

## RESEARCH

# Doubling Down on Double Standards: The Politics of Solidarity in the Externalization Society

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## 1. Introduction

A basic consensus concerning the history, distinctive features and crisis of the welfare state has become established among scholars in the social sciences and, through them, in the public political discourse of the Western European postwar societies. The following article takes as its starting point the claim that the sociopolitical common-sense view according to which the European welfare state is an arrangement of institutionalized solidarity draws its support from a one-sided scientific-political narrative. My reflections boil down to the claim that this, as it were, semiofficial narrative is completely right, and yet at the same time completely wrong. Its ambiguity is characteristic of a *politics of solidarity* that will be defined in greater detail here. This ambiguity is by no means exhausted in the discursive dimension, but has a variety of material implications, namely, in the shape of structures of social closure whose historical dynamics have proven to be remarkably stable but are conspicuously absent from the self-description of the European welfare state. However, since the welfare state in its European manifestation, as an arrangement of solidarity, is invariably at the same time invested with a pronounced moral meaning by its proponents as well as its critics, the politics of the welfare state is a prototypical example of the social double standard that can be regarded as the cultural signature of what I call the externalization society.

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## 2. Completely Right and Completely Wrong: The Essential Narrative of the Welfare State

Following Thomas A. Herz, I understand by an essential narrative the construction or reconstruction of a historical configuration through narratives that conveys its socially dominant version, and thus the version that is recognized as legitimate (see Herz 1996). As such, corresponding narratives are fundamentally socially contested and constitute an unavoidable point of reference for all kinds of historical-political conflicts over the interpretation of socio-historical phenomena and entities. While Herz focused on National Socialism and its subsequent reappraisal as the essential narrative of the Federal Republic of Germany, what I am interested in here is the welfare state's essential narrative of *socially and politically organized social cohesion* in postwar Germany and Europe. Thus, my topic is as it were the civilizational contrasting or complementary narrative to the one which, since the 1950s, has sought to enable German and European society to come to terms with their original experience of the fascist breach of civilization.

In the relevant research in the social sciences, this basic understanding of its object has become known—and dominant—since the 1980s, simultaneously with the high and turning point of the postwar social policy cycle (see Shalev 1983), as *the social democratic model* of welfare-state development. The story line of the social-democratic narrative, presented in a concise but not unduly stylized form, goes something like this: in the beginning was the industrial class conflict. The historical roots of the modern, democratic-capitalist welfare state can thus be traced back to the specific organization of social production as a relationship between wage labor and industrial capital shaped by antagonistic material interests. The conflict dynamics of this extremely asymmetrical social relationship—the dependence of wage earners on the owners of capital is disproportionately more existential or potentially more threatening to their existence than the other way around (see Offe and Wiesen-thal 1985)—which were virulent since the beginning of industrial capitalism, gained new momentum with the democratization of political relations. The turn in social history toward the welfare state was a result of the transformation of the proletarian class struggle into the “democratic class struggle” (Korpi 1983): by winning universal and equal suffrage in tenacious struggles against the classes that had hitherto ruled for the most part unperturbed by the will of the people, the working class equipped itself with a new, decisive power resource, namely (at least indirect) influence over how industrial production, work and employment are shaped by politics. The welfare state, with its ever-expanding system of *worker-friendly* interventions, ranging from occupational health and safety to the cluster of employee insurance and family benefits to a freely accessible public health and education system, is then the institutionalized expression of the historical compromise between capital and

labor. Although private ownership of the means of production and the discretionary management rights of employers remain essentially untouched, the regulative principle of “politics against markets” (Esping-Andersen 1985) means that the dependence of wage earners on the market is reduced, their working and living conditions are at least to some extent decommodified, i.e. freed from the silent coercion of their status as commodities. Although labor and capital still do not encounter each other on an equal footing in the welfare state, late twentieth-century industrial capitalism, according to the interim conclusion of this story, has been domesticated into democratic capitalism; through welfare state action, it has become a capitalism with a human face and social aspirations.

