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## **Pre-Political Bases of a New Cleavage?**

Social Identities, Moral Economy, and Classed Politics in Germany

PhD Thesis

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## Extended Abstract

The thesis takes up debates about emerging ‘cultural class conflicts’ between workers and a left-liberal new middle class. Such conflicts are said to be fought over issues like migration and diversity, law-and-order, or cultural liberalization; and to be rooted in diverging lifestyles and moral intuitions of communitarian, ‘down-to-earth’ workers and cosmopolitan middle class ‘frequent travelers’ (Calhoun 2002). Influential diagnoses describe the conflict of these worldviews as one that pits large sociopolitical groups against one another, not only in the form of ideologically polarized camps, but also on the deeper, more visceral level of *social identities*. The study interrogates this diagnosis empirically, centering on Germany and using a mixed-method interview- and survey-based design. It reconstructs the contours and sociostructural roots of key ideological divides in the German population, and explores to what extent the social identities of crucial class fractions can be said to polarize along a new set of divides.

Guiding the analysis is the analytically most advanced scientific formulation of some of the core assumptions behind the ‘new cultural class conflict’ discourse: scholarship on the rise of a new cleavage of universalism and particularism (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015). This research tradition centers on a divide over transnationalization, authoritarianism, and welfare deservingness, articulated by New Left and Radical Right parties, whose class bases are said to be found among middle class sociocultural professionals on the one hand, and production workers on the other. The study contextualizes the diagnosis of a new cleavage as one attempt of coming to grips with the reordering of class and politics in postindustrial societies. That problematic is shared by a second tradition drawn on here, Bourdieusian research on new forms of “classed politics” (Jarness, Flemmen, and Rosenlund 2019). Both approaches see a continued salience of social structure in postindustrial ideological alignments, which they identify with similar, multi-dimensional understandings of class. Further, both approaches focalize the mediating position of *social identities* between social structure and political alignments (Bornschieer et al. 2021).

In a two-step empirical study, neo-Bourdieusian and cleavage approaches are brought into conversation on two levels. The first is the spatial reconstruction of correspondences between social structure and ideological polarities. This forms the object of the first part of the analysis, which develops a geometrical reconstruction of the German sociopolitical space, analyzing data from the 2018 General Population Survey ALLBUS, using the technique of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). The goal is a holistic reconstruction of the contemporary linkages between social structure and ideological divides, or what I call the class-political constellation. This reconstruction also serves to interrogate the idea of a rift sorting classes and class fractions into opposing ideological camps.

Results confirm that the German political space is “classed”, with considerable correspondences between ideological positionings and social positions. A cartwheel-shaped constellation of four divides – between redistribution and property, universalism and particularism, left and right, and anti-populist ‘high’ and populist ‘low’ politics – structures the German political space. This constellation corresponds to vertical and horizontal *social* divides based on the volume and composition of capitals. Issues of universalism-particularism form a central divide that separates workers and sociocultural professionals, among other groups, confirming findings of the new cleavage literature.

Putting this framework in dialogue with Bourdieusian political sociology, the MCA also reveals that the class-political constellation does not take the form of Manichaeian political camps, but that of a gradational space. Instead of coherent and polarized camps, cleavage poles describe loose clusters connected by family resemblances. Coherent universalists and particularists are minorities, the majority stands in between. Overall, the polarization of the space is limited and there is an ideological center encompassing positions on which very large majorities concur. Sociopolitical divides that are salient are multidimensional and do not align on a single line of conflict. Further, the political space is not only structured by differences in political opinions but also by degrees of exclusion from politics altogether, with lower strata, particularly workers, on the excluded side. This first step of the analysis paints a nuanced picture that refutes central assumptions of ‘cultural class conflict’ discourses, while upholding the centrality of class and inequality for political and ideological alignments.

It also sets the stage for the second, more extensive part of the study, which centers on classed forms of *social identity*. In cleavage theory, speaking of a full-blown cleavage requires not only the coincidence of social bases and voting tendencies, but also the formation of distinct group identities and modes of normative integration. This *sociocultural or identity level of cleavages* has largely been neglected in past cleavage scholarship or treated in a reductionist way. The second part of the study aims at this gap, and digs into the pre-political realm of identification and social morality, below and beyond the sphere of party competition. It asks whether and how the divide of universalism-particularism rests on deeper pre-political bases of classed identification, zooming in on the class fractions most distant on the universalism-particularism divide in the quantitative analysis: production workers and middle class sociocultural professionals.

Theoretically, this part draws on Bourdieusian cultural class analysis (Savage 2012). It unpacks the elusive concept of identity into three more specific relational components (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). These are a) self-understandings embedded in a sense of social location, expressed relationally through symbolic boundaries; b) moral boundaries and moral economies; and c) relations to politics, i.e. what “politics” is to people and how it relates to who they are. Against intellectualist understandings of public opinion, this approach highlights the non-ideological and pre-reflexive articulation of positionings through embodied, intuitive

schemes of categorization which Bourdieu calls habitus. The basic idea is that the regularities of political positionings among ordinary, i.e. non-expert citizens generally do not spring from coherent ideological orientations regarding political conflict, but from basic practical schemes and modes of thought embedded in wider forms of life.

Empirically, this part draws on 50 in-depth interviews with Millennial cohort production workers and sociocultural professionals in Germany. Interviews centered on self-understandings, asking respondents to describe “the type of person you are”. The line of questioning was deliberately kept open, leaving the respondents a lot of space to focalize elements of their self-understanding they wanted to highlight. Cleavage-related issues, and political positionings overall, were deliberately not prompted, leaving open whether they were salient or not. Similarly, the analysis of the interviews, based on techniques of the Documentary Method, reconstructed classed forms of social self-location, morality, and relations to politics in a holistic way, and only then asked for the role that cleavage-related identification played in them.

The results of this second step of the analysis are in-depth portraits of six diverse clusters of sociomoral identities and relations to politics found in the two class fractions. Workers clusters include rural, status quo- and respectability-oriented Working Class Conservatives; Social Populists negotiating a perceived loss of status as manual workers by sharp boundary drawing against both those above and those below; individualized Pragmatic Privatists living by a creed of ‘live and let live’; as well as Alternative Workers whose activism leads them to a disidentification from the working class. Among the sociocultural professionals sample, a cluster of caring, recognition-focused Social Therapists is distinguished from an expertise-centered and socially distinctive cluster of High Liberals. Each of these clusters stands for common entanglements of social location, identity, and morality, entanglements that are also reflected in specific relations to politics and political positionings. What emerges is a panorama of diverse social identities within the two classes, directly mirroring findings of the quantitative analysis.

The core of each of the social identity clusters is situated in a specific moral project. These are captured e.g. as the pursuit of *embeddedness* among Working Class Conservatives, of *deservingness* among Social Populists, of *autonomy* among Pragmatic Privatists, of *solidarity* among Alternative Workers; *flourishing* among Social Therapists, and *expertise* among High Liberals. Each moral project is anchored in a specific sense of social location which respondents seek to reevaluate. Doing so, they each draw on a specific set of identity categories, demarcations from specific others, distinct forms of occupational and gendered ethos, as well as invocations of implicit social contracts inscribed in the wider moral economy. These pre-political constellations furnish the central categories also for political positionings, and thus mediate between social structure and political ideology.

In this way, the study paints a rich picture of social identity processes among two classes central for recent debates of realignment. It is shown that the coherent, ideological, conflictual, and dualistic picture of cleavage conflict does not describe the vernacular in which most people develop their views in everyday life. Instead, the politics of ordinary people is an appendix of pre-political moral projects situated in social structure. To understand the pre-political realm, we need a different vocabulary than that suggested by diagnoses of ideological conflict and 'culture wars'. Yet, there are specific instances and dynamics by which pre-political identity constellations do provide openings for the formation of a new cleavage. These give important insights into potentials for future realignment. In this sense, the findings of this part of the study are two-fold. On the one hand, it identifies some crucial sites and dynamics by which classed social identities provide a "mobilization potential" for a deeper politicization of the universalism-particularism divide. But at the same time, it shows that as a diagnosis of an *existing* state of social division, the geological imaginary of a new cleavage rift running through all of the social sphere is misleading.

While discourses about a 'new cultural class conflict' are thus rejected, the diagnosis of a new cleavage is confirmed as a description of the structural underpinnings of an important pattern of *partisan* alignment and, to some degree, partisan identification. The diagnosis is shown to be much less accurate in the realm of pre-political identities, where a new cleavage only exists as a set of more or less diffuse potentials. Is German society ripped into antagonistic halves or thirds by the cultural conflict of a high education, frequent-flying universalist new middle class looking down on a rooted and traditional particularist working class which resents them? The answer this study gives is: no, not really. But political actors who want to make such a conflict reality could draw on a range of distinct potentials and openings.

*For Heinrich*  
*from whom I keep learning so much*

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When I was interviewing young workers and professionals in cities and villages across Germany, I often thought of a quote I once read. “No one is more tolerant than me”, the author of the quote writes, “I see reasons to support all opinions. It's not that mine are not clearly decided, but I can see how a person who has lived in circumstances contrary to mine also has contrary ideas.”<sup>1</sup> I think this quote aptly describes a mentality which will evolve in almost any person who spends hours listening to other people's stories. Regardless of whether I shared my interlocutors' opinions, it was striking how understandable and, in a sense, adequate they seemed in the context of the circumstances in which they had developed. That opinions arise in close interaction with circumstances is a guiding theme of this study. If there is anything interesting I can say about it, I owe it to a large extent to the 60 women and men who took the time to sit down with me for an interview. With its tacit assumption that it is possible to understand people who have lived in circumstances contrary to one's own, interviewing is a deeply humanist exercise. And it is a humbling one as well, reminding the interviewer of the specificity also of his or her own ideas, bound as they are to their own set of circumstances. For this experience, I thank my interviewees.

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is by Stendhal and appears in Ces Noteboom's novel *Rituals*.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Strange Return of Class

Recent years have seen a strange and historically rare phenomenon: a rethematization of class by advances of the political right. Since the inception of the left-right distinction, class conflict had been the terrain of the left. Yet, after decades in which class was said to be dead as a factor in politics, in recent years talk of class, and particularly of the working class, have made a comeback in explanations of the rise of the Populist Radical Right. A particularly prominent form of these new discourses about class are such that see class conflict as returning in the form of a *cultural* polarization and conflict between two class fractions which had previously been united by center-left voting coalitions. These are the “left behind” “white working class” locally rooted in the peripheral “heartlands”, and an educated urban middle class, emulating or synonymous with a “cosmopolitan class” of “liberal elites” (see fig. 1; Bergfeld 2019; Mau, Lux, and Gülzau 2020). Elements of this discourse had been around since at least the 1980s when right-wing mobilizations like that of Ronald Reagan or the French Front National gained popularity among workers (Eribon 2013; Kuhn 2020). But a high point came in 2016’s “Trump/Brexit moment” (Dodd, Lamont, and Savage 2017) which saw a proliferation of journalistic and scientific explorations of white working class anger and resentment as well as indictments of the “arrogance” of liberal middle class “bobos” or “frequent flyers” looking down on the ordinary people over the rim of their Latte Macchiato glass (see Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016, Calhoun 2002; Goodhart 2017a).

In the imaginary of these discourses, class conflicts are equated with culture wars; and class is described through the lenses of lifestyles, identities and moral intuitions, often linked with metropolitan or peripheral social geographies. In accounts largely originating in the US and the UK, workers mainly appear in the guise of a “new minority” of white men inhabiting provincial and/or deindustrialized places (Gest 2016). These workers are described as having been displaced both by economic transformation and by the devaluation of their traditional lifestyles, a devaluation caused by the cultural hegemony of a new middle class, clustering in the urban hubs of the knowledge economy, and dominating policy-making and the media with

its ethos of cosmopolitan opening, post-traditional experimentation, and self-realization. According to Reckwitz (2019) and Koppetsch (2019), this new middle class, comprising about a third of the population in Western European countries on the one hand, and the equally large old or traditional middle class, also including more affluent workers and artisans, on the other, today engage in an embittered “cultural struggle” over definitional power, in which the old middle class “fights for the restoration of its claim to represent the general norm, [...] and defends its values against the hegemonic culture of the postindustrial-academic middle class and the culture of the foreigners and outsiders” (Koppetsch 2019, 388).<sup>2</sup>

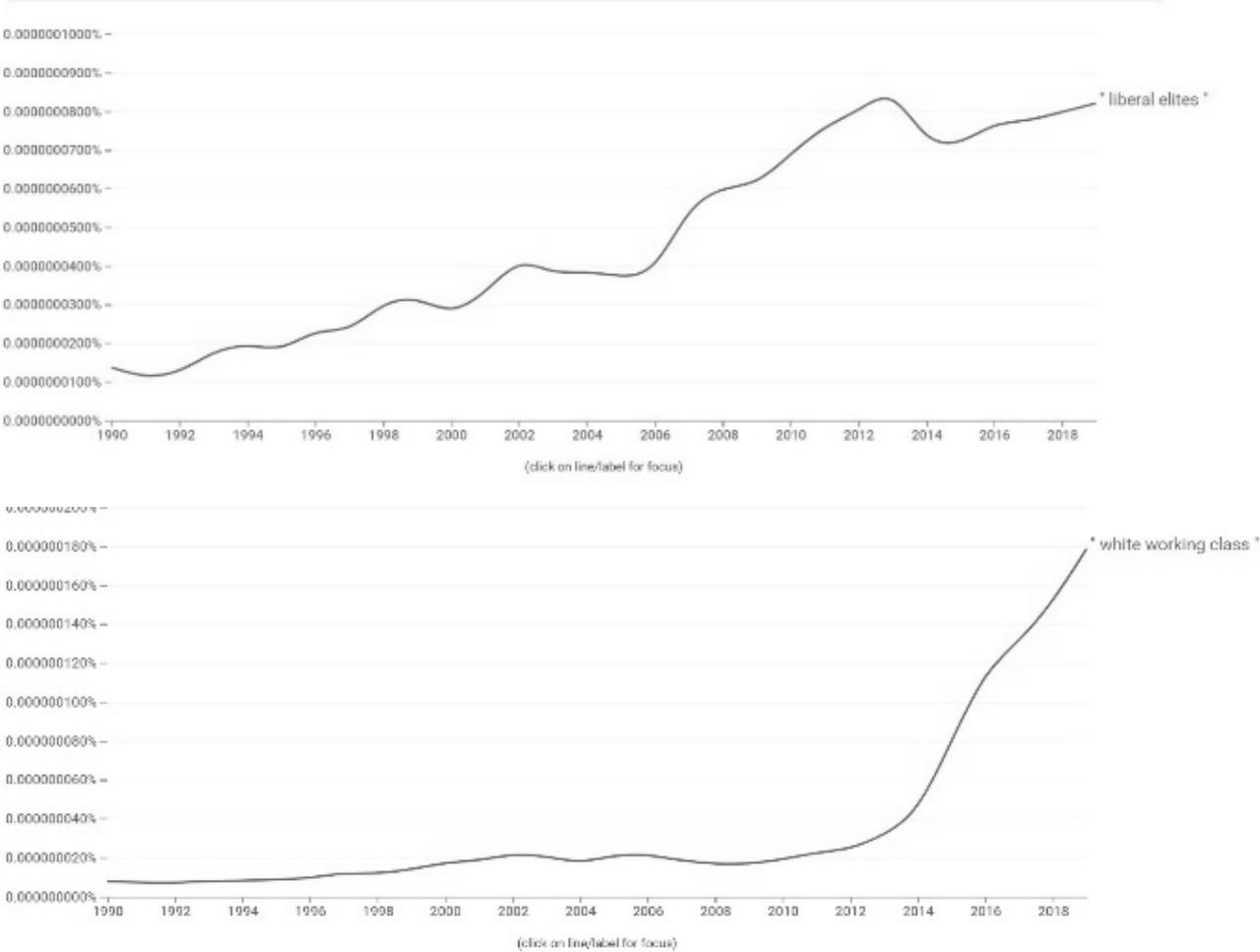


Figure 1: Ngrams "liberal elites", "white working class" (Source: Google Ngram)

In the political realm, this is said to take the form of a “populist revolt” (Goodhart 2017a), aiming to reinstall the common sense values of the disgruntled shrinking class of

<sup>2</sup> Here, as throughout the text, translations from German originals are mine.

manufacturing workers and other members of the ‘ordinary people’, against the dominance of liberal elites. This revolt could not find a home in left-wing political formations, because besides being the winners of structural change, the new middle class is also said to have taken over the former political vehicles of the working class, social democratic and left parties. Alluding to the Indian high caste of scholars, Piketty calls this a “Brahminization” of the left (Piketty 2018). To some commentators, a symptom of this shift is an increasing preponderance of identity politics on the left, which leads to a neglect of the bread-and-butter issues workers care about and an excessive and moralistic emphasis on diversity, openness, and cultural liberalism (Lilla 2017).

As so often, this debate has been imported more or less directly to Germany with a few years delay, so that notwithstanding the considerable differences between the social structure, history, and political culture of the countries, many buzzwords of the newest chapter of the US culture wars gained traction also in recent German debates. The main occasion was the emergence of the first sustained radical right challenger in German postwar political history, the anti-immigration party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), in the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015. But observers also saw the steady rise of polling for the left-liberal Green Party as the flipside of the same phenomenon. Directly citing the discourse of new cultural class struggle, then-leader of the AfD Alexander Gauland in 2018 denounced a “new urban elite” of the “culturally colorful [...] globalist class that dreams of one world” in their apartments in “Berlin, London or Singapore” (Gauland 2018, n.p.). For Gauland, this class

is opposed by two heterogeneous groups: [...] the traditional middle class, including small business owners, who cannot just move their production to India to cut costs; and many so-called common people, whose jobs are paid miserably or have disappeared, who have toiled for a lifetime and now live off paltry pensions. For them, the native country still has a high value, and they are the first to lose it, since they inhabit the milieus into which migrants are streaming. (ibid.).

Similarly, in a debate on “identity politics” hosted by the center-left newspaper *taz*, political scientist Wolfgang Merkel described the German “academic classes” as emulating the lifestyle of a “global class [...] who can live in Rome, Paris, New York or Beijing. The frequent flyers of

our society. Grouped around them are the academic classes, who have the same consumption habits and ways of thinking, and who display the same gestures of moral superiority” (Orde 2020, n.p.). His opponent in the discussion, the sociologist Naika Foroutan, replied,

The globalized world is becoming increasingly complex. Left-wing liberals may be able to come to terms with this more easily. Not because of their status or income, but above all because of a more open view of the world. There is one part of society that recognizes plurality [...], and another that gives an exclusive nationalist offer. You can be a bricklayer from a village in the Rhineland and still be a left liberal.” (ibid)

Accepting the premise that globalization had introduced a new central conflict between a left-wing liberal “open view of the world” and a “nationalist offer”, Foroutan sought to decouple left liberalism from status and income. As a potential left liberal she cited an imaginary male provincial bricklayer, a kind of Joe the Plumber of German cultural class discourse. Such a generalized social base for left liberalism was forcefully repudiated by Sahra Wagenknecht, the former leader of the radical left *Die Linke*'s parliamentary caucus, who in a recent book denounced liberal “lifestyle leftists” for cultivating an aloof and distinctly middle class approach to politics that alienated the left from ordinary people (Wagenknecht 2021). Doing so, she painted another picture of the class referent of cosmopolitan left liberalism.

The typical lifestyle leftist lives in a big city or at least a fancy university town and rarely in places like Bitterfeld or Gelsenkirchen. He studies or has a university degree, advocates a post-growth economy and pays attention to buying organic food. He abhors people eating meat from the discounter, driving diesel-fuelled cars, or traveling to Mallorca on budget flights. [...] [He] is open-minded [...] considers the nation-state to be obsolete and himself to be a citizen of the world who has little connection with his own country. [...] The lifestyle leftist values autonomy and self-realization more than tradition and community. He finds traditional values such as performance [*Leistung*], diligence and effort uncool. (Wagenknecht 2021, 43)

It is notable that throughout these discourses, strong connections are drawn between sociostructural profiles of class, education, and place; mentalities, moral outlooks, and lifestyles; and liberal or populist-authoritarian political leanings. While Gauland and Merkel

stress the local uprootedness of “global class” careers, Wagenknecht identifies class positions by a gap in social geography between the “fancy university town” on the one hand, and Bitterfeld and Gelsenkirchen, the emblematic poor ex-industrial cities of East and West Germany on the other. She cites higher education, consumption behavior, as well as values like those of community and work ethos as linked to political convictions. And in hers, like in Gauland and Merkel’s accounts, socially privileged members of the liberal left “abhor” people like the provincial bricklayer, making less ethical consumption choices due to their conventional lifestyles and/or smaller budgets. The new discourse of class conflict as culture war not only focuses on differences in lifestyles, culture, and morality, it also embeds these in a logic of group conflict.

In discourses around the new cultural class conflict, the picture is clear. Workers and the educated new middle class form part of large groups (according to Reckwitz (2019) around a third of the population each) which are in feud with each other both culturally and politically. Structurally divided by class, education, and a growing center-periphery divide, culturally embedded in antagonistic ideals of traditionalism and openness, these groups form opposing camps clashing over a range of issues like identity politics and, above all, immigration (De Wilde et al. 2019), politically represented by left liberalism and right-wing populism. Particularly the refugee crisis of 2015 here appears as a critical juncture that aligned these classes into antagonistic camps whose polarization structures contemporary politics in Germany and beyond.

### **1.2. “Things Are Going Downhill Around Here” – A Story**

A change of scenery: In the course of the refugee arrivals of 2015, a Syrian family moved into the place next to my parents’ house, on the outskirts of a smaller Western German city, and I happened to be present when my parents hosted a welcome lunch for the new neighbors, meant to introduce them to the tightly-knit indigenous community of suburbians. While the neighbors discussed the heating value of various types of local timber and the Syrian arrivers nervously smiled and nodded, I sat in a corner with an elderly woman who proudly told me she had lived on this street since 1948, when all the surrounding land was still fields.

Unfortunately though, she sighed, things were going downhill around here recently, with “all these new ones coming here, whom no one knows and who make no efforts to fit in”. Bracing myself for the inevitable, I asked whom she meant. “Well, you for example”, she replied, “I don’t know who you are – I haven’t even seen you on the street before!”

It turned out that the woman had identified me with a group of university students who had moved into the street a year earlier. The students had not introduced themselves to any of the neighbors, and it had been observed that they neither kept their house front clear of fallen leaves, nor separated their trash according to the recycling rules.

The point of this story is that once we leave the realm of sweeping political diagnoses and op-eds, the picture often becomes less clear-cut, but also more interesting. Local milieus, like that of my parents’ neighborhood, have idiosyncratic ways of drawing boundaries between those who belong and those who don’t, boundaries deeply charged with moral evaluations of right and wrong behaviors, and distinct from the summary lines drawn by public discourse and social scientists seeking to bring order into the mess of social facts. The ethnic distinction I had expected turned out to be at best a subordinate variant of a more general “neighborhood nationalism” (Back 1996, Wimmer 2013), tying commitments to neighborhood cohesion with the feeling that behavioral norms must be defended against an ever-increasing sense of disorder. Such neighborhood nationalism *can* turn into anti-immigration sentiment, but it does not have to (and in this case did not).<sup>3</sup>

It is through the idiosyncratic and relational vernacular of local groups and milieus that objective social positions are translated into socially consequential self-understandings; that legitimate claims and expectations are defined; and that lines of social closure against “polluting categories” like asylum seekers or university students, are drawn. Analytically ‘before’ politics, the categories of this vernacular are articulated in terms of affinities and oppositions, the terms of ‘moral worlds’ (Lamont 2000) inhabited by individuals and groups of similar social position. Pre-political boundaries and moral distinctions are politically malleable. Yet the understanding of the self and its social location they provide, the categories of

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<sup>3</sup> In the neighborhood in Berlin where I lived then, a similar defense of old-established residents against newcomers was at times mobilized in protests against yuppie gentrifiers.

evaluation they proffer, and the commonalities in experiences of the world they assert – in short, the role they have for social identity processes – provide the building blocks upon which political allegiances are constructed (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Jenkins 1996).

