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**Sonderausgabe zum zehnjährigen
Jubiläum/Special Issue for the
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- **Teil A Grundlagen/**
Part A Fundamentals
- **Teil B Forschungsüberblicke und einzelne Ansätze/**
Part B Research Overviews and Specific Approaches
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Metapolitics as Programmatic Storytelling

New Right Discourses as a Challenge for Discourse Research

Zusammenfassung: Neurechte Metapolitik ist eine Herausforderung für die Diskursforschung, da neuere Diskursakteur:innen zum Teil über reflexives Wissen zum diskursiven Feld verfügen, in das sie strategisch intervenieren. Die Analyse dieser diskursiven Praktiken erfordert konzeptionelle und begriffliche Rahmungen, die sich von der Objektsprache der Neuen Rechten unterscheiden. Bisher gibt es nur wenige methodologische Reflexionen der Spezifik metapolitischer Diskurse. Ich stelle einen analytischen Rahmen vor, in dem ich für die Unterscheidung von Narrationen und Narrativen plädiere, die Neue Rechte als Erzählgemeinschaft konzeptualisiere und neue Analysekatgeorien für eine Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse vorschlage.

Schlagwörter: Metapolitik, Neue Rechte, Narrativanalyse, Erzählgemeinschaft, Halbwahrheiten, Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse

Abstract: New Right metapolitics is a challenge for discourse research as its proponents possess reflexive knowledge of the discursive arenas in which they engage. To critically analyse these discursive practices requires conceptual approaches that differ from the emic concepts of the New Right. So far, there are scant methodological reflections on the peculiarity of metapolitics. This paper offers an analytical framework to tackle these shortcomings. I argue to distinguish between narrations and narratives, and to conceptualise the New Right as a narrative community. Furthermore, I propose several analytical categories to be implemented in a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse.

Keywords: Metapolitics, European New Right, Narrative Analysis, Narrative Community, Half-Truths, Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse

Introduction

Discourse research-driven studies of Far-right political communication have been on the rise in recent years.¹ Concomitantly, public and political awareness of discursive phenomena has been raised. Against this background, it is no surprise that the scope of the phenomena grasped under the umbrella term »Far-right« is as broad as the underlying conceptualisations of discursive dimensions and the subsequent operationalisation. Regarding the phenomena, various stakeholders are of interest, ranging from lone wolves and autonomous grouplets to extra-parliamentary movements and polit-

1 E.g. Ahmed 2014; Wodak 2015; Ekström et al. 2018; Alava et al. 2020; Shroufi/De Cleen 2022 ; Puschmann et al. 2022.

ical parties that often claim to be conservative. In analysing those, one could draw on different concepts of discourse research, such as discursive environment, political framing, talking points, agenda setting, discourse coalitions, semantics, metaphors, and narratives or related concepts like ideologies and affects, to name but a few. They all share a common aim of unpacking and reconstructing more or less latent patterns of sense-making, communication, knowledge production and distribution. However, there is another stakeholder whose discursive practice may challenge the paradigms of these analytic approaches.

The European New Right (ENR) that I will address in this article can be distinguished from other Far-right stakeholders as follows. Whereas extra-parliamentary movements and more or less political entities involve themselves in public discourse, the ENR positions itself not only as a participant in discourses but also as its critical observer. With references to Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony (e.g. Benoist 1985), it draws primarily on reflexive knowledge of arenas of discursive struggle, which its proponents have dubbed as »metapolitics«. Yet, it is more appropriate to say that the ENR's idea of metapolitics hardly serves any analytic or heuristic purpose. On the contrary, most people applying the term have a horse in the race and try to apply the reflexive knowledge to gain sovereignty in what they call the »cultural war«. The Foucauldian problematisations crucial for discourse research (cf. Foucault 1984; Keller 2018) are barely relevant to this metapolitical endeavour as it mainly targets a self-purposeful means. As a consequence, in the discursive environment of the ENR, the distinction between emic and etic concepts, as well as the hierarchy of first-order and second-order observations, tend to blur. That is particularly true for corpora of ENR publications that contain both discursive interventions and discursive observations.

In my research about crisis narratives in ENR magazines, this delimitation problem struck me from the very beginning. During the initial coding process, it soon became apparent that I needed to redescribe my research subject in terms other than its self-ascription. Unfortunately, there are hardly any reflections on metapolitics in discourse research. This acknowledgement leads to several questions that read as follows: How could I conceptualise metapolitics without buying into its emic connotations? How should I approach those fragments of my material that initially did not only seem to lack latency but sometimes even frankly communicated their discursive ambitions? How appropriate is a discursive approach if most problematisations are only a function of opportunistic intents and discourse strategies?

