, violent, hard-right, and dangerous. Along with this argumentative strategy came the argument that the dominant political discourse in Britain had shifted so far to the right that humanism could be branded as left-wing extremism. If right-wing extremism is hegemonic, then everything questioning it can more easily be presented as extremist: “Crazy that somebody as moderate as Corbyn is seen as some kind of radical revolutionary. Is that how far politics has shifted in the UK?” (№756), “The Conservative Party have moved so far to the right that a moderately left wing Labour leader is considered a Trot or Marxist” (№14239), “anyone who shows humanity in this country is instantly a communist” (№14971).

A third strategy was to use satire and humour to ridicule anti-socialist ideology. It is based on the insight that ideologies are often irrational and emotional. They are difficult to challenge by rational arguments. The hashtag #suggestacorbysmear that emerged on Twitter on August 31, 2015, and was used within 24 hours more than 11,000 times (Wilkinson 2015) is an example. It was a satirical reaction to the right-wing smear attacks against Corbyn that could be found online and in right-wing papers such as The Sun, The Daily Mail, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Express and the Times. Instructions how to generate ridiculously sounding <383:> smears circulated on Twitter (see figure 1). #suggestacorbysmear used overemphasis as political strategy: It radicalised the absurdity and irrationality of the Corbyn-smears so that this over-affirmation turned into a critique of right-wing scapegoating. Examples in the analysed dataset included: “Jeremy Corbyn shares the letter 'n' with Stalin and Satan, and the letters 'e' and 'r' with Hitler! #suggestacorbysmear” (№5229), “Jeremy Corbyn was born in 1949. Stalin was alive in 1949. Coincidence? I think not. #suggestacorbysmear” (№5251).

## What's your Jeremy Corbyn smear campaign headline?



### Jeremy Corbyn + the day you were born + the month you were born.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> likes the same flavour crisps as            | 17 <sup>th</sup> gave 20p to                                   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> smiled at                                   | 18 <sup>th</sup> received a leaflet from                       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> stood in front of                           | 19 <sup>th</sup> picked up litter dropped by                   |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> shared a bus with                           | 20 <sup>th</sup> shared the same love for corduroy trousers as |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> had a friend who knew a guy who knew        | 21 <sup>st</sup> used the same reusable shopping bag as        |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> has a cat who looks like                    | 22 <sup>nd</sup> returned a wallet dropped by                  |
| 7 <sup>th</sup> ate a muffin with a face like               | 23 <sup>rd</sup> was born in the same decade as                |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> joked at a party about                      | 24 <sup>th</sup> stopped a childhood friend from bullying      |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> uses the same mobile phone network as       | 25 <sup>th</sup> woke his wife talking in his sleep about      |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> likes the same music as                    | 26 <sup>th</sup> "ironically" retweeted                        |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> used deodorant endorsed by                 | 27 <sup>th</sup> actually is the reincarnation of              |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> wrote an essay quoting                     | 28 <sup>th</sup> momentarily thought about                     |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> fell over a wall belonging to              | 29 <sup>th</sup> is the great grand-cousin (twice removed) of  |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> drew a picture as an infant that resembled | 30 <sup>th</sup> has central heating, just like                |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> has the same blood type as                 | 31 <sup>st</sup> had a facebook friend request from            |
| 16 <sup>th</sup> has a mole in exactly the same place as    |  |

|          |                         |           |                    |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| January  | Stalin's dog            | July      | a holocaust denier |
| February | Robert Mugabe's ex wife | August    | David Icke         |
| March    | Trotsky                 | September | a 9/11 conspirator |
| April    | a statue of Lenin       | October   | the ghost of Marx  |
| May      | Rolf Harris             | November  | North Korea        |
| June     | Tony Benn               | December  | Hiter's cat        |