To be sure, in European and transatlantic comparison different varieties of democratic welfare capitalism have emerged (see Esping-Andersen 1990), which present themselves in light of the essential narrative of the welfare state as different answers to the question of how the risks of a wage laborer existence (and, more broadly, life-course and intergenerational risks) are socialized. The various welfare state models can be described in this sense as different *models of solidarity* (see Esping-Andersen 1999:40-46), as institutional realizations of different—strong or weak, “thick” or “thin”—conceptions of solidarity. At the same time, these variants are identified more or less explicitly in the social-democratic narrative as normatively superior or inferior (see Manow 2002): the greater the role played by the state as the guarantor of a universalistic risk equalization encompassing all social groups and milieus, strata or classes, the *better*, i.e. the more valuable in terms of the politics of solidarity. On the other hand, to the extent that markets or family households or both are used, or at any rate are allowed to function, by the state as instances of social risk management, the air becomes thinner for social solidarity. Although risks can also be pooled and regulated through market mechanisms, each individual market player is then ultimately dependent on his or her own efforts to ensure individual well-being, with the corresponding consequences for inequality. And even in an intermediary model of communal solidarity, in which smaller or larger groups—ranging from the family to professional associations—ensure a mutual balancing of needs (whether in the form of childcare or accident liability) should the risk event occur, risk management remains in principle particularistic, leading to correspondingly unequal levels of protection and group-related graduated life chances.

So much for the narrative of the rise of the European welfare state that has become widely accepted in research on European social policy, even beyond academic milieus that are politically sympathetic to social democracy. Given that the welfare state was a product of the industrial class conflict and the struggles for democratization of the labor movement, the strength of the latter and its historical successes or

failures in class coalition building (see Esping-Andersen 1990:29-32) were essential in shaping the national welfare regimes and determining whether they spelled out the solidarity principle in more universalistic, particularistic or individualistic terms.

Social advancement, however, is always followed at some point by social decline—as has also been the case in the history of the welfare state. And this is the starting point of part two of the essential narrative that has become formative for much of the research on the welfare state in social science. As in the essential narrative of the Federal Republic of Germany, in which the people were “infected” by National Socialism, which supposedly befell them like “a plague from the outside” in a “treacherous attack”—according to the retrospective interpretation of no less a figure than the first postwar chairman of the German Sociological Association, Leopold von Wiese (see Dyk and Schauer 2015:141)—the image of being overwhelmed from outside is no stranger to the welfare-state essential narrative either. According to this narrative, foreign influences, operating exclusively under the banner of neoliberalism, have appropriated social capitalism.

Already in part one of the narrative, it was market socialization or the liberal welfare state in its American guise that featured as the opposed institutional horizon to the European social model or as the market-radical other of the European models of solidarity. For the 1980s, the standard narrative in social and political science assigned the role of *bad guy* once and for all to Anglo-Saxon welfare capitalism as the big bad wolf that began to threaten the solidarity worlds of those European societies that had managed to free their citizens from the welfare-individualistic state of nature just a few decades earlier with the help of the sociopolitical Leviathan. According to this view, the neoliberal transformation of the European welfare state came from outside, from across the Atlantic or at least the English Channel, from the houses of Reagan and Thatcher, and destroyed the good old-European model of sociopolitically organized social cohesion.

The rest of the story is quickly told. The capital side felt politically empowered by the neoliberal tidal shift to terminate the postwar democratic-capitalist compromise and it had the necessary power to impose its ideas concerning what form a new accumulation cycle should take (see Streeck 2014). With the active assistance of European social democracy, which saw a programmatic and political turn toward market liberalism as the sole guarantor of its viability in the competition between political parties (see Nachtwey 2009), the regulative logic of the European welfare state was consistently adjusted to *politics for markets*. Neoliberalism began its triumphant march across all spheres of social life (see Brown 2015), and the gradual recommodification of labor and the creeping marketization of social policy led to progressive

social desolidarization and the establishment of post-welfare-state conditions (see Butterwegge 2015).

What can be said in summary about this narrative, which is supported by social science that is often avowedly sympathetic to its subject? As suggested at the beginning, two things: on the one hand, a straightforward *Yes, that's how it was*. The history of the rise and fall of the European welfare state can indeed be reconstructed in this way. On the other hand, however, this is only half the truth. Or, to put it differently, this story is too simple—and too gruesomely beautiful to be true. There are also heterodox narratives, of course, but they have hardly been able to hold their own in the game of scientific truth against the mainstream of the social democratic narrative.

