

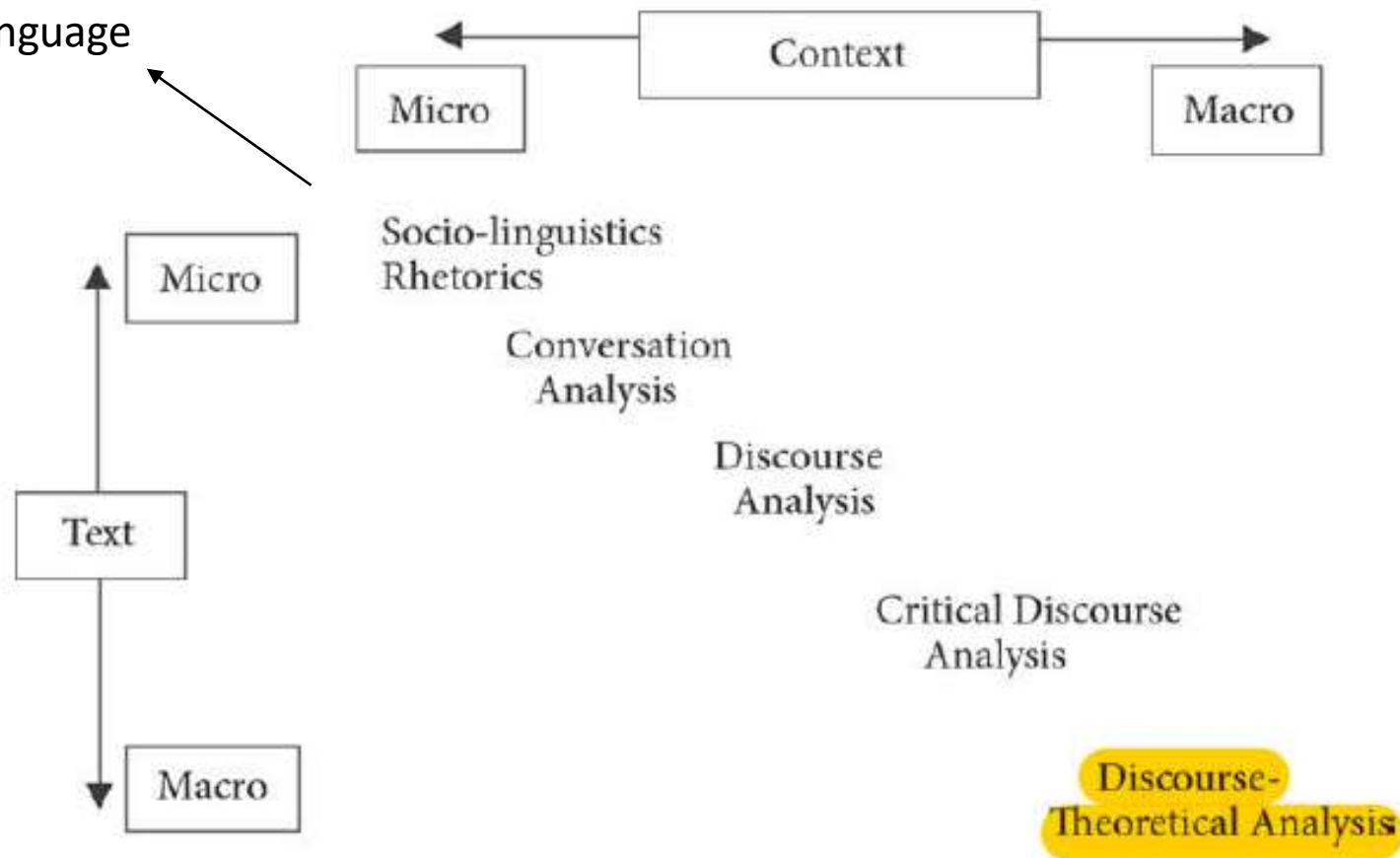
The role of culture and tradition in the shift towards illiberal democracy: The counter-hegemonic challenge of Polish neo-traditionalism.



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Discourse as language



Discourse as meaning

Figure 1. Approaches to discourse.
Source: Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 277.