Figure 1: Instructions for #suggestacorbysmear circulated on Twitter

A fourth strategy was that Corbyn-supporters denounced specific discourses as biased and sensationalist. A large number of viewers complained about the BBC Panorama documentary "Jeremy Corbyn: Labour's Earthquake" (7/9/2015, 20:30), arguing that it violated the BBC's legal commitment to impartiality. Labour MP Diane Abbott argued that the BBC conducted a "hatchet job" (Dathan 2015). Tweets in our dataset criticised BBC Panorama for example the following way (see also figure 2 for a critique that uses the strategy of argumentative dialectical reversal): "Why are BBC 1 trying to portray Jeremy Corbyn as some kind of left wing socialist Nazi without mentioning another of his actual policies??" (№8405), "hardly objective" (№8409), "BBC broadcasts a documentary about the Queen <384:> straight after a Corbyn documentary, which comments on how scary socialism is; coincidence?" (№8418), "WHY DOES THE BBC BETRAY J CORBYN AS A COMMUNIST DICTATOR USING WORDS LIKE: COMRADE, LEFTIE AND CONSTANTLY SUGGESTING HE'S UNELECTABLE." (№31151).

#Panorama cheap smear campaign against Corbyn tonight trying to link him to terrorist group short memory of this



**Figure 2: A Twitter-critique of the BBC Panorama documentary on Corbyn that uses visual dialectical reversals by showing images of Gordon Brown and Tony Blair with Gaddafi, Blair with Assad, and Thatcher with Pinochet.**

## 5.2. Security Policy: “Corbyn is a Friend of Britain’s Enemies”

The **security policy discourse topic that Corbyn loves Britain’s enemies** played a major role in the analysed dataset. Some tweets swear at Corbyn by claiming he loves and supports terrorists:

#Corbyn your a Terrorist loving Cunt. (№1591)

Fuck off Corbyn you terrorist loving twat! (№14612)

Such characterisations are at the same time nominations and predications (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 94): They construct social actors discursively by qualifying them in specific manners. In the security policy discourse, these characterisations are relational: Corbyn is characterised negatively by the claim that he loves terrorists.

Others made a direct link between Marxism and sympathies for Britain’s enemies by combining anti-socialist and nationalist ideology:

Corbyn is Marxist, he hates Britain (№1145)

Corbyn this filthy Marxist enemy of Britain (№9088)

In these examples, the politonym “Marxist” is used for making a specific logical conclusion in the form of the topos of danger and threat (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 77): Being a Marxist is presented as a danger to Britain’s national security.

One tweet by the most re-tweeted user in the dataset added to this combination the claim that Corbyn is pro-immigration. The implication is that Corbyn will open British borders, invite terrorists to the country, and thereby destroy Britain.

RT if you will never vote for the Labour Party led by anti British, pro immigration pro terrorist traitor Corbyn (№20162).

This tweet included an image of Corbyn saying “Share if you will never vote for the Labour Party led by this anti-British traitor”, which increased its effectiveness. It had 482 re-tweets in the dataset. In this tweet, there is a combination of a negative political collectivisation (“anti-British”), a politicised xenonym (political friend of immigrants), and a relational securitisation (friend of terrorists) that is used as logical foundation for the conclusion that one cannot vote for Corbyn. It is argued Corbyn is unelectable by evoking the logic of numbers (“nobody will vote for such a guy”).

<385:> Some tweets discussed implications of Corbyn’s alleged terrorist links, suggesting that he is a national security risk, should be locked up or put on a list of terrorists:

Jeremy Corbyn's #IRA links make him 'national security risk' [+link to Daily Mail article Corbyn's #IRA links make him 'national security risk', Aug 23, 2015] (№163)

@jeremycorbyn is a security risk to this country. (№14758)

It is clear that commie Corbyn is a terrorist and should be locked up as soon as possible! [+link to Daily Telegraph article “Jeremy Corbyn calls death of Osama bin Laden a “tragedy”, Aug 31, 2015] (№4983)

Hope Cameron puts #Corbyn on terrorist watch list (№26059).

