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# The Discursive Construction of a New Reality in Olaf Scholz's Zeitenwende Speech

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## **The Discursive Construction of a New Reality in Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* Speech / A construção discursiva de uma nova realidade no discurso *Zeitenwende* de Olaf Scholz**

Mario Bisiada\*

### ABSTRACT

This article applies Bakhtinian dialogism and the concept of centripetal-centrifugal struggle to critical discourse studies to analyse how powerful and marginalised discourses are brought into competition in political language to justify paradigm changes. I analyse German chancellor Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* ('watershed') speech, which he gave as a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, announcing a radical armament programme and change in foreign policy, a paradigm shift that had previously been unthinkable in German politics. Based on a qualitative analysis using the Appraisal Theory strategies Attitude and Engagement, I identify how Scholz aligns himself with particular powerful discourses, centring some powerful ones and marginalising others, constructing an existential threat for Germany, the so-called watershed, a new situation which casts his policies of German armament as without alternative. The paper demonstrates the strength of the analysis of dialogically contractive and expansive strategies in critical discourse studies.

KEYWORDS: Dialogism; political discourse; discursive struggle; power; dialogic contraction

### RESUMO

*Este artigo aplica o dialogismo bakhtiniano e o conceito de luta centrípeta-centrífuga a estudos de discurso crítico para analisar o quão poderosos e marginalizados discursos são trazidos à concorrência na linguagem política para justificar mudanças de paradigma. Analiso o discurso *Zeitenwende* ("início de uma era") do chanceler alemão Olaf Scholz, que ele deu como resposta à invasão russa da Ucrânia, anunciando um programa radical de armamento e uma mudança na política externa, uma mudança de paradigma que antes era impensável na política alemã. Com base em uma análise qualitativa utilizando as estratégias da Teoria da Avaliação Atitude e Engajamento, identifiquei como Scholz se alinha a discursos particulares e poderosos, centrado em alguns poderosos e marginalizando outros, construindo uma ameaça existencial para a Alemanha, o chamado início de uma era, uma nova situação que lança suas políticas de armamento alemão como sem alternativa. O artigo demonstra a força da análise de estratégias dialogicamente contrativas e expansivas em estudos de discurso crítico.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dialogismo; discurso político; luta discursiva; poder; contração dialógica*

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## Introduction

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, top German politicians have coincided rhetorically in announcing that the Russians have forced “us” into a “*Zeitenwende*” (‘dawn of a new era’), a “watershed”, a “new era” and a “new reality”. “With his attack on Ukraine on Thursday, President Putin has created a new reality”, said German chancellor Olaf Scholz in his policy statement on 27 February 2022. “Russia’s war marks the dawn of a new era. It’s a watershed moment. Yesterday’s certainties are gone. Today, we face a new reality that none of us chose. It is a reality that President Putin has forced upon us”, said German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock at her speech at the United Nations. It is notable that the word *truce* did not occur at all in these speeches. Instead of demanding de-escalation and dialogue, Scholz announced an armament plan that would make Germany the world’s third largest spender on defence. While Germany was never the pacifist country that self-perception myths had entertained (DALGAARD-NIELSEN, 2005; RATHBUN, 2006), Scholz’s decision still means a paradigm shift in German military culture.

The terms *Zeitenwende*, *watershed*, *new reality* and *new era* all imply the absence of agency. They do not mean that *we see* things differently now for some reason, as, for instance, the term *paradigm shift* that I used above would, but they sustain that things just are different now, that we cannot but adapt to new circumstances. The German discourse on the Russian invasion of Ukraine thus seems to construct a perspective that explicitly relegates “us” to the passive observer’s perspective, to those who now have to react to the forceful loss of “yesterday’s certainties”. Such attempts to discursively exclude the Self from any responsibility for actions of an Other that it has been in dialogue with raise doubts, particularly from a Bakhtinian dialogic perspective where “the position of the observer is fundamental” (HOLQUIST, 2002, p.19). One goal of critical discourse studies is to explain how powerful discourses reassert themselves and how politicians use them to legitimate chosen actions as allegedly without alternative. Bakhtin’s dialogic perspective and the notion of centripetal and centrifugal discourses are helpful analytical tools to understand such competition of discourses in the construction of reality to support political aims.

In this article, I analyse the German federal chancellor Olaf Scholz's policy statement held in the German parliament on 27 February 2022, investigating which major discourses compete in the speech and how Scholz uses them to legitimise his policies. Specifically, I analyse, first, the attitude, that is, the emotional reactions and judgements transmitted in the speech and how the speaker aligns himself to particular discourses, from an appraisal theoretic perspective (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005). Second, I analyse the speaker's engagement, that is, how different discourses are brought into competition, seen as centripetal-centrifugal struggle through the lens of Bakhtinian dialogism, and how Scholz thus justifies his policies. To begin, I describe the genre of policy statements and its communicative functions.

## **1 Theoretical framework**

### **1.1 Communicative functions of a *Regierungserklärung***

A *Regierungserklärung*, which I translate here as 'policy statement', is usually given at the beginning of a chancellor's mandate as an inaugural speech. However, under German law, chancellors can give one at any time and they are generally followed by a debate (KORTE, 2002, p.452–453; STÜWE 2005, p.21). The term consists of the words *Regierung* ('government') and *Erklärung*, which can mean both explanation and declaration. As such, it is ambiguous by both referring to an explanation of government policy in the sense of an interpretation and justification of it in terms of the situation, and also to an official declaration and directive clarification of a given situation (PÖRKSEN, 2003, p.40).