Research Outline

- **Case study:** The unit of analysis of the research is the neo-traditionalist discourse spatially bounded in today's Poland
- **Retroductive mode of reasoning:** 1) Problematization (Explanatory hypothesis) 2) Retroductive explanation and theory construction 3) Intervention and persuasion. (Glynos and Howarth, 2007)
- **Hypothesis:** as opposed to a relativization of values that questioned the traditional world view of the conservative segment of Polish society and questioned existing meanings (phase of **disruption**), the turn toward illiberalism is explained as a **counter-reaction** against liberal values by (re-)producing a reactionary neo-traditionalist discourse (phase of **production**). This neo-traditionalist discourse is based on cultural illiberalism and traditional conservatism.
- **Objective:** to provide an explanation (critical rather than causal) of the 'illiberal anomaly' in Poland in terms of hegemony.
- **Expected Results:** the research will show **how** the shift to the illiberal right in Poland is expressed through the articulation of a neo-traditionalist hegemonic project that aims at redefining the core concepts of liberalism
- **Research Question:** How has the Polish neo-traditionalist discourse been articulated in order to put forward the counter-hegemonic project?

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Theoretical Framework

Antonio Gramsci and Ernesto Laclau: the Concept of Hegemony

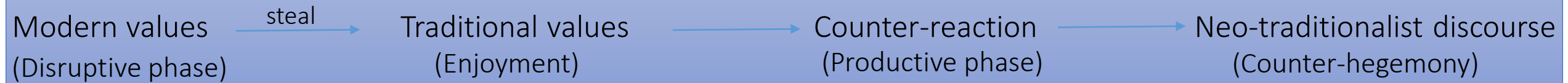
- Political power + Cultural power --- Domination + Leadership
- Organic intellectuals or *discourse makers*
- The twofold role of crisis: disruption and production
- Construction of hegemony: passive revolution (logic of difference) and expansive hegemony (logic of equivalence)
- The ultimate goal of a hegemonic project: (an impossible) unity → ‘to dominate or structure a field of meaning, thus fixing the identities of objects and practices in a particular way’ (Howarth, 2000: 102).
- Antagonism, *the real*, and empty signifiers



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Disruptive phase of the crisis → Threat to identities and theft of enjoyment

The real as the lack of *jouissance* (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2004) and the impossibility of society (Laclau 1990)