These tweets use the relational predication of Corbyn as a friend of Britain’s enemies and of terrorists as foundation of the argument. These are politonyms that combine a nationym (“We Britis”) with a militaronym (“These enemy terrorists want to attack us Brits”) (see Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 50-51). This construction is used for a arguing with the help of the topoi of danger and threat that Corbyn should be jailed, repressed, or (in some versions) killed.

Links in tweets that used the enemy of Britain discourse particularly were to online articles in the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph, two right-wing tabloids that took a leading role in the anti-Corbyn campaign.

Corbyn has frequently stressed that one does not create peace by bombs, but by political solutions that bring together those who oppose each other in peace talks. “To bring about a peace process, you have to talk to people with whom you may profoundly disagree. There’s not gonna be any peace process unless there are talks“ (Channel 4 News, July 13, 2015). So anti-socialist Twitter ideology directed against Corbyn neglects presenting what he actually says about security and how to achieve it, but instead characterises socialists who argue for peace, peace talks and against an



escalating spiral of violence as being themselves violent. Such a negative predication is used for trying to distort the public perception of Corbyn's position on security.

Corbyn supporters questioned this ideological discourse. They for example pointed out that Jews and Israelis defended Corbyn against the claim he was anti-Semitic and his positive relations to the Jewish community (see figure 3):

An 89 year old Jewish friend finds anti-Semitic attacks on #Corbyn ludicrous.  
(№208)

<386:>

Notorious anti-semite Jeremy Corbyn  
pictured here commemorating North London  
synagogue. @jonnybraham



RETWEETS 23 FAVOURITES 16

**Figure 3: An example of how the Corbyn = anti-Semitic friend of terrorists and Britain's enemies was challenged on Twitter**

Also the strategy of the argumentative dialectical reversal was used: Some users made the point that not Corbyn, but his opponents have extremist links:

Tony Blair calls Corbyn a terrorist sympathizer whilst Blair helped create ISIS and is currently supporting terrorist dictators worldwide. (№8299)

Is Corbyn part of an EU grouping that includes documented anti-semitic parties?  
Cameron is (№13)

In an era when Thatcher was calling Mandela a terrorist, Jeremy Corbyn was

protesting against apartheid. (№873)

Young Cameron was on all expenses trips 2 S Africa & Thatcher was calling Nelson Mandela a terrorist. (№699).

<387:> Corbyn supported Mandela when Thatcher branded him a terrorist. Opposed Saddam when your lot were selling him weapons. (№12059).

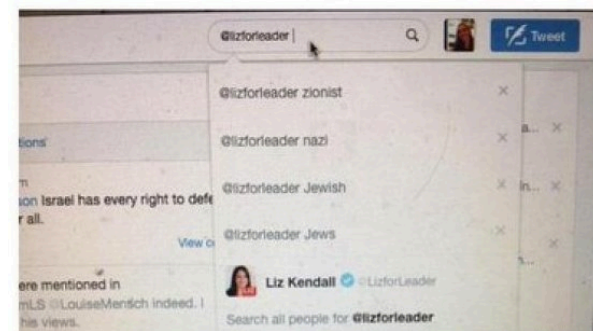
As part of the strategy of discursive dialectical reversal, some users pointed out that it is a perverse right-wing logic that those arguing for peace not bombs are called terrorist allies:

Corbyn suggests peaceful & non-violent solutions and he's a terrorist ally? Is war the only way we communicate? (№11183)

World according to UK right wing media fascists is black/white upside/down. War Criminal #Blair is moderate. #Corbyn is dangerous extremist. (№18502)

In right-wing ideology, pacifists and humanists are branded as terrorists and violent and warlords seen as freedom fighters. War is peace. Peace is war: A truly Orwellian logic. When Corbyn was labelled terrorist-sympathiser by the right-wing media after he called Osama Bin Laden's assassination a tragedy, Glenn Greenwald in a post that was re-tweeted 588 times alluded to the fact that it is a strange reversal the main Nazis criminals were put on trial in Nuremberg, while today those calling for trials are called extremists: "Capturing & giving trials before killing people is now considered extremist & embarrassing? Like at Nuremberg?" (№4375).