First of all, there is the basic counter-narrative of the theory of capitalism: at no time in social history were welfare-state policies tantamount to *politics against markets*; they have always been at the same time market-enabling, always both commodifying and decommodifying—and necessarily so in the democratic-capitalist social formation (see Lessenich 1999). The democratic-capitalist welfare state is permeated by structural contradictions, indeed it is a self-contradictory arrangement (see Borchert and Lessenich 2016:48-76)—an analytical insight that is systematically denied in social democratic politics of history and is confidently circumvented in the present-oriented diagnoses of neoliberalism (see Lessenich 2017). For their part, two other counter-narratives repudiate, as it were in a pincer grip, the reconstruction of the European welfare state as an institutionalized—and, above all, a universalistic—solidarity arrangement. The feminist critique of the *social democratic model* demonstrated as early as the 1970s how welfare state solidarity is only a half measure as regards productivity policy and gender policy, and how the social rights wrested from capital are in essence those of the normal male worker (see e.g. Orloff 1993). Critical migration research, in turn, points to more far-reaching structural limitations of the welfare state promise, insofar as the principle of citizenship rights is always also one of exclusion from citizenship and the stratification of rights through residency law (see e.g. Morris 2002). Welfare state solidarity is, prior to all other social selectivities, structured first of all along national lines.

The concept of the externalization society takes up all these analytical objections against the essential narrative of the welfare state and, combining the critiques based on the theories of capitalism, gender and migration, problematizes in a very fundamental way the scientific self-description of the European welfare state as an institutionalization of relations of social solidarity.

### 3. Externalization: The Other Side of the Welfare State Solidarity Arrangement

By externalization I understand a specific mode of socialization, a historically situated and spatially circumscribed structural mechanism of social reproduction. Capitalist societies—or, more precisely, “societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails” (Marx 1990:125)—are externalizing societies: they unavoidably, even compulsively, externalize in order to be able to permanently maintain their mode of production and to reproduce it on a constantly expanded level. This constitutive mode of reproduction of capitalist societies, which became established in the European centers of the capitalist world system beginning in the late sixteenth century (see Wallerstein 2004), underwent an unprecedented expansion, deepening, and intensification with the consolidation of the industrial capitalist mode of production in precisely those central economies since the mid-eighteenth century. Embedded in the historically shifting political and economic configurations of capitalism with its tendency to spread globally (see Arrighi 1994), the externalizing societies of the Western world—or, to use the later, more comprehensive term, of the Global North—developed a socio-economic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural dynamic of development that allowed them to rise unchallenged to the pinnacle of the social structure of world society in the course of the twentieth century.

Describing the early industrialized capitalist societies of the Euro-Atlantic area as externalizing societies refers to the analytically central fact of the *unacknowledged preconditions, side effects and consequences* of their world-historical success. But this generally untold history of Western industrial capitalism in particular is apt to cast its macroinstitutional corollaries—the institutional systems of representative democracy and the democratic welfare state that count as co-evolutionary civilizational achievements—in a different, quite unflattering light. For the externalization perspective reveals that the social compromise structures that underpin industrial welfare capitalism and are central to the social democratic essential narrative have systematically produced *compromises at the expense of third parties*. Whether intended or implied, the failure of all those who remain excluded from these compromise structures is at any rate an objective functional necessity and is subjectively accepted. It must therefore be seen as the, or at least a very decisive, secret of the economic success and social cohesion of welfare-capitalist democracies.

Here I cannot offer a detailed explanation of the conceptual architecture of the notion of externalization. Based on an analysis of seven dimensions of the concept, however, I can at least hint at the nature of the essential structural mechanism involved. It is important to emphasize that functional mechanisms as such do not exercise social effects, but only insofar as they are mediated through the social prac-

tice of really existing actors. Hence, each of the following categories also designates specific social practices, moreover practices that combine to constitute a specific functional nexus.