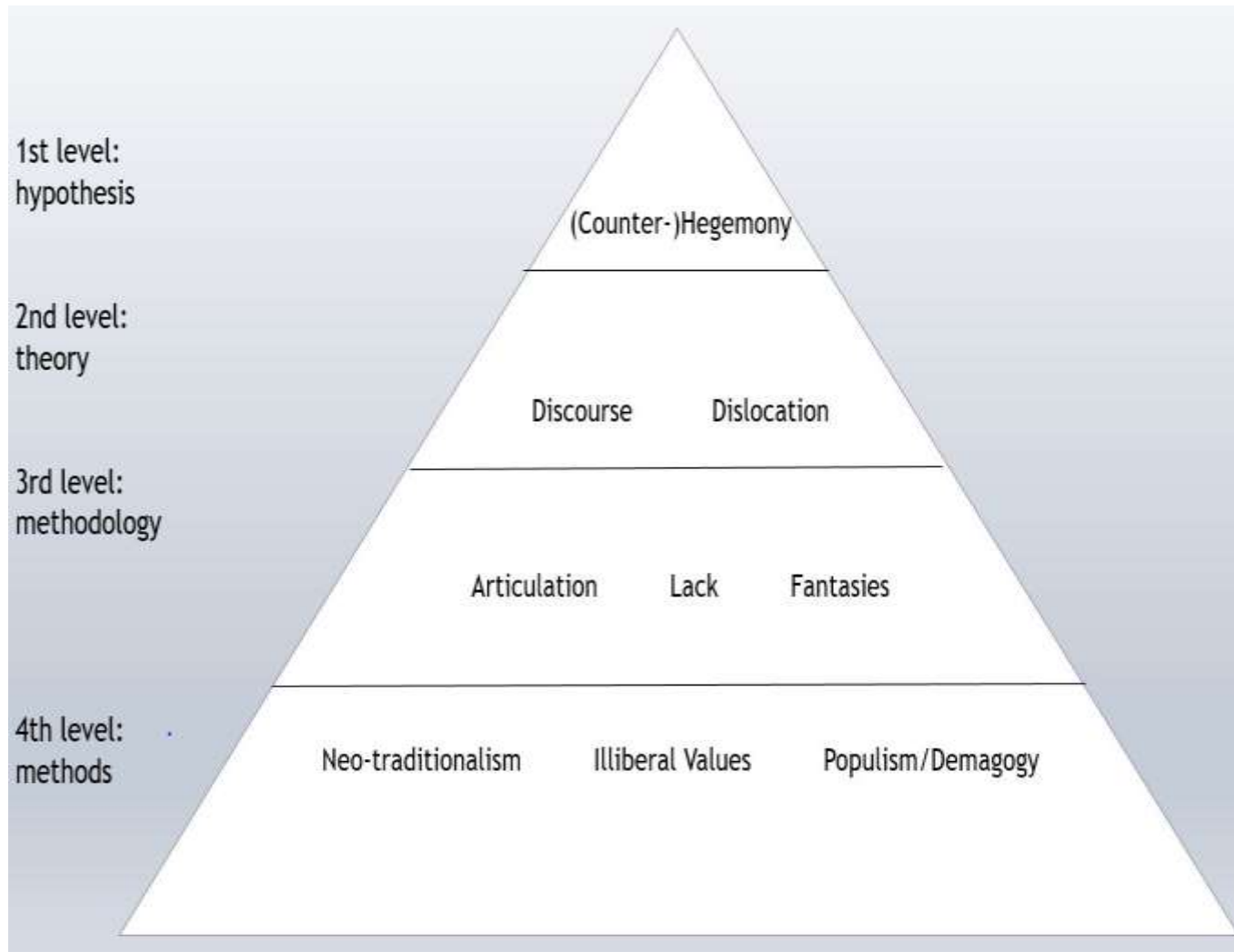


Productive phase → Foundation of identities

The aspiration to that fullness or wholeness does not, however, simply disappear; it is transferred to partial objects which are the objects of the drives. In political terms, that is exactly what I have called a hegemonic relation: a certain particularity which assumes the role of an impossible universality (Laclau 2005: 115).



How to reconstruct the neo-traditionalist discourse?



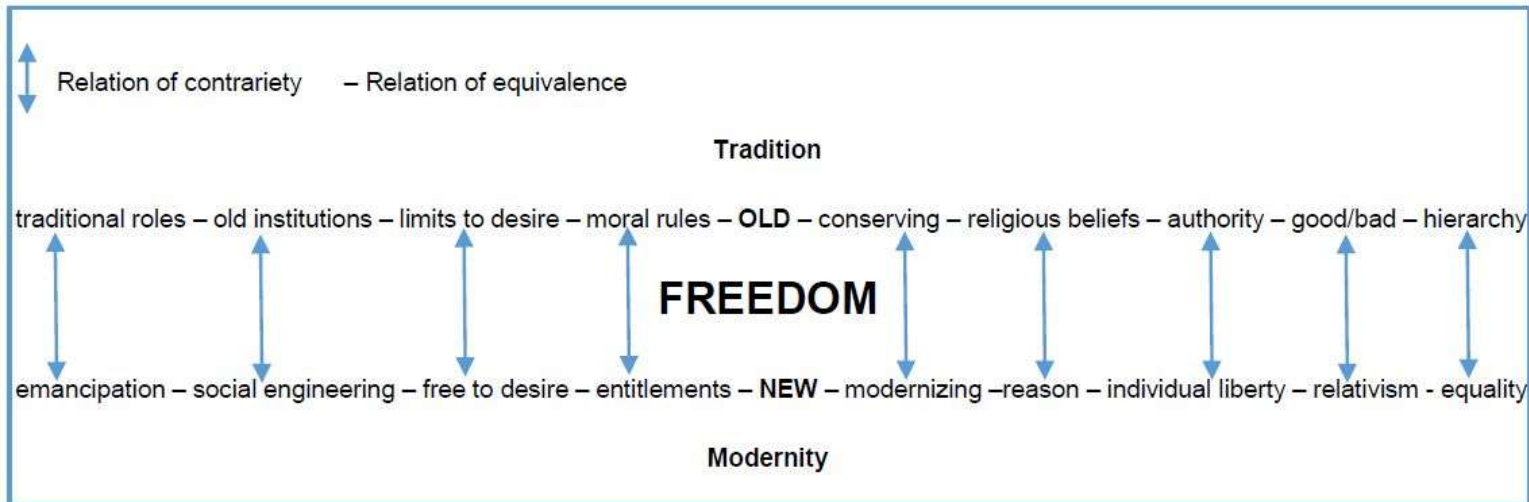
*Everything—in both communism and liberal democracy—should be **modern**: thinking, family, school, literature, and philosophy. If a thing, a quality, an attitude, an idea is not modern, it should be modernized or will end up in the dustbin of history. [...] By becoming a member of a communist and liberal-democratic society, **man rejects a vast share of loyalties and commitments** that until not long ago shackled him, in particular those that were imposed on him through the tutelage of **religion, social morality, and tradition** (Legutko, 2016: 14)*