<388:> It can also happen that limited skills and capacities result in self-defeating tweets. Former Tory MP and columnist Louise Mensch, who with around 100,000 Twitter followers reaches high attention on this medium, created the hashtag #ToriesForCorbyn in order to encourage Tories to sign up as affiliated supporters to the Labour Party and vote for Corbyn because she believed that thereby the Tory's rule could be strengthened. She tweeted on August 21 that Corbyn's supporters tend to be anti-Semitic:



**Figure 4: Louise Mensch’s anti-Semitism tweet**

She did not realise that Twitter’s autocomplete search suggestions are based on previous searches. Corbyn supporters commented: “HUMILIATED: Louise Mensch Tweets Her Own Twitter Searches, Claims Corbyn Supporters Are Anti-Semitic As a Result <http://t.co/XmXfp67dml> (№440; 46 re-tweets)”.

### **5.3. Economy: “Corbyn Wants a Stalin-Like Command Economy and Hates the Free Market”**

Also the **command economy-discourse** topic could be found on Twitter. Some examples:

Waiting for #Corbyn to come out with a Stalin-esque 5 year plan for the economy, collective farms? #LabourDebate (№6807)

Jeremy Corbyn economics died in USSR. His views on terrorism and dictatorships ended when the Gulags closed. He is Stalin resurrected. (№11261)

#corbyn communist policies if brought in would lead to mass starvation like in China. (№12287)

Hold on to your wallets people....Corbyn is out and about with his socialist loony toons! #bbc #Panorama (№8397)

You're not having any of my money Corbyn, you bloody communist! (№23575)

These tweets use politonyms (communist, friend of terrorists), pathologynyms and somatonyms (loony) as foundation for arguing with the topos of history and the topos of reality (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 79-80) that if elected, Corbyn would shipwreck the British economy. The argument goes that the history of the Soviet Union and of

social- democratic welfare states has shown that communists and socialists mismanage economies. Corbyn would be “one of them” and would therefore have no economic competence.

This economic discourse is based on two related claims: “Corbyn will implement a command economy like Stalin in Russia and Mao in China”. “The result will be starvation, poverty for all, and Gulags”. A third claim is that Corbyn will take away individuals’ hard-earned income and implement tax and spend-policies that <389:> will bankrupt Britain. This claim has historical parallels in Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal ideology. She argued: “Socialist governments traditionally do make a financial mess. They always run out of other people's money” (Thatcher 1976). “It's the Labour Government that have brought us record peace-time taxation. They've got the usual Socialist disease – they've run out of other people's money. And it's the Labour Government that have pushed public spending to record levels. And how've they done it? By borrowing, and borrowing and borrowing” (Thatcher 1975). The Thatcher quote about running out of other people’s money was twice mentioned in our dataset (№18768, №18729). The formulation “running out of other people’s money” assumes that the rich have created their wealth themselves and therefore have a natural right to own it. It also implies that taxation is theft. This possessive-individualist claim overlooks that not capital, but labour creates wealth that it does not own, and that a lot of wealth is inherited.

Corbyn supporters also contested the command economy ideology on Twitter. They used the strategies of positive connotation and dialectical reversal (“Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity plans are sound & the austerity agenda is extremist” [№726], “The Tories Have Done More Damage Through Austerity Than Jeremy Corbyn Ever Could With Socialism” [№26643]). They also stressed that Corbyn’s economic policies stand for social justice (“remember that Britain is the most unequal society in the EU”, [№995], “Congratulations to Corbyn. Unity, equality, social justice” [№20752]). And they referred to authorities by e.g. arguing that economists support Corbyn’s plans (№1, №32, №28927) or characterising Corbyn’s economic strategy as Keynesian (e.g. №350, №28117). Some tweets made intertextual reference to a support letter of 42 economists published in the Observer and to the accompanying front-page headline “Corbyn wins economists' backing for radical plan” (23/8/2015).