The original mechanism of externalizing socialization is the *appropriation* of goods and resources of relevance for production by the ruling strata. This is primarily a matter of appropriating living labor and living nature—a process of incorporating value indispensable for initiating and perpetuating a capitalist dynamic of accumulation and exploitation. From its historical beginnings, the material efforts of appropriation of European capitalism were designed on a global scale, and from its inception, the appropriation of labor and nature went hand in hand with the dispossession of those who had previously been masters over themselves or beneficiaries of their natural environment. This mechanism was immediately followed by a second one, namely the economic exploitation of the previously appropriated goods and resources. Exploitation is to be understood here in the most general sense as a social relationship in which it is possible for the more powerful side to exploit systematically—and thus over and over again—the socially vulnerable position of its less powerful counterpart to its unilateral advantage (see Tilly 1998:117-146; Haubner 2017). In the history of European capitalism, the central economies have succeeded in actively creating corresponding positions of vulnerability, and thus exploitability, on their peripheries, where such positions did not already exist in any case: first in the classical, violent variant of establishing colonial relations of domination and extractivist economies based on unfree labor, subsequently in the more modern, legally codified form of unequal economic and ecological exchange within the framework of asymmetrical global labor, production, and trade regimes (see Boatcă 2015:117-137).

The third mechanism, which completes the two previously mentioned ones or first makes them possible, is that of the material and symbolic *devaluation* of all of the goods and resources that are to be exploited after their appropriation. Labor and nature in other social spaces defined as external are, on the one hand, dear to industrial capitalist externalization societies, because they are directly relevant to accumulation; but, on the other hand, they are precisely not dear because they are subject to a systematic process of devaluation—up to and including complete loss of value. Accordingly, nature is assumed to be abundant and not to belong to anybody (until one acquires the title to it oneself), so that it is to be appropriated and exploited without restraint. The same holds for the labor of *savages* and indigenous people, slaves and day laborers, women and migrants: in the logic of externalization, they and their capacity for work can also be had cheaply; they are the industrial and reproductive reserve armies that represent an inexhaustible source of value creation and can be used in an uncontrolled manner and abused at will—that is,

exploited in a “devaluing” manner (see Biesecker et al. 2013). All of them—*freely available* nature, the *weaker* gender, the *underdeveloped* economies—are socially marked as the other of industrial-capitalist modernity, which is at any time and without limit open to the sovereign (not to mention, white male) grasp of the more powerful side of the respective social relationship.

How can this functional relationship of devaluing appropriation and exploitation of goods and resources necessary for accumulation be made permanent and reproduced in a stable, dynamic way? This question is answered by a set of four further mechanisms. First, there is the fourth member of the dimensions of externalization, the *outsourcing* itself. This refers to externalization in the narrower and proper sense, namely the intensive effort to leave the collateral damage and follow-on costs of capitalist relations of exploitation as far as possible in the external economic and social spaces or to transfer them there. The corresponding cost portfolio goes far beyond the dimension of strictly economic costs, for example in the form of the one-sided world-market-dependent and hence extremely crisis-prone specialization of peripheral national economies. The ecological costs of raw materials and energy production without regard for losses, the social costs of the consumer goods and service industries based on systematic overexploitation of labor, the political and legal costs of the often semi-legal or criminal agrarian and fossil fuel capitalism in the countries of the global South are also immense and incalculable in every sense—the only thing that is calculable is that they do not have to be borne by the externalizing societies themselves (see I.L.A. Kollektiv 2019). The latter also seek to ensure this externalization of costs with the help of the fifth mechanism to be mentioned here, the maximally effective or calculatedly selective *closure* of one’s own economic and social space against what is construed as the outside. Whereas the Western-dominated free trade regime was for a long time effective in promoting the competitive and standard-setting industrial economies of the center, the migration regimes of the rich democracies are designed to prevent uncontrolled immigration from the rest of the world or to enable the self-interested recruitment of labor. In both ways, closures are undertaken to ensure the monopolization of economic opportunities, thereby systematically reducing the opportunities for production and consumption, mobility and living of the economic and social regions on the peripheries.