In this paper, I address this issue with a narrative approach to metapolitics. I argue that to properly understand ENR's metapolitics, we must consider its bridging function between discursive and epistemic dimensions. Having said that, I will show how the research programme of a sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) could benefit from analytical categories of narratology, such as the distinction between narration and narrative and the concept of a narrative community. Before I elaborate on this further, I have to make some preliminary remarks. First, I will examine how ENR proponents understand and implement concepts of metapolitics in their struggle for discourse sovereignty and trace the genealogy of this approach within the history of conservatism.

Second, I will distinguish these rather programmatic endeavours from heuristic propositions made by some scholars who faced similar problems as I did in my research. Third, I will elaborate on my understanding of the ENR as a narrative community and argue that metapolitics should be addressed in terms of a bridging concept that aims at transforming narrations into narratives through the shaping and spreading of topoi and social figures. I will conclude with preliminary ideas about how this heuristic framework could be implemented into discourse research.

Metapolitics of the European New Right

The European New Right (ENR) arose in the 1960th in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Algerian War of Independence. Its emergence marks a tactical and generational shift within the Far-right (cf. Greß et al. 1990, p. 237). According to Tamir Bar-On, the ENR is composed of »clusters of think tanks, cultural institutes and journals« (Bar-On 2007, p. 3). Most scholars emphasise the metapolitical practice to distinguish the ENR from other Far-right phenomena.² In this sense, metapolitics is described as a »focus on the battle of ideas« rather than a mere activist struggle (Griffin 2008, p. 195).

Proponents of the ENR expose this understanding in their writings. Jacques Marlaud, former president of the ENR think tank GRECE, defines metapolitics as »any work of reflection or analysis, any diffusion of ideas, any cultural practice liable to influence political society over the long term« (Marlaud 2008, quoted in Camus/Lebourg 2017, p. 120). Alt-right publisher Daniel Friberg relates to the same idea when he delineates metapolitics as »the process of disseminating and anchoring a particular set of cultural ideas, attitudes, and values in a society, which eventually leads to deeper political change« (Friberg 2015, p. 4). In a postface to Renaud Camus's infamous book about the »Great Replacement«, identitarian activist Martin Sellner is even more candid about the ENR's metapolitical endeavours. According to Sellner, metapolitics

»is essentially a work with concepts and images. Its goal is to influence the cultural hegemony that shapes society's basic beliefs and moods. This means, above all, ›inoculating‹ new concepts and images. [...] A good metapolitical term must condense many theoretical considerations and yet be clearly understandable. It must evoke the right frames and convey a clear explanation of what is happening (and the right bogeyman image!). It must pose a ›question‹ and contain a problem, which calls one's own movement as a redeemer.« (Sellner 2016, p. 189; translated by F.S.)

Here at the latest, it becomes apparent that the hierarchy of discourse and problematisation is turned upside down. Whereas discourse research usually draws on the idea that discourse strategies are related to problematisations, the ENR virtually seek problematisations to implement them as discourse strategies.

2 Cf. Bar-On 2007; Camus/Lebourg 2017; Weiß 2017; Sedgwick 2019; Brumlik 2020; Salzborn 2020.

That is all but a new phenomenon. Although the idea of metapolitics is often accorded to the key thinkers of the ENR (e.g. Maly 2020), or, as Peter Viereck (2004, p. 4) falsely stated, to a letter from Constantin Franz to Richard Wagner, it dates back to the very origins of modern conservatism. The Counter-Enlightenment doyen Joseph de Maistre already used the term, referring to German philosophers who invented it borrowing from the concept of metaphysics. Maistre's idea of metapolitics, however, differs slightly from the ENR's understanding. He assumed a divine structure behind the daily pursuit of political conflicts that should guide any conservative reflection on society (cf. Maistre 1814, p. iii). Notwithstanding the underlying reification of social practice, Maistre could be seen as a pioneer of discourse studies, as he emphasised a more or less intelligible deep structure of political communication and knowledge production that might become the starting point for any struggle for cultural hegemony later on.