#### 5.4. Culture: “Corbyn is a Loony-Left Hippie”

Raymond Williams argues that “culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also and essentially a whole way of life” (Williams 1958, 325). Culture as everyday life is for Williams about people’s ordinary daily routine activities. In the analysed tweets, one could also find postings about Corbyn’s lifestyle. So also the **cultural discourse topic that Corbyn is a loony-left hippie** with an odd lifestyle was present in the dataset. Some users pointed out that Corbyn is bearded, old, rides a bike, is a vegetarian and does not dress appropriately for a party leader:

“Never trust a vegetarian with a beard and terrorist friends” (№17197).

“Corbyn is grumpy old man on bike” (№12090).

<390:> “Can't this Marxist dinosaur afford socks?” (№1811).

“Jeremy Corbyn plots his first days as Labour leader in shorts and t-shirt” (№11671).

These are ad hominem attacks on Corbyn’s look and lifestyle, namely on his style of dressing, going to work, and his eating habits. There is also a somatisation (focus on his beard) and a gerontonym (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 49) that characterises him as old (dinosaur, old man). All of these attacks are personalisations, blunt personal attacks without any political arguments.

Some of these posts linked to newspapers, such as the Daily Mail-article “Corbyn shows some leg” (11/9/2015) that argued that Corbyn is looking “more like a pensioner popping out for a pint of milk than someone who is about to take charge of one of the world's best-known political parties”. Other tweets linked to images of Corbyn’s birth house and tabloid articles about it (e.g. “Jeremy Corbyn, the boy to the manor born”, Daily Telegraph, 22/8/2015) and argued for example: “Welcome to the seven-bedroom home where Jeremy Corbyn set out on his radical path” (№77). The implication expressed is that Corbyn had a privileged upbringing and today wants to deny the rich the same privileges. Others argued that Corbyn’s idea of women-only carriages for safer transport is “crazy, extremist” (№2021) and “Sharia compliant” (№2701), or that Corbyn after his victory went <391:> to “a packed pub”, “singing the Red Flag” (BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg, №18847).

Corbyn supporters contested such personal attacks on his look, lifestyle, manners and family by pointing out that his cultural policy ideas are nuanced. One user posted that Corbyn argued that he “would consult with women” on women-only carriages (№2021). Another strategy was to link to Corbyn’s arts and culture policy strategy document (“Jeremy Corbyn: My radical plan for the arts will make Britain happier”, №5598)). Users pointed out that “The Red Flag is the @UKLabour anthem”. “It's therefore no surprise that people, including #Corbyn, are singing it” (№20967). The comedian David Schneider used sarcasm as strategy (see figure 5). The post was re-tweeted 245 times in the dataset.



**Figure 5: The comedian David Schneider’s response to anti-Corbyn discourse**

### 5.5. Politics: “Jeremy Corbyn just like Stalin and Mao Wants a Totalitarian State”.

A discourse topic that was hardly present in the news media, but could be found on Twitter was the one of **authoritarian and totalitarian politics**: “Jeremy Corbyn just like Stalin and Mao wants a totalitarian state”. Some examples:

Corbyn, Stalin, Mao all ingredients in same pie! (№4277)

Lenin Stalin Mao Kim Corbyn #CultOfPersonality (№6922)

Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot, Hitler and now Corbyn (№21039)

BREAKING NEWS: THE UNITED KINGDOM LITERALLY JUST BECAME A PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP! JEREMY "STALIN II" CORBYN HAS BEEN ELECTED LABOUR LEADER (№23872)

freedom of the press? For how much longer under a communist corbyn (№14247)

CORBYN. communism is back baby! prepare the gulags. (№13357)

The linguistic strategy of these tweets is to mention Corbyn in a row with dictators, to reason that he is like them, and that the result of it will therefore be dictatorship, the end of civil liberties, and mass killings. These tweets use historicising politonyms: Corbyn is characterised as communist and communism is put into the historical context of dictators like Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Kim Il-sung. The hashtag #CultOfPersonality and the references to freedom of the press, proletarian dictatorship and the Gulag use the topos of history in order to imply that given the predicated parallels to historical dictators, it is likely that if Corbyn comes to power, he will implement a totalitarian political system.