Policy statements are instruments of leadership of German chancellors and their increasing use over time is part of a mediatised democracy: as a public presentation, such policy statements receive particular attention by the media and thus serve as a visualised personification of government policy (KORTE, 2002, p.453). As they are an instrument of government that is both publicly effective and inwardly coordinative, policy statements are usually based on a range of sources, scientists, surveys, contemporaries or a range of other voices whose composition are a sign of the personal style of the chancellor (KORTE, 2002, p.460–461). Studies of this genre in German

political discourse studies have concentrated on the inaugural policy statements given by chancellors at the beginning of their mandate (BARNICKEL, 2020; BUSCH & KAUPERT, 2018; STÜWE, 2005), but studies of strategies of legitimisation have been conducted regularly (see, for instance, REYES, 2011).

Policy statements have an immediate and a historical function. Immediately, a policy statement may be used as a special expression of the chancellor's "*Richtlinienkompetenz*" ('policy-making power') (STÜWE, 2005, p.26–43), announcing guidelines and programmes that are to discipline the entire coalition government (Korte 2002, p.456). Historically, policy statements are also conceived as documents in which the problematisation (or not) of particular topics and the language used become primary sources for the interpretation of the chancellor's historical role (KORTE, 2002, p.457).

In Bakhtinian dialogism, where speakers enter into a dialogical relationship with "the alien horizon of the understanding receiver" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.282) constructing their utterances against the listener's background, the "listener (real or imagined) shapes the utterance from the outset" (MORSON & EMERSON, 1990, p.129). Therefore, the discursive power enacted in policy statements should be analysed not only regarding the immediate function and addressees, who are brought into line and whose potential reactions are anticipated, but also regarding the historical function, that is, how it speaks to perceived future addressees that may evaluate the role of the speaking chancellor in the discursive construction of historical reality in the future. For this purpose, a dialogic perspective is well-suited, as I argue in the next section.

## 1.2 Dialogism

Dialogism is a central concept in Bakhtin's work, and he used the term in various senses (MORSON & EMERSON, 1990, p.130–131). In general, he considers all utterances dialogic in the sense that

the living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.276)

Utterances are shaped both by past uses of particular discourses as well as by envisaged future uses (VOLOSHINOV, 1973 [1929], p.86), so that “all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates” (TODOROV, 1984, p.x). Discourses that relate to the anticipation of a response are called the not-yet-spoken and discourses that consist of previous utterances about the topic are called the already-spoken (MORSON & EMERSON, 1990, p.137). A discourse is here understood as “a system of meaning—a set of propositions that cohere around a given object of meaning” (BAXTER, 2011, p.2). In any utterance, discourses are in competition “when the meanings they advance negate one another in some way” (BAXTER, 2011, p.2).

This understanding of dialogue can be harnessed for discourse studies. Appraisal Theory uses a dialogic perspective to analyse how language “locate[s] the writer/speaker with respect to the value positions being referenced in the text and with respect to, in Bakhtin’s terms, the backdrop of alternative opinions, points of view and value judgements against which all texts operate” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.94). The specific advantage of a Bakhtinian dialogic perspective is that it lets us recognise the status of “bare assertions”, or monoglossic talk, which does not overtly reference other voices, recognise alternative positions or put competing discourses into contact (BAXTER, 2011, p.127; MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.99). Monoglossic talk appears as “a compact and indivisible mass [...] fused with its authority”, assuming taken-for-granted status so that one can either wholly accept or reject it.

Within the category of heteroglossic expressions, on the other hand, an utterance may be more or less dialogic, depending on the degree to which we either make present other voices in our utterance and reflect on them or whether we hide them (MORSON & EMERSON, 1990, p.146). Utterances can thus be dialogically expansive or contractive. The former type opens up dialogic space for alternative positions and voices whereas the latter type closes down the dialogic space by challenging, fending off or restricting the scope of dialogic alternatives (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.102–103), which we refer to as discursive struggle.

To analyse how power is exercised through discursive struggle, Baxter (2011) adopts Bakhtin’s concept of centripetal (centralising) and centrifugal (decentralising) forces (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.270–272). Marginalised discourses are “easily forgotten or

silenced relative to what is centred. The centre is easily legitimated as normative, typical, and natural” and serves as a benchmark against which all else is compared, a position of privilege and, thus, power compared to the centrifugal (BAXTER, 2011, p.123). I understand power in a Foucauldian sense as something that needs to be explained, not assumed as a condition of society (PENNYCOOK, 2021). Power thus “resides in the systems of meaning – the discourses – through which social reality as we know it is constructed” (BAXTER, 2011, p.124), not in individuals or social groups. Centripetal discourses are more powerful than centrifugal ones because their systems of meaning are presented as social reality (BAXTER, 2011, p.124). By means of discourses, we exercise power to use language to produce reality rather than just reflect it, producing “domains of objects and rituals of truth” (FOUCAULT, 1979, p.194). In Bakhtinian terms, “social life and historical becoming” create within languages “a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.288), so that “we only have access to competing accounts of the truth” (PENNYCOOK, 2021, p.112). A Bakhtinian understanding of languages as worldviews and discursive struggle thus entails the position that meaning-making always takes place within relations of power and that there is no truth outside of power.