Finally, the functionality of the entire externalization process as regards its political legitimation and social acceptance is based on two further mechanisms: on the one hand, the consistent *suppression* of the entire practical context of appropriation, exploitation, devaluation, outsourcing, and closure from the socially effective store of knowledge; and, on the other, the *postponement* to a supposedly distant future of the consequences of the externalization process that make themselves felt in the



externalizing societies themselves. In a way, both suppression and postponement are second-order externalization mechanisms, since the knowledge about and experience of externalization themselves are externalized. On the one hand, knowledge about the “imperial way of life” (Brand und Wissen 2017) of the rich industrialized nations is split off from the collective consciousness of society. It is communicatively silenced in an eloquent matter, or is entrusted to the care of specialized systems of actors (academia, churches, development policy NGOs, volunteers), where it can be processed in ways that do not threaten the logic of externalization itself. On the other hand, the material consequences of continued externalization policies—not least for the populations of the externalizing societies themselves—are systematically shifted, or attempts are made to shift them, into the future. This first enables or decisively promotes the social acceptance of a “sustainable non-sustainability” (Blühdorn 2018; Blühdorn et al. 2020) of production and consumption.

The seven dimensions of externalization form an essentially political and economic constellation. The specific mode of sociality that is historically constituted and established around or through this constellation is what first justifies us in speaking in terms of an externalization *society*—as a complex ensemble of mutually supporting social practices, forms of subjectivity, and normativities (see Lessenich 2018a). The latter include, on the one hand, the *taken-for-granted* aspects of the everyday lifestyle of large majorities of the population in the externalization societies of this world—ranging from practically unlimited spatial mobility to never-ending consumer offerings to the availability of a functioning infrastructure of public services and facilities. On the other hand, the political-economic logic of externalization acquires concrete form in the *self-conceptions* especially of the socially dominant middle classes with regard to lifestyles and personal life plans befitting their status.

The motivations and practical orientations of ordinary citizens in Western welfare capitalism are intimately bound up with bourgeois norms of material prosperity centered on individual ownership and with norms of social advancement, personal self-realization, and the individual and collective utilization of potential (see Lessenich 2018b). These social self-understandings and taken-for-granted realities are in turn embedded in a permanent process of explicit—and, in particular, also implicit—social *self-clarification* about the appropriateness and legitimacy of those global conditions in which one’s own life unfolds. The externalization society is sustained by an economic-liberal moral economy that deems its own economic conduct to be ethically neutral. According to this view, markets and outcomes *in line with market conditions* are not subject to moral evaluations; free trade is seen as a positive-sum game in which the comparative advantages of all participants can play out; and although the earth may not be a disc, the global economy is seen as a single competitive plat-

form that provides systemic opportunities to catch up for all those stragglers who are able to find and survive in their niches of the world market.

All of this points to the profound socializing effects of the externalization society. In their individual action orientations and social patterns of interpretation, the citizens of the externalization society are closely intertwined with its functional mechanisms and are part of an institutional arrangement from which they cannot escape through their individual decisions—and to which they are bound by very basic material and ideal interests. In this respect, they live in a kind of forced complicity, in a state of participatory compulsory integration. Their accustomed living conditions and everyday practices, the standard of living and the levels of entitlement they have achieved can be maintained over time only through the permanent reproduction of the logic of externalization. The citizens of the externalization society are thus dependent on its continued ability to function. In this specific sense, they are at once rulers and ruled: without having even rudimentary decision-making power over the concrete historical form of their socialization, possibly situated on one of the lowest levels of the national social structure of distribution of life chances, they nevertheless also unavoidably participate materially and symbolically in the externalization dividends that arise through the systemic social practice of appropriation, devaluation, and exploitation, of outsourcing, closure, suppression, and postponement. In for a penny, in for a pound: there is no right life in the externalization society.

#### **4. Limits of Solidarity Or: The Double Standard of History**

This insight points, in turn, however, to the possibility of an immanent critique of externalization or, more precisely, of a reflexive critique by the dominated of their enforced domination. In effect, the citizens of the externalization society can only maintain their positions in the system of social inequality and can only realize their participation, whatever form it assumes, in the context of the mutual recognition of claims to social security and protection that is established through public welfare institutions by systematically harming third parties who do not belong to this context. The mode of operation of the externalization society is based to a certain extent on the inversion of Rawls's difference principle: even the worst-off can only secure their social condition at the expense of others; the logic of externalization dictates that any absolute or relative improvement in their situation is accompanied by an increase in the costs for others.