External concepts: liberal democracy, traditionalism

Internal concepts: articulations of equivalence and contrariety, the blocking Other, hegemony

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The fight for freedom



*[LGBT ideology] must be rejected. If we want to live much better in 5-10 years, living in freedom and not being subject to what is happening in the West, where freedom is liquidated, where people are punished for saying what they think, it should not be allowed to come to our country. Poland must be an island of freedom. And **Polish freedom is the right to have our sacred values respected** (Kaczyński at the family pic-nic in Stalowa Wola, 2019a).*

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Antagonism: 'the establishment' is liberalism

"[Post-communist liberalism was] socially, economically, and morally harmful. It damaged the foundations of morality, the foundations of relationships between people, the binder of society, that is empathy, the ability to empathize with the situation of others. This was consistently rejected in the name of principles that were part of this [social] Darwinism" (Kaczyński at PiS Convention in Katowice, 2019b).

"It is known that some of those who would like to destroy the family, destroy the national tradition, who would want a completely new society, as the communists once wanted, they will not support us. There is such a group in Poland. Of course, we will never be supported by those who believe in such extreme, liberal ideas, who believe that if they give anything away to others, it is something terrible that they cannot experience - they will not support us either. But the vast majority of ordinary Poles must finally realize that the path we have chosen is in their obvious interest, in the obvious interest of the crushing majority of society" (Kaczyński at PiS Convention in Bydgoszcz, 2019c).



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Theft of enjoyment

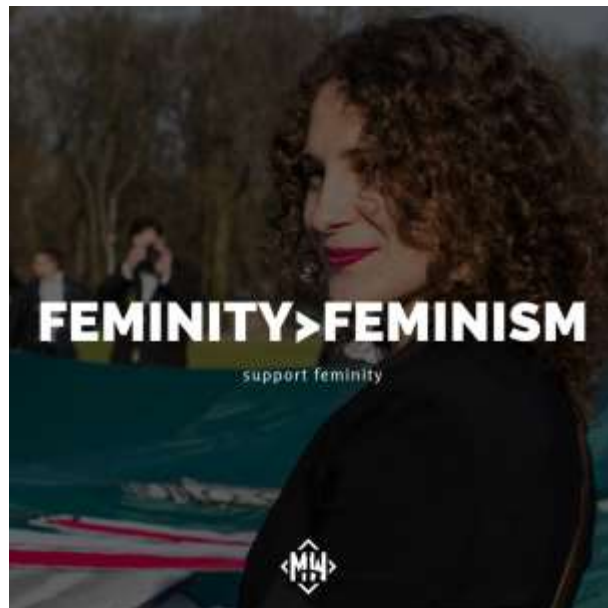
*There are some in our country who want to encroach into our families, schools, kindergartens, into our lives; who want to **steal** our culture, **freedom**, rights; they attack **our sacred values**, they attack the Church. They want what is normal for us to become contested (Kaczyński, 2019a).*



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The perverse way of enjoying of the Other

Women, homosexuals, lesbians, polygamists, advocates of sexual communes all wanted to have their claims recognized and to contribute to the making of a new society. Sex became both the weapon to destroy the old order and the instrument to forge a new one (Legutko, 2016: 103).



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Collection of data

Sample of *discourse makers*:

- Politicians
- Members of academia, think tank and Journalists
- Grassroot political movements

Data gathering (triangulation)

- Discourse-theoretical analysis of existing texts (broadly speaking)
 - 1) Speeches of Jarosław Kaczyński
 - 2) Texts (books, newspaper and magazine articles, social media posts, speeches or declaration by secondary actors)
- Semi-structured elite interviews of «organic intellectuals»
- Direct observation of «neo-traditionalist» events

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Thank you