<392:> Another user combined the authoritarianism topos with the cultural topos, describing Corbyn as “Stalin dressed as Santa Claus” (№11924). Some users in this context argued that Corbyn’s ideas are totalitarian because communism failed historically: “I refer you to 1970/80s East Europe.” (№17233). “Estimated 85-100 million killed – particularly by starvation by #communism. #corbyn supporters forget history” (№12412). Such tweets imply that given the violent history of Stalinism and Maoism, any left-wing idea is corrupted and must fail.

For questioning that Corbyn is totalitarian, his supporters pointed out that he is a defender of human rights and believes in democracy: “Jeremy Corbyn is a democratic socialist” (№29769), “SHOCK, HORROR! Corbyn would respect international human rights law.” (№2954). Others argued that Corbyn is a decent person: “Corbyn sure seems like a decent fella” (№17315). One strategy was to use an argumentative dialectical reversal to stress that not Corbyn, but the Tories support human rights abuses: “David Cameron is also a supporter of human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia “ (№3614). In reference to the creation of a British surveillance state and GCHQ’s mass surveillance of communications, Glenn Grenwald in a satirical manner also used the argumentative strategy of dialectical reversal (see Žižek 2014 and Fuchs 2014 for a discussion of this concept), implying that the surveillance state is extremist and Corbyn opposes it: “After exposing him for advocating trials, what extremist ideas will UK media next reveal Corbyn favors? Spying warrants?” (№5529). This posting resulted in 136 re-tweets.

## 6. Conclusion

Anti-socialist ideology that rebaits the Left is not new. It already existed at the time of Marx and found one of its culminations in McCarthyism. In Britain, there were previous campaigns against the Labour Left that portrayed politicians such as Tony Benn or Ken Livingstone and their ideas as “loony left”. The argumentative core of anti-socialist ideology has remained the same in the age of social media, but the forms and means of ideological expression and its contestation have changed.

Ideologies are semiotic structures that justify domination. Twitter limits linguistic expression to 140 characters. User-generated ideology such as online rebaiting therefore has to compress ideology. User-generated ideology is the use of digital media for producing and spreading semiotic structures that justify domination by distorting reality, misrepresenting it, or inventing false representations of reality. By making claims, insults and personal attacks without underlying arguments and justifications, users compress ideology on Twitter into 140 characters. A feature of many anti-socialist tweets was that they made claims about <393:> Corbyn without arguments and proof. They never or only in single cases referred to Corbyn’s extended arguments, interviews with him or to his team’s strategy and policy documents.

Anti-socialist ideology often uses the strategy of ridiculing individuals (by for example calling Corbyn and Labour Deputy Leader Tom Watson “the Tom and Jerry show” [№13358]), associating them with violence, dictatorship and terrorism; and describing them by negatively connoted terms (“loony”, “terrorist”, “extremist”, “radical”, “dangerous”, “enemy”) that can easily stir up negative emotions. Twitter’s

speed, ephemerality and brevity can intensify the compression-tendency of ideologies that neglects profound arguments, advances claims without proofs and claims that are inconsistent with reality. One Corbyn-supporter noted this tendency: “Have u noticed that Tories never provide intelligent arguments opposing J Corbyn? They just comment things like ‘LEFT LOONY’ ‘FKN COMMUNIST’” (№23376). During the Labour leadership election, Jeremy Corbyn’s team published 12 policy strategy documents on arts, housing, railways, the economy, small businesses, the environment, education, Britain’s North, young people, gender equality, peace & defence, and mental health. Not a single one of the analysed ideological tweets mentioned or linked to any of these policy documents.