### 1.3. Questions, Aims, and Structure of the Text

In this study, I draw on Bourdieusian class analysis to interrogate the idea of a new cultural class conflict, taking as a starting point the analytically most advanced formulation of this idea, the diagnosis of a *new cleavage* of universalism-particularism, which will be introduced below. Methodologically, I take both a survey-based *view from above*, as is done in larger-scale diagnoses of political conflict, and an interview-based *view from below*, as illustrated by the story in the last section. In the first perspective, the central aim is to map and explore the connections between class and ideological polarities in Germany, asking whether and how the picture of a polarized opposition of classes and ideological camps bears out empirically. In the second part, I turn to the pre-political level of identities and morality sketched above. Drawing on 50 in-depth interviews with cultural middle class professionals and manual workers (incidentally including a bricklayer from a Rhenish village), I explore whether and how the conflict pattern diagnosed by cleavage theory and the ‘new cultural class conflict’ discourses is salient for the class-specific social identities on either side of a supposed “new cleavage”.

The broad questions of this study, further specified theoretically below, are as follows:

- Are Germans polarized into two opposing ideological camps based on their universalist and particularist outlooks?
- Are these camps underpinned by clear class profiles? And can class and ideological leanings be said to align in the form of a new class conflict between workers and the educated, professional, or cultural middle class?
- Are these divides meaningful for the way ordinary people understand themselves? On other words: Does the rift of a new divide also run through social identities?

My goal by answering these questions is to help objectify public debates, and to use the discursive opening of the ‘new cultural class conflict’ debates for returning to questions of class, identity, and politics. For sociologists, it is certainly great news that there is such interest

in the connections between sociostructural change, mentalities, and political leanings. And debates like those cited above – in principle – already apply a complex, non-reductionist understanding of class, in which interests and identities, redistribution, recognition, and representation, occupational positions, gender, ethnicity, and regional environments are all brought into the mix. Yet, all too often the rhetorical setting of these debates leads the arguments back into reductionism, from which class reemerges as a caricatured set of sock puppets (here the honest, down-to-earth, though mildly racist worker “capable of a good belly-laugh” (Hoggart 1957, 74), there the jet set yuppie or vegan middle class moralizer).

My aim then is to show that precisely because the linkage of class, culture, and politics taps into a crucial dimension of current alignments, its realities deserve a less polemical treatment. The overall approach sympathizes with recent invocations of a “right to object” of empirical research against all-too sweeping diagnoses of cultural conflict (Mau et al. 2020; see also Mau, Lux, and Jacobi 2021; Schäfer 2021; Biskamp 2020). But it also takes very seriously the findings of cleavage theory positing such a conflict. Ideally, my contribution can be read both as a critique of and a contribution to cleavage research, one that brings cleavage theory into a conversation with Bourdieusian sociology.

The text is structured as follows: In the next chapter (2), I introduce the theoretical background, central concepts, as well as, briefly, the German context of my study. Then follows the first part of the empirical analysis, the “view from above”. It consists of a Multiple Correspondence Analysis of survey data from the General Population Survey ALLBUS, whose methodology and data is explained in chapter 3 and whose results are discussed in chapter 4. With chapter 5 we turn to the sample and method of the longer and more in-depth second part of the analysis, “the view from below”. Here, the shorter chapters 6-9 and 11-13 reconstruct patterns of social identification among clusters of workers and middle class professionals, each followed by summaries of the class sample as a whole (10 and 14) which place findings in the context of cleavage research. Chapter 15 summarizes key findings and discusses the conclusions.

## 2. Theory: Classed Politics and the Search for the Prepolitical Bases of a New Cleavage

*Political force resides in a common sense, which exists most powerfully not in the formal language of politics, but in the vernacular, the familiar language of the street, the home, the pub, the workplace and the terraces.*

(Hall and O'Shea 2013, 9)

### 2.1. Two Perspectives on the Contemporary Realignment of Class and Politics

“The overall cleavage structure of a political society”, Zsolt Enyedi writes, “results from the interplay between three factors: political entrepreneurs, *the pre-political preferences and structures of a society (the raw material political entrepreneurs work with)*, and the constraining institutional structure” (Enyedi 2005, 700, emphasis added). The middle term of this triad, the pre-political structures of a society, are the central object of this study.<sup>4</sup> Pre-political structures comprise a heterogeneous field of identities and values, gut feelings and common sense, an “economy of affection and dislikes” (Ostiguy 2017, 83) which mediates between people’s sense of *who they are* and their sense of *where they stand*. My main contribution in this work is to study central elements of this pre-political vernacular, and situate it in the larger structures of evolving cleavages.

My starting point is a diagnosis that stands behind many of the public debates cited in the introduction, and has developed a complex analytical toolkit and a wealth of empirical findings. This is the diagnosis of a realignment of class and political partisanship along a *new cleavage of universalism-particularism*. In the first part of this theoretical introduction, I explain what is meant by these terms. I also introduce a complementary second approach which has evolved from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and describes a similar set of phenomena as a transition from class politics to “*classed politics*” (Jarness, Flemmen, and Rosenlund 2019). Coming from different angles, both the “new cleavage” and the “classed politics” approaches link political conflict to social structure. Although the disciplinary boundaries between

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<sup>4</sup> Enyedi’s differs from the classical formulation which I follow, and which names *social structure* as the third factor (see below).

sociology and political science have so far kept the two approaches almost entirely separated, I show that they are highly complementary and good to think with together (see also Damhuis 2020; Zollinger and Westheuser 2021).

Cleavage research is interested in the sociostructural determinants of voting behavior and party system structuration, and inspects the social bases behind party *electorates*. The Bourdieusian approach is interested in correspondences between the structural positions and the cultural and ideological positionings of *classes, class fractions, and milieus*, including such expressed in voting.<sup>5</sup> I show that both present partly complementary attempts to describe the complex realignment of politics and social structure after the end of the postwar class-political constellation. I then home in on the question of the pre-political and its place in cleavage change. Both approaches centered here acknowledge that between sociostructural positions and political mobilization stands a conglomerate of socially situated processes of identification, group formation, and normative orientation – here summarized as *social identities*. In cleavage theory, social identities had been one of three core dimensions of cleavages ever since the inception of the approach (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). But until recently, this dimension has remained neglected, leading to significant gaps in the conceptualization and methodology for studying social identities in cleavage formation. I suggest that some of these gaps can be filled with the analytical vocabulary developed in the tradition of Bourdieusian cultural class analysis.

I unpack three ways in which a pre-political social sense of “the kind of person I am” links social structure to politics. These are self-understandings and a *sense of social location* elaborated via symbolic boundaries; *moral economies*, or normative expectations tied to social relations; and differing *relations to politics*, including sociopolitical styles and degrees of political in- or exclusion. These three aspects are developed in the second part of this chapter, and guide the empirical inquiry especially in the qualitative part. The basic argument is that ideological positionings, including those along the “new cleavage”, flow from pre-political self-understandings embedded in vertical and horizontal class relations.

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<sup>5</sup> As Enyedi suggests with the image of pre-political structures as the “raw material” of politics, I see the prepolitical vernacular and common sense of social groups as politically powerful. Yet I largely leave aside the question of a mobilization or non-mobilization of prepolitical structures in party politics.

## **Class and Politics After the End of the Postwar Settlement**

This first section introduces cleavage theory and Bourdieusian class analysis as two answers to the same problematic, that of the pluralization of class and politics beginning around the 1970s. What both the Bourdieusian and the new cleavage approach contend is that class and other factors of social structure continue to be relevant for politics, even after the end of a classical period of class politics in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which placed class-based distributive conflict at the center of politics. Both theories acknowledge a pluralization both of the class structure and of political conflicts since the 1970s (Vester et al. 2001; Oesch 2006a), but against claims of a “death of class” supposedly caused by this pluralization (Pakulski and Waters 1996), both theories maintain that given the right concepts and methodological tools, class and politics can still be shown to align also in postindustrial societies. In the terms of cleavage theory, this is expressed by the image of two interlocking cleavages, the old class cleavage and a new universalism-particularism cleavage. From the Bourdieusian angle, it has been called a transition from class politics to “classed politics”.

Cleavage theory, first formulated by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967), continues the oldest theory of voting behavior, the socio-structural approach also known as the Columbia School (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). The theory borrows its guiding metaphor from geology, where a cleavage designates “the crack in the rock that is the first to emerge under pressure” (Deegan-Krause and Enyedi 2007, 1). The cleavage concept stands for a “type of conflict in democratic politics that is rooted in the social structural transformations that have been triggered by large-scale processes such as nation building, industrialization, and possibly also by the consequences of post-industrialization.” (Bornschier 2009, 1; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; see also Korom 2019). Cleavages are “a pattern of political competition embedded in the cognitive, emotive or social structures of the citizenry as opposed to one determined by day-to-day issues, evaluations of government performance or personalities” (Enyedi 2005, 698). In other words, they are the basic and slow-moving faultlines underneath the back and forth of claims, campaigns and candidates that make up the day-to-day sphere of politics as it appears on our screens. More than mere oppositions on this or that issue, cleavages are divisions that run through all of the political realm and cast it in a dichotomous vision of friend and foe.

Some political conflicts reach such pervasiveness and durability because they are the expression of historically grown rifts in the social structure of societies (e.g. between owners and tenants, or national center and periphery), rifts that separate the interests and experiences of people on either side of the divide so starkly from one another that their worldviews and political allegiances will, over time, come to mirror the divisions of the structural level. With this perspective, which it derived from Marxism and the study of class formation,<sup>6</sup> cleavage theory tries to identify bundles of historical macro-scale process of closure in social relationships (Bartolini and Mair 1990). At the core of the theory is the rise and decline of political formations shaped by historically variant but slow-moving structural potentials (Bornschieer 2018). With Bartolini and Mair (1990), a cleavage is widely understood to necessarily include three elements:

- The first *sociostructural* or empirical element rests on the separation of interests between populations characterized by features like class, religion, ethnicity, or region, in the course of a large-scale social transformations. (e.g. landed aristocratic elites had very different interests vis-à-vis industrialization than urban factory owners).
- The second *sociocultural*, normative, identity or group element denotes a sense of collective identity which must be present among the structurally separated populations to constitute a cleavage. A common set of values and beliefs is thought to underpin collective identities and to give shape to a specific group consciousness.
- The third *political*, organizational or behavioral element comprises the articulation of the group's interest through institutions or organizations. In addition to the awareness of their collective identity, the members of a given group must be also willing to act on this basis. Typical examples are political parties, unions, or movements. The resulting organization of group interests and definition of identities leads to an institutionalization of conflicts.

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Marx statement: "In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class" (Marx 1852, 192).

While in the classical formulation, the bottom-up structural genesis of political conflicts was the most central line of inquiry, in newer cleavage studies, it is highlighted that political formations can also create group identities top-down through their appeals and organizational cohesion (see Evans 2010, Robison et al. 2021, Deegan-Krause 2009).<sup>7</sup> In any case it is now widely agreed in cleavage research that it is only when all three elements align along one logic of opposition that we can speak of a cleavage.<sup>8</sup>

In Lipset and Rokkan's classical formulation, four cleavages were theorized to have arisen in the context first of the national and then of the industrial revolution. These were the center-periphery or territorial cleavage, religious-secular or church versus state cleavage, the urban-rural cleavage, and the labor-capital or class cleavage.<sup>9</sup> The most important cleavage in Lipset and Rokkan's time was the *class cleavage* that had configured the Left and Right sides of Western European party systems throughout the first two thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The class cleavage saw Left and Right divided over questions of the rightful appropriation and redistribution of wealth and income, state intervention into markets, public or private ownership, and increasingly the size and generosity of the welfare state. As redistribution, public control, and welfare disproportionately benefited workers and other non-owners at the

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<sup>7</sup> In Kriesi's words, "a structural division is transformed into a cleavage, if a political actor gives coherence and organized political expression to what otherwise are inchoate and fragmentary beliefs, values and experiences among members of some social group" (Kriesi 2010, 673; see also Ford and Jennings 2020).

<sup>8</sup> "The theoretical connotation of the concept of cleavage refers to the combination of interest orientations rooted in social structure, cultural/ideological orientations rooted in normative systems, and behavioral patterns expressed in organizational membership and action" (Bartolini 2004, cit. in Kriesi 2010, 673).

<sup>9</sup> The former, consisting in the creation of territorial and increasingly centralized states with a nationalizing logic, created an opposition of territorially defined interests and identities, as it pitted local powerholders against the centralizing pull of governments and bureaucracies in the capital. This split of interests and allegiances introduced by nationalizing states created a durable site of conflicts all over Europe, which endure until this day in places like Catalonia or Scotland, as well as, less conspicuously, in regionalist and anti-metropolitan forms of the urban-rural divide. A second conflict related to the territorial politics of nationalization was that between the central administrations of the new nation states and the vested interests of the Catholic Church, the central institution preceding the modern state. While Protestant churches were quite easily integrated into state apparatuses, the transnational and centralized nature of Catholicism resisted (Rovny and Polk 2019). The industrial revolution, on the other hand, created a new order of stratification and differentiation based on functional criteria and with it two conflicts: That between the interests of the landed gentry and urban industrial entrepreneurs as well as later that between workers and capitalists. While the latter throughout Europe led to the establishment of Socialist parties in the wake of working class enfranchisement, rural and religious populations formed the backbone of Conservative or Christian Democratic parties of the center-right (Gidron and Ziblatt 2019).

expense of capital, these conflicts were direct expressions of a “democratic class struggle” between the forces of labor and capital (Lipset 1960, ch. 7; Przeworski and Sprague 1986).

Emerging in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the institutional heyday of the class cleavage was the “midcentury social compromise” (Crouch 1999) of the postwar decades. A Fordist growth regime which relied heavily on semi-skilled labor in manufacturing for the large-scale production of standardized commodities here was coupled with extensive state planning, interventionism, and welfare redistribution. Rising wages, and the extension of social rights and employment security, according to the principle of “participation for performance”, effected a process of de-proletarianization among workers (Vester et al. 2001). Although won against the resistance of capital, these policies actually stabilized capitalism, as growing prosperity ensured rising demand and the predictability of investments into economies of scale (Hall 2020; Streeck 1997). Strong unions, social democratic parties, and the threat of communism forced capitalists to channel a comparatively large part of surpluses into wage increases or, via taxes, into the social wage, i.e. public services disproportionately benefiting workers, the middle classes, and the poor. This ensured that historical rates of economic growth went hand in hand with historically low rates of inequality (Piketty 2014).

Against this historical background, the class cleavage was the dominant frame of what Peter Hall calls the terms of political contestation (Hall 2020). During the postwar ‘trente glorieuse’, the memory of unemployment, immiseration, and austerity in the interwar years ensured that voters were first and foremost concerned with questions of economic rebuilding, redistribution, and justice, the wellbeing of working people, as well as the forms and extent of economic planning. This led to a convergence of center-left and center-right parties on struggles over the terms of welfarist and state interventionist policies, with both sides maintaining relatively high degrees of political control over capitalist market economies. Older cleavages, most importantly the religious cleavage, intersected with the democratic class struggle. But parties predominantly acted as vehicles for class interests, and the link between class and politics could be explained by the “simple economic self-interest” of voters (Lipset 1960, 223).

This postwar settlement fell apart in the follow-up to a profitability crisis beginning in the 1970s (Mann 2012b; Levy 2021, pt. 4). Permanently lowered growth rates made redistribution schemes increasingly difficult to maintain (Przeworski 2021), and, opposite to the previous era, low growth now went hand in hand with rising inequality (Hall 2020). At the same time, the expansion of the welfare state and the collective upward mobility and qualification of large parts of the former proletarian working class had also pacified many of the distributional conflicts virulent in the former periods (Clark, Lipset, and Rempel 1993). Increasing qualification levels, automation, and increasingly also the globalization of production chains caused an erosion of manufacturing in the industrial core and a concomitant decline of industrial class cultures (Mooser 1983; Raphael 2019).

The ensuing era of liberalization (Hall 2020) was marked by a new concertation of growth strategies of capitalist firms and government policy, in which the increasing financialization of companies and economies was bolstered by state liberalization and deregulation. Governments tended to step back from interventions and introduce market solutions, thus allowing for the intensification of competition and increases in inequality. The pressure on firms to lower labor costs led to downsizing and a rise in unemployment, which had been very low throughout the previous era. In the course of deindustrialization, manufacturing contributed an ever-declining share of value added in Western societies, with Asian economies increasingly becoming the center of global growth (Raphael 2019, 39). While high tech industrial production continued to be extremely important, especially in Germany, this production accounted for a declining share of employment, as productivity rose, semi-skilled work was automated, and service sector jobs related to industrial production were outsourced. All this coincided with a continually strong rise of employment in the service sector and in higher qualified occupations, made possible by the vast extension of access to higher education. Especially the 'new occupations' in science, culture and education, social work, medicine, and technical intelligence expanded in the course of welfare state expansion in the previous era, increases in higher education rates, and the mass entry of women into labor markets (Oesch 2006b).

The terms of political contestation too shifted to debates about liberalization, not only in the sense of economic deregulation, but also in the sense of a pluralization of socially acceptable

life forms. The latter was due to a value-based 'New Politics' emerging from mobilizations of the New Left, which introduced a range of issues that lay diagonal to the older class cleavage, and essentially replaced the value-based religious cleavage declining in the course of an increasing secularization of electorates (Rovny and Polk 2019). Instead of the distributional conflict of the previous era, the central terms of political contestation increasingly revolved around so-called 'cultural' issues: environmental concerns, issues of peace and disarmament, and feminist struggles over abortion and economic independence raised by the New Social Movements drew mass support and fierce conservative opposition in this era. Other causes like LGBT liberation or Third World solidarity reaching large milieu-specific audiences. In a second meaning, liberalization here stood for the political battles over a gradual erosion of traditional norms of deference and conformity that had been underway since the 1960s. As Niklas Luhmann observed drily, "suddenly you could walk on the grass" (Luhmann cit. in Müller 2016, 68).

Responses from the right, such as German chancellor Helmut Kohl's 1983 call for a 'spiritual-moral turn' [*geistig-moralische Wende*], linked commitments to the family and patriotism to a willingness to hard work [*Leistungsbereitschaft*] (Biebricher 2018). Clearly, slogans like these also very much touched upon distributive questions of the legitimate scope of social rights. And the New Social Movements' critiques of material social structures like the military-industrial complex or the state (e.g. Jungk 1984; MacKinnon 1987), made their designation as 'cultural' politics somewhat misleading. But compared to the postwar era, questions of economic justice and state planning did not form the dynamic center of political contestation. What left and right clashed over most visibly were questions of traditional authority versus the extension of individual rights, the limits of state power, and of the encroachment of instrumental rationality on societal flourishing, that is, questions posed by a new and often radical current of liberalism, in line with structural changes towards a postindustrial society. This political current found a political expression in parties of the New Left, and especially Green parties, often emerging from New Social Movement initiatives (Rucht and Roth 1987). One reflection of these trends, which rose to prominence particularly from the 1990s onwards, were diagnoses of a "death of class" or even an end of structurally situated cleavage politics as a whole (Clark et al. 1993). An economically grounded politics of life chances was

said to be replaced by a more individualized and culture-based “politics of life choices”, concerned with “how we should live in a world where everything that used to be natural (or traditional) now has in some sense to be chosen or decided about” (Giddens 1994, 91; see also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Political scientists pronounced an increasing tendency towards political dealignment, an individualization of lifestyles and political allegiances, through a cognitive mobilization of a more highly educated electorate, and more flexible issue- and candidate-based vote choices (Inglehart 2008; Dalton 2002; see also Elff 2007).

Yet almost simultaneously, an alternative narrative emerged to which both the newer strands of cleavage theory and the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his followers can be counted. This narrative maintained that politics had not been unmoored from class, but that the pluralization of political contestation simply mirrored a simultaneous pluralization also of sociostructural relations. In voting studies, for instance, it was shown that class voting was not “dead” but simply overlaid by, or “buried alive” under forms of cultural voting rooted in educational differences (van der Waal, Achterberg, and Houtman 2007). In particular, divisions *within* the ranks of the middle class were shown to underpin the emerging landscape of political division. As Left and Right had transformed, so had their social bases. Consequently, the new political landscape could still be understood as expressing a class-political nexus if only the analytical tools were reformulated to be back in sync with structural and political realities.

### **The New Cleavage Approach: The Rise of a New Universalism-Particularism Divide**

New cleavage approaches focus on showing that core dimensions of New Politics and subsequent political conflicts, which lie orthogonal to the democratic class struggle, continue to be anchored in social structure, particularly occupational class and education, but also sectoral or urban-rural divides, and those between labor market insiders and outsiders. Important early starting points were class-specific patterns of participation in the New Social Movements (Kriesi 1989); changes in the electorates of Social Democratic and emerging New Left parties (e.g. Greens) (Kitschelt 1988; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015); as well as later the changing class composition of Populist Radical Right electorates (Bornschieer 2010; Bornschieer and Kriesi 2012; Oesch 2012; Rydgren 2012).

Since the 1970s, the working class share of the left base had been decreasing, and the voice of the working class became more and more muted in the political arena (Hall 2020). Instead the middle class, particularly that emerging in the social and cultural ‘new occupations’ increasingly became the dominant part in the social democratic and left-wing electoral coalitions. Approximately since 1990, middle class members, and disproportionately those fractions employed in sociocultural professions (see below), formed majorities among (center-)left electorates in Western Europe (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015). This trend was recently rediscovered by Piketty under the suggestive label of a “Brahminization” of the Left, i.e. their increasing representation of highly educated populations (Piketty 2018; see also Abou-Chadi and Hix 2021). This contrasted with an increasing “proletarianization of the radical right” (Betz 1993; Minkenberg and Perrineau 2007), mobilizing in particular male and rural manufacturing workers with medium skill levels. This twin transformation of electoral blocs forms the backbone of the new cleavage diagnosis, and was often understood as causally linked, the Radical Right’s resurgence presenting a backlash against the liberalization won by the advances of the New Left (Bornschieer 2010), and a reaction of the losers of the new political economy of transnationalizing knowledge economies. Indeed, the radical right thrived on the politicization of migration issues, which has been a powerful dimension of political conflict at least since the beginning of the new millenium (Bornschieer 2018).<sup>10</sup>

The terminologies used to describe this realignment have been varied. Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks list no less than *sixteen* major diagnoses of newly emerging cleavages formulated for Western European politics in the preceding 35 years, that is, almost one for every other year (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 26ff.). New cleavage terminologies essentially progressed in three waves that followed the evolution of political issues, conflicts, and actors.

The first wave centered on the value divide around societal liberalization, or what became known as the divide between *authoritarianism* and *libertarianism* (Kitschelt 1994, Kriesi 1998). This divide hinges on justifications of hierarchy and tolerance for non-conformity (Flanagan and Lee 2003). As Stubager writes,

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<sup>10</sup> As discussed below, in Germany the “foreigner question” had already been at the center of political debate in the early 1980s, and the country saw a violent far right mobilization against refugees in the early 1990s.

authoritarians favour social hierarchy – that is, the rank ordering of individuals in a system with a clear distinction between superior and inferior groups or persons. Such hierarchies are both natural and right to authoritarians. Libertarians, on the other hand, dislike social hierarchies and prefer the free and equal interaction of people without regard to social positions of any kind [...]. Entailed in a libertarian position [is] a basic respect for and tolerance of other people – including those who deviate from one's own norms or the norms of society. [...] This is not so for authoritarians: those who deviate from conventional norms or who stand outside society should first and foremost be made to comply. (Stubager 2009, 329).