It is only on this basis that *solidarity* becomes possible in the first place in the externalization society—only on this basis can programs for equalizing needs and risks,

the production of public goods or the guarantee of social assistance be organized and financed. Therefore, solidarity *in the externalization society* is—beyond specific, more far-reaching practices of propagated or realized exclusion from the national community of solidarity (see Brosch 2007; Dörre 2016)—in principle exclusive or *excluding* solidarity. Even if we disregard all criticism of the current variant of basic income support for jobseekers, which is one of the last fallback positions of individual subsistence social security in the German welfare state, and accept that it is an act of institutionalized social solidarity with the weakest (i.e. those who remain unemployed in a society thoroughly geared to gainful employment), it nevertheless disguises a bitter truth. It is only thanks to the *artificial*, but in fact extremely violent, lowering of the social reproduction costs of labor power—because, thanks to externalization, the prices for clothing and food, energy and electronics are ridiculously low in this country—that it is possible to live or survive on a household income at the level of basic income support in Germany. This form of sociopolitically organized social cohesion has very demanding social preconditions and is exceedingly harmful to others, but at the same time is in itself extremely meager and threatening to self-esteem. Yet even this meagre level of support is repeatedly qualified in public discourse as *too expensive*, as a *misdirected social incentive*, or as a magnet for *immigration into the social systems*; and this generally serves as a pretext for taking further measures to secure the social exclusivity of the welfare system, whether in the form of group-related sanctions or the lowering of benefits below the supposed *basic income support* standard.

Analyzed as an externalization society, therefore, the democratic-capitalist welfare state has a second face. If we view it in a global context, it appears as a giant machine for destroying or restricting solidarity, and this as a matter of principle, already in virtue of its constitutive logic, even without its more recent *neoliberal* subversion or perversion. If we understand the “idea of a mutual connection between the members of a group of human beings” (Bayertz 1998, 11) as the descriptive core of the concept of solidarity and the idea of “mutual ties and obligations” (ibid., 49) between these group members as a way of investing this concept with a broadly acceptable, because relatively undemanding normative meaning, then the analytical instruments of the externalization diagnosis are certainly suitable for describing manifold reciprocal connections between the citizens of welfare capitalist democracies in the Euro-Atlantic area and their global social environment. But these transnational contexts have by no means become the historical point of reference in the democratic-capitalist welfare states of the Western world for the institutionalization of mutual ties and obligations. To the present day, their material binding effect remains entirely subordinated to the world of ideas of national solidarity.

The inherent demarcations of this historically concrete conception of solidarity can be understood in turn, following the neo-Marxist rereading of Max Weber by the sociologists Frank Parkin (1974) and Raymond Murphy (1984), as multiple structural dynamics of *social closure*. *Internally*, industrial capitalist societies operate a twofold closure of the space of institutionalized solidarity in the process of becoming welfare states. A first demarcation—below the prior, capitalism-constitutive meta-boundary between owners of the means of production and owners of labor power—is that of the industrial-capitalist gender relation: “The ascription of the gender characters is the *basis* of the industrial society” (Beck 1992:104), which is founded “on an incomplete, or more precisely, a *divided* commercialization of human labor power” (ibid., emphasis in original). The “ascribed roles ... of gendered status” (Beck 1992:106) of industrial capitalism are reflected in a modern, first and foremost gender-segregated “hierarchy of status” (ibid.) of the understanding of solidarity. While male production workers assure themselves sociopolitically of their mutual support in the vicissitudes of their wage-dependent existence, female reproduction workers are relegated to the status of dependency on wage dependency and must be content with security claims derived from the solidarity claims of their husbands. A second, complementary internal demarcation is that between natives and immigrants—a classic established-outsider configuration (see Elias and Scotson 1994), which is associated in industrial capitalism with a structural split or “horizontal disparity” (see Borchert and Lessenich 2016:49-54) in the labor market between different groups of production workers. The establishment of a guest worker regime in Western European industrial societies after the Second World War led to the systematic “underclassing” of national employment systems. This manifested itself not only in symbolic demarcations between the members of ethnically marked labor market segments, but also in the material structuring of the system of social legal rights and solidarity guarantees along the legal-political status differences among employed non-citizens (see, for Germany, Karakayali 2008).