In the analysed dataset, users for example argued that because of being left-wing, Corbyn is loony, an extremist and dangerous (compressed general ideology), is a friend of terrorists, radicals and dictators and thereby supports Britain’s enemies (foreign policy discourse topic), wants to create a state-controlled economy that will result in poverty and deprivation for all (command economy-discourse topic), wants to create a totalitarian state like Stalin or Mao did (authoritarian and totalitarian politics discourse politics), and is an old, badly dressed, vegetarian, bike-riding loony-left hippie with a beard (culture and lifestyle discourse topic). The foreign policy, command economy, and lifestyle-discourse topics were also prominently featured in the right-wing media. User-generated ideology on Twitter in these cases is closely related to ideologies spread by the mass media. It copies the latter’s contents by linking to articles, using certain headlines or biased phrases such as “the Loony Left” and at the same times feeds these media by showing that there is an interest in and positive response to stories that scapegoat the Left. There were also ideological discourse topics in the dataset that were not prominently featured in the mass media. This included especially the assumption that Corbyn stands for authoritarian state politics and wants to create a dictatorship. Import was also general scapegoating that drew biased claims about Corbyn without making further arguments for grounding or justifying them.

Twitter is a new medium, but anti-socialism is an ideology that has a history. Anti-socialism on Twitter is an old ideology expressed in new ways (140 characters) in a new medium. It is a re-contextualisation of ideological discourse. The <394:> content of user-generated ideologies is to a specific degree originally created by users and to a specific degree a reflection of exiting ideologies. Ideological topics and texts created online tend to interact with other texts. In the analysed Twitter dataset this became evident by tweets that refer to mainstream newspaper articles. Ideological tweets especially referred to articles about Corbyn in the Daily Mail, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Express, the Sun and the Times, which are Britain’s key nation-wide right-wing newspapers. The ideological topos that Corbyn is disloyal and defied the whip more than 500 times did not at all play a role on Twitter, but was more important in the mainstream news media. This circumstance shows that ideologies online and offline stand in specific relations of dialectical articulation to each other, but also have relative autonomy. Offline ideologies can reach into online space, online ideologies into offline spaces. But there can also be ideologies that play a more important role in specific mediated spaces than in others.

Basil Bernstein (1990, 11) defines a code as a selection and integration of meanings, which implies that each code evokes certain contexts. A specific instance of a code,



such as the expression of an anti-socialist ideology, stands in a primary context (Basil 1990, 52), the original context of production. Recontextualisation means that a discourse is relocated from one context to another one (Basil 1990; Krzyżanowski 2010, 78; Krzyżanowski 2016, 314).

Section 4 has shown with various examples that socialism has in its history been accompanied by anti-socialist ideology. This can be explained by the fact that socialism challenges class society and that representatives of class orders resist such challenges in various forms, including discursively. Recontextualisation of anti-socialist ideologies involves the embedding of anti-socialism into specific political contexts such as Marx's death, the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, the McCarty era in the USA, Thatcherism in the UK and in the case studied in this paper, the contemporary British political context of Thatcher-inspired neoliberalism and its challenge by Jeremy Corbyn's version of socialism. Recontextualisation also means that anti-socialism can be embedded into various media formats and technologies that have specific affordances that shape the way this ideology is expressed. The analysis in this paper has shown that in the case of Twitter, anti-socialist ideology must be compressed into 140 characters, which often results in ad hominem attacks and the use of slur words without any underlying arguments.