This understanding is a considerable strength over other approaches to discourse studies. Too many critical discourse approaches hold a view of ideology whereby there is some “ideal *order* that is distorted, disordered, or perverted by the operations of power” in the form of corrupting ideologies, and which assumes that Critical Discourse Analysis can “discern truth from falsehood with discourse analytic tools” (PENNYCOOK, 2021, p.106). Such Structuralist or neo-Marxist approaches “where ideology (falsehood) is infused with power (a result of dominant views of the world) and truth sits outside such power (the revelations of the analyst)” (PENNYCOOK, 2021, p.112) can lead to “a patronising principle that people are ideological dupes from whose eyes the clear-sighted analyst can remove the blindfolds of ideological obfuscation” (PENNYCOOK, 2021, p.107).

In the current context, such thinking is behind the EU decision to ban Russian state-owned media, in President Ursula von der Leyen’s words, the “Kremlin’s media machine”, to stop their “toxic and harmful disinformation” from “spread[ing] their lies

to justify Putin’s war and to sow division in our Union” (VON DER LEYEN, 2022). “We” assume that “our” media system is free and balanced, while that of the Other is bound by ideology and full of propaganda. As we are so used to our system, we lose sight of “what the effects of being immersed in one-sided, intense and highly emotionalised war propaganda are—effects on your thinking, your reasoning, your willingness to endorse claims or support policies, your comfort with having dissent either banished or inherently legitimised” (GREENWALD, 2022). It is only possible to speak of a “new reality” from within a posited ideal (Western) order distorted by non-Western power and corrupting ideologies. From a non-Western perspective, “the invasion of Ukraine does not mark some astonishing, unprecedented departure from an ‘order’ that existed mostly in the minds of Western observers rather than the real world” (BACEVICH, 2022). This is because international law has never been a rigid concept, but “only exists to the extent to which the nations of the world are willing and able to enforce it” and the US’s narrative control power means that “international law is only ever enforced with the approval of that empire” (C. JOHNSTONE, 2022). From the perspective of discursive struggle, then, NATO discourse is hegemonic and thus centripetal; the US “dictates the military, political and diplomatic framework of international relations. Other countries, including potential rivals like Russia and China, have to operate within that framework” (COOK, 2022), which often makes their actions visible as actions or “escalations”, while NATO activity is generally constructed as a (necessary) reaction. This hegemony allows NATO to shape discourses by defining what a *preventive war* is, or by euphemisms such as *humanitarian war* and *collateral damage*. To focus on the current conflict, I will now proceed to give a short account of the context.

### **1.3 The Ukraine crisis context**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine can be seen as the tragic culmination of a crisis that has been unfolding at least since the Maidan protests in 2014, where democratic protest against electoral fraud ultimately became dominated by far right groups (ISHCHENKO, 2016) and was “inextricably bound up with geopolitical contestation”, as US politicians hurried to Ukraine to voice “US support for Ukraine’s NATO and

Euro-Atlantic aspirations” (SAKWA, 2016, p.52–53). The view that “Ukraine’s existence transforms Russian power by reducing it significantly” (BRZEZINSKI, 1996, p.4) has informed US geopolitical strategy and shows the wider importance the current conflict has for European and even global peace (GARDNER, 2016). The Paris Charter of 1990, which was based on the Helsinki Final Act and marked the end of the Cold War, presented an opportunity for lasting peace and unity in Europe but was unsuccessful, largely because the signatory states’ distinct cultures and traditions of security did not approximate each other as agreed in the Charter (MEYER, VON BREDOW & EVERS, 2015). The EU, mainly driven by Swedish and Polish foreign ministers Carl Bildt and Radek Sikorski, designed the Eastern Partnership to take in former Soviet states other than Russia: “Instead of finding ways to transcend the deepening lines of division in the continent”, Bildt and Sikorski institutionalised them in order to “engineer Ukraine’s separation from Russia”, which “rendered the EU as much of a threat in Russian perceptions as NATO” (SAKWA, 2016, p.39–41). All the implications cannot hope to be accurately and fairly represented in an article, but a wealth of relevant literature exists (D. JOHNSTONE, 2022; PETRO, 2017; POCH-DE-FELIU, 2003, p.357–374).

The NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, a prime reason for the Russian invasion of Ukraine (KLARE, 2022), angered Russia and represents broken promises by Western leaders, as documental evidence shows (POCH-DE-FELIU, 2022; SAROTTE, 2021; SAVRANSKAYA & BLANTON, 2016). Summarising their work on declassified US, Soviet, German, British and French documents, Savranskaya and Blanton state:

The documents show that multiple national leaders were considering and rejecting Central and Eastern European membership in NATO as of early 1990 and through 1991, that discussions of NATO in the context of German unification negotiations in 1990 were not at all narrowly limited to the status of East German territory, and that subsequent Soviet and Russian complaints about being misled about NATO expansion were founded in written contemporaneous memcons and telcons at the highest levels. (SAVRANSKAYA & BLANTON, 2017)

Whether the purpose of NATO expansion is seen as an attempt to prevent the formation of a Eurasian alliance (KLARE, 2022), a “justifiable response to the [...] entreaties of new Central and Eastern European democracies” (SAROTTE, 2021) that contributed to the frustration of East-West cooperation, or “the most fateful error in the

entire post-Cold War era” (KENNAN, 1997) always depends on one’s standpoint; there is no “objective position”. It is a central contention of Bakhtinian dialogism that we do not only engage in talk *about* discourse, but *with* discourse, and that a form of dialogical understanding always includes evaluation and response Todorov (1984, p.16). In the continuously changing realm of politics, any analyst not only observes political processes, but also shapes them, so that “decision and standpoint are inseparably bound up together” (MANNHEIM, 1936, p.152). Individual standpoints, also sometimes called researcher bias, thus unavoidably permeate any type of analysis (DAVIS, 1990, p.16; GEE, 2011, p.9). It is with this perspective in mind that I will proceed to outline the method in the following section.

## 2 Method

The text under analysis is the *Regierungserklärung* (‘policy statement’) given by Olaf Scholz on 27 February 2022, three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The text is drawn from the German government’s website (SCHOLZ, 2022). On this website, apart from the original German text, translations into English and Russian are also available, which indicates some secondary addressees. The translations of the examples in this paper are partly official and partly my own.

The analysis has two steps. In the first step, I identify already-spoken and not-yet-spoken discourses in the speech through a thematic analysis. These discourses can be manifest or latent; while manifest discourses are explicitly introduced, latent discourses appear as unspoken presuppositions, assumptions that are taken for granted (BAXTER, 2011, p.158–159). Latent discourses can be identified by asking “What does a listener need to know in order to render this textual segment intelligible? What sociocultural and interpersonal discourses need to be invoked to understand what this textual segment means?” (BAXTER, 2011:, p.159). I will draw on Appraisal Theory’s resources of *attitude* (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.42), as they can indicate what is regarded as typical or normal: “When a judgement is made in talk, it is grounded in an often unstated discursive system of meaning” (BAXTER, 2011, p.160). Both already-spoken and not-yet-spoken discourses can be proximal or distal: while proximal ones are spoken by directly involved parties, distal ones are utterances circulating in culture

at large, spoken “by cultural members other than the parties of a given relationship” (BAXTER, 2011, p.53).

*Attitude* is divided into *affect* (the emotive dimension of meaning; reactions to behaviour), *judgement* (the ethical/moral dimension of meaning; evaluation of behaviour according to some norm) and *appreciation* (the aesthetic dimension of meaning; evaluating a text, a process or a phenomenon) (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.42–44). We can think of these expressions of attitude as “institutionalised feelings, which take us out of our everyday common sense world into the uncommon sense worlds of shared community values” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.45). Thus, judgement implicitly or explicitly invokes some rule or regulation and “reworks feelings in the realm of proposals about behaviour” whereas appreciation expresses evaluation of “semiotic and natural phenomena” and “reworks feelings as propositions about the value of things” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.45). Appreciation and judgement are not separate, but overlapping, with affect expressing a more personal evaluation within both of them (see the illustration in MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.45).

The second step analyses how the identified discourses are brought into competition, as centred and marginalised. For this, I will draw on resources of *engagement*, which are ways “to construe for the text a heteroglossic backdrop of prior utterances, alternative viewpoints and anticipated responses” (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.97). Those are either dialogically expansive or contractive, as discussed in Section 3. Dialogically contractive resources of engagement are *disclaim* (deny, counter) and *proclaim* (concur, pronounce, endorse); dialogically expansive resources are *entertain* and *attribute* (acknowledge, distance) (MARTIN & WHITE, 2005, p.134). For more detail on these resources, see Martin & White (2005, p.97–98).

### 3 Analysis

#### 3.1 General comments

The speech has seven parts: an introduction, followed by the five “courses of action” that Scholz proposes, and a final part. In the original text, Scholz says “*Fünf Handlungsaufträge liegen nun vor uns*”, which can be translated as ‘five mandates of

action now lie ahead of us’ and suggests a certain passivity, an imposition of these mandates by someone else, perhaps a higher force such as moral obligation or time, given that in the previous sentence Scholz identifies a challenge “*vor die die Zeit uns gestellt hat*” (‘that time has brought us up against’). This constructed passive reactivity disappears in the official translation, which has “there are five courses of action that we must take” and “the challenge that now faces us”, where time disappears as an actor.

### 3.2 Introduction to the speech

Scholz introduces his speech by claiming that the Russian invasion of Ukraine marks a “*Zeitenwende*” in the history of Europe, officially translated as ‘watershed’. I will here refer to this as the watershed discourse. It is at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken, as it is the Scholz government’s way to justify a range of potentially controversial policies, by the logic that a new era needs to be reacted to in new ways. The discourse is manifestly tied to the actions of Russia through Scholz’s analysis of the alleged turning point (example 1), which is introduced by the contractive proclaim “*im Kern geht es um*” to show that Scholz knows what this is fundamentally about.