It is just here that the interface with the *external* demarcations of industrial capitalist solidarity arrangements is located. Paradoxically (or perhaps not paradoxically at all), the social category of citizenship, which in the theoretical tradition in sociology stemming from Thomas H. Marshall has always been commended as an instance of inclusion of virtually the entire population in almost all functional and performance systems of democratic industrial-capitalist society (see Marshall 1992; Mackert 1999), also is just as originally an instrument of effective social exclusion. “Citizenship laws in industrialized capitalist countries ... operate to prevent the dilution of the benefits of industrialization (spread them more thinly among a large number) through the exclusion of people born elsewhere” (Murphy 1984:559; see Scherschel 2018). In addition to class, gender, and race as structural categories of

demarcation generated by the politics of solidarity, another, fourth one comes into play, namely the structural category “place” (see Milanovic 2012), on the basis (or literally, on the ground) of which the three aforementioned forms of social structuring operate. A person’s place of birth, and the nationality and citizenship it confers, is the very first, fundamental limit and boundary of solidarity drawn and institutionalized by national welfare states. This demarcation implies going beyond the division in relations of solidarity in industrial capitalist society as a result of gender and migration policy, “an additional line of class cleavage beneath property classes—the line separating the working class of advanced capitalist countries from the poor of the Third World” (Murphy 1984, 559). Citizenship rights, their institutional guarantee or the negation of this very guarantee, draw a solidarity boundary antecedent to the entitlement structures within the welfare state, through which the national community of solidarity, “including the most disadvantaged fraction of the working class” (ibid.), protects itself against any solidarity claims from its external social world. Raymond Murphy therefore describes the working classes living outside the industrial capitalist centers as a “citizenship underclass” (ibid.) who are excluded from the internal processes of democratic-capitalist status allocation but whose life chances are affected directly or indirectly by these processes.

Historically and sociologically speaking, these connections can be translated into the figure of a dual social contract that sustained the democratic forms of capitalism in the West and their welfare-state development during the twentieth century, especially during the long postwar period. At its core, the Western social contract consisted of a social exchange relationship: the political acceptance of private property and free enterprise was secured in exchange for the increasing social share of the non-owning classes in the prosperity of the respective nation. This arrangement found institutional expression in the industrial solidarity pact of the modern welfare state and cultural expression in the democratization and concomitant expansion of opportunities for consumption. In different variants and historically out of phase, this “implicit contract” (see Moore 1978, 18ff.) has become a basic component of society’s self-image that is semantically represented, for instance, in the formula of the social market economy in Germany or the New Deal in the United States.

However, the democratic-capitalist social contract had a second side. For it was based in turn on the agreement across social classes that the negative consequences of the industrial welfare capitalist model of growth and distribution outside one’s own borders should be effectively kept at a distance from the Euro-Atlantic nations themselves. The exploitation of natural resources and the overexploitation of labor power in distant regions beyond the Western world, without which its modes of production and consumption would not have been possible or sustainable at all, were supposed

to proceed as smoothly and unnoticed as possible. Accordingly, this flip side of the much-vaunted success stories of (more or less) “social capitalism” was not trumpeted from the rooftops—either in Germany or in the U.S. or any other Western welfare state; it was the fine print, the truly implicit part of the implicit social contract.

Today, however, this double social contract has become precarious in both of its dimensions. Even as the wealth of industrial capitalist nations continues to increase, social security guarantees and promises of advancement have been shaken right into the middle of society; the experience of precarious working and living conditions is by no means merely a marginal social phenomenon. The resonance with the German public of sociological diagnoses of an impending “society of social decline” (Nachtwey 2018) speaks as much for a profound feeling of insecurity among broad sections of the population as does the unmediated political success of Donald Trump in the 2016 American presidential election. Like the rise of neo-nationalist movements in Germany and Europe, the *Trump effect* also points to the fact that the perceived erosion of the democratic-capitalist social contract is not being attributed to *the economy* or the economic functional elites, but instead to politics or the “political class” (see Borchert and Lessenich 2016, 123ff.).

At the same time, however, the political rulers are now coming under pressure from a second side. For the secret clause of the democratic-capitalist compromise is also increasingly losing its validity. In this respect, too, Western societies are currently experiencing an erosion of the conditions for their stable reproduction. Climate change and migration are the symbols of the growing public awareness of the fragility of the two foundations on which the entire Euro-Atlantic model of society rests, namely the energy regime based on fossil fuels and the global system of inequality. It is therefore not only the socio-economic situation, narrowly understood, of large parts of the population that is feeding a social feeling of precarity—in the literal sense of the revocability of an achieved social condition or status. The discontent in and with democratic welfare capitalism runs deeper. It is grounded in the unnerving premonition of a way of life that is unsustainable in every respect, one that can no longer rely on the inexhaustibility of natural resources and the reticence of the Third World proletariat.

However, this reveals the fundamental contradiction in which the overwhelming majority of citizens of the externalization society are compelled to live for structural reasons, and thus in which they are trapped: themselves excluded from the central resources of power—the possession of productive assets—they depend for their social existence not only on those in power who exclude them, but at the same time on the fact that other, structurally even more powerless, groups are excluded

from the democratic-capitalist game of distribution. With Murphy (1984:562) one can speak here of an almost schizophrenic positioning, of a “Jekyll and Hyde relationship” in which the “derivative exclusionary groups”—the dominated in and of the externalization society—stand to the “principal exclusionary group,” those who dominate them: “the former are dependent on and hence allied with the latter and yet they are dominated and excluded by the latter and therefore provoked to usurp the latter’s exclusive power and advantages.”

How can and will this tension between wanting to extract more welfare from those who dominate internally, but thereby inevitably harming the welfare of the externally dominated, be resolved? One possibility that is not only conceivable, but for which there are unmistakable signs at present, is an adaptation of the essential narrative of the welfare state in the direction of a more offensive and aggressive emphasis on the exclusive character of sociopolitically organized social cohesion—that is, on the national in the social. This would be, or is tantamount to the initially discursive, but subsequently also material intensification of the solidarity-political double standard typical of externalization. This strategy certainly comes in milieu-specific variants (see Koppetsch 2018), ranging from the naturalizing codifications of social hierarchies in the upper classes to the attempts to restore the claim to exclusive cultural representation of the (white male) middle classes to the symbolic devaluation of outsiders in the context of social distribution conflicts at the lower end of the social structure. In any case, however, here the boundaries of solidarity—toward the underclasses, women, immigrants, those who are kept out—are tightened, and all emancipation claims and concerns other than one’s own are rejected.

A second, opposed possibility, which for the time being is generating much less social discussion, would be changed practices of solidarity (see Lessenich 2019:96). These would be practices that do not seek to reconstitute the solidarity arrangement of the democratic industrial-capitalist welfare state—following the *neoliberal* attack—but rather to transcend it. They would be solidary practices based on a new essential narrative of the welfare state. The narrative I have in mind is one of solidarity as a practice that is *cooperative*, *performative* and *transformative* all in one—cooperative, in that the idea of mutual connectedness is not spelled out in terms of vicariously standing up for the concerns of others, but of *jointly* standing up for shared concerns; performative, in that it does not rely on the notion of a prior attitude of solidarity, which, if necessary, could only find individual expression, but instead makes clear that the awareness of mutual connectedness only grows *in the act* of jointly standing up for shared concerns (which in turn only prove to be such via the detour of this collective action); and transformative, in that the goal of the obligations arising from mutual connectedness is not defined as, for example, the mainte-

nance or restoration of a given structure of privileges, but as fundamentally *changing* the social system of unequal life chances.

In this respect, the history of Western welfare capitalism will have to be rewritten in two ways: retrospectively, by historical sociologists who systematically reconstruct the preconditions, concomitants, and consequences at the level of world society of institutionalized social solidarity at the national level; but prospectively, by social individuals whose social practice is capable of pushing solidarity beyond the boundaries and limitations of its previous institutionalization in the national welfare state.

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