Thus, conservatism as a style of thought has had a metapolitical quality ever since. Whenever conservatives believed themselves in a downswing position, they aimed at fostering an oppositional worldview as a precondition for regaining executive power. That is why Samuel Huntington describes conservatism as a positional ideology that »reflect[s] the changing external environment of a group rather than its permanent internal characteristics« (Huntington 1957, p. 468). In some respects, modern conservatism is a flexible and opportunistic ideology as it responds to the needs of a discursive environment. That indeed applies to any political ideology. Yet, what is unique about conservatism is that, unlike other ideologies, it hardly conceals its positional approach when preaching to the converted.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Karl Mannheim (1986) initially developed his sociology of knowledge from an analysis of conservatism. In his postdoctoral thesis, he draws a bigger picture of modern conservatism as a style of thought that, unlike traditionalism, has a peculiar reflexivity. Following Mannheim, conservatism adopts parts of a hegemonic discursive order in his attempts to defy social change. Simultaneously, conservatism tries turning the main arguments taken from this order against itself. The »rhetorics of reaction,« as Albert O. Hirschmann calls it, consists primarily of such »polemical postures and maneuvers« (Hirschmann 1991, p. 6). Current right-wing populism's claim of ›the people‹ who are juxtaposed against ›the elite‹ is a striking example of this conservative appropriation of a once anti-feudal semantics. Thus, a rather epistemic dimension, the semantics, becomes part of a discursive struggle. The strategic recoding of existing semantics is exactly the moment where metapolitics in its present understanding comes into play. Surprisingly, however, there are only a few reflections on metapolitics in discourse research.

Metapolitics in Discourse Research

With respect to the apparent staging of social media performances, the notion is seeing some elaboration recently. Ico Maly's (2020, p. 4) ethnographic works on metapolitical New Right influencers, for example, point out that the »audience labour« carried out in

social media requires media literacy on the part of producers. It is striking, however, that he discusses neither the conceptual nor the methodological implications resulting from this media literacy and provides only a simplified understanding of ENR's metapolitics – a notion that, regardless of its connotations, he frequently adopts for analytic purposes (e.g. Maly 2019).

Media scientist Jan Zienkowski, on the other hand, calls to focus on the metapolitical dimension of discourse. He argues that the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in particular, has paid too little attention to the modes of conceptualising politics. To tackle this shortcoming, Zienkowski stresses to distinguish between politics and metapolitics in the sense that the latter

»consists of practices that potentially reconfigure existing modes of politics, the associated logics and rationalities, as well as the dominant power structures in a given public sphere. Metapolitical debates have the potential to reshape the structure of a public realm, the entities and processes that constitute it, as well as the concepts and practices of politics that underpin it.« (Zienkowski 2018, p. 132)

Relating to post-foundational discourse studies, Zienkowski attributes a metapolitical dimension to all forms of politics that differ in »degrees of explicitness and reflexivity« (ibid., p. 138). Notwithstanding this epistemological disclaimer, he is mainly concerned with detecting criteria to differentiate normatively between democratic and anti-democratic forms of metapolitics. Thus, he faces the problem of distinguishing his above-mentioned »analytical and descriptive notion of metapolitics [...] from the programmatic anti-democratic concept of metapolitics developed by the New Right (NR)« (ibid., p. 140). Regarding the latter, Zienkowski presents three notions of metapolitics: First as a political strategy, second as intellectual leadership, and third as a programmatic attempt to implement a fascist model of society. Unfortunately, however, it remains unclear why the way the ENR understands metapolitics should contradict his notion, as its long-term goal is precisely to reconfigure existing modes of politics, the associated logics and rationalities, as well as the dominant power structures in a given public sphere (ibid., p. 142).

Matters of research ethics are also challenging discourse linguistics. In this regard, Simon Meier-Vieracker's (2020) approach to online hate speech offers some promising thoughts on what he calls »metadiscursive reflexivity«. Hate speech, according to Meier-Vieracker, could be understood as self-legitimizing »dirty work« that draws on moral communication. Following Meier-Vieracker, exclusionary hate speech embodies a peculiar metadiscursive reflexivity because it is often embedded in a semantic of morality whose strategic thrust is not much different from an inclusive morality. From a discourse linguistic point of view, this raises the question of whether claims on ethical principles are sufficient to distinguish between Far-right hate speech and critical scientific approaches. Therefore, Meier-Vieracker emphasises the necessity to extend discourse research to the underlying semantics of morality and to illuminate the mechanism of discursive struggle. A similar argument could be made regarding metapolitics and its underlying programmatic.

Unlike hate speech, successful metapolitics is more subtle and sometimes difficult to dissect. Nicola Gess's notion of »half-truths« which she applies to the contemporary example of the myth of the »Great Replacement« could prove helpful here. According to Gess, half-truths that »take on narrative forms and are not concerned with knowledge and provability but with belief and plausibility« are among the outstanding tools of post-factual political discourse. To this end, they »produce tendentious interpretations of actual situations« and coincide with the interest of particular ideologies (Gess 2022, p. 168). Gess argues that post-factual discourse is popular in periods of crisis, especially in crises of knowledge and trust. What makes her approach particularly interesting for discourse research on metapolitics is her emphasis on the structure of half-truths. First, they emerge out of collective authorship. This leads, second, to the observation that they are connective and multiversional (ibid., p. 167). As Gess states, »every half-truth as a rule corresponds to many similar ones that all serve one and the same political narrative,« whose collective production establishes a sense of belonging. Thus, half-truths resemble political anecdotes in the sense that they are »repeatedly copied and revised, moving from (digital) platform to (digital) platform« (ibid., p. 172). Following Gess, half-truths could be defined as a particularly successful example of metapolitics as both aim to persuade an audience with a little help of discourse strategies. I will elaborate on this further in the following narrative approach to metapolitics.