(1) Im Kern geht es um die Frage, ob Macht das Recht brechen darf, ob wir es Putin gestatten, die Uhren zurückzudrehen in die Zeit der Großmächte des 19. Jahrhunderts, oder ob wir die Kraft aufbringen, Kriegstreibern wie Putin Grenzen zu setzen.

[‘Fundamentally, this is about the question of whether power is allowed to break the law, whether we allow Putin to turn back the clock to the time of the great powers of the 19th century, or whether we summon the force to keep warmongers like Putin in check.’]

That analysis shifts the focus away from modern great powers’ existence and implication in the Ukraine war and simplifies it as a purely historically revisionist attack. It also implies that power does not routinely break international law, which is an odd observation given just the history of recent NATO operations globally or the war in Yugoslavia in Europe (GRAY, 2018; D. JOHNSTONE, 2022). While Scholz is adamant that the invasion of Ukraine marks the dawn of a new era, the politics of armament announced as a reaction to that new era are allegedly aimed at preventing such a new era, at retaining the current order. It is thus unclear what exactly this new era

is supposed to consist of. Does Scholz say “warmongers like Putin” because he expects there to be others? If the goal is to preserve the current order of security and international law as we know it in Europe and not to return to an era of military aggression and war, why do Scholz and other German politicians so adamantly announce the dawn of a new era of defence spending?

Scholz then expresses moral indignation about the violation of international law and by drawing analogy to the Second World War, invoking a personal perspective. This is recommended by speech writers, as starting a speech by stating one’s personal attitude, feelings and values makes the speech credible (PÖRKSEN, 2003, p.35). This discourse of moral indignation is latent, expressed through a range of realisations of judgement by social sanction, such as “*kaltblütig einen Angriffskrieg vom Zaun gebrochen*” (‘started a war of aggression in cold blood’), “*menschenverachtend*” (‘inhumane’) or “*die ganze Skrupellosigkeit Putins*” (‘Putin’s complete ruthlessness’). The personal involvement is expressed through realisations of affect such as “*die schrecklichen Bilder*” (‘the horrible images’), “*himmelschreiende Ungerechtigkeit*” (‘appalling injustice’) and “*furchtbaren Nachrichten*” (‘terrible news’). The personal perspective is also evident in the emotive approach to a second discourse, that of international law, for instance in the formulation “*infamer Völkerrechtsbruch*” (‘malicious breach of international law’), which seems to suggest that some such breaches can be benevolent, or the description of the Russian veto, which is its right as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as a “*Notbremse*” (‘emergency brake’) and the added qualification of “*Was für eine Schande!*” (‘What a disgrace!’).

There is also a discourse of personal war experience, manifest through the mention of “*Erzählungen unserer Eltern und Großeltern [...] vom Krieg*” (‘our parents’ or grandparents’ tales of war’), which invokes World War 2 experiences and constructs the narrative of something unseen in Europe since that war, using realisations of affect: “*Entsetzen*” (‘horror’), “*für die Jüngeren ist es kaum fassbar: Krieg in Europa*” (‘for younger people it is almost inconceivable: war in Europe’). Thematically, the same claim is made when Scholz states that Putin is demolishing the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century since the Helsinki Final Act. While the war in Ukraine may be the first invasion by land, air and sea since the World War 2, the insinuation that Europe has not experienced war or violent redrawings of borders since

then is misleading and seems to hide NATO's and Germany's controversial role in the Yugoslav wars.

The fifth discourse I identify is the indivisible security discourse (example 2). It is manifest through the indirect reported speech ("*redet von*"), which cursorily introduces the safety guarantees that Russia has demanded based on the norm of indivisible security agreed by OSCE countries in the Helsinki Final Act and again in the Paris Charter. Scholz does not refer to those treaties but gives Putin's demand a vague, unclear and personalised character through the formulation *reden von*, thus not just undermining its validity rhetorically but also placing the discourse on the level of the proximal already-spoken rather than the distal already-spoken. This is a dialogic expansion by distancing, followed by the combination of countering and pronouncement "*Tatsächlich aber*" to suggest that Putin is untruthful and Scholz knows what the real intention is.

(2) Präsident Putin redet dabei stets von unteilbarer Sicherheit. Tatsächlich aber will er gerade den Kontinent mit Waffengewalt in altbekannte Einflussphären teilen.

[‘President Putin always talks about indivisible security. But what he really seeks now is to divide the continent into the familiar old spheres of influence through armed force.’]

Dialogic contraction through pronouncement is used to assert that Putin started the war "*aus einem einzigen Grund*" ('for a single reason'), which disqualifies the indivisible security discourse in favour of a Putin's war discourse that casts the invasion as an unprovoked attack on the free world by a potentially unhinged individual actor who wants "*ein unabhängiges Land von der Weltkarte tilgen*" ('to wipe an independent country off the map').

That discourse is also reflected in the phrase in example (3), where Scholz anticipates a potential argument that points to the OSCE accords. To exclude such Eurasian partnership arguments, he connects the indivisible security discourse with the watershed discourse by using a countering construction: he acknowledges that long-term peace in Europe is only possible with Russia, but counters it by stating that for the foreseeable future Russia endangers that security, supported by a pronouncement in the last sentence.