In the case of anti-socialist ideology on Twitter, it is a common strategy that users post links to online articles in right-wing mainstream tabloids. As the URLs are often too long, short tiny URLs tend to be generated and posted. The URL is a reference that connects the Twitter text to the newspaper text. It helps to delocate the primary context and to transfer it into a different context that allows the use of hashtags and the networking with other users via re-tweets and comments. So the transformation that the ideology undergoes when relocated into Twitter is that it is embedded into a more social and networked environment, where anti-socialist ideology is communicated in compressed form at high speed. The necessary compression to 140 characters results in the fact that anti-socialist ideology expressed in sensationalist terms in tabloids is further simplified and even more tabloidised on Twitter so that anti-socialist ideology on Twitter tends to be mere hatred, empty negative claims without any underpinning arguments.

Ideologies are not static and fixed, but change dynamically. Because humans are reflective, active, social beings, they have the capacity to challenge, contest and "see through" ideologies. Social struggle therefore can also take place in the ideological realm. In the analysed dataset, users challenged ideological anti-Corbyn discourse topics in various ways. Users are not the helpless victims of anti-socialist and other ideologies, but can contest, oppose and struggle against ideologies. Online technologies such as Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms not just allow to express, but also to challenge ideologies in linguistic, visual and audio-visual ways.

Strategies that Corbyn-supporters used for challenging anti-Corbyn ideologies on Twitter included the foregrounding of Corbyn's characteristics in positive terms (decent, honest, humanist, gives hope, democrat, defends human rights, cares for everyday people, etc.); using satire, sarcasm, cynicism and humour (e.g. the #suggestacorbynsmeat-hashtag); reference to authorities supporting Corbyn; providing links to what Corbyn really says and thinks and to his real political ideas

and policy documents; the strategy of argumentative dialectical reversal (“Not Corbyn, but the Tories and right-wing media are extremists, radical, fundamentalist, supporters of human rights abuses because they do this and that...”); pointing out anti-socialist ideology’s hypocrisy and contradictions; or spreading information about some of Corbyn’s opponents’ self-defeating silliness (e.g. the example of Louise Mensch’ anti-Semitism tweet). In general the responses to anti-socialist ideology tend to be smart, complex, dialectical, reflective and argumentative, whereas ideologies tend to be rather irrational, one-dimensional, unreflected, and to make claims without proofs and arguments. Anti-socialism’s non-dialecticity aims at what Herbert Marcuse (1964) terms the “liquidation of two-dimensional culture” (60), of dialectical language and of “two-dimensional, dialectical modes of thought” (88).

Social media is a communication space where ideologies are expressed and challenged. Studying user-generated ideologies online therefore allows identifying and analysing the structure of anti-socialist and anti-Corbyn ideologies and how they can best be challenged. Ideologies tend to be irrational, emotional, affective, personalising, scandalising, and to create discursive divisions between in- and out-groups (van Dijk 2011, 397-398; van Dijk 1998, 267). It is in general difficult to challenge them. Jeremy Corbyn argues it is best to ignore smear campaigns. <396:> Often it may indeed be good to not immediately react to ideological scapegoating, but to retreat and not start a discursive offensive. Generally neglecting to react to and contest ideology can however also be a disadvantage because discourses can have real impact on how citizens judge and relate to politicians, how they vote, etc. The question and difficulty is how to respond in a smart tactical manner. The analysis shows that promising strategies for Jeremy Corbyn’s team could be to use satire and humour, use the strategy of argumentative dialectical reversals for responding to ideological attacks, and to point out the contradictions and limits of ideological claims. Left-wing social media users have developed smart, complex, dialectical strategies of how to react to ideological smear campaigns. Studying counter-discourses to anti-socialist ideology can inform political campaigns at a time when redbaiting is again omnipresent in politics. There is no guarantee that attempted counter-campaigns can be successful because the opponents are powerful. The only thing that remains is to attempt to develop intelligent forms of struggle that challenge anti-socialism.

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<sup>i</sup> The numbers of followers for the ten accounts were accessed on September 27, 2015, 18:21 BST.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2015/01/twitter-marketing-stats-and-facts-you-should-know.html>, accessed on September 27, 2015.