Metapolitics as Programmatic Storytelling

Drawing on Wolfgang Müller-Funk's narrative approach to cultural theory, Ansgar Nünning has described the bond emerging out of the collective production of knowledge as a »narrative community«. According to Nünning, narratives are not only »cultural ways of worldmaking« but also »cognitive forces in their own right«. Thus, they provide the performative power »to make worlds and to disseminate worldview« (Nünning 2010, p. 208). They are, in a nutshell, bridges between agency and structure and, therefore, powerful tools to be used in metapolitics.

The peculiarity of metapolitics lies in its flexible epistemology. The metapolitical »practitioners,« as Martin Sellner (2016, p. 191) calls them, share a programmatic attitude towards the ways of worldmaking. They coin terms and shape concepts depending on strategic implications. The audience, however, who participates in disseminating those ideas, shall not be bothered with this level of reflexivity. An analytical approach to metapolitics must take into account these different layers.

In my research, I apply Nünning's considerations to the ENR in a slightly modified manner. I distinguish between narrations and narratives on the one hand and between discourse coalitions and narrative communities on the other hand. Narrations, as I understand them, are a mode of situational communication in a social arena that usually relates to latent patterns. The latter I call narratives. Following Barbara Czarniawska (2004), they could be described as modes of knowing. From a methodological point of view, narrations could be analysed in a synchronic framework, whereas narratives call for a diachronic approach.

I argue that discourse coalitions emerge when different actors use overlapping narrations intentionally or by effect (cf. Keller 2018, p. 36). In contrast, narrative communities involve a broader epistemological bond. They share narratives that are rooted in a common worldview. Hence, discourse coalitions could become narrative communities if they systematically relate to the same narratives. In this sense, metapolitics is programmatic storytelling that aims to spread these narratives in the long run.

Differentiating between narrations and narratives, we could now describe the metapolitics of the ENR. As an ideology or a Mannheimian style of thought, the ENR contains a worldview that is embedded in narratives. These narratives, like the infamous frame of decadence, inform the ENR's anti-liberal and anti-democratic sense-making. That is why I call the ENR a narrative community. Metapolitical implications, however, apply only to narrations circulating in social arenas. While narrations relate to narratives, they are nevertheless more flexible and open to adjustments made by collective authorship. Details may alter, bogeyman images may be replaced, and posed questions may vary, but the underlying deep story hardly ever changes. Metapolitics may implement frames, foster topoi, and introduce new social figures, but it still relates to a conservative ontology. It is important to note that the above-mentioned discursive reflexivity of ENR's metapolitics is limited in this respect. Metapolitics of the ENR shapes narrations but is informed by narratives at the same time.

Conclusion

Most scholars agree that metapolitics should be considered as the ENR's key characteristics. In this article, I have addressed the lacking methodological debate in discourse research on how to approach metapolitics. I have outlined different understandings of metapolitics and argued that ENR's metapolitics poses a problem for discourse research as it tries to adopt etic concepts to emic perspectives. That calls for an analytic frame that differs from the self-ascriptive notions given by those involved in discursive struggles.

Drawing on my research on ENR's crisis narratives, I have proposed the following definition of the metapolitics of the ENR. Metapolitics is programmatic storytelling that aims at disseminating and fostering a particular worldview. It applies discourse strategies to narrations that relate to narratives. Its long-term objective is to transform cursory discourse coalitions into mentally shaped narrative communities that extend the groupuscules of the ENR.

This narrative approach to metapolitics has further implications for discourse research. First, it calls to distinguish more profoundly between different target audiences. Utterances from proponents of the ENR should be treated differently regarding the level of reflexivity they communicate. Gess's concept of half-truths may prove fruitful in this regard. Second, concerning the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD) on which I draw in my research (cf. Keller 2018), I argue to consider topoi and social figures as analytical concepts. A topos is a concept that bridges programmatic frames and interpretative schemes and could thus be a starting point for a sociology of knowledge-driven

discourse research. Narratively evoked social figures (cf. Moser/Schlechtriemen 2018), on the other hand, imply both bogeyman images and redeemers and, therefore, function to (de-)legitimise political projects. These social figures could be taken into account as elements of the narrative structure of a given discourse. Yet, metapolitics remains an area of investigation that demands further methodological and conceptual innovation.

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Anschrift:

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