(3) Ja, dauerhaft ist Sicherheit in Europa nicht gegen Russland möglich. Auf absehbare Zeit aber gefährdet Putin diese Sicherheit. Das muss klar ausgesprochen werden.

[‘Yes, in the long term security in Europe cannot be achieved in opposition to Russia. But for the foreseeable future, Putin is jeopardising this security. That must be stated clearly.’]

### 3.3 First course of action

The theme of the first course of action Scholz announces is support to Ukraine, which now also includes arms delivery to a conflict zone, an activity that has hitherto been tabu in Germany. I identify this as the Germany as military power discourse at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken. Scholz picks up the watershed discourse (“*in einer neuen Zeit*”, ‘in a new era’), which constructs a “*neue Realität*” (‘new reality’) to give credence to the claim that the policy shift in arms delivery to conflict zones is necessary. Disagreement on this is forestalled by presenting it as without alternative, through the dialogically contractive denial “*konnte es keine andere Antwort geben*” (‘there could be no other response’).

The Putin’s war discourse reoccurs here. Scholz’s stated aim is to distinguish the will of the Russian people, assumed to align with the Western free-world viewpoint, from that of its president, thus isolating him. On a more hidden level, it also attempts to simplify the conflict by casting it into a binary good vs evil scheme and thus anticipates potentially complicating views that defend the Russian move historically. The discourse is latent through a combination of affect (“*verzweifelten Lage*”, ‘desperate situation’) and judgement, as Scholz asserts that the Ukrainian people do not just protect their homeland, but also fight for “*Freiheit und ihre Demokratie, für Werte, die wir mit ihnen teilen*” (‘freedom and democracy, for values that we share with them’), thus aligning them as democrats and Europeans. By supporting them, “we” are “*auf der richtigen Seite der Geschichte*” (‘on the right side of history’), an expression that harks back to the personal war experience discourse and Germany’s past on the wrong side of history. The shift in arms delivery policy is thus cast as morally justified and historically necessary, contrasted as it is to the evil of “*Putins Aggression*” (‘Putin’s aggression’).

### 3.4 Second course of action

The second of Scholz's course of action is "to divert Putin from his path of war". Here, Scholz lists the sanctions against Russia and, using the contractive strategy of counter, concedes that Putin will not change course overnight, but argues that an effect will be seen very soon, reaffirmed by the pronouncement "*ohne irgendwelche Denkverbote*" ('no thought whatsoever is prohibited'). The Putin's war discourse is manifest again through the very pronouncement "*gehört es deutlich ausgesprochen: Dieser Krieg ist Putins Krieg*" ('it must be clearly stated that this war is Putin's war!') as well as the judgement that it is a "*Konflikt zwischen Putin und der freien Welt*" ('conflict between Putin and the free world'), which establishes a morally compelling "with us or against us" situation similar to the one constructed by George W. Bush after 9/11.

Scholz connects the differentiation between Putin and the Russian people through an appreciation of the discourse of German reconciliation, at the level of distal already-spoken, and manifest in example 4. The connection of these two discourses gives the personal attack on Putin moral justification, implying a historic duty to lead Russia into the free world.

(4) Die Differenzierung ist mir wichtig; denn die Aussöhnung zwischen Deutschen und Russen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg ist und bleibt ein wichtiges Kapitel unserer gemeinsamen Geschichte.

[‘This differentiation is important to me, because reconciliation between Germans and Russians after the Second World War is and remains an important chapter of our shared history.’]

Finally, I identify a latent regime change in Russia discourse, which is at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken. It can be identified in the judgements that in many Russian cities, people have protested against "Putin's war", showing "*großen Mut und große Tapferkeit*" ('great courage and true bravery'), and that "we" stand with all those in Russia who "*Putins Machtapparat mutig die Stirn bieten und seinen Krieg in der Ukraine ablehnen*" ('who are boldly defying Putin's regime and opposing his war against Ukraine'). Given the preference for dialogic contraction in Scholz's speech, there is a notable concentration of dialogically expansive strategies applied to this discourse ("we should not forget" the protests, "*Ich bin ganz sicher: Freiheit, Toleranz*

*und Menschenrechte werden sich auch in Russland durchsetzen*”, ‘I am quite sure that freedom, tolerance and human rights will prevail in Russia, too’). That language, while entertaining possibilities of protests, freedom and human rights, does open the way for arguments that the Russian people agree with Putin and that freedom, tolerance and human rights do not currently prevail in Russia in general, which is a strong and unfounded claim and one that the West used in the past to justify wars against countries.

### 3.5 Third course of action

In the third section, Scholz identifies a major challenge in preventing Putin’s war from spilling over into other countries in Europe. There is a discourse of NATO alliance, at the level of the proximal already-spoken, manifest through a reference to conversations with allied countries in Eastern Europe and through dialogically contractive pronouncements and judgements to stand “*Ohne Wenn und Aber*” (‘unconditionally’) by the collective defence obligation within NATO and “*unsere Entschlossenheit*” (‘our resolve’) to defend every square metre of NATO territory: “*Wir meinen das sehr ernst*” (‘We are absolutely serious about this’). This is connected to the Germany as military power discourse, which is latently present in the list of recent actions the German army has carried out, appreciatively called “*wichtige*” (‘important’) signals. Soldiers are thanked for their “important” services, accompanied by a contractive pronouncement “*sicher auch in Ihrem Namen*” (‘surely also in your name’), aligning the audience with his position.