This divide partly absorbed elements of the religious versus secular, where both did not become synonymous, as in the US-American ‘culture wars’ over abortion, criminal justice, and other moral issues.

The second wave centered on cleavage transformations related to struggles over borders (De Wilde et al. 2019), i.e. the cultural, economic, and political ramifications of transnationalization in the form of migration, the deregulation of global markets, and transnational political integration. This was labeled as a cleavage of *integration-demarcation* (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012) or *cosmopolitanism-communitarianism* (De Wilde et al. 2019). Hooghe and Marks synthesized these issues with those focalized in the first phase by their formulation of a transnational cleavage pitting “Green-Alternative-Liberal” against “Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist” parties and electorates (GAL-TAN) (e.g. Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002).

A third most recent wave added the observation also of *distributive* conflict, specifically over welfare chauvinism and restrictive or expansionary deservingness in the context of austerity, as well as diverging preferences for social policies centered on consumption or investment (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Busemeyer, Rathgeb, and Sahm 2021; Attewell 2021; Rathgeb 2020).<sup>11</sup> Noting an overlap of positionings on these issues with those on authoritarian-

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<sup>11</sup> Where social investment policies are those that “empower people to earn a living in the labor market – with policies classified under the rubrics of education, child care, labor market activation, research and development, and public infrastructure”; while social consumption policies are those that “help people cope with the loss of income, whether due to old age (pensions), skill redundancy (unemployment insurance), or illness (disability benefits and sick leave from employment, medical diagnostics and therapy)” (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015, 8).

libertarian sociopolitical governance and national demarcation, the conglomerate of positionings on all three dimensions was summarized as a *universalism-particularism* cleavage that divides

preferences for a 'universalistic' conception of social order in which all individuals enjoy and support a wide and equal discretion of personal freedoms to make choices over their personal lives, from preferences for a 'particularistic' conception that sees the individual as embedded in a collective heritage and tradition that command compliance, including a clear demarcation of boundaries between those who are members and those who are not. [...] The polarity of universalism versus particularism [...] thus relates to the role of the individual, as the locus of rights and the origin of choices and with the basic equality of all individuals. It therefore reflects a preference for the procedural treatment of all individuals as equal and endowed with personal autonomy to make decisions about their own lives and participate in collective decision making, regardless of their particular tastes, beliefs, and social affiliations. (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015, 18)

Throughout these three waves, a basic diagnosis regarding the sociostructural underpinnings of the changing 'second dimension' orthogonal to the democratic class struggle remained relatively stable. This diagnosis saw a disproportionately urban and highly educated professional class with liberal values as the winners of occupational change, educational expansion, transnationalization, and social investment (e.g. into education or child care), and as a primary carrier stratum of social liberalization, transnational integration, and universalism (see also Reckwitz 2019). This class had already been shown to be highly overrepresented among the New Social Movements of the 1970s and 80s, as it was later found to be among the electorates of New Left parties. The losers of structural change and liberalization, on the other hand, were said to be the aforementioned male traditional workers and rural dwellers overrepresented among the voters of the Populist Radical Right.

From 2006 onwards, these social bases were commonly identified with the help of an occupation-based class scheme developed by Daniel Oesch (Oesch 2006a, 2006b), which is also used in the analysis below. Partly inspired by Kriesi’s work on the class bases of the New Left and Populist Right, Oesch developed a scheme which, like the political conflict structure observed in political science, is two-dimensional. A vertical axis of the hierarchy in marketable skills is crossed with a horizontal axis of four work logics, which capture differences in sectors, task profiles, ownership, and employment relations. An independent work logic of the self-employed and owners is differentiated from three work logics experienced by employees: technical, organizational, and interpersonal service work logics.

Self-employed		Employees			marketable skills:
Independent work logic		Technical work logic	Organizational work logic	Interpersonal service work logic	
<b>1. Large employers (&gt;9)</b> <i>Firm owners</i> <i>Hotel owners</i> <i>Salesmen</i>	<b>2. Self-employed professionals</b> <i>Lawyers</i> <i>Accountants</i> <i>Medical doctors</i>	<b>5. Technical experts</b> <i>Mechanical engineers</i> <i>Computing professionals</i> <i>Architects</i>	<b>10. Higher-grade managers</b> <i>Business administrators</i> <i>Financial managers</i> <i>Marketing managers</i>	<b>14. Socio-cultural professionals</b> <i>University teachers</i> <i>Medical doctors</i> <i>Journalists</i>	Professional / managerial
<b>3. Small proprietors, artisans, with employees (&lt;9)</b> <i>Restaurant owners</i> <i>Farmers</i> <i>Garage owners</i>	<b>6. Technicians</b> <i>Electrical technicians</i> <i>Computer equipment operators</i> <i>Safety inspectors</i>	<b>11. Associate managers</b> <i>Managers in small firms</i> <i>Tax officials</i> <i>Bookkeepers</i>	<b>15. Socio-cultural semi-professionals</b> <i>Primary school teachers</i> <i>Registered nurses</i> <i>Social workers</i>		Associate professional / managerial
<b>4. Small proprietors, artisans, without employees</b> <i>Shopkeepers</i> <i>Hairdressers</i> <i>Lorry drivers</i>	<b>7. Skilled crafts</b> <i>Machinery mechanics</i> <i>Toolmakers</i> <i>Electricians</i>	<b>12. Skilled office</b> <i>Secretaries</i> <i>Banking tellers</i> <i>Stock clerks</i>	<b>16. Skilled service</b> <i>Policemen</i> <i>Cooks</i> <i>Children's nurses</i>		Generally / vocationally skilled
	<b>8. Routine operatives</b> <i>Assemblers</i> <i>Machine operators</i> <i>Freight handlers</i>	<b>9. Routine agriculture</b> <i>Farm hands</i> <i>Loggers</i> <i>Gardeners</i>	<b>13. Routine office</b> <i>Mail sorting clerks</i> <i>Receptionists</i> <i>Messengers</i>	<b>17. Routine service</b> <i>Shop assistants</i> <i>Home helpers</i> <i>Waiters</i>	Low / unskilled

Note: Continuous lines indicate how classes are to be collapsed into the 8-class version

Figure 2: Oesch Class Scheme With Typical Occupations (Source: Oesch 2006)

The social bases of the new cleavage in its different guises were identified as production workers, especially in the more highly qualified skilled crafts category, as well as sociocultural professionals like doctors, and semi-professionals like social workers. Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) theorized that occupations directly act as sites of preference formation through an identification with and generalization of the cognitive mode acquired on the job. The more libertarian positionings of sociocultural professionals were explained by the altruistic and

empathetic traits and skills fostered by work environments based on face-to-face interactions, their relative autonomy from hierarchical lines of command, and an identification with the needs clients, patients, and students. In a revival of the theory of “working class authoritarianism” developed by Lipset (1960), the technical work logic, as well as low levels of education, political participation, and political knowledge, were said to predispose production workers in particular to inflexible, conventional attitudes that could turn into authoritarian aggression if the normative order of society was seen to be threatened.

Sociostructural differences of occupational class and education were also shown to exist with regard to transnationalization and welfare attitudes. “Two of the most important groups on the winners’ side, highly educated people and sociocultural specialists, are far more supportive of opening borders than are those with lower levels of education and those who are unskilled workers” (Kriesi et al. 2012, 73; Ivarsflaten and Stubager 2012). It has remained contested whether affectedness by globalization can be seen as in itself relevant for this divide, or whether migration issues simply channel older divides of education and class (as found e.g. by Langsæther and Stubager 2019). In any case, affectedness and political expression diverge in the sense that those parts of the working class most threatened either by offshoring or direct competition from recent migrants, labor market outsiders, service and production workers in lower skilled occupations (Dancygier and Walter 2015), tend to abstain rather than vote for the radical right. Instead, as mentioned, the radical right draws disproportionate support from the ranks of labor market insider workers with intermediate skills and education levels (Kurer and Palier 2019).<sup>12</sup>

All three dimensions of the most recent and most encompassing synthesis of cleavage research, the universalist-particularist cleavage, are thus said to be anchored in the preferences of production workers and sociocultural professionals as the strongest social bases of Populist Radical Right and New Left parties. An empirical summary of the resulting alignment of class and cleavages was recently developed by Oesch and Rennwald (2018) in

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<sup>12</sup> Workers were shown to tend towards consumption-oriented, sociocultural professionals towards investment-oriented social policies.

the form of a two-dimensional and tripolar political space of party competition and social bases (fig. 4).

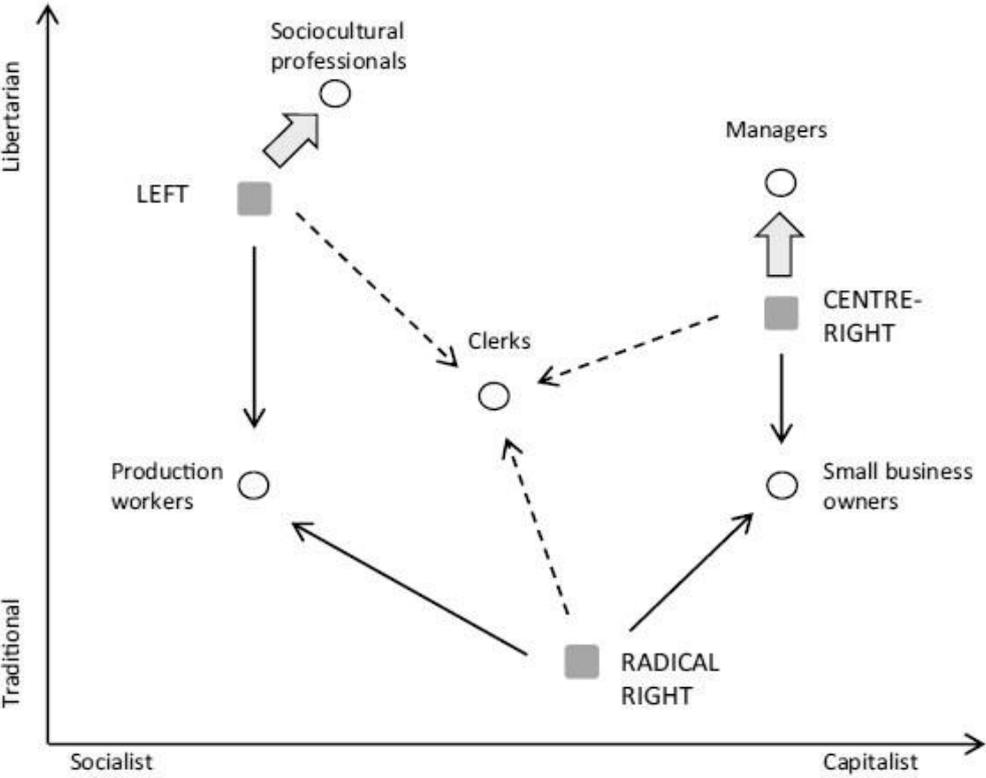


Figure 3: Tripolar Competition In The Two-Dimensional Political Space (Source: Oesch and Rennwald 2018)

The political space is here reconstructed by crossing the older cleavage of “democratic class struggle” with a new cleavage here designated as traditional-libertarian. Libertarian-redistributionist Left parties are shown to increasingly rely on the support of sociocultural professionals, though also competing with the Radical Right over production workers, while the Radical and Center Right are shown to compete over the petty bourgeoisie, with the Center Right most strongly anchored in the class fraction of higher and mid-level private sector management employees. In this way, the model of two intersecting cleavages with distinct political expressions and social bases is very helpful to understand the structure of political conflict after the end of the postwar settlement.

Although the degree of political realignment differs across countries (e.g. Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Emanuele, Marino, and Angelucci 2020), and divides on the redistributive class cleavage still loom large (Amable and Darcillon 2021), the centerpiece of the “new cleavage” narrative

is the emergence of a second dimension of political conflict and its subsequent transformations into what is now labeled a universalism-particularism cleavage.

### **The Neo-Bourdieuian Approach: From Class Politics to Classed Politics**

Not least because Oesch also drew on Bourdieu's contributions when developing his class scheme, there are strong overlaps with Bourdieu's reconceptualization of the class structure (Bourdieu 1984) and his studies of class-political alignments. Bourdieu distinguishes social positions by the possession of multiple types of *capital*, or "accumulated labor" (Bourdieu 1986, 241). Capitals are assets that can be used as a resource for appropriating past and future gains, e.g. via rents, privileged positions, and earnings. They can also be accumulated and stored, be it through property or educational titles, institutional roles and privileges, or the embodiment of skills, knowledge, and the ability to "move" adequately in high-status social spheres (Lareau and Weininger 2003; Joppke 1986). The two most central forms of capital acting as 'trumps' on the playing field of contemporary capitalist societies are economic capital (money and property), and cultural capital (education, skills, and mastery of cultural codes), with social capital (networks and connections) as a third factor (Bourdieu 1985).

On this basis, Bourdieu develops a reconstruction of the class structure as a two-dimensional relational *space*. The space is formed by a vertical axis that differentiates individuals and groups by the overall *volume of capitals* they possess, while a horizontal axis differentiates the *relative composition of their capitals*, especially the relative weight of economic or cultural capital (see fig. 5; Bourdieu 1984, see also Atkinson 2017). Within this space, clusters of individuals close to each other in the social space can be described as classes by scientific observers, but these groupings only have a nominal status as "classes on paper" unless they are mobilized through processes of group-making.

On the basis of knowledge of the space of positions, one can separate out *classes*, in the logical sense of the word, i.e., sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances. This 'class on paper' has the *theoretical*

existence that is that of theories: [...] it makes it possible to explain and predict the practices and properties of the things classified – including their group-forming practices. It is not really a class, an *actual* class, in the sense of a group, a group mobilized for struggle; at most, it might be called a '*probable class*'. [...] Contrary to the *realism of the intelligible* (or the reification of concepts), one must assert that the classes that can be separated out in social space (for example, for the purposes of the statistical analysis which is the only means of manifesting the structure of the social space) do not exist as real groups, although they explain the probability of individuals constituting themselves as practical groups. (Bourdieu 1985, 725)

In contrast to “classes on paper”, “actual”, “practical”, or “real classes” are those which are mobilized and aware of their commonalities as a group.<sup>13</sup> We will return to the *making* of groups below. Here it is important to note that in the Bourdieusian “relational realism” (Wacquant 2013), a gradational *space of relations* is placed at the center of class analysis, and has primacy over the categories used to classify regions and positions within it. Still, class categories can be identified for the purpose of statistical analysis, and Bourdieu regularly used occupational classifications to reconstruct the logic of the social space. Examples are shown in figure 4 which situates typical occupations for the different combinations of capital volume and composition.

But while occupations here function as proxies for positions in the social space, neither occupations nor groups of occupations are treated as synonymous with classes (Harrits 2013; Brubaker 1985). “Social class” as a whole is not isolated as a causal factor against, say, education. Instead, a multitude of structural factors is drawn on in an attempt at a holistic reconstruction of the social space.<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu’s spatial, relational, and asset-based class analysis became particularly important for the analysis of the middle classes, where the overall

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<sup>13</sup> This follows the Marxist distinction between “classes in themselves” and “classes for themselves”, as well as Weber’s insistence that “‘classes’ are not communities; they merely present possible, and frequent bases for communal action” (Weber 1958, 181).

<sup>14</sup> Bottero draws out the difference between this spatial or relational approach and older structural approaches: “in structural approaches groups are defined as socially distant if they are very *different* to each other (in terms of class, gender or race categories), in relational approaches groups are defined as socially *distant* if they are held to rarely associate with each other” (Bottero 2004, 7). As discussed below, this introduces a different perspective from that suggested by the class analysis underpinning cleavage research.

higher volume of capital gives greater weight to differences in its relative composition (Savage 2012).

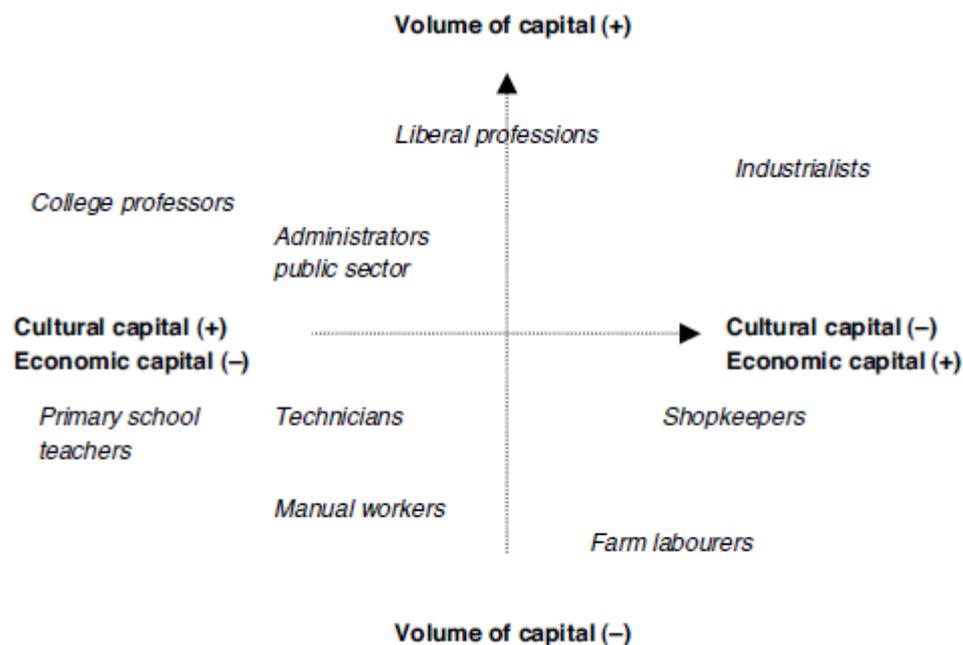


Figure 4: The Bourdieusian Social Space With Occupational Groups (Source: Oesch 2006, 18; adapted from Bourdieu 1984, 127f.)

As we saw, especially in the postwar period, a growing number of wage dependents were not employed in manual but white-collar work,<sup>15</sup> and the conservative or progressive class consciousness and political trajectory of this “New”, “Service”, or “Professional-Managerial Class” (Ehrenreich 1990; Gouldner 1979; Brint 1984; Goldthorpe 1982) became the object of intense debate. Mike Savage and others drew on Bourdieu to develop a differentiation of middle class fractions based on the assets afforded by their occupational involvement in the hierarchies of *property*, *bureaucracy*, or *cultural capital* (Savage et al. 1994).<sup>16</sup> The three resulting middle class fractions comprise a property-dependent petty bourgeoisie of small and

<sup>15</sup> As Chauvel and Hartung (2016) point out, the idea of a split inside the middle class between the higher and lower middle class, as well as between an old and a newly emerging *Mittelstand*, was already analyzed by the early German sociologist Gustav Schmoller in 1897. Schmoller’s observation that the dynamic of occupational change propelled a new middle class of the liberal professions, of civil servants and higher administrative personell to the fore, essentially prefigured reconstructions of a two-dimensional social space as inherent in Oesch’s and Bourdieu’s approaches.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Mann pointed out that the middle class is variably entangled in social relations of capitalist property ownership, the hierarchies of companies and state bureaucracies, and the system of licensed professions (Mann 2012a, 549).

mid-sized owners, a managerial and higher clerical class fraction drawing assets and status from positions especially in private sector hierarchies, and a cultural middle class employed disproportionately in the public sector, whose status reproduction strategies are centered on education and cultivation.

The left leanings of the latter class fraction vis-à-vis the other two was explained by their interest in public services funded through taxation, and the shelteredness from imperatives of profit making and competition (Heath and Savage 1995; Lamont 1987, 1992, 150ff.). Erik Olin Wright highlighted the decommodification of sociocultural services in education, health, public recreation, and social work (Wright 1997, 459ff.). For Wright, such services, oriented at the provision of use value and the satisfaction of needs, follow a non-capitalist logic, and could even be understood as embryonic post-capitalist institutions. Bourdieu himself highlighted the contradiction of interests between the middle class fraction engaged in state services to those of the economic wing of the middle class.

‘Social workers’, family counsellors, youth leaders, rank-and-file magistrates, [and] secondary and primary teachers constitute what I call the left hand of the state, the set of agents of the so-called spending ministries which are the trace, within the state, of the social struggles of the past. They are opposed to the right hand of the state, the technocrats of the Ministry of Finance, the public and private banks and the ministerial cabinets. A number of social struggles that we are now seeing express the revolt of the minor state nobility against the senior state nobility.” (Bourdieu 2008, n.p.)

For Bourdieu, the “minor state nobility”, i.e. those fractions positioned in the higher regions of the social space and richer in education than in property constituted the “dominated pole of the dominant class” (Bourdieu 1988). He speculated that it was the similarity of their relative position *within* the dominant side of the social space that made them prone to a class alliance with groups on the dominated side of the space as a whole, like workers; against the dominant pole of the dominant class, the “technocrats and bankers”.

Conceptually, Bourdieu understood the linkage of class and politics as one of *homologies* between the social space and the political space (Bourdieu 1984, 420f.). In structuralist jargon, homology designates the correspondence of multiple structures. Despite their different

appearances, the fin of a whale and the leg of a horse are homologous in the sense of their common position in the overall anatomical structure – a fact that betrays a common evolutionary lineage. In the same way, Bourdieu shows that relations in the social space, like those differentiating the cultural from the economic fraction of the middle class, tend to be homologous to distinctions in the political space, like that expressed in left- and right-voting.

These homologies arise because individuals internalize a sense of their location in the social space – and the other locations that theirs is differentiated from – in the form of embodied intuitions, or *habitus*. Equipped with a habitualized sense of their place, individuals are able to anticipate the kinds of practices and positionings that will be deemed fitting or “adequate” for their position. This leads to a generalization of the relations structuring the social space, because the conditions under which the embodied dispositions of the *habitus* were socialized become the basis for practices in a range of fields, like consumption, lifestyles – or politics.

On the other hand, because they are informed by a sense of social location, political positionings, like cultural tastes and lifestyles, can become markers of social position. In his magnum opus *Distinction*, Bourdieu illustrates this by showing empirically that the social space is homologous not only to political positionings, but also to the space of lifestyles reconstructed by markers of cultural tastes, sports activities, consumption patterns, or media choices.<sup>17</sup> The homology of the relations structuring the distribution of political positionings with the relations structuring the social space reveal the political space as an indirect or “distorted” articulation of the class structure.

In a series of recent studies revitalizing Bourdieu’s approach, this is given the useful label “*classed politics*” (Flemmen and Haakestad 2018; Jarness et al. 2019; Harrits 2013). Different from *class politics*, *classed politics* is not (necessarily) articulated as a conflict based on class by the actors involved. Yet the unacknowledged class character of political oppositions can be revealed by charting the social underpinnings of political positionings in the social space. A

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<sup>17</sup> In a graph adapted from the MCAs of *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1998a, 6), Bourdieu, for instance, uses MCA to link differences in leisure activities and beverage consumption to the volume and composition of capital, illustrated by occupational groups, and both to tendencies towards left- or right voting. Indeed in a footnote, Bourdieu (1984, 421) directly likens political leanings to cultural tastes. “At every moment of each society, one has to deal with a set of social positions which is bound by a relation of homology to a set of activities (the practice of golf or piano) [...] that are themselves characterized relationally.” (Bourdieu 1998, 4).

common method for doing so is Multiple Correspondence Analysis (introduced below). In this way, studies reveal homologies between the space of political attitudes and the primary dimensions of the social space in Denmark (Harrits et al. 2010; Harrits 2013), Norway (Flemmen and Haakestad 2018), Flanders (De Keere, 2018), the Netherlands and France (Damhuis 2020; see also Chiche et al. 2008), and the UK (Flemmen and Savage 2017).

Generally speaking, the dimensions structuring classed politics found here resemble those identified in the cleavage approach. Economic egalitarianism is strong among those with a lower volume of capital, as well as those with a capital composition dominated by cultural capital. Libertarian positionings are positively associated with the volume of capital, and especially with that of cultural capital. Special attention is given to the political expressions of divides between the cultural and economic fractions of the middle class, which are shown to structure the distinction between left and right, as well as, for instance, that of anti-racism and an imperial form of nationalism in the UK (Flemmen and Savage 2017).<sup>18</sup>

A Bourdieusian occupational class scheme developed in this context, and utilized below, is the Oslo Register Data Class scheme (ORDC, fig. 7 and Hansen, Flemmen, and Andersen 2009),

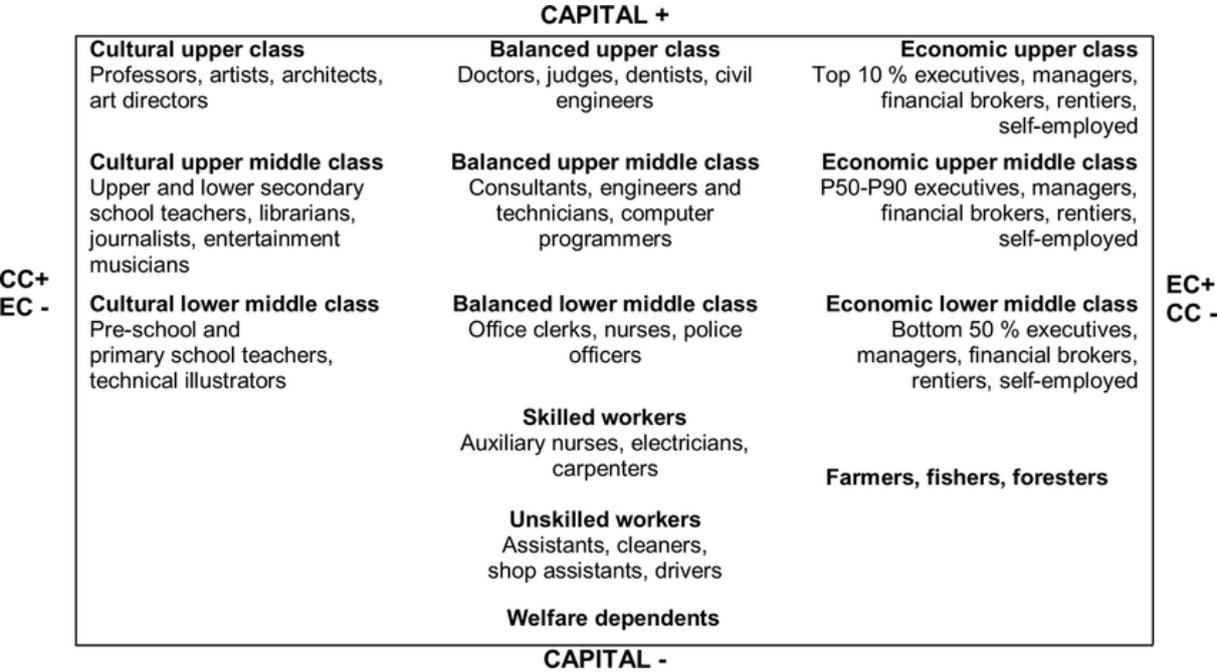


Figure 5: Oslo Register Data Class Scheme (Source: Hansen et al. 2009)

<sup>18</sup> Political divisions between class fractions by capital composition were captured down to different fields of study (Werfhorst 2020; Werfhorst and Graaf 2004).

which captures vertical stratification by capital volume as well as horizontal differentiations in the capital composition of fractions within the (lower and upper) middle and upper classes by occupation and income.

### **Elective Affinities and Divergences**

The presentation here is meant to bring out the considerable overlap and elective affinities between the cleavage approach and that developed in Bourdieusian political sociology. Both perspectives use a similar intellectual strategy to describe the same phenomenon, i.e. the social logic of politics after the 1970s, and more specifically the reconfiguration of the class-political constellation due to the simultaneous pluralization and differentiation of political divides and the class structure. In both approaches, vertical class differences are supplemented with horizontal differences between different fractions of the middle and working classes, which are shown to correspond to ideological divides of New Politics and subsequent changes in political conflict structures. In this way, both approaches reconstruct the social logic of politics in a multi-dimensional and structural way. These elective affinities are notable because – although engaged in a loose conversation on the level of class theory (see e.g. Oesch 2006; Vester and Weber-Menges 2014) – both approaches have remained almost entirely disconnected regarding their observation of political realignment.

As in the proverbial conversation of blind sages sat around different parts of the same elephant, the complementarity of perspectives creates occasions for mutually informative dialogue. But it also implies different inherent perspectives on what it is we are looking at. Such differences in a way are already expressed in the guiding analytical metaphors of the two approaches. While cleavage research is multidimensional with regard to the intersection of cleavages, within each of these cleavages, its ‘geological’ sensitivity makes it seek out dualistic rifts or faultlines whose two sides are embodied by an antagonistic couple of class fractions and political organizations. The basic theoretical logic of cleavage research demands a bipolar shorthand, like cosmopolitanism-communitarianism. This has to do with the focus on *party competition* and *electorates*, which presents a dependent variable with a clearcut friend/foe distinction.

This theoretical logic leads to a productive reductionism, which we can trace in the rapid succession of cleavage terminologies noted above. Summary, or ‘lumping’ strategies like that of the universalism-particularism cleavage diagnosis, capture oppositions on multiple issues (here: authoritarianism, migration, and deservingness) and theorize their core as consisting in one overarching ideological or value constellation. Here, it is notable that in order to present a neat dichotomous terminology, lumping strategies either tend to considerably increase the level of abstraction (as in the philosophical terminology of universalism-particularism), or to resort to *lists*, so as to capture the multiplicity of aspects, as in the libertarian/universalistic-traditionalist/communitarian (Bornschieer 2010), right/authoritarian-left/libertarian (Kitschelt 1994) or Green-Alternative-Libertarian/Traditionalist-Authoritarian-Nationalist (GAL-TAN, Hooghe and Marks 2017) terminologies.<sup>19</sup>

In all cases, the cleavage metaphor is productive because it simplifies an extremely complex picture of public opinion and draws strong connections between the relations of political camps and classes. But there is also a risk of reductionism, because lines of conflict are inherently presented as a unitary and dichotomous phenomenon. This becomes particularly problematic in the case of personified compound labels regularly used to name populations on either side of cleavages, such as “authoritarians” and “libertarians”, “cosmopolitans” and “communitarians”, or “globalization winners” and “losers”. As we saw in the introduction, these terms are eagerly taken up by public discourses, where they fuel perceptions of bipolar conflicts between large and irreconcilable sociopolitical camps.

Critical of this dualistic logic, Mau et al. (2020, 2021) pursue a ‘splitting’ strategy, developing a taxonomy of four inequality conflicts.<sup>20</sup> “Above/below inequalities” revolve around material distribution, “insider/outsider inequalities” around the struggle over migration, borders, and national belonging, “us/them inequalities” concern societal liberalization and the acceptance of diversity in identities and lifestyles, and “today/tomorrow inequalities” relate to the costs

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<sup>19</sup> In other cases, cleavages were named by core issues, as in the transnational or cosmopolitan-communitarian cleavages (De Wilde et al. 2019; Hooghe and Marks 2017). This has the advantage of highlighting important or emerging issues, but with the corollary risk of taking a part for the whole. As we saw the issue content of the second dimension has changed over the last decades, while its core structure stayed intact.

<sup>20</sup> With the exception of the environmental conflict type, these resemble Kitschelt’s typology of the ‘greed’, ‘grid’, and ‘group’ dimensions of conflict (Kitschelt 1994)

and priorities of socioecological transformation. Mau et al. find different social logics for each of the inequality conflicts and take this to contradict the idea of a unitary alignment along a single second dimension.

In contrast to the dualistic “geological” lenses, the Bourdieusian focus on the social space follows a more “topographical” sensibility. As we saw, Bourdieu’s main point was that lifestyles and political views are shaped by positions in relational inequalities, while also insisting that “the classes that can be separated out in social space for the purposes of the statistical analysis [...] do not exist as real groups” (Bourdieu 1985, 725). By looking at homologies of *relations*, the spatial metaphor here suggests a gradational reality of “regions”, proximities, distances, and trajectories through the space, which are approximated by various social indicators but never directly identified with specific occupational classes, political camps, or parties. Clarifying the non-linear relation between classes “on paper” and classes in social reality, Bourdieu writes, “social classes do not exist. [...] What exists is a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but *something to be done*” (Bourdieu 1985, 275). As a corrective to the ‘lumping’ tendency of cleavage research, this cautions us to understand structural positions in the social space, the categories by which groups come to understand who they are, and political camps as distinct and only contingently connected realities.

As we develop in the next section, this approach to class as a “doing”, contingent on the making of classes as groups, or the “realization of categories” (Wacquant 2013) is a helpful paradigm for capturing the pre-political level of social identities. As Bourdieu insists, people can not only be located in the social space, they also locate themselves. And the categories by which they do so are decisive for the question whether a class or attitudinal cluster “on paper” exists as a *group* in social reality. The next part shows that this relatively autonomous dynamic of social identification and its mediating position between social structure and politics has been neglected in cleavage research, and that a Bourdieusian cultural class analysis approach here can fill an important gap.

## 2.2. The Neglected Sociocultural Dimension of Cleavages

*Although the conventional, hard-nosed view is that politics is about 'who gets what,' the prior question is who 'who' is.*

Paul Starr (1992, 294)

To recap, Bartolini and Mair designate the sociocultural or social identity dimension of a cleavage as the “normative element, that is the set of values and beliefs which provides a sense of identity and role to the empirical [i.e. sociostructural] element, and which reflect the self-consciousness of the social group(s) involved” (Bartolini and Mair 1990, 215). Placed analytically before conflicts over “who gets what”, sociocultural dimensions concerns the questions of “who ‘who’ is” and “why they should get what”. As we saw above, social identities took a central position in the original formulation of cleavage theory, as one of three dimensions of sociopolitical conflict besides sociostructural positions and interests and political organization (Bartolini 2000; Kriesi 2010). The sociocultural dimension of cleavages concerns people’s identities, their sense of belonging to one social group in demarcation from another, and the claims and positionings emerging from this sense of membership. “Social identity refers to the social categories, attributes, or components of the self-concept that are shared with others and therefore define individuals as being similar to others” (Monroe, Hankin, and Vechten 2000, 421;<sup>21</sup> see also Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner et al. 1987).

From a class sociological angle, the question of social identities was long posed as that of class formation (Butler 1995). This problematic historically emerged from Marx’ sociological program and especially the scientific and political interest to identify forms of consciousness that aided or obstructed the transition of the working class from a “class in itself” to a “class for itself”.<sup>22</sup> Savage et al. define the question as that of “whether structurally based

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<sup>21</sup> “In contrast, personal identity is made up of those attributes that mark an individual as distinct from all others.” (ibid.)

<sup>22</sup> Indeed Marx’ definition of classes can be read as a direct forerunner also to the trias of cleavage theory (formulated as it was by former Marxists): “In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class” (Marx 1937 [1852], 192). Similarly, E.P. Thompson writes that “class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and

relationships are socially meaningful and, if so, how of and why they become significant” (Savage et al. 1994, 23). As Goldthorpe writes, “the occupancy of class positions is seen as creating only potential interests, such as may also arise from other structural locations. Whether, then, it is class, rather than other interests that individuals do in fact seek to realise will depend in the first place on the *social identities* that they take up” (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992, 384, emphasis added). Here, as in cleavage research, social identities focalized the symbolic mediation of structural positions, as well as the rootedness of political conflict in pre-political allegiances that constitute a “mobilization potential” (Bornschieer 2007).<sup>23</sup>

This question received renewed attention because in the historical conjuncture of realignment after the end of the midcentury social compromise, as sketched above, questions of identity have moved to the center of politics and political discourse (see Bernstein 2005; Hobsbawm 1996).<sup>24</sup> But what would emerging social identities look like in the context of a new universalism-particularism cleavage? Broadly speaking, a fully realized cleavage on the identity level would consist in a) a perception of society as structured by a conflict between social groups defined by e.g. ‘open’ and ‘tolerant’ or ‘rooted’ and ‘traditional’ identities, values, and mindsets; b) a recognition of many or even most people as themselves belonging to either one of these groups, or at any rate a salient and more or less coherent sense of proximity or distance from them; and c) the intuitive sorting of others into one of these camps, using specific identity markers and public representations (see Tilly 2015). In the extreme, universalists and particularists, cosmopolitans and communitarians, or libertarians and authoritarians would form durable opposing groups whose *social* (not merely political) markers of membership would be intuitively recognized by people on either side of the boundary.

The closest contemporary equivalent is perhaps the personalization of positions on the Brexit referendum as “Brexiters” and “Remainers”, labels that carry extensive identitarian

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articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs” (Thompson 1968, 9).

<sup>23</sup> “Because each individual has multiple group identities, the relative salience of these attachments determines the potentials for parties’ efforts at mobilizing new structural divisions” (Bornschieer 2007, 5).

<sup>24</sup> Achen and Bartels, for instance, show for the US “that social identities have trumped policy reasoning in shaping politics [...]. In thinking about politics, it makes no sense to start from issue positions – they are generally derivative from something else. And that something else is identity” (Achen and Bartels 2016, 231).

connotations beyond the political question of secession from the EU (Sobolewska and Ford 2020; Hobolt 2016). But it remains to be seen whether these indeed stand for persistent and coherent social identity blocs, or just momentary partisan coalitions on a particularly polarizing issue. Overall, the formation of social identities along the lines of sociostructural voting patterns labeled as a new cleavage of universalism-particularism essentially has the status of an untested hypothesis, with a few notable exceptions discussed below (for theoretical expositions see Bornschieer 2007, 2009; Bornschieer et al. 2021). Cleavage research has neglected the sociocultural or identity dimension both conceptually and empirically in its focus on the conjunction of social structure and party system structuration. As Bornschieer notes, “although it is often alluded to [...] collective identity is often unduly neglected in empirical applications” (Bornschieer 2007, 3). Where they are considered, social identities are often treated in a reductionist way, conflating identity with politics or social structure. In the following, I briefly review some common forms of such reductionisms in the study of identities and cleavage transformation, including a few examples from outside the cleavage tradition.

### **Cultural Reductionism**

A prominent form that we encountered in the introduction is the *cultural reductionism* found in many public interventions that describe cultural class conflict with metaphors of “tribalism” (Goodhart 2017b; Krekó 2021; Davies 2021).<sup>25</sup> An imaginary of social class, fragments of discourse, attitudinal averages, political rhetoric, and lifestyles of different milieus (think Latte Macchiatos and Avocado Toasts) are here analogized into social-cum-political identity blocs (Foster 2018). In an influential book, right-wing advocate David Goodhart (2017), for instance, reduced class, ethnicity, migration attitudes, political leanings, mobility experiences, regional belonging, and a host of other factors into a single dichotomy between the rooted and uprooted “tribes” of Somewheres and Anywheres. From this dichotomy, he constructed a whole cosmology of “Somewhere places” and “moral intuitions”, an “Anywhere political

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<sup>25</sup> The very vocabulary of tribalism is odd, suggesting a form of sociability marked by high cohesion, low differentiation, as well as pre-modern and implicitly non-Western *irrationality*.

class”, “Anywhere media”, and “Somewhere populism” which unites stances on a vast array of policy areas from migration to welfare.<sup>26</sup>

The reason this type of cultural reductionism works is that it exploits the analogy-generating function of dichotomous language. We can illustrate this by looking at two central signifiers in the new cleavage vocabulary – “cosmopolitan” and “down-to-earth” (see Zollinger 2021 and below). The associations linked to these terms are revealed by the analysis tools of the Digital Dictionary of German Language (DWDS 2020), which charts primary linguistic connections in a very large corpus of texts.<sup>27</sup> These are common connections for:

**Cosmopolitan** [*kosmopolitisch*]: flair, open to the world [*welttoffen*], urban, humanism, thinking, city, formalistic

**Down-to-earth** [*bodenständig*]: close to the people [*volksnah*], connected to the homeland [*heimatverbunden*], cuisine, peasant culture, pragmatic, unpretentious

These linguistic analogies between categories of politics and ideology (humanism, homeland), aesthetics (flair, cuisine), personality (pragmatic, unpretentious, thinking), and social structure (city, peasants) are permanently deposited in the semantics of these words. This means that with the two terms, culturally competent speakers mobilize an implicit field of associated categories and the binary oppositions between them. This enables the analogical translation of a dichotomy related to e.g. migration attitudes, into areas like lifestyles, analogies which will seem *plausible* because they draw on established semantic associations. This operation is akin to the recognition found in horoscopes or other differential systems, by which we might say, for instance, that in all of humanity there are lion types and mouse types and that a lion mentality will get you to lion places, etc. For the question of cleavage identities, analogizing operations like these and the resulting webs of association are highly important *objects* of study (see e.g. Zollinger 2021; Westheuser 2020). But if used unreflexively as categories of analysis such associations merely repeat the prejudices deposited in everyday language.

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<sup>26</sup> Neatly aligning with the agenda of the “Blue Labour” current Goodhart is part of. E.g. welfare expansion is said to have “increasingly got out of kilter with Somewhere moral intuitions”, (Goodhart 2017, 156).

<sup>27</sup> I.e. the most frequent combinations of the word in adjective attribute, predicative and adverbial constructions.

An approach that is more reflexive but falls prey to a similar form of reductionism are *dispositional accounts* of value conflicts common in political psychology (Jacoby 2014). Sociocultural cleavages are here posited by demonstrating the explanatory force of value clusters for social conflicts (Graham et al. 2013; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Schwartz 2012; Davidov et al. 2008; Davidov and Meuleman 2012).<sup>28</sup> The problem is that these studies' explanatory program relies on dispositional pre-assumptions, which treat value patterns as an explanans without specifying their social genesis or context, often by reference to neuronally 'hard-wired' cognitive patterns (Kandler, Bleidorn, and Riemann 2012).<sup>29</sup> Dispositional accounts are reflexive and relational in the construction of their scales. But they treat the respondent groups of "authoritarians" or "benevolents" categorized on these scales as atomistic, unchanging, and undersocialized, that is, profoundly unrelational entities (see also the critique by Abend 2011, 2017).

### **Political and Structural Reductionism**

Within cleavage research proper, social identities are usually elided by two other types of reductionism, which may be called *political* and *structural reductionism*. Political reductionism infers the existence of collective identities from the presence of stable political conflict. In this sense, cleavage studies have often conflated cleavage identities with political identities, for instance by deducing the presence of cleavage identities from low electoral volatility across cleavage blocks (e.g. Bartolini and Mair 1990, see critically Bornschier 2010). Such inter-block stability or differences in relative rates of political, e.g. party identification alone should not

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<sup>28</sup> This has provided useful tools for comparing moral patterns across populations (Vaisey and Miles 2014). Studies show, for instance, that clusters of respondents strong on certain dimensions, like 'benevolence' or 'universalism', will systematically score lower on others, like 'authority' and 'control', and vice versa. One may suspect that this patterning is to some degree an artefact of the scales, as the subjects of the study master the logic of binary oppositions that goes into the construction of the survey items.

<sup>29</sup> This is necessary to avoid the fallacy of explaining attitudes by attitudes. In order to serve as an explanatory variable, values must be grounded in pre-social factors, independent of group identity, and conforming to universally applicable scales. While each of these assumptions may partially point to valid aspects, taken together they paint a deeply unrealistic picture of the role of morality in social life. If social conflict was indeed based on innate variations in brain configuration, we should expect a convergence on a single, historically ultra-stable set of conflicts reflecting these broad configurations. We would then be puzzled by the immense variations of social morality and conflict across social, geographical, and historical contexts, the malleability of value orientations by socialization (not least through political organizations), and the contestation surrounding the role of values in group-making.

be interpreted as evidence of cleavage identities, unless they can be shown to act as proxies of networks and self-understandings beyond the political partisanship of particularly mobilized circles. This reductionism also affects insightful studies like that of Helbling and Jungkunz (2020), which measures “social divides” underlying the integration-demarcation cleavage via the social closure against AfD members.

Political reductionism seems plausible in contexts like the US, where partisanship is ‘naturally’ taken to encompass a whole range of differences in values and lifestyles (Lakoff 2010). And generally speaking, the universalism-particularism divide clearly is of the greatest prominence in politics. Opening her 2019 election campaign, the liberal UK politician Jo Swinson, for instance, stated: “Politics is no longer about left or right. It's about open or closed. Liberal or authoritarian” (Liberal Democrats 2019). But it is less clear whether and how this logic of distinction also guides the identification of ordinary citizens. Grasping the positionings of ordinary people with terminologies centered on political expressions on the supply side (e.g. as GAL and TAN parties) paints an overly ideological picture of positionings in the population. It is well-established that outside small highly mobilized partisan circles, political positionings tend to be shot through with very high degrees of heterogeneity, ambivalence, non-attitudes, and non-partisanship. Most citizens neither have definite attitudes that only need to be aggregated, nor do they “have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time” (Converse 1974, 265; see also Achen and Bartels 2016).

Similarly, in what may be called structural reductionism, social identities have sometimes simply been equated with socio-structural correlates of political behavior (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2008; Andersen and Heath 2003). Overrepresentations of political antagonisms among specific educational, occupational, geographically, or ethnically defined populations indicate relevant “identity potentials” (Bornschieer 2010) for the emergence of cleavage dynamic. But it is not at all a given that lay actors categorize their belonging to certain groups in the same way as researchers do. Patterns of association between socio-structural location and political choices should not be interpreted as evidence of identity antagonisms, unless such an antagonism is found in the logic of distinctions deployed by actors themselves. Bourdieu’s

distinction between a “class on paper” and an “actual class, in the sense of a group mobilized for struggle” (1985, 725) is a helpful antidote to this type of reductionism.

Methodologically, political and structural reductionisms to a certain extent stem from the inherent limitations of an *attitudinal approach* that informs the most common type of cleavage research: Mostly using factor analyses of large sets of survey data, these studies are able to impressively map the coincidence of divisions in values and attitudes with differences in social position and political positionings (Bornschieer 2010; Kriesi 2010; Kriesi et al. 2012; Rennwald and Evans 2014). But for all their usefulness, important elements of social identities remain outside the scope of such analyses, since response categories of surveys are exogenous and derived from researcher’s theories. The “social construction of latent groups” (Kriesi et al. 2012, 11f.), which the sociocultural cleavage dimension consists in, is observed only by proxy and as *fait accompli*. As Franklin writes,

it is often thought to be enough to demonstrate that there is a linkage in regression effects or variance explained (or both) between group membership and party choice. [...] [But] some of the most elegant social cleavage theories fall to the ground when the question is raised whether those on each side of an objective divide *recognise* this divide and their positions on each side of it. (Franklin 2010, 652)

Similarly, the items used to tap into values often tend to be derived from issues, like migration, that are of interest because they are politicized. Lastly, due to the restrictions of survey data, classifications tend to be interpreted and named according to scientific rather than lay theories of social differences, e.g. as “cosmopolitanism”, “communitarianism”, or “universalism”. This is relevant because in effect it means that the social classification logic respondents actually apply in their own idiom is dropped in favor of a pre-constructed logic of classification introduced from the outside. The loss of context makes it impossible to discern the degree to which values and attitudes serve as proxies of groups, i.e. are habitually associated with group membership and the distinction between members and non-members. But this is exactly what we must find out about to establish a sociocultural cleavage that is more than a proxy of divisions in social structure or political ideology (see below).

It thus remains necessarily unclear by what social principle factors and their relation are constructed in real life. Because survey data reveals the social patterning of responses but not the dynamics producing it, important cleavage narratives (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2012) resort to a relatively unspecific mode of explanation that attributes sociocultural dynamics variably to value differences, sociopsychological attitudes, material interests, and/or cultural anxieties. The reason that we cannot tell one from the other is that our grasp of the situation is limited by the formulation of survey items. This produces a common fallacy by which structural positions or distributional variables are somehow thought to act in isolation, as when the observation that 'every year of education makes respondents half a standard deviation more liberal' is simply restated as the "liberalizing effect of education". Such statements are of course perfectly fine as descriptions of statistical models, but they should be seen only as the starting point, rather than substantive ends of inquiries into the confluence of structure, identity, and politics.

All in all, we can thus make out considerable gaps left in the study of sociocultural cleavages. Culturally reductionist ad hoc accounts trace current idioms of social classification and discursive markers of cultural divisions, but overstate the uniform "groupness" of categories, and unreflexively compound structure, identity, and politics. Dispositional accounts reconstruct latent patterns of values underlying patterns of social conflict, but are unable to link conflict-related value patterns to the making of social group distinctions, because values are thought of as pre-social. Attitudinal accounts look at contextually variable patterns of proximity between value clusters, social positions, and positionings on conflictual items. These accounts reveal latent social groups on a number of interlocking dimensions, whose limitation, however, remains that their classificatory logics are constructed by the researchers and not the respondents. For the most part, cleavage theory has thus not found convincing ways of bridging the gap between social structure or the neat patterns of friend and foe articulated in party systems and the pre-political logic of social identities.

## Social Identities Along the New Cleavage: First Evidence

That said, there are four newer studies in particular which do systematically and non-reductively raise the question of social identities underpinning current cleavage transformations, and which this study is informed by. The earliest one is Stubager's (2009) study of social identities of educational groups linked to the authoritarian-libertarian divide. Having established the connection between education levels and positionings in political conflicts along the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, Stubager addresses the level of identities as the "subjective side" of the conflict, asking, "whether members of the educational groups themselves identify with their respective groups, whether they perceive the intergroup relationship as conflictual, whether they have developed antagonistic group consciousness, and whether such psychological factors are related to the authoritarian-libertarian value dimension" (Stubager 2009, 205).<sup>30</sup> In a representative survey in Denmark, Stubager asked respondents: "People regularly say that there are two groups of people in Danish society: those with high education and those with low education. Would you say that you feel (highly/somewhat/not) attached to people with high/low education?" (Stubager 2009, 212).

He found that while more highly educated people identified with the highly educated, people with lower education tended to not identify with the lower education group, but to rather report 'don't know' answers or not feeling attached to either group. Those identifying with the high education group were the most likely to signal libertarian attitudes, while low-education group identifiers exhibited the strongest authoritarian leanings. Stubager further showed that a large majority of respondents perceived the high and low educated to have "different everyday worries", while a smaller share thought there was a "fundamental conflict of interests" between low and highly educated people (Stubager 2009, 218). The perception of conflict was stronger among those with low education. In direct evaluations of high- and low education groups (e.g. "the highly educated are taking society in the wrong direction"), the findings were much more muddled, as majorities of all groups, but especially the highly educated did not derogate the opposite educational group. Stubager speculated that the

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<sup>30</sup> This group dimension is relevant because "By far the largest part of education's effect on authoritarian-libertarian values is due to the direct socialisation-based transmission of values that takes place in different educational milieus" (207, see also van de Werfhorst and de Graaf 2004).

highly educated's positive evaluation of the less educated "might be seen as a way of compensating for the perceived lower status of the low education group, which contradicts their libertarian worldview" (Stubager 2009, 226).

In summary, Stubager's findings show that people perceive education to be a divide that is relevant for lived experience and their own attachments, and that this subjective divide was linked both to structural positions in education inequalities, and to positionings on the authoritarian-libertarian cleavage.<sup>31</sup> Whether education differences are really understood as a source of conflictual identification effectively remained open. In any case, his study is special for complementing objective education levels with a separate item on subjective identifications, and linking both to political positionings. A limitation is that the prompt cited above ("People often say there are two groups ...") captured identification in a very suggestive and schematic way. It essentially asked respondents to position themselves towards a *claim* of group identities, rather than finding out whether such identities were salient for the respondents. This problem was especially dire since no alternative form of categorization (apart from refusing to answer) was possible.

These problems were partly overcome in a highly original more recent study by Bornschieer et al. (2021). In a survey fielded in Switzerland, this research group asked respondents to report the degree to which they felt close to a whole list of social categories defined by occupational class, wealth, education, rural or urban residence, categories related to the new cleavage ("cosmopolitans"), and lifestyle ("culturally interested people"). The results showed that party electorates differed systematically in the combinations of perceived closeness to such categories. Especially significant for the "new cleavage" question, there was a strong link between New Left leanings and a perceived closeness to categories such as "urban", "cosmopolitan", or "culturally interested people"; as well as between Radical Right leanings and reported closeness to "Swiss people" and "rural dwellers".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Here measured in terms of attitudes towards law and order politics, dictatorship, migration, and Islam.

<sup>32</sup> Independently of the respondents' own place of residence and nationality – all respondents were Swiss nationals.

In an even more nuanced analysis, Zollinger (2021) used an *open-ended* question of the same survey to show that among New Left and Radical Right electorates, the respondents' characterizations of people who were similar/different to themselves also strongly recur on the universalism-particularism cleavage. Radical Right and New Left voters describe people like themselves as "socially-minded", "open", "broadly interested", "cosmopolitans" and distance themselves from "selfish" "xenophobes", while Radical Right voters self-describe as "down-to-earth", "hard-working" "Swiss citizens" and dissociate themselves from "lazy people", "foreigners" and "nonconformists". The combination of open and closed questions also reveals the wider associations mobilized in these divides:

terms such as 'open,' 'internationally oriented (*weltoffen*),' or 'tolerant' are most frequently and characteristically mentioned by respondents who report closeness to *cosmopolitans* in the closed-ended question. Respondents who report closeness to *culturally interested people* characteristically describe themselves as having wide-ranging (cultural) interests, being open-minded, tolerant, cosmopolitan and outgoing. (Bornschieer et al. 2021, 14)

Bornschieer et al.'s and Zollinger's studies can thus show that in Switzerland, a case of early realignment and a particularly contoured political divide between New Left and Radical Right, partisan divides along the new cleavage are indeed underpinned by group-based forms of social identification that are rooted in social structure. By measuring vote intentions, objective positions, and subjective closeness to a range of alternative categories separately, both studies can show a complex interplay of structural positions, partisanship and identities, also providing an instrument that is more nuanced than that of Stubager's study.

Still, a few limitations remain here as well. The closed-ended study of Bornschieer et al. too cannot capture the degree to which the group categories suggested are salient for the respondents outside of the context of the survey suggesting them. At the core, the study measures whether respondents jump through the hoops of cleavage identity categories when they are held in front of them. In line with the study's interest in *electorates*, both studies further relied on a survey that not only primed groups and politics in the introductory description of the survey, but also cued an expressly political form of identification by phrasing

the question about social identification as one for “people with a lifestyle *and opinions* similar to your own” (Zollinger 2021, 9) or “people you feel close to in terms of their *attitudes* and sentiments” (Bornschieer et al. 2021). In both cases, this is justified by the study’s core interest in identification among electorates. But it makes the approach less suited for the question whether identification along the new cleavage is relevant in the consciousness of sociostructural categories like classes and class fractions also outside the context of their party-political mobilization.

Nearly all limitations and reductionisms cited here were overcome in another recent study by Koen Damhuis which uses a mixed-methods design to explore the sociostructural positions and identity dynamics behind voting for the Radical Right in France and the Netherlands. Merging perspectives from cleavage theory and Bourdieusian political sociology, Damhuis first situates Radical Right voters in the social space using Multiple Correspondence Analysis. His main finding is that of a specific pattern of sociostructural diversity, whereby Radical Right voters are situated in a range of locations at the bottom and the (economic capital-heavy) right of the social space (see also Beaumont, Challier, and Lejeune 2018). Damhuis broadly identifies three social bases of the Front National and the Dutch PVV: a segment of the working and lower class, the small owning petty bourgeoisie, and parts of the economic elite.

An in-depth qualitative analysis based on interviews then shows that these three social bases essentially correspond to three distinct “roads to the radical right” that are each defined by a distinct constellation of socially situated identities, moral outlooks, and political positionings. These are a populist moral protest of workers and lower class members who feel “hard done by” (ibid., 118) in comparison to the recipients of state support for outgroups, particularly migrants, and identify with the populist right as outsiders like themselves; a “contributionist” consciousness of small owners and other members of the economic middle class who support the radical right out of a feeling of “violated reciprocity” (ibid., 141) whereby they feel they give too much of their hard-earned money; and a “radical conservatism” of upper middle class members whose support for the radical right is based above all on an ideological commitment. What Damhuis thus shows is a complex picture of the way identities and moral dynamics figure in the linkages between social structure and political leanings on one side of the new

cleavage. Apart from its different subject, and from its selecting on the dependent variable of cleavage voting rather than class, Damhuis' work is a close model and inspiration for this study. Not least, Damhuis introduces an important concept which helps reconcile an inherent tension between Bourdieusian and cleavage approaches, that of electoral or *political equifinality* (ibid., 17ff.). The idea of equifinality highlights that political divides can bundle a variegated array of sociostructural positions and identities,<sup>33</sup> so that what appears as unitary and socially homogenous ideological blocs of the "New Left" or "Radical Right" *in the political sphere* belies a great diversity of lived realities and identities in the pre-political sphere. The equifinality lenses describe a form in which the "geological" and the "topographical" perspectives can describe the same reality on different dimensions, with the cleavage perspective seeing political camps where the class-centered perspective sees social heterogeneity.

In this way, Damhuis' work and the equifinality concept in a sense also stake out the ground for an analysis of cleavage identities beyond partisan electorates. We here have to expect forms of diversity and logics of articulation outside and beyond the scope of partisanship and ideology. How this might be captured is developed in the next section.

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<sup>33</sup> Damhuis here quotes Gramsci's illuminating observation about Catholicism being "in reality a multiplicity of distinct and often contradictory religions: there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the petty bourgeoisie and the urban workers, one for women, and one for intellectuals which is itself variegated and disconnected" (Gramsci, 2000, cit. in Damhuis 2020, 17).

### 2.3. Theorizing the Pre-Political Bases of Cleavages

*The main business of human discourse is to put an orderly face on the underlying messes. Human powers of perception are limited and it is not surprising that some agreed descriptions of boundaries are used for orientation to and within social spaces. The business of social organization is ultimately to make boundaries, which native theories attempt to portray.*

White (2008, 127)

Overcoming the reductionisms noted above, and further filling the gap in existing scholarship on the sociocultural dimension of cleavages, the aim in the following is to sketch a relational perspective on the sociocultural identities insofar as they are relevant for the question of cleavage formation. Doing so, the section also clarifies the dimensions of interpretation used in the qualitative part of the analysis.

Following the Bourdieusian tradition of cultural class analysis (Savage 2012),<sup>34</sup> social identity is here captured in the form of *self-understandings* embedded in a *sense of social location*. Both are expressed in habitual, ordinary practices of *categorization and classification*, and particularly the drawing of *symbolic boundaries*, distinctions between one's self or group and a specific set of others (see below). The *groupness* of self-understandings, i.e. the degree to which they articulate the sense of belonging to a distinctive and bounded group, is treated as a gradational and empirically open question. Bringing in the "normative element" commonly cited in definitions of the sociocultural dimension, I explore how a sense of social location is bound up with normative expectations in the form of *moral economies*. Lastly, I develop how, prior to and below the level of ideological positionings, *relations to politics as a whole* form a relevant dimension of socially situated self-understandings.

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<sup>34</sup> As reconstructed by Savage (2012), a cultural class analysis approach means expanding our attention also to misrecognized, indirect forms of "classed" consciousness in which class relations find expressions also outside of explicit discourses on class and inequality; to the ways in which class is entangled in other forms of inequality like gender, ethnicity, and region; to recognition claims and status struggles also beyond economic interests; as well as to occupational identities, communities, and lifestyles.

The starting point of this conceptual strategy is inspired by Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) critique of the ambivalences and internal contradictions of the overloaded signifier "identity". Brubaker and Cooper criticize the implicit assumption that all individuals 'have' an identity, and that this identity is invariably linked to group belonging. The authors convincingly argue for an analytical distinction of different dimensions of identity using the more precise terms of *self-understanding*, *sense of social location*, and *groupness*. The sense of one's social location links back to the spatial understanding of class introduced above. The concept captures how individuals interpret their positions in social space, that is, what the space looks like from someone positioned inside it. Linked to this, the term self-understanding

designates what might be called 'situated subjectivity': one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act. As a dispositional term, it belongs to the realm of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *sense pratique*, the practical sense – at once cognitive and emotional – that persons have of themselves and their social world" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 17).

This underlines the practical and dispositional, often pre-reflexive nature of self-understandings. "Identities are a practical category, they are about doing not being" (Brubaker 1996, 7).<sup>35</sup>

In addition, Brubaker (2006; Brubaker and Cooper 2000) helpfully distinguishes another dimension commonly conflated in the term 'identity', that of *groupness*, or what Weber called a "feeling of belonging together" (Weber 1972, 22), based on perceptions of privileged relations or shared culture. As we saw in the definitions of cleavage theory, the sociocultural dimension essentially asks whether structural categories and political camps correspond to social *groups* on either side of a cleavage (a question that resembles the Bourdieusian distinction between categories "on paper" and realized groups). Groupness is here understood as a gradational construct, ranging from an emphatic and active identification with a group as a central pillar of self-understandings, to a practically irrelevant, implicit, nominal, misrecognized, distant, ironic, or ritualistic sense of membership. Either way,

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<sup>35</sup> This also includes the possibility of a non-doing or even *undoing* of categories (see Hirschauer 2014).

groupness cannot be deduced from structural positions or political positionings, but hinges on the practical recognition of *the individuals in question* of belonging to a social group.

### **Sense of Social Location**

What this means is that we must capture social identities in their own vernacular, the logic by which they are articulated in everyday life. To not mistake ‘classes on paper’ for socially classified and self-classifying groups, we must distinguish between *categories of analysis* of researchers and political actors, and *categories of practices* of the people in question (Brubaker 2004). We do so by reconstructing a typical range of categories of practice that individuals draw on to express a sense of social location. As we saw, social identities develop from people answering the question “What kind of person am I?” by categorical attributes that they share with certain but not all others. This makes categories the building blocks of social identity.

Social *categorization*, here used virtually synonymously with the term *classification*,<sup>36</sup> describes cultural processes of dividing the social world into groups on the basis of commonalities and resemblances, and assigning individuals to these groups (see Jenkins 2000). “Doctors” and “nurses”, “the middle class”, “a thug”, “a Christian”, “a local”, or “Quants” and “Quals” are examples of social categories, each embedded in very different institutional, social, and moral classifications. The capacity for social categorization has been found to arise extremely early in the course of cognitive development, and is constantly used

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<sup>36</sup> By and large, the two terms are used by different authors to describe the same processes, such as when Fourcade (2016) speaks of classificatory principles and Starr (1992) of principles of categorizing things and people into classifications. Jacob (Jacob 2004, 1991) proposes an interesting but not commonly used differentiation between a fuzzier, more experiential and practice-based categorization versus a more stable and deductive logic of classification. “While traditional classification is rigorous in that it mandates that an entity either is or is not a member of a particular class, the process of categorization is flexible and creative and draws nonbinding associations between entities—associations that are based not on a set of predetermined principles but on the simple recognition of similarities that exist across a set of entities. Classification divides a universe of entities into an arbitrary system of mutually exclusive and nonoverlapping classes that are arranged within the conceptual context established by a set of established principles. [...] In contrast, categorization divides the world of experience into groups or categories whose members bear some immediate similarity within a given context. That this context may vary— and with it the composition of the category—is the basis for both the flexibility and the power of cognitive categorization.” (Jacob 2004, 527f.). I use both terms interchangeably here.

to navigate the social world.<sup>37</sup> 5- to 6-year-olds demonstrate the ability to classify others into social classes based on their appearances and items of clothing (Vandebroeck 2021), and in a range of studies, class and strata have been shown to be salient mental schemata in Western European populations, allowing for accurate categorizations e.g. in the context of foto-elicitation methods (Robison and Stubager 2018; Pape, Rössel, and Solga 2012; Rössel and Pape 2010; Pape, Rössel, and Solga 2008; Sachweh 2010). When categorizing others, people consciously or unconsciously draw on relatively stable cognitive and emotive schemes and folk theories about who belongs in which box (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983; Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst 2000).

A tool to focalize particularly relevant categories of socially situated self-understandings is the concept of *symbolic boundaries*, i.e. categorical pairs (whose centrality is also at times acknowledged in cleavage theory; see Bornschier 2007, 5). Popularized by Neo-Bourdiesian cultural sociology, particularly the work of Michèle Lamont, symbolic boundaries are a special form of usually binary classifications, which distinguish between what belongs to a social category and what does not (Jenkins 1996, 2000; Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007; Tilly 2015; Wimmer 2008a, 2008b, 2013). Examples are distinctions between the “foreign” and “from here”, “hard-working” and “lazy”, “cultured” and “basic”, etc. Boundaries capture the comparative, relational logic of social identities. “In picturing others as inferior to ‘us’, people are implicitly describing themselves as the reverse: superior (respectable, moral and civilised)” (Bottero 2005, 27). Though not necessarily hostile, boundaries record a negative form of relational identification that is relevant also to the type of conflicts observed in cleavage research. The basic form of a boundary is “I am/we are x, not y (like them)”.

Where people draw boundaries is highly dependent on where they stand. In a classical study of perceptions of class (Davis et al. 1941, cit. in Bottero 2005, 28), a team of sociologists drew up maps of the class structure as it was seen from different levels of the social hierarchy in a 1930s Mississippi town. They reconstructed that people made the finest distinctions in the

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<sup>37</sup> “Not only are children adept at using kinship categories to order and partition the social world, they appear to have a well-developed capacity for reasoning about the nature of the relationships among members of various aggregates” (Hirschfeld 2001, 108).

segment of society *they themselves belonged to*, while lumping together socially distant groups. Those on the bottom would distinguish between ‘shiftless people’, on the very bottom, and ‘poor but honest folk’ slightly above; but indiscriminately group together all those above the lower middle class as ‘folks with money’. In reverse, those on the upper end could tell apart the minute differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ aristocrats, but perceived the entire lower class as ‘poor whites’.

What this illustrates is that the sense of social location expressed in categorical distinctions is rooted in objective positions (Jarness 2018).<sup>38</sup> As Bourdieu writes, “social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat” (Bourdieu 1984, 479). In the bigger picture, it is crucial to remember, “that the question of space is raised within the space itself – that the agents have points of view on this objective space which depend on their position within it and in which their will to transform or conserve it is often expressed” (Bourdieu 1984, 169).<sup>39</sup> Through boundary drawing people locate themselves and/or their group; but these practices are themselves located in the social space. Categorization too is a dual process, whereby internal identification on the part of actors responds to the external categorization by others, and vice versa (Jenkins 2000). Both sides do not need to align and indeed can be a site of intense symbolic struggles over the devaluation and revaluation of categories and positions.<sup>40</sup>

The source of struggles over boundaries is that they are intimately linked to *status*, differences in respect and recognition people can expect depending on categorical and group membership (Ridgeway 1997, 2014; Ridgeway and Correll 2006; Ridgeway and Erickson 2000). “Categories

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<sup>38</sup> “Resemblance legitimates the ‘lumping together’ of individuals or things, but what resemblance means, how it should be established, and where it comes from is always the outcome of a contested social process. Furthermore, the causal logic may even be reversed: As Durkheim and Mauss have argued, the people and things that social life lumps together come to be seen as similar, and those that are separate in practice come to be seen as different” (Fourcade 2016, 176).

<sup>39</sup> In his trademark style, both convoluted and precise, Bourdieu adds: “As if carried away by their quest for greater objectivity, sociologists almost always forget that the ‘objects’ they classify produce not only objectively classifiable practices but also classifying operations that are no less objective and are themselves classifiable.” (ibid.)

<sup>40</sup> We need to “keep together what goes together in reality: [...] objective relations of material and symbolic power, and the practical schemes (implicit, confused and more or less contradictory) through which agents classify other agents and evaluate their position in these objective relations, as well as the symbolic strategies of presentation and self-representation with which they oppose the classifications and representations (of themselves) that others impose on them” (Bourdieu 1991, 227)

and the classification systems that sustain them, acquire an emotional or cathectic dimension, along with subtle stamps of appreciation or depreciation [...]. They bind us to one another and to objects around us, but also separate us” (Fourcade 2016, 176; see also Durkheim 1995; Durkheim and Mauss 1963). This hierarchical element of classification makes boundaries sites of social closure, the monopolization of access to symbolic, as well as material goods (Weber 1978; Mackert 2013). Blumer called the underlying practical anticipation of social hierarchy a *sense of group position* (Blumer 1958), including the sense of legitimate claims e.g. to deference, superiority, or solidarity, derived from the categorical relation between the self and others.

Boundaries are supraindividually binding because classifications and hierarchies exceed the control of individuals wherever they are intersubjectively recognized.<sup>41</sup> Because this is so, boundaries are the object of social struggles over the consensus on group categories and group valuations, as well as the processes of closure and the status hierarchies organized and legitimized by this consensus (Wimmer 2013, Bourdieu 1984, 479ff.). Especially when situated in an understanding of objective positions in unequally distributed social positions, we can thus read the deployment of categories as reflecting social relations of hierarchy and differentiation. In stratified societies, categorization is not a neutral act of sorting, but one steeped in social valuation and evaluation, a connection that Bourdieu named *distinction* (Bourdieu 1984, see also Starr 1992).<sup>42</sup> Boundary making is thus entangled in struggles over recognition, or symbolic power, “in which each pursues not only the imposition of an advantageous representation of himself or herself, [...] but also the power to impose as legitimate the principles of construction of social reality most favourable to his or her social being (individual and collective, [through], for example, struggles over the boundaries of groups) (Bourdieu 2000, 187).

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<sup>41</sup> The higher the degree of closure and consensus over the location of a boundary and the relation between its categories, the more salient and consequential membership in one of these categories will be for individual lives (Wimmer 2013). A link to the conflict logic of cleavages is developed by Bornschier (citing Bartolini): “Conflicts are only interpreted in group terms if intergroup mobility is low, because these conditions make probable the identification of individuals with the group they belong to. On the other hand, if social mobility is perceived to be high, the symbolic construction of boundaries will be much more difficult.” (Bornschier 2007, 7)

<sup>42</sup> This is very much in line with the cleavage perspective’s focus on the relationality of social positions (organizing identification of antagonistic groups with regard to a common boundary), as well its insistence on the foundation of identity change in struggles over structural transformations, which often upend established status hierarchies.

Besides the vertical relations between dominant and dominated populations, boundaries have also been described as *horizontal* demarcations between groupings with similar social rank but different lifestyles, mentalities, and moral codes (see also below). The resulting units are commonly described as *milieus*, social circles sharing similarities of culture and lifestyle and a heightened degree of internal communication (Hradil 2013; Vester et al. 2001). The milieu perspective has sometimes been understood as a culturalist alternative to that centered on class and material inequality (Otte 2013),<sup>43</sup> but in a Bourdieusian framework, as developed for instance by Vester et al. (2001), or Rehbein et al. (2015), we can understand the cultural units of milieus as nested in the social space, i.e. the multidimensional class structure.<sup>44</sup> Boundaries based on traditionalism or modernization, or orientations to duty or self-realization (as observed in the SINUS milieu studies, see Barth et al. 2017) are here shown to correspond to horizontal differentiations between fractions within broader strata of the social space, following first and foremost the principle of capital composition (but also other structural factors, like age, and upward or downward social trajectories; Hradil 2006).

Generally speaking, the boundary perspective thus captures socially situated self-understandings through instances of categorization and particularly sets of demarcations from specific others – upward, downward, or horizontal. Depending on the strength and salience of, as well as the consensus over symbolic boundaries, such boundaries form a potential mechanism for the emergence of identity-based groups (Wimmer 2013). “Being verified in terms of a social identity reinforces group-nongroup distinctions, thus maintaining boundaries and supporting continued differentiations and cleavages” (Burke 2004, 9; Stets and Burke 2000, see also 2005). But neither categorization nor boundary drawing are necessarily synonymous with groups or inter-group conflict, because boundaries based on one logic of

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<sup>43</sup> Herein following the Weberian distinction of status groups, or ‘*Stände*’, both from economic classes and political parties (Bourdieu 1985, 730, see also Jarness and Friedman 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Translated into the terminology of Erik Olin Wright, we can think of milieus as meso-level class formations. These are “relations between individuals occupying class locations (micro-level) defined by class structures (macro-level). Milieus are thus nested between a variety of occupational, but also gendered and ethnicized class structures, and individual locations in these structures. The object of study are neither the individuals, nor the class structure, but the relations between individuals located in class structures.” (Wright 1997, 452)

categorization, like ethnicity, might intersect with others, e.g. having grown up in the same village and thus being “from here”.<sup>45</sup>

Refining our understanding of the way the new cleavage diagnosis pertains to identities, we can say that it expects populations structurally found on different sides of the new political divide to also demarcate self-understandings through categories of national “opening” and “closure”, cosmopolitanism, universalism, authoritarianism, or deservingness. Implicitly, the claim of a displacement of older cleavage identities also entails that such demarcations are more prominent for people’s self-understandings than such based on distributional questions or relating to material distinctions of above and below. Further, it is clear that in order to underpin political conflict dynamic, the cleavage approach assumes these forms of categorization to be endowed with a high level of groupness on both sides of the divide, that is, that boundaries more or less coherently converge in identifications with culturally distinct and relationally bounded groups along the new cleavage.

### **Moral Boundaries and Moral Economy**

For a number of reasons, *morality*, “the nature, causes, and consequences of people’s ideas about the good and the right” (Abend 2008, 87), forms a particularly important dimension of social identities in the perspective developed here. We encountered this dimension in the introduction, when my parents’ neighbor identified me as belonging to the “polluting category” of students (see Douglas 2003), which brought down the whole neighborhood by breaching the moral code of recycling and leaf-raking. As this illustrated, moral evaluations are not only powerful and omnipresent in everyday categorization.<sup>46</sup> The attributes and criteria of these evaluations are also crucial for defining the boundaries of groups, such as

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<sup>45</sup> This is illustrated in Ivo Andrić’s novel ‘The Bridge on the Drina’ (Andrić 1977) which tells the story of four centuries of relations between Serbs, Muslim Bosniaks, Roma, and Spanish Jews in the town of Višegrad. All populations continuously maintain strong boundaries against each other and habitually slander each other in private. But this has no bearing on cooperation and the pursuit of common interests in trade, and public interactions are mostly cordial and unproblematic. Groupness in the sense of ethnic conflict only arises when conquests by the Ottoman and Austrian-Hungarian empires upset status orders, divisions of labor, and trading hierarchies, by distributing privileges and career chances based on ethnic membership.

<sup>46</sup> Sayer wagers that “normative evaluation is likely to be more important to people than positive understanding of their situation” (Sayer 2005, 187)

here that of orderly neighborhood natives. Weber captured this when he observed that status groups (*Stände*) were defined by a specific code of *honor* (Weber 1978), and cultural class analysis recovers this tradition by centering on the intimate “relation of classification and judgment” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2005, 5; see below, Lemieux 2014, Lamont 2012).

In sociology, morality has been central since the classical authors, with the focus shifting from a “Durkheimian” view of morality as the underlying organizing principle of all of society<sup>47</sup> towards a more “Weberian” meso-level focus on the ethos of specific occupations, classes, and milieus, which is currently seeing a revival in the new sociology of morality (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). Morality here is looked at under the aspect of its social embeddedness. We are interested in morality as a vernacular in which specific populations elaborate a sense of social location and distinction. Two main concepts are introduced in this section, that of *moral boundaries*, i.e. social categorization based on moral criteria, and that of *moral economies*, i.e. moral correlates of social relations of exchange, domination, and the division of labor.

In Lamont’s famous application of the boundary perspective to the cultural repertoires of workers and upper middle class members in the US and France (Lamont 1992, 2000), she distinguishes socioeconomic boundaries, boundaries based on material assets, cultural boundaries, based on education and cultivation, and moral boundaries, distinctions “on the basis of moral character, centered on such qualities as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity, and consideration for others” (Lamont 1992, 4). Lamont finds that moral boundaries are particularly salient among the working class, where they serve to project the image of a disciplined self, capable of holding the world in moral order through dedication and hard work. Morality is said to have a compensatory function for respondents unable to base status claims on wealth or educational attainment.<sup>48</sup> But also among the French and US upper middle class,

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<sup>47</sup> In Durkheim’s holistic sociology, the analysis of morality was equated with the analysis of society as a whole. “If there is one fact that history has irrefutably demonstrated, it is that the morality of each people is directly linked to the social structure of the people practicing it. [...] The connection is so intimate that, given the general character of the morality observed in a given society [...] one can infer the nature of that society, the elements of its structure and the way it is organized” (Durkheim 1961, 87; see also Durkheim and Mauss 1963).

<sup>48</sup> “Keeping the world in order – in moral order, that is – is at the top of [workers’] agenda. Making sure their family is secure in a threatening world is an unending task. [...] Moral norms of interpersonal relations create a more predictable world by reducing environmental uncertainty. [...] Morality plays an extremely prominent role in workers’ descriptions of who they are and, more important, who they are not. It helps workers to maintain a

moral identification is important and often linked to the professional ethos of respondents, who demarcate themselves from polluting categories like insincere ‘phonies’, overly eager ‘social climbers’, and undisciplined ‘low-morals types’ lacking work ethic and rectitude. In another important account of moral boundary work, Elijah Anderson describes how Black working and lower class residents of the US Inner Cities distinguish “decent” and “street” conducts of life, as two distinct strategies of dealing with social marginalization (Anderson 1999), again reminding us that boundaries are predominantly drawn against those closest to the self.

Cultural class analyses like those of Skeggs (1997), Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2001), and Sachweh and Lenz (2018), describe a moral concern with *respectability* and *ordinariness* as a highly important register of classed identification. Particularly in the working and lower middle class, claims to recognition and worth are staked on a rule-conforming life and the prudent dealing with limited resources. The flipside of this is the moral deprecation or even “disgust” (Lawler 2005) expressed towards lifestyles below the “threshold of respectability” (Rehbein et al. 2015; see also Jarness and Friedman 2017).<sup>49</sup> The achievement of respectability is an object of emotional investment intimately linked to the differences in assets that groups have at their disposal; yet here these differences are expressed through non-economic categories based on the judgment of lifestyles. These observations are important because they clarify the place of moral distinction in the pre-political vernacular of “classed” self-understandings, and the entanglement of moral boundaries in the emotional dynamics of class. The focus on morality here follows the important intuition of cultural class analysis that class is not just experienced through interests, but also through values, emotions, and (mis-)recognition (Savage 2012, Skeggs 1997).

In Michael Vester’s important map of German social milieus (Vester 2012, Vester et al. 2001), moral boundaries of “respectability” and “distinction” take an important constitutive role as demarcations of milieus in the upper, middle, and lower reaches of society. Highlighting the

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sense of self-worth, to affirm their dignity independently of their relatively low status, and to locate themselves above others” (Lamont 2000, 19. For similar themes see Kefalas 2003; Sennett and Cobb 1972).

<sup>49</sup> Analyzing interviews with working class women, Skeggs writes that “the way class was experienced was through affectivity, as a ‘structure of feeling’. This was the emotional politics of class fuelled by insecurity, doubt, imagination and resentment” (Skeggs 1997, 162).

historical durability of basic sociocultural formations, Vester identifies five main “lines of tradition” in the German tableau of milieus, which each contain multiple smaller milieus. In the upper “bourgeois” regions (18% of the population), a tradition of “academic intelligence” is distinguished from one defined by “power and property”. Both are separated from the middle regions of “respectable employee” milieus (70%) by a *threshold of distinction*. In the intermediate region, Vester locates milieus of “qualified workers and practical intelligence” (35%), distinguished both from a “petty bourgeois” line of tradition (23%) and a smaller and younger set of “hedonistic avantgarde” milieus (12%). Positioned below a *threshold of respectability* are milieus of the marginalized and “traditionless working class” (12%).

The thresholds of distinction and respectability identify dynamics of cultural stratification. With Bourdieu, Vester highlights that respectability or a distinguished lifestyle above the fray of social struggle are the product of vertical social demarcations. But respectability and distinction also mean different things to different horizontally differentiated milieus. In this way, class- and milieu-specific forms of moral focus in individuals’ lives, such as the cultivation of rich experiences and a complex, multi-faceted personality among the academic intelligence, can be interpreted as subjective reflections of social location. “One’s position in social space provides a vantage point from which allies and rivals, role models and cautionary tales, all play a role in shaping the salience of particular kinds of moral judgment over others” (Hitlin and Vaisey 2010, 9; see also Vaisey and Lizardo 2010, 1600). De Keere (2020), for instance, demonstrates a homology between the differentiation of moral worldviews and the social space in general, and a divide between an “entrepreneurial” moral worldview of the economic middle classes and an “institutional-therapeutic” one of the cultural middle class in particular (de Keere 2020, 10f.).

The close connection of social identity and morality has also been noted in political science. As we saw, the *moralization* of politics and belonging has been a constant concern in discussions over “new cultural divides”.<sup>50</sup> Throughout most of Europe, traditional issues of moral politics, most notably religion, have lost significance (Mooney 2001), but migration,

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<sup>50</sup> These themes are familiar from discussions of the moral bases of the US culture wars (Lakoff 2010). Morality has been thematized as a central feature of contemporary politics, notably in the context of a dichotomy between the “pure” people and “corrupt” elites seen as central to populist politics (Mudde 2007; Müller 2016b).

environmentalism, technological change and other newly salient issues are said to become the object of new moral polarization (Feinberg and Willer 2013; Ryan 2014; Andrews 2018). The central characteristic of moralized issues in the perspective of political science is that they present themselves not as an object of interest-based negotiations over relative gains, as it is sometimes possible to in distributive conflicts, but as either/or questions tied to identities.<sup>51</sup> In the terms of cleavage theory, looking at the moral criteria underpinning social categorization, we capture the *normative* element highlighted in core definitions of the sociocultural cleavage dimension (e.g. Bartolini and Mair 1990). Besides group belonging, a cleavage on the sociocultural dimension is said to encompass shared values, and indeed in some studies, “social identity” was directly equated with value orientations (Knutsen and Scarbrough 1995; Tóka 1998; Kriesi 2010).

In German postwar political sociology, morality, milieu, and politics were brought together prominently in Mario Rainer Lepsius’ concept of *socio-moral milieus* (Lepsius 1966), which identified historically grown linkages between populations and political formations. Lepsius analyzed German politics as structured since Imperial times by a constellation of four socio-moral milieus, the Social Democratic, the Protestant-Liberal, the Protestant-Conservative, and the Catholic, each with specific social profiles, forms of morality and sociability, and political representation channels. Socio-moral milieus were described as “socio-cultural structures formed by the coincidence of multiple structural dimensions, like regional tradition, economic position, cultural orientation, and the stratified composition of intermediary groups” like churches and unions (ibid., 38, see also Vester 2017). While Lepsius himself already noted the demise of the four milieus in the transformations of postwar capitalism, his conception of an intersectional linkage between social structure, morality, and political representation remains informative. In a sense, it can be said that new cleavage diagnoses predict the formation of *new sociomoral milieus*, differentiated along lines of libertarianism, cosmopolitanism, or universalism, in the same way that Lepsius’ older formations were by religion and ideology.

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<sup>51</sup> E.g. it is essential that queer people must either be allowed or denied marriage rights, refugees declared welcome or unwelcome, etc., not necessarily because my camp gains directly from the decision, but because the opposite decision would be an unacceptable challenge to my moral identity (Ryan 2017).

A further concept even more clearly draws the connection between social position, morality, and political mobilization, by examining how social relations are coupled with and sustained by ideas of legitimacy and justification, whose violation creates legitimate occasions for critique or even rebellion. This is the concept of the *moral economy*. The moral economy can be understood as “collectively validated beliefs about just distributions and exchanges rooted in both the community and the past. [...] The centrepiece of the moral economy is that all forms of social exchanges have moral attendants which convey a sense of legitimacy or illegitimacy” (Mau 2011, 466, see also Booth 1994). The concept was first developed by the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson in his studies of popular protest and the formation of English working class consciousness from artisanal cultures and religious dissent (Thompson 1971, 1968, 15ff.).

Thompson observed working class formation as not recurring on common economic interests under capitalism, but in the moral defense of a host of customary rights and traditions that were drawn from an earlier feudal era. As Polanyi (2001 [1944]) before him, Thompson showed that industrialization, and the expansion of capitalist property and market relations upset the social equilibria between rulers and the ruled that had been negotiated and renegotiated in past social struggles. The claims with which dominated populations criticized these social changes were rooted in what Barrington Moore calls an “implicit social contract” (Moore 1978) of feudal patronage.<sup>52</sup> against the rise of *political economy* as the language in which distribution, division of labor, and authority were reorganized, a popular, proto-proletarian moral economy of rights and obligations developed (Steinberg 1997; Götz 2015). This moral economy was chiefly articulated negatively, as indignation and righteous anger at violations of the implicit social contract. A classical example were riots which broke out whenever merchants sought profit through hoarding and speculation, or when rulers were seen to neglect their duty to prevent such acts (Thompson 1971, 76f.).

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<sup>52</sup> “When people search for legitimations for protest, they often turn back to the paternalist regulations of a more authoritarian society, and select from these parts most calculated to defend their present interests” (Thompson 1991, 10). For an insightful recent application of the idea of the implicit social contract, see also (Scheiring 2020).

The core assumption of the moral economy concept is that social relations of economic exchange, division of labor, authority, and domination rely on implicit moral expectations.<sup>53</sup> The moral economy usually describes relations of *reciprocity*, i.e. a relation between contributions and entitlements, or rights and duties. “However, the concept of reciprocity neither implies equality of burdens or obligations, nor a balancing out of material costs and benefits. [...] There is also ‘no written contract with precise terms but a deep-rooted sense of mutual obligation, and trust on both sides that the obligation will be honoured’” (Mau 2004, 189, citing Ferge 2000). As an epistemic strategy rather than a clear-cut theory of causal mechanisms (Powell 2010, 35), the moral economy perspective has been used to work out the consequences of implicit customary contracts about the shape of just relations between rulers and the ruled, employers and employees, or distributors and recipients in diverse fields, such as the reciprocity arrangements of welfare states (Mau 2004), inequality perceptions (Sachweh 2012) government debt (Fourcade et al. 2013), domestic labor (Näre 2011), or humanitarian aid (Götz, Brewis, and Werther 2020).<sup>54</sup>

The moral economy perspective is of interest here for capturing the moral correlates of social relations and what Honneth calls the “moral grammar of social conflicts” (Honneth 1996). Encapsulated in claims and forms of critique justified by perceived violations of moral expectations are implicit group referents and the rights and obligations attached to the relations between groups.<sup>55</sup> The moral economy perspective thus helps us reconstruct the link between social relations, normative outlooks, and conflict perceptions. Morality is a central

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<sup>53</sup> As Scott writes in his *Moral Economy of the Peasant*, “the problem of exploitation and rebellion is not just a problem of calories and income but is a question of peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity” (Scott 1977, vii).

<sup>54</sup> Labor sociology operates with the closely related notion of the “psychological contract”, which stipulates forms of obligation and reciprocity between employer and employee beyond the terms laid down in written employment contracts (Cullinane and Dundon 2006).

<sup>55</sup> An important example concerns perceptions and legitimations of inequality, as studied by Patrick Sachweh and others (Sachweh 2012; Svallfors 2006; Heuer et al. 2020).<sup>55</sup> Sachweh shows that inequality is legitimized both as a normative requirement – unequal outcomes are justified if they reflect unequal inputs – and as a functional requirement – unequal outcomes are justified as motivating incentives (Sachweh 2012, 428). Yet inequality was criticized where it was seen to undermine social cohesion and lead to polarized lifeworlds, especially in the form of an ‘irresponsible’ accumulation of extreme wealth beyond one’s needs (see also Prasad et al. 2009).

quality of social categorization and becomes consequential for self-understandings in the double process of identification and categorization.<sup>56</sup>

A highly salient expression of the moral economy are distinctions of *deservingness*, which we already encountered above in the findings on the distributive element of universalist and particularist orientations. Deservingness distinctions concern the moral criteria used to discern whether claimants are worthy of support, i.e. answers to the question “who should get what, and why?” (van Oorschot 2000). Such distinctions are the product of the conditionality of institutional access in the fields of welfare (van Oorschot 2006; Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky 2016), but also migration and citizenship (Casati 2018; Helbling and Kriesi 2014). Deservingness is embedded in institutional criteria like those of means testing and the construction of target populations for policies (Schneider and Ingram 1993).<sup>57</sup> Van Oorschot identifies five criteria of deservingness that are commonly applied by ordinary people and politicians alike:

1. *Control*: poor people’s control over their neediness, or their responsibility for it: the less control, the more deserving;
2. *need*: the greater the level of need, the more deserving;
3. *identity*: the identity of the poor, i.e. their proximity to the rich or their ‘pleasantness’; the closer to ‘us’, the more deserving;
4. *attitude*: poor people’s attitude towards support, or their docility or gratefulness: the more compliant, the more deserving;
5. *reciprocity*: the degree of reciprocation by the poor, or having earned support: the more reciprocation, the more deserving. (van Oorschot 2000, 36)

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<sup>56</sup> As Fourcade illustrates with a view to the derogation of the poor: “even when routinely contradicted by the reality of social inequalities, [...] those who find themselves at the bottom of the economic scale, or in a situation of financial distress, are often suspected of low effort, innate mediocrity or moral weakness. Always in want of money, but never trusted with it, the poor in particular are the object of enormous suspicion, which seems to justify special controls and obligations. Moral hierarchies are brought into alignment with economic hierarchies through the frequent and ordinary ‘shaming of those who fail’” (Fourcade et al. 2013; citing Sayer 2005, 959).

<sup>57</sup> to the point that “social welfare policy cannot be fully understood without recognizing that it is fundamentally a set of symbols that try to differentiate between the deserving and undeserving poor.” (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991, cit. in van Oorschot 2005, 1). Such institutions recursively strengthen the moral notions on which they were built. Welfare states are reciprocity arrangements who rely as much on institutional capacity, as they do on the resonance of its organizing principles with the moral notions of a large number of citizens and the elites providing them with opinion cues.

Similarly Casati's ethnography of refugee receptions in Italy (Casati 2020) shows that among the receiving communities, the deservingness of newcomers is determined by the questions: 'Are they nice people? How much are they suffering? How well are they suffering (i.e. are they trying to help themselves by working)?' With its peculiar mixture of moral judgments of behaviors, positional group- or "identity"-based claims, and a sensitivity for violations of an implicit contract mandating reciprocity and gratitude in exchange for support, the deservingness distinction is a prime example of the workings of the moral economy. Deservingness distinctions are highly consequential for political positionings, with restrictive deservingness notions forming the social policy preferences at the basis of radical right support (see below and Attewell 2020; Rathgeb 2020; Busemeyer, Rathgeb, and Sahm 2021). Moral boundaries and moral economies are important conceptual tools for capturing the subtle interplay of classed social identities and political claims. The study of moral boundaries captures how beliefs about right and wrong distinguish individuals, groups, classes, and milieus from each other, how these distinctions are tied up with cultural stratification, and how they can stabilize political representation. The moral economy perspective helps us understand how forms of justification and acquiescence, or critique and indignation, are embedded in implicit social contracts that stabilize unequal relations but also provide occasions for critique wherever the implicit contract is violated.

### **Relations to Politics**

If the boundary perspective sensitizes us to the comparative categorization processes by which we define *who we are*; and the perspective of morality lets us see how *who we are* impinges on *what we want to be* and *what we can legitimately expect*; we are now briefly adding a last jigsaw piece connecting *who we are* and *what we can expect* to *where we stand* in terms of politics and ideology. This last piece concerns the relation between sense of social location, morality and classed forms of politics. In this perspective, we reconstruct the pre-political roots of cleavages and classed politics not only in the sense of the motivations for ideological positionings, but also in terms of class-specific forms and styles of engaging with

politics and ideology in the first place. We are here looking at two intertwined social facts: social differences in sociopolitical styles and differences the degrees of political exclusion.

This taps into a dimension in which the Bourdieusian approach to political sociology quite radically departs from conventional political science. As Savage reconstructs, Bourdieu

draws attention away from the familiar political sociology question of whether people from different classes support left- or right-wing parties. Rather, he starts from a different place. Ruminating on the apparently minor point [...] that those who are in lower-class positions are more likely to offer 'don't know' responses in opinion polls, and are more likely to be politically disengaged, Bourdieu sees the extent to which people feel politically entitled as fundamental to the political field. 'The right to speak' is even more significant than whether one speaks from a feminist, conservative, socialist, liberal, or any other perspective. And, in many democratic nations, Bourdieu notes, large numbers of people do not think they do have the right to speak. Their lack of capital and their marginalized position in social space have made them internalize their own lack of right to a view. It is this that speaks to the true power of class. [...] [And] it is this analysis of how the unequal distribution of cultures of entitlement, shame and respect are implicated in the political agenda that lie at the centre of the cultural class analysis paradigm" (Savage 2012, 300)

Bourdieu points out that politics is a *competence* in two senses (Bourdieu 1984, 109f.).<sup>58</sup> The first is a learned *cognitive* ability to discern political positionings according to the logic of the political system. As long discussed under the heading of 'political sophistication' (Zaller 1992,

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<sup>58</sup> "The act of producing a response to a questionnaire on politics, like voting or, at another level of participation, reading a party newspaper or joining a party, is a particular case of a supply meeting a demand. On one side is the field of ideological production, [where] the politically thinkable, or, to put it another way, the legitimate problematic, is defined. On the other side are social agents, occupying different positions in the field of class relations and defined by a greater or lesser specific political competence – a greater or lesser capacity to recognize a political question as political and to treat it as such by responding to it politically, i.e., on the basis of specifically political principles (rather than ethical ones, for example). This capacity is inseparable from a more or less strong feeling of being competent, in the full sense of the word, that is, socially recognized as entitled to deal with political affairs, to express an opinion about them or even modify their course. In fact, there is reason to suppose that competence in the sense of technical capacity (political culture) is correlated with competence in the sense of a socially recognized capacity, ascribed by and ascribing status--the opposite of which is both impotence and objective and subjective exclusion ('That is none of my business'; 'That doesn't interest me!')." (Bourdieu 1984, 399)

Converse 1964), classes differ in their propensity of thinking and talking about politics in abstract ideological terms like 'left' and 'right', with dominated classes much less likely to express positionings in such terms, or to state an opinion in the first place (Laurison 2015). Ideological modes of political reasoning are differentiated from less coherent, more or less ad hoc judgments "by proxy of group identifications and benefits, in opposition to other social groups. One thinks of the poor versus the rich, old versus young, national versus foreign, etc." (Damhuis 2020, 46). Damhuis draws on Neuman to develop a useful typology of the dimensions of sophistication as ideological *differentiation*, "the ability to identify and discriminate among the different political issues, actors and events that jostle for attention in the news media", and ideological *integration*, i.e. "the explicit organization of political ideas and issues in terms of abstract or ideological constructs" (Neuman 1981, cit. in Damhuis 2020, 46). What is captured here are not ideological positionings per se, but the very ability to participate in the political game.

This is also true for the second sense of political competence, the one highlighted above by Savage, i.e. a competence in the sense of an ascribed capability and entitlement of making political judgments based on social status. As Bourdieu writes, "political competence, in the sense of a socially recognized capacity, is one of the aptitudes a person has insofar as he has a right or duty to have them" (Bourdieu 1984, 410). In reverse, this means that those effectively excluded from political decision-making, as it has been shown to be the case for the contemporary working class (Evans and Tilley 2017; Heath 2018) also tend not to develop positionings in the form of systematic ideologies.

This point can be deepened by the insightful observations made in the early work of Axel Honneth (1995), which also clarify the links between political competence and the moral horizon articulated by individuals and groups in different class locations. Honneth shows that the conditions of possibility of generalized moral judgments are circumscribed by the structure of class domination; and that dominated groups therefore do not tend to develop normative expectations as a systematic set of positively formulated moral propositions.

A coherent value system does not normally belong to the institutionally regulated parts of the occupational roles available to members of oppressed social classes. Their

occupational activity challenges them seldom or not at all to develop even the most provisional overview of the social life-and interest-structures of society as a whole. Thus, nothing is built into the daily routine of these social strata which is anything like an institutional pressure to depersonalize one's own norms of action. [...] The general pressure to integrate one's own moral norms of action into a potentially testable, consistently constructed system is very low for members of the socially lower strata. (Honneth 1995, 210)

As Michael Mann suggests, “only those actually sharing in societal power need develop consistent societal values” (Mann 1970, 435), while outside of contexts of political mobilization like those of poor people’s or workers’ movements, the baseline attitude of the powerless is one of “pragmatic acceptance” (ibid.). Very much in line with the observations on political sophistication cited above, the very ability to articulate systematic and “depersonalized” social justice claims is here depicted as a privilege of higher “culturally qualified strata” (Honneth) who live with a sense of ‘being asked’ to justify their views of society (Ivković 2015, 16). Those excluded from this privilege are left with a form of social critique consisting of ad hoc, situational, non-systematic, and reactive expressions of moral disapproval, or what Honneth describes as “an inner morality which is preserved in a complex of standards for moral condemnation” (Honneth 1995, 209). In contrast to the more depersonalized and systematic moral discourses of higher strata, the situational “social ethic of the suppressed masses contains no ideas of a total moral order [...], but is instead a highly sensitive sensor for injuries to intuitively recognized moral claims” (ibid.). Echoing the logic of moral economy as articulated through a reactive sense of indignation responding to violations of an implicit social contract, this sensitive ‘inner morality’ “represents the negative side of the institutionalized moral order” (ibid., 208).

An inherent principle of both Honneth’s and Bourdieu’s reconstruction of the *social prerequisites* of moral claims and political ideology, is that abstraction and mediation tends to be higher among classes and strata higher in the societal hierarchy. As we saw, both Honneth and Bourdieu suggest that negative moralized forms of judgment, centered on “injuries to intuitively recognized moral claims”, are particularly important for those disappropriated of the means of articulating political judgments in the terms of the political field proper. In this

view, ideology in the sense of a systematic articulation of preferences and normative ideals, is seen as highly dependent on social position. The very form of critique is defined by a class ethos, i.e. a sense of social location tied up with moral expectations (De Keere 2020, see also Bourdieu 1984, 421).<sup>59</sup>

As established above, politics in the everyday “vernacular” of the street corners, kitchens, and office canteens usually does not take the shape of political partisanship built on systematic ideological systems, but hinges on an intuition about the type of positions, parties, or candidates appropriate for “people like me” (Achen and Bartels 2016). An insightful recent classification capturing differences of this class ethos and the attendant “economy of affection and dislikes” (Ostiguy 2017, 84) is Pierre Ostiguy’s theory of sociopolitical styles, which builds on Bourdieu. Embedded in a theory of populism, Ostiguy distinguishes a polarity of sociopolitical and sociocultural styles which he calls “the high” and “the low”. The high sociopolitical style stands for decision-making based on expertise, institutionally mediated, impersonal authority, and legalism, while low politics for an ideal of immediacy, understanding, and physical proximity, often embodied in personalized leadership or direct democracy as “way[s] to shorten the distance between the legitimate authority and the people” (Ostiguy 2017, 83).<sup>60</sup> Ostiguy describes the low as the basis of populist politics, both in terms of appeals and the conditions of their resonance, while anti-populism is linked to a high sociopolitical style (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016).

In Ostiguy’s approach, the sociopolitical high and low are linked to a *sociocultural* high and low, which captures a polarity in the habitus of social groups and classes. Here, the low is linked to concretion, uninhibited, straightforward or ‘popular’ styles and an emphasis on common sense, while the high is linked to manners, abstraction, and polished or learned styles. Ostiguy’s classification is interesting because it captures political positionings not in the

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<sup>59</sup> “Political position taking is seldom the result of people consciously reflecting on their class interests, on which they then base their ideological stance, but is more often the consequence of following an intuitive class ethos. The ethical habitus people acquire through their lives makes them inclined towards particular moral discourses and attitudinal styles, and in this way, it ties political preferences to class structure.” (De Keere 2020, 9)

<sup>60</sup> “The high is more abstract and restrained, claiming to be more proper, whether in manners or in procedures. [...] Political authority on the low is institutionally less mediated.” (ibid.)

intellectualist, cognitive form of beliefs and ideological preferences,<sup>61</sup> but through the lense of embodied, intuitive, emotional, and socially specific *relations to politics*.<sup>62</sup>

#### **2.4. Summary and Reformulated Research Questions**

This theoretical sketch introduced the successive stages of new cleavage diagnoses and embedded them in the transformation and erosion of a class-political constellation that saw its heyday in the postwar period. With cleavage theory and the Bourdieusian study of “classed politics”, we introduced two approaches which are connected by the common agenda of studying the continued salience of social structure in postindustrial ideological alignments. Although developing in isolation from one another, both approaches draw on a similar multidimensional understanding of both class and political divides. Conflicts between the working and (upper) middle class are complemented with horizontal divides within especially the middle class, based on the composition of cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu) or technical and organizational versus interpersonal work logics (Oesch).

With this picture, both approaches capture social bases of political alignment beyond the classical picture of class conflict in the postwar settlement. Cleavage theory has been particularly pointed in claiming the rise of a new cleavage, variably identified with conflict over authoritarian or libertarian ideals of sociopolitical governance, cosmopolitan or communitarian attitudes towards migration and transnational integration, and/or expansive or restrictive notions of welfare deservingness. The class bases of this divide, politically articulated by New Left and Radical Right parties, are said to be found in the cultural pole of the middle class, or sociocultural professionals, and the ‘old’ industrial working class of production workers.

We noted that cleavage theory’s “geological” sensitivity leads to an implicit dualistic understanding of ideological polarities and the search for opposing ideological camps. This is countered by a skepticism against the reification of groups in the “topological” approach of

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<sup>61</sup> As in most political science, including definitions of populism like that of Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017).

<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Vester et al. (2001, 444ff.) identify a range of political styles like the “social integrationist”, “moderately conservative”, “disappointed apathetic” or “skeptically distanced”, which I take some inspiration from below.

Bourdieuian class analysis, which centers on the structures of relations but treats the groupness of populations in these spaces as a distinct question. The first part of this study links both perspectives in a reconstruction of the interconnections of social structure and ideological polarities in Germany. The goal is a holistic reconstruction of the contemporary class-political constellation. This also serves to interrogate cleavage theory's image of a rift sorting classes and class fractions into two opposing ideological camps.

The second part then turns to the questions of identity and morality developed in the second half of this theoretical sketch. As we saw, in the framework of cleavage theory, speaking of a full-blown cleavage requires not only the coincidence of social bases and voting tendencies, but also the formation of distinct group identities and modes of normative integration on both sides of a divide. This is the sociocultural or identity level of cleavages, which, as was shown, has largely been neglected in cleavage scholarship or treated in a reductionist way. Existing studies give some indication that identification along the new cleavage is forming; they also identify specific sets of categories (e.g. "down-to-earth" versus "open to the world") and moral dynamics (like violated reciprocity) that are salient in this process. But the focus on electorates and party competition has largely left open the question whether this is a phenomenon pertaining only to political partisans of Radical Right and New Left parties or forms a more general pattern of cleaved identification in postindustrial class societies, as has been suggested in public discussions of new cultural class conflicts.

The qualitative part of this study aims at this gap in cleavage research, and digs into the pre-political realm of identification and social morality, below and beyond the realm of elections and party conflict. As elaborated, the pre-political cannot be reduced to a mere extension of partisanship, nor is it synonymous with objective sociostructural positions. Following the advice of Brubaker and Cooper (2000), we unpacked the fickle concept of identity into three more specific and thoroughly relational components. These were a) self-understandings embedded in a sense of social location, expressed relationally through symbolic boundaries, that is, the image of the social space individuals make for themselves from a particular position within this space; b) moral boundaries and moral economies, i.e. typical moral dimensions of self-understandings and distinction, and normative expectations tied to social relations; and c) relations to politics, i.e. what type of game "politics" is to people and with which

competences and styles they relate to it. All three dimensions are reconstructed in an interconnected and relational way that extends the “view from above” of studies of cleavages and classed politics.

Against an intellectualist notion of public opinion as a given set of attitudes and preferences in an informed and politically involved public,<sup>63</sup> this type of approach highlights the non-ideological and pre-reflexive articulation, as well as the social embeddedness of positionings. Political positionings are here understood in continuation with (or even derivative of) self-understandings, and as relying on embodied, supra-individual, and intuitive schemes of categorization, which Bourdieu calls *habitus*. The basic idea is that the regularities of political positionings among ordinary, i.e. non-expert citizens do not spring from coherent ideological orientations regarding the political sphere, but from basic practical schemes and modes of thought embedded in wider forms of life.

With this theoretical background, we can now also further specify the research questions. What this study sets out to understand is whether the divide described as a new cleavage structures the contemporary class-political constellation in Germany, and whether it leads to the formation of polarized ideological and social camps.

Is the German political space classed? Is there a class-specific divide over authoritarianism, transnationalization, and deservingness? Which position does this divide take in the bigger picture of the class-political constellation? And do classed and cleavage politics presuppose the formation of coherent and antagonistic ideological camps?

Do central sets of categories that ordinary people draw on to elaborate self-understandings deploy a classificatory logic linked to the new cleavage (e.g. by drawing boundaries between people like themselves and others based on openness and closure, down-to-earthness and cosmopolitanism, or even the party-political referents of New Left and Radical Right)?

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<sup>63</sup> For an incisive critique of this tacit assumption of public opinion research see Achen and Bartels 2016 and Bourdieu 1979.

How are such categories embedded in people's sense of social location, to the moral boundaries by which they distinguish themselves from others, and the relations to politics they entertain?

To which degree do categories take on a quality of groupness, i.e. are thought of as coinciding with specially bounded relations, cultural similarity, or common interests? And to what extent is the relation between categories of identification and demarcation perceived as one of conflict, in or outside the political sphere?

All these are dimensions of one and the same question, namely whether latent groups and oppositions found in statistical reconstructions correspond to the habitual modes of classification of the populations in question. Where the search for homologies identifies structural commonalities of spaces "from above", the focus on self-understandings seeks to reconstruct the perspective of actors situated *in* these spaces "from below".<sup>64</sup> As Rogers Brubaker puts it, this amounts to "a comparative study of comparison: a comparative analytical sociology of the vernacular comparisons embodied and expressed in folk sociology" (Brubaker 2003, 6).

Conceptualizing categorization as a distinct logic that is pre-political and elaborates structural positions in an idiosyncratic way, we avoid the reductionisms introduced above. By situating cleavage identities in dynamics of categorization at large, we enable ourselves to see the competition of cleavage-related boundaries with other boundaries, and leave open the possibilities that there is no strong sense of groupness or conflict, or that groups are demarcated by categories that do not align with those reconstructed in the cleavage perspective. By focalizing morality, we highlight the normative dynamics of social identities which might or might not crystallize into new cosmopolitan and down-to-earth sociomoral milieus linking group belonging, morality, and political leanings, in similar ways to those Lepsius had described for the old German Republic. In the following section we take a brief look at the German context of the study, to then proceed to the empirical analysis.

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<sup>64</sup> As Bourdieu puts it, we are looking for "correspondence[s] between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world [...] and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to them" (Bourdieu 1998b, 1).

## 2.5. Germany – Demobilized Class Society

The history of German cleavage transformations in many ways resembles the general story recounted above, but with specific historical trajectories, political, and institutional settings. For readers unfamiliar with the German context, I here want to very briefly sketch some of these specificities, insofar as they relate to cleavage change, the structure of classes and milieus, and the moral economy.

The postwar years were marked by a dual cleavage (Müller 2011), consisting of a class cleavage that opposed workers to capital owners and was the source of allegiance of workers to the SPD, as well as of industrialists, smaller owners and independent farmers to the CDU. The second one was a religious cleavage originating from the *Kulturkampf* of Protestant state elites against the Catholic minority in the late 19th century, which, after WWII, transformed into a generalized cleavage between disproportionately CDU-voting church members and the non-religious. Throughout, the German party system has remained relatively strongly rooted in the electorate (Elff and Rossteutscher 2011) and German politics has been marked by a *centripetal* dynamic, created among other factors by strong federalism and the effect of cross-cutting cleavages (Bornschieer 2010).<sup>65</sup> Consensual orientations towards a “middle path” have traditionally been prominent in German politics (Schmidt 2021), while both the radical right and the radical left were confronted with state repression, e.g. through employment bans against 1970s student radicals or state-sponsored antifascism (Koopmans et al. 2005). Historically, volatility had been low, but this has been changing quite dramatically in recent years, as the party system is becoming more fragmented and volatility has increased, while party membership and party identification plummeted (Niedermayer 2020).

In socio-structural terms, what was euphemistically called the “leveled middle-class society” of postwar Germany remains a potent point of reference (Schelsky 1953; Dahrendorf 1957; see Vogel 2018). This was a society characterized by comparatively low inequality, upward mobility, and cultural conformity. The average income quadrupled between 1950 and 1970 (Lepsius 1993, ch. 8) and there was a de-proletarianization of workers in terms of qualification, employment security, and social rights after 1945 (Vester et al. 2001, 72f.). Great inequalities

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<sup>65</sup> Whereby many religious workers, for instance, would vote for the center-right CDU.

by education, between men and women, blue- and white collar workers, as well as ethnic Germans and “guest workers” brought in for the reconstruction persisted. The four socio-moral milieus described by Lepsius (1993, pt. 1), which had formed strong social, regional and cultural pillars of German social and political life for decades, lost some of their homogeneity and boundedness through internal migration and the separation of the country.<sup>66</sup> The organizations of the workers’ movement, unions and SPD, continued their evolution from class organizations with “counter-cultural” orientations into actors integrated into the power bloc, increasingly representing an overall interests of employees and forming a strong center-left pole in the political system – with the corollary of a demobilization of workers as a distinct political group.

In the GDR, extensive state regulation and subsidies for housing and other social needs created a thoroughly egalitarian class structure, including high rates of female labor market participation. Yet the low productivity of the GDR economy, among other factors, lead to an economic collapse after reunification, a social rupture still felt to this day (Mau 2019). The whole of the Eastern German population came to form part of the lower strata of unified Germany, an inequality cemented by the establishment of a low-wage, low-unionization employment regime under West German ownership (Schmalz et al. 2021). Eastern German society before unification was strongly centered on the figure of the worker, both institutionally and in terms of political rhetoric, and identification with the working class and with socialism remains higher in the East than in the West (Kahrs 2018, ALLBUS 2018).

By contrast, in West Germany, class relations remained muted in public and political discourses post-WWII, and even in state statistics (Raphael 2019), in stark difference also to other Western countries like France or the UK. Indeed we see in the graphs in figure 6 that the term “worker” [*Arbeiter*] all but disappeared from political discourse (here: speeches in the Bundestag) and the public in general (here: big newspapers), beginning in the 1960s and especially from the 1990s onwards.

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<sup>66</sup> As Lepsius explains, the influx of refugees from areas like Silesia in what was now Poland meant that the number of Catholics was equal with that of the dominant Protestant milieus, which led to an integration of the former persecuted minority into the larger center-right bloc of the CDU. The separation of the German East cut off not only large Protestant areas but also hotbeds of the socialist milieu, the only true metropolis in the country, Berlin, and the agrarian power base of the conservative landed aristocracy.

Multiple studies have documented a severe underrepresentation of lower income strata and the working class in German politics, especially of precarious outsiders (Trappmann and Vallzade 2017). This was shown in terms of voting and party membership (Schäfer 2015;

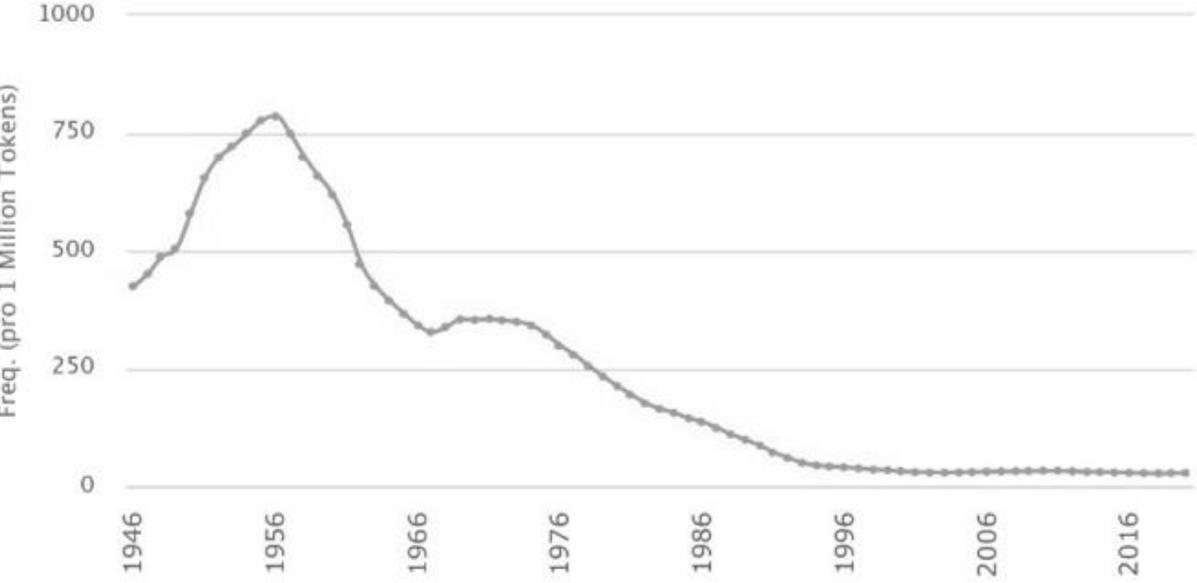


Figure 6: Above: Mentions of the term ‘worker(s)’ in large German newspapers 1945-2019 (per 1 million words, source: DWDS 2021). Below: Mentions of ‘workers’, ‘working class’ and related composita in speeches of the German Bundestag 1949-2019 (per 100.000 words, source: Biermann et al 2019)

Schäfer, Schwander, and Manow 2016), descriptive representation, and responsiveness (Elsässer, Hense, and Schäfer 2017, 2018; Vester 2009).

Both the West and the East after reunification saw a secular trend of a concentration of capital, connected with a decline of small ownership and the share of helping family members (Geißler 2014). Yet also many larger companies – about 90% of German companies generating more than half of the overall cash flow – remain family-controlled (Schröder and Westerheide 2010). Family ownership has been shown to foster paternalistic firm cultures (Boers 2020; Ram and Holliday 1993), and is an extremely important factor for the reproduction of inequality in the German 1% (Bartels 2017). As elsewhere, there has been a constant and strong expansion of white collar work, an increase in qualifications and education across all occupations, and a decline in the share of manual labor in industrial occupations. Yet higher qualifications and occupational upgrading (Oesch and Piccitto 2019) have not lead to a narrowing of inequality in incomes or wealth (Vester and Weber-Menges 2014). Nor did the relative decline of the manufacturing workforce result in an overall loss of industrial capacity. By the numbers of the General Population Survey ALLBUS (2018), production workers formed a very significant share of the working population, about one fifth, a majority of which were higher qualified *Facharbeiter* (Table 1). An almost equally large number of about one sixth of employees were sociocultural (semi-)professionals, two-thirds of which fell into the (semi-professional) group with intermediate qualifications (e.g. kindergarten teachers and social workers), the remaining third in the more highly qualified professional segment (e.g. university teachers or hospital doctors). Jodhka et al. find a surprisingly strong tendency of occupation-based intergenerational closure, whereby – despite drastic changes in the occupational structure – more than 50% of Germans share the same occupational Oesch class as their fathers, and a stunning 70% have partners within that same class (Jodhka, Rehbein, and Souza 2017, 30).

<b>Independent work I.</b>	<b>Technical work logic</b>	<b>Organizational w. I.</b>	<b>Interpersonal w. I.</b>
<i>Large employers, self-employed professions</i> <b>5%</b>	<i>Technical (semi-) professions</i> <b>11.4%</b>	<i>(Associate) Managers Administrators</i> <b>19.9%</b>	<i>Sociocultural prof.s / semi-professions</i> <b>17% (5.6% / 11.4%)</b>
<i>Small business owners</i> <b>6.9%</b>	<i>(Skilled / unskilled) Production workers</i> <b>19% (13% / 6%)</b>	<i>Office clerks</i> <b>9.6%</b>	<i>Service workers</i> <b>11%</b>

Table 1: Oesch Classes: Share of German Working Population (ALLBUS 2018, weighted)

At the time of data collection in 2018 (survey) and 2018-2019 (interviews), the economic situation was generally positive, and both unemployment and subjective measures of job insecurity were at a historic low (Manning and Mazeine 2020), though pressures were lurking in the background. Germany had weathered the economic crisis of 2008 largely unscathed, a skilled labor shortage strengthened the negotiation position especially of qualified workers, and a boom period followed after 2010 (Klein and Pettis 2020; Rinne and Zimmermann 2012). Germany's long-standing export orientation, pumped up by an undervalued European currency (Polyák 2021), partly, among other factors, led to a slower decline in manufacturing compared to other Western countries, its share of employment remaining virtually constant in the last 20 years (Streeck 2021).

Yet, a recession was underway at the time of data collection, even before the pandemic hit, and smaller firms were perennially under pressure from automation and competition with larger companies. The biggest contrast to the rosy picture painted by high employment rates and economic stability is the steady rise in inequality (Fratzcher 2016). Between 1980 and 2016, the pre-tax income share of the lower half of the income distribution declined by 21%, while that of the top 1% rose by 27% (WID 2020). And before the introduction of a minimum wage in 2015, the bottom 40% had seen two decades of wage stagnation, often legitimated with a view to international competitiveness (Dörre 2018, 68). Particularly with a view to wealth inequality, increasingly reproduced through inheritance at the top, Germany is among

the most unequal societies internationally, on a par with the US (Waitkus and Groh-Samberg 2017; Alvaredo, Garbinti, and Piketty 2017).

Politically, the setting of data collection was one of relative political stability. Angela Merkel had been chancellor for consecutive 14 years, during 10 of which Germany she governed with a “grand coalition” of the center-right CDU and center-left SPD, both parties articulating moderate, centrist appeals. Yet also the Merkel era was coming to an end, and the rise of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), a populist radical right party polling at 16% nationally in the summer of 2018, was still a new and, for some, shocking phenomenon (see below). In addition, the Green Party saw a stellar rise in the polls, beginning 2018 at 10% and rising to 26% in the summer of 2019. This means that in political terms, the timing of data collection was conducive to observing dynamics of a new cleavage expressed politically between the Populist Radical Right and the New Left. Both the AfD and the Greens received their highest poll results in their history in the time of data collection in 2018/19. There was a widespread sense of increasing polarization and a roughening of the political climate. One of the largest German newspapers organizing a series of thousands of encounters of citizens across political divides entitled “Germany Talks” (Modersohn 2019) to help overcome what was seen as an unusual degree of polarization and political animus.

Figure 7 shows the historical background of the Green Party and AfD’s arrivals in what until the 1980s had been a stable three-party system of SPD, CDU, and the liberal FDP. The top graph charts issues debated in the German Bundestag around the time of the Greens’ first entry in 1983: peace and armament, as well as environmental protection and nuclear energy. Especially in comparison to the graph on the discursive presence of “workers” and the “working class” above, this stands for the first wave of shifts in political conflict, as sketched above. The Green Party, a child of the New Social Movements, has since become a moderate liberal-progressive party. Its voters are more urban and highly educated than the average, with sociocultural professionals and students overrepresented (Dolezal 2010).

In 2013, a group of right-wing nationalist industrialists and intellectuals, many of them former CDU and FDP backbenchers, formed the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), at first chiefly motivated by an opposition to rescue measures for countries hit by the Eurocrisis. In the spring

of 2015, an internal power struggle reoriented the party towards a more decidedly Populist Radical Right and especially anti-immigration profile that proved to be of lasting electoral success. Compared to countries like France or Switzerland, where a serious Radical Right challenge had been mounted since at least the 1980s, Germany thus is a case of late realignment (Bornschieer et al. 2021). Before the rise of the AfD, it was mainly the CDU that mobilized anti-immigration sentiment, and the AfD can also be seen as an inheritor of discourses developed in the center (see also Berntzen 2019).

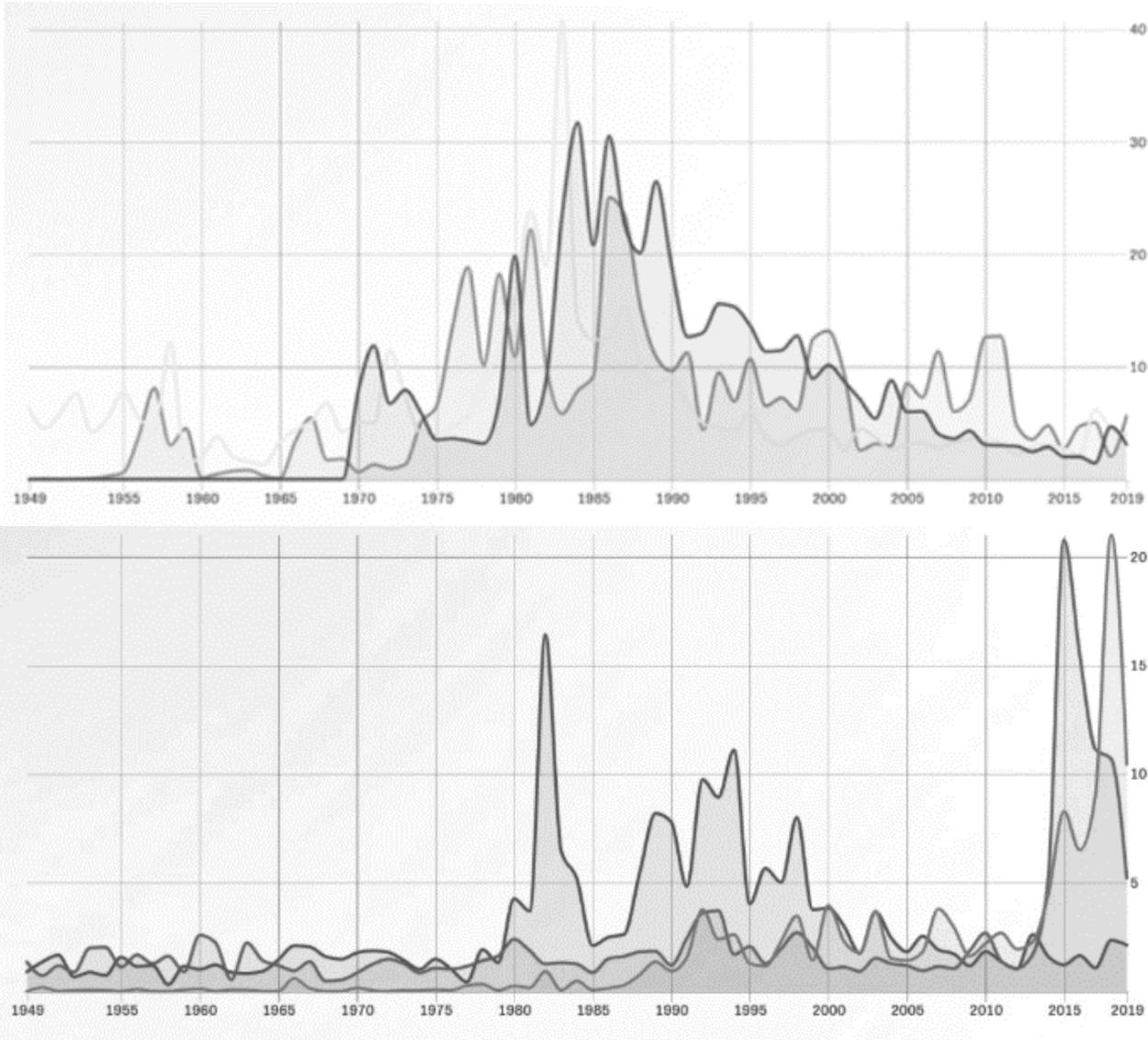


Figure 7: In speeches held in the German Bundestag, above: mentions of peace/armament, environmental protection, and nuclear energy. Below: Mentions of the terms, ‘foreigners’ (peak 1982); ‘refugees’ (peak 2015); and ‘immigration’ (peak 2018). From: Biermann et al 2019

The lower graph of figure 7 traces migration in the Bundestag speeches, showing a first peak in the early 1980s and 1990s for the term “foreigner”. In the midst of a worldwide recession, CDU candidate Helmut Kohl won the 1983 election with the promise to drastically reduce the number of descendants of former guest workers, especially from Turkey, living in Germany. And also then-chancellor Schmidt of the Social Democrats promised that “not a single Turk will cross the border under my watch” (Seils 2013). In 1982, two thirds of the population agreed with a survey item stating that “All foreigners should return to their countries” (Der Spiegel 1982).<sup>67</sup> A second peak is seen in the early 1990s, when large refugee arrivals connected with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Eastern bloc were met with violent protests of the Radical Right and a restriction of the constitutional right to asylum carried in unison by CDU, SPD, and FDP.

Since the 1990s, there has been a gradual shift from a traditionally ethnically centered towards a more civic understanding of nationhood (Winter, Diehl, and Patzelt 2015; Brubaker 2009), with an increasing acknowledgment of diversity in German “immigration” or “postmigrant society” (Foroutan 2019). Yet, migration remains a highly polarized issue. A “critical juncture” was 2015’s “refugee crisis” or “summer of migration” (Mader and Schoen 2019), which forms an important background of the material analysed here. In a largely symbolic move, chancellor Angela Merkel in August 2015 suspended the Dublin-II treaty mandating the deportation of Syrian refugees to the country of their first entry into the EU, famously stating “we can do it” with a view to the integration of roughly 750.000 asylum seekers arriving in 2015. Although studies have rejected the idea that Merkel’s declaration constituted a pull factor (Tjaden and Heidland 2021), it was widely regarded as an invitation of and “open door” to refugee migration.

This “new culture of welcome”, as it came to be known, was countered most strongly by the rising AfD, but also by the CDU’s Bavarian sister party CSU; and the period saw a surge of mobilizations on the Radical Right, in the form of xenophobic demonstrations and violent attacks against asylum seeker accommodations (see e.g. Dancygier et al. 2021). Faus and Storks

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<sup>67</sup> SPD secretary Peter Glotz feared that “after sitting between all chairs on nuclear energy and rearmament, we will do the same with migration. [...] What if soon we don’t just lose voters to the Greens but also to right-wing anti-foreigner parties?” (ibid.)

(2019) show that about about one fourth of the population respectively expresses very critical and very positive opinions about refugee reception and integration, with half of the population in an ambivalent, 'flexible middle'. The topic remained salient in the years following 2015.

By contrast, contention over welfare and redistribution had been much less visible in the immediate temporal context of this study. Due to a traditionally welfarist stance of German Christian Democracy, which also did not make a neoliberal turn comparable e.g. to that of UK Conservatives, as well as considerable benefits of the welfare system enjoyed also by the middle classes, there is a wide-reaching welfare consensus in Germany (Mau 2004). However from 2003 onwards, a government of SPD and Green party pushed through a package of neoliberal social security cuts and labor market reforms entitled Agenda 2010, which in 2007 led to the formation of another new party, a left-wing split from the SPD that united with the successors of the GDR socialist state party to form the radical left *Die Linke* (The Left). Although no longer politically salient by 2018/19, the Agenda reforms not only lead to an even more rapid loss of workers from the social democratic electorate (Elff and Roßteutscher 2016) but also brought lasting changes to the German welfare regime (Seeleib-Kaiser 2016) that continue to shape the institutional setting of moral economies.

For the purposes of this brief sketch it suffices to note that the conservative or Christian-democratic German welfare system historically focused heavily on social insurance and status-preservation, with benefits related to earnings (Esping-Andersen 1990). This coincides with a moral economy of welfare predicated on *contributions* and linked to a *work-centered understanding of meritocracy*, which also informs deservingness discourses and the legitimization of inequalities (Heuer et al. 2020). The second important feature is an *institutional dualism* between relatively generous social protection of insider workers and much more meagre means-tested social assistance for outsiders like the non-working poor. This dualism has been deepened considerably by the reforms of the 2000s, which cut entitlements and protections especially on the margins, e.g. in the rising segment of atypical

employment, while leaving the claims of insiders largely intact (Beramendi et al. 2015).<sup>68</sup> An exceptionally large percentage of 23% of employees works in the low-wage sector<sup>69</sup> (Eurozone average: 15%, Eurostat 2020), and there has been a marked rise in precarious conditions of life and employment which affect disadvantaged workers as well as sociocultural professionals, especially younger women (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander 2015; Mrozowicki and Trappmann 2021).

Dualization and precarization are exacerbated by a decline in the efficacy of the German collective bargaining regime, a fall in the number of employees and workplaces covered by industry-wide collective bargaining and significant long-term decline in the number of workplaces with works councils and in the workforce represented by them (Streeck 2009, 39f.). The exception are larger high value-added German firms oriented towards exports, yet also in these firms, precarization has often introduced a two-class employment system whereby core workers and precarious temp workers work side by side but with huge differences in remuneration, employment security, and welfare entitlements. Dualization has deep consequences for the self-understandings of workers and creates divisions between insiders and outsiders (Goes 2015), which link to the moral economy of the conservative welfare state. According to Hürtgen, “by their rejection of precarious workers, core employees seek to maintain a societal configuration that can be called the ‘moral economy of the welfare state’, whose heart is the structural link between wage labor and social citizenship” (Hürtgen 2017, 28).

In its generality, Nachtwey’s (2018) characterization of Germany as a ‘society of downward mobility’ might be a slight overstatement. But the increases in low-wage work, precarity, dualization, and inequality, and the transformation of the German collective bargaining regime, signal the erosion of central pillars of the corporatist “German Model” and the postwar social compromise (Kitschelt and Streeck 2004; Vester 2015; Bosch and Kalina

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<sup>68</sup> The measures “to a large extent preserved the rights of the core workforce but pursued segmentation by liberalizing, activating, and retrenching at the margin, that is, among service sector employees, atypically employed workers, the young, and others. This strategy of segmentation and dualization exacerbates the fragmented and stratified nature of these systems with the support of a coalition of the core workforce and industrial employers.” (Beramendi et al. 2015, 38)

<sup>69</sup> I.e. for wages below 2/3 of the median.

2016).<sup>70</sup> In a recent survey, 81% perceived an increased risk of downward mobility in recent years, 87% reported that the gap between rich and poor had reached a dangerous extent (Fricke 2019). Yet, in the political debate, these themes remained very marginal, with migration, and particularly the “refugee issue” (as well as, increasingly, climate politics) taking center stage. Dörre (2018) has described the resulting constellation as that of a ‘demobilized class society’. “While vertical, predominantly class-specific inequalities increase, unions and political organizations acting on the conflict axis of capital and labor are as weak as never before in postwar history. [...] Class-specific inequalities do not find adequate representation in the political system” (Dörre 2018, 52).

Under these conditions, Germany makes for an excellent case for studying classed politics and cleavage transformation. Class inequalities are as structurally pertinent as they are muted in political and public discourse. Conflicts between New Left and Radical Right are dominating the political scene, especially in the direct aftermath of 2015’s critical juncture in the polarization of migration attitudes. But in international comparison the political realignment of a conflict between New Left and Radical Right is still at a relatively early stage. This context makes it seem plausible that cleavage-related identification is salient, but also lets us expect that these would not take the form of entrenched party political partisanship.

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<sup>70</sup> Inequalities are also growing between richer and poorer regions and states, including but not limited to lingering East-West disparities (Hüther, Südekum, and Voigtländer 2019, Vester and Weber-Menges 2014, 7). That said, urban-rural divides are overall not as pronounced as they are in more centralized countries like France or the UK.

## FIRST PART: THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

The first part of the empirical analysis reconstructs key ideological and political divides in the German population and how these divides correspond to positions in the social space, i.e. the class structure. Looking at this complex mainly from a sociological angle, my does not start from voting behavior, but from a reconstruction of the overall *class-political constellation*, that is, the relational structure of correspondences between ideological and class differences. Ideological leanings are ultimately treated as one of many articulations of class-specific ways of thinking and relating to the world. The goal is to work out structural elements of *classed politics* in Germany, and to situate the divides described as a new cleavage in them.

In class analyses of politics, as in all sociology, we can take a ‘view from above’ and a ‘view from below’. The former tries to decipher the social logic of politics by distributions, frequencies, probabilities, and transformative mechanisms. The question here is whether patterns of political behavior bear the imprint of various aspects of social stratification and social differentiation. To answer this question we model relevant dimensions of politics and class, and assess whether these distributions ‘fit’ with one another. In this way, the view from above is documented in *maps* of the nexus between social relations, ideological positionings, and political practices. We take the existence of such a nexus as evidence for a social structuration of political ideology, because the reverse direction of causation appears rather implausible. As mentioned, the view from above misses crucial things for which we need to be closer to our objects. These include the dynamics, histories, practices, and interpretative schemes that organize the class-political constellation in social reality, as well as the “human variety” (Mills 1959) involved. All these are what the later ‘view from below’ will be concerned with. Outlining the connection of both views, Bourdieu summarizes,

one [must] construct the objective class, the set of agents who are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence imposing homogeneous conditionings and producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices; and who possess a set of common properties, objectified [...] as possession

of goods and power, [or] embodied as class habitus (and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes)” (Bourdieu 1984, 101).

In other words, the view from above may reveal objective classes of people whose ‘common conditions of existence’ and position in relations of power and property predispose them to similar ways of thinking about the world and about politics. The view from below then reconstructs how this is borne out on the level of embodied, historically and locally situated, practical and categorical schemes of everyday meaning making, or habitus.

This first part of the analysis reconstructs a synoptic summary of key ideological polarities dividing the German population, the *political space*. We then examine how classes and class fractions differ in their ideological tendencies, and more generally whether there are homologies between the political space and the social space of vertical and horizontal inequalities. The full analysis is documented in appendix B. Here, I try to keep technicalities to a minimum and focus on the display of relations that the MCA’s graphical output makes possible. MCA reveals relations in two senses. On the one hand it maps correspondences between social positions and political positionings, that is, tendencies of groups with similar social positions to have similar ideological leanings. On the other hand, the MCA reveals relations between and within classes, i.e. the ideological specificities of class fractions, and their relative differences vis-à-vis others.

By reconstructing relations in both these senses, we can situate the “view from below” of the people, milieus, and class fractions we encounter in the later qualitative analysis. Further, the MCA lets us assess the structure of the overall phenomenon we are looking at. Is German politics “classed” in the sense introduced above? And does this imply the presence of polarized camps? Are workers drifting to the right and professionals to the left? If so, does this hold for the entirety of these classes? Themes explored in this analysis include the multidimensionality of classed divides along the new cleavage; the overlap of social and political inequality; the persistent ideological significance of class identities; and the differentiation of groups *within* the sociocultural professional and production worker categories.

### 3. Data and Method

#### 3.1. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)

Methodologically, both cleavage research and the Bourdieusian sociology of ‘classed politics’ have in common that they identify key dimensions of political conflict from survey data and chart the correspondence of class and other social relations with these lines of conflict. While in cleavage research this empirical synthesis is commonly achieved through factor analyses, I here follow the neo-Bourdieusian approach in relying on the technique of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). MCA is a type of principal component analysis for categorical data. It is related to factor analysis in its focus on the reduction of the dimensionality of data and an inductive logic that differentiates it from techniques focused on the testing of pre-specified models (Le Roux and Rouanet 2010). Instead of isolating the effect that individual independent variables have on a dependent variables *ceterum paribus*, i.e. ‘controlling away’ the configuration of variables, MCA seeks to reconstruct these configurations as holistically as possible. This is achieved by extracting basic common *dimensions* of variance and charting the contribution of individual variables to these dimensions (Hjellbrekke 2018). Similar to factor analysis, the latent dimensions of variation found in MCAs are used as crossed *axes* to create geometrical representations of a factorial plane, or *space*.

The distance between points is discerned using chi-square values, a measure of statistical association. Summarizing these distances, MCA calculates factors that reconstruct polarities in the data by minimizing the distance of points to the axis while maximizing the distance between points (Hjellbrekke 2018, 16). The most important axes, that is, those that capture most of the variance in the original data, can then be charted as a factorial graph. The origin of this graph is defined by the average distribution, also called the *barycenter*, or center of gravity. The position given to individual points in the space is a direct expression of its differentiation from other points, e.g. their relative proximity or distance on various axes of differentiation (see below). As Bourdieu remarks, this makes MCA specifically suited for inquiries with a relational logic (Bourdieu 1998a).

The main part of the analysis consists in inspecting the distribution of categories, cases, and classes of cases in the factorial spaces. As individual cases are defined by the response categories they selected on the various variables, these spaces directly link the distributions of categories and individuals. The distances between individual cases and categories can be visualized by their relative position vis-à-vis the average distributions on the axes. This creates two distributions, or clouds: a *cloud of individuals* representing the distances between individual cases based on their response profiles; and a *cloud of categories* representing the distance between categories based on the degree to which they share individual respondents. In the latter cloud, categories are located at the mean points of all the individuals belonging to it, that is, they themselves are centers of gravity for the points they represent.

This introduces a relational dynamic often compared to the effect of a magnetic field, with the axis as magnetic poles, and the individual cases as the iron filings aligning with them: Categories will be pulled towards those other categories with whom they share many individuals, and pushed away from those categories with dissimilar respondent profiles. Equally, individual cases will align along the dimensions so that they are closer to other individuals with similar response profiles on the range of variables inspected, and distant from those that have selected dissimilar combinations. In this way, MCA reveals polar structures in the data. Firstly, by identifying crucial underlying dimensions summarizing large chunks of variance in the data, and representing it in the form of a space. And secondly, by providing informations about the relational configuration of response categories, cases and classes of cases within this space.

### **3.2. Active and Supplementary Categories**

MCA also allows for a simultaneous, synoptic visualization of oppositions in different sets of variables, i.e. the correspondence between oppositions in class, education and income distributions and the distribution of certain consumption styles. This is achieved by the joint display of *active* and *supplementary variables*, where active variables are those used to construct the space, and supplementary variables are mapped onto it, without altering its shape and orientation. In Bourdieu's research and that of researchers following in his

footsteps, this feature has been intensively used to assess whether two sociological distributions – e.g. of consumption behavior and class positions, where one would be reconstructed in the active and the other by supplementary variables – exhibit homologies, that is, whether they can be shown to resemble each other in their structural logic.

In the approach taken here, the space is constructed from active variables that measure attitudes on central issues of political-ideological division. Class categories and other variables reflecting positions in the social space, as well as political practices and identities, are then introduced as supplementary categories and their distribution across the political space analyzed (see e.g. Flemmen and Haakestad 2018). This reverses the order of analysis many Bourdieusian studies commonly take, starting from reconstructions of the *social* space and then inspecting its association with the distribution of positionings and practices. Reversing the order should be understood as increasing the robustness of the findings: as class divisions are not made to structure the analyzed space *a priori*, it sets the bar a little higher for social structuration of politics to be found. To return to the earlier analogy, supplementary sociostructural variables here are ‘demagnetized’ and fall only according to their link with the active – political – variables. If associations between class and politics emerge, these are directly shown to be inherent in the political positionings, while the opposite strategy always runs the risk of forcing a ‘classed’ form onto the survey data.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.3. Interpreting MCA Results

A range of important relations can be read off the graphical representation of MCA results. Firstly, as supplementary variables are plotted on the space constructed from active variables,

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<sup>71</sup> Using a technique called *Specific MCA* (Hjellbrekke 2019, 58ff.), I also make use of the differentiation between active and supplementary categories in a more technical way: In a standard MCA, cases missing observations on any of the active variables are excluded from the analysis, while in specific MCA these are kept as supplementary, allowing us to retain the full range of the data set. Further, to avoid a skewing of the space by outliers, active categories with a weight of less than 5% (determined by the weighted number of respondents they comprise) are automatically set as supplementary. Lastly, the distinction of active and supplementary variables also allows for a more balanced construction of the political space: As the impact of variables increases with the number of their categories, variables recorded e.g. on a five-point scale would register more strongly than those with a three-point scale. While most of this is resolved by a unitary recoding (see below), in some cases additional response categories are retained but set as supplementary to allow for the inspection of more fine-grained differences between categories without giving the underlying variable an overly large impact on the construction of the space.

the distances between the categories of supplementary variables indicate how strongly they correspond to the active variables. If there is little correspondence, say, between political positionings used to construct the space and a passive occupational class variable, all categories of the latter variable will appear close to the barycenter. The larger the distances of categories – measured in standard deviations of the active dimensions – the stronger the relation between the dimensions and the supplementary variables. According to a common rule of thumb, distances above .5 standard deviations (s.d.) can be considered as noteworthy, and those above 1 s.d. as large (Le Roux and Rouanet 2010).

Secondly, as supplementary categories are displayed at the mean location of their component points in the underlying point cloud, their trajectories express the directionality of their relation with the active variables. Constellations of supplementary categories signal their relation with the active variables used to construct the space, and with each other as far as the active variables are concerned. Going beyond a mere ‘eyeballing’, looking at an MCA graph already tells us significant empirical facts about the relation of multiple spaces, such as here the political and social spaces. In this sense, MCA has been likened to a “visual regression analysis” (Lebart, Morineau, and Warwick 1984) and can be translated into regression coefficients through the use of analyses of variance, ANOVA (see below).

The *eigenvalues* of the extracted axes can be used to calculate the contributions or ‘rates’ of each dimension, that is, the amount of variance in the data that each axis captures. This tells us how many axes we need to interpret in order to capture a relevant amount of variance. For this, rates are commonly modified using a formula developed by Benzécri (see Le Roux and Rouanet 2010). The so-called Kaiser criterion recommends that an analysis should take a closer look at all axes that together capture 80% of the variance in the data (Kaiser 1960, cit. in Hjellbrekke 2018). The *contributions* of categories (comparable to factor loadings in factor analysis) tell us which categories are most important for constructing the axis in question. Here the criterion commonly used is whether categories have an above average contribution, i.e. one that exceeds  $100/K$ , where  $K$  is the number of active categories. Categories with

above-average contributions, also called *explanatory points*, are of special importance for the analysis.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.3. Data

The variables constructing the political space and the various supplementary variables for the analysis are drawn from the 2018 wave of the German General Population Survey, or ALLBUS (ALLBUS 2018), comprising 3477 respondents. Table 