To introduce the fourth course of action, Scholz addresses the audience again specifically and again connects the Germany as military power discourse to the watershed discourse, now latent, through the utterance in example (5). As such, he specifically labels the newly announced military policy as necessary and “standard”.

(5) Meine Damen und Herren, angesichts der Zeitenwende, die Putins Aggression bedeutet, lautet unser Maßstab: Was für die Sicherung des Friedens in Europa gebraucht wird, das wird getan.

[‘In view of the watershed that Putin’s aggression entails, our standard is this: what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done.’]

### 3.6 Fourth course of action

This is the longest section in the speech. Here, Scholz connects the previously introduced watershed and Putin's war discourses to claim that Putin "*will ein russisches Imperium errichten*" ('wants to build a Russian empire'). This claim is supported by a strategy of acknowledgement through negative appreciation of Putin's voice, as manifested in his "*historisierende Abhandlungen*" ('historicising essays'), televised declaration of war and personal talks Scholz has had with him. This voice is then represented through the dialogically contractive pronouncement "*kann keinen Zweifel mehr haben*" ('can no longer have any doubt') as allowing only one conclusion, which is the one Scholz has drawn. The validity of his conclusion is further alleged by the dialogically contractive endorsement "*Das sehen wir heute in der Ukraine*" ('We can see that today in Ukraine') and when he makes the judgement "*schreckt er nicht zurück vor militärischer Gewalt*" ('has no qualms about using military force').

Based on this conclusion, Scholz constructs a discourse of threat to national security, which is proximal not-yet-spoken and latent. The war in Ukraine, stripped of all its prehistory, is presented as an act of aggression to start building an empire that may eventually entail Germany. Such a threat to national security is constructed, first, through the rhetorical question of what capabilities Putin's Russia possesses and what "we" need "*um dieser Bedrohung zu begegnen, heute und in der Zukunft*" ('to counter this threat, today and in the future'), which makes clear that Scholz envisages a lasting conflict with Russia that may entail the (alleged) need for Germany to acquire nuclear arms. The rhetorical question is left open and Scholz uses the dialogically contractive pronouncement "*Klar ist*" ('it is clear') to assert that, if one thing is clear, it is that Germany must invest much more in the security of the country, in order to protect "*unsere Freiheit und unsere Demokratie*" ('our freedom and our democracy'). The second manifestation of the threat to national security discourse again picks up the Germany as military power discourse, latently present in the assertion that a functioning army is "*ja wohl erreichbar für ein Land unserer Größe und unserer Bedeutung in Europa*" ('quite certainly something that a country of our size and our significance within Europe should be able to achieve').

Finally, there is a latent discourse of inner-EU discipline, at the level of the proximal not-yet-spoken, observable in the judgement that preserving the

“*Geschlossenheit*” (‘unity’, the official translation has the more military term “united front”) is an opportunity, and in the dialogically contractive pronouncement of a demand that unity means that member states not simply ask what they can extract in Brussels for their own country, but ask what the best decision for “our” Union is. This discourse is connected to the watershed discourse (“*die Zeitenwende [...] trifft ganz Europa*”, ‘the watershed affects all of Europe’), suggesting that the new reality German politicians are discursively constructing is envisaged for all of Europe.

### 3.7 Fifth course of action

The fifth and last point Scholz makes is that “Putin’s war” represents a “*Zäsur*” (‘caesura’) for German foreign policy, which again invokes the watershed discourse. Compared to the previous courses of action, he is less clear on what future foreign policy will look like, other than that “*wir werden uns Gesprächen mit Russland nicht verweigern*” (‘we will not refuse talks with Russia’), which implies that “we” will not seek them either. The judgement “*Alles andere halte ich für unverantwortlich*” (‘Anything else, I believe, would be irresponsible’) entertains potential voices that demand a diplomatic rupture with Russia. Voices that argue that talks with Russia should be sought are not envisaged by this statement. Scholz wants to avoid being “naive”, which he defines as “*kein Reden um des Redens willen*” (‘no talking for the sake of talking’). Using a dialogically contractive concurrence, he judges that Putin has never been interested in dialogue (example 6). This assertion heaps all the blame and responsibility on Putin and shows that Scholz has no faith at all in the effectiveness of dialogue. The envisaged caesura for German foreign policy, thus, seems to entail, as was stated above, a lasting conflict with Russia.

(6) Für echten Dialog braucht es die Bereitschaft dazu auf beiden Seiten. Daran mangelt es aufseiten Putins ganz offensichtlich, und das nicht erst in den letzten Tagen und Wochen.

[‘True dialogue requires a willingness to engage—on both sides. That is lacking on Putin’s side, quite clearly—and not just in recent days and weeks.’]

Scholz’s comments on foreign policy can be read as a turn away from Merkel’s pragmatic policy, which was characterised by “strong commitment to the Minsk

negotiations, as well as to the so-called Normandy Format, and Chancellor Merkel's frequent meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin" (RÁCZ, 2022, p.3) to maintain dialogue with Russia. The new coalition government is expected to take a tougher course in line with US expectations, considering Merkel's policy "naive" and akin to the "appeasement" politics in 1938 (RIPSMAN & LEVY, 2008; LATHAM, 2021).

### 3.8 Final part

In the final part, there is a discourse of German unity, latent and at the level of the distal already-spoken, which is connected to the discourse of threat to national security, present in "*das große Glück, das unser Land seit über dreißig Jahren genießt*" ('the great fortune our country has enjoyed for over thirty years') and the entertainment of a hypothetical future that the thirty years of German unity might be a "historical exception". To avoid this, Scholz asserts through appreciations, "*müssen wir alles tun für den Zusammenhalt der Europäischen Union, für die Stärke der NATO, für noch engere Beziehungen zu unseren Freunden, Partnern und Gleichgesinnten weltweit*" ('we must do everything we can to maintain the cohesion of the European Union, the strength of NATO, to forge even closer relations with our friends, our partners and all those who share our convictions worldwide'). This again excludes discourses critical with NATO and naturalises the discourse that a strong NATO is essential for German national security.

Finally, there is a latent discourse of free democracy, invoked by the appreciation "*wir wissen um die Stärke freier Demokratien*", which unites "us". This discourse is connected to the Putin's war discourse by labelling the attack on Ukraine an attack on the peaceful order in Europe and the world and another mention of "Putin's war". The final sentence, the announcement that "*wir werden es verteidigen*" ('we will defend it'), is another invocation of the Germany as military power discourse.

In this section, I have analysed the speech thematically, identifying a range of manifest and latent discourses. I have used a range of appraisal strategies to show how Scholz expands or contracts dialogue around them through engagement and how he connects these discourses to position himself and justify his future policies. In the following section, I will provide an overview and an interpretation of the interplay of

the discourses from a dialogic perspective on centripetal and centrifugal discourses.

#### **4 Discussion: The interplay of competing discourses**

The major centripetal discourses are the watershed and Putin's war discourses, which are centred through their sheer frequency of occurrence and through the recourses of engagement used around them. The watershed discourse constructs a new reality that demands a total paradigm shift caused by the invasion of Ukraine, at the time of speaking three days after its beginning. This invasion is constructed as an act of aggression not seen in Europe since World War 2 and at the hands of an isolated and ruthless oppressor that wants to wipe Ukraine off the map and build a Russian empire, a view that I have summarily labelled the Putin's war discourse.

Combining these discourses, as I have shown, Scholz asserts that there is no alternative to a paradigm shift in military spending to become a military power adequate to the country's importance in Europe, which in his plans translates into a budget that puts Germany into third place in global defense spending, after the US and China. This Germany as military power discourse is also centripetal, through naturalisation (BAXTER, 2011, p.171; DEETZ, 1992): there was "no other response" to arms delivery, it is "clear" that we must spend more on defense and NATO "must" be strong to protect German freedom and democracy in the future, a legitimisation by stoking fear of a hypothetical future (REYES, 2011). Due to the powerful position Germany holds within the EU, Scholz announces this threat not just for Germany, but expects all of Europe to follow his paradigm shift.

That shift is constructed as a necessity, not a choice, to protect the existence of Germany from Russian aggression, "today and in the future". Despite envisaging a lasting conflict with Russia and a paradigm shift also in diplomatic position, the Ukraine war is presented as "Putin's war", an aggression by an isolated individual that has no public support in his country. So rather than a profound military threat, it seems that it is Putin's mere challenge of the NATO world order that in Scholz's view has ushered in a new era, also evident in a latent regime change discourse. Scholz's analysis of Putin's perspective is supported by the sole argument that Russia has invaded Ukraine, and no further arguments seem necessary as Scholz speaks from a perspective

of NATO hegemony (see Section 3). Scholz takes the invasion of Ukraine, stripped of all its context and pre-history, as legitimisation to engage in astonishing claims on Putin's motives and ambitions, unbacked by any serious political or historical analysis. Potential voices arguing that Putin sought dialogue for decades are brushed away through denial (see example 6). Instead, through methods of neutralisation (BAXTER, 2011, p.171; DEETZ, 1992), the conflict is elevated into a conflict of good vs evil, of the free world against oppression.

The historically documented Russian position (see Section 4) is here represented by the indivisible security discourse, which is centrifugal. As I argue above, its marginalisation supports the Putin's war discourse by making it seem as if the concept of indivisible security were a fabrication only entertained by Putin, a position that is supported by the ubiquitous watershed discourse, which argues that Putin will be a security threat for the foreseeable future, thus invalidating potentially competing discourses of indivisible security and those demanding diplomacy. Where he does engage with alternative voices, those represent a tougher stance than his own, for instance those demanding a rupture of dialogue with Russia and those arguing that freedom, tolerance and human rights do not generally exist there.

To conclude, this article has demonstrated the strengths of Bakhtinian dialogism applied to discourse analysis, specifically through an operationalisation of the concept of centripetal-centrifugal struggle. It shows how powerful, centred discourses are mobilised in a political speech to exclude marginalised discourses justify a previously unthinkable paradigm shift in foreign policies and military spending. The method is especially useful for global analyses where particular discourses and ideologies, mainly of Western origin, are taken for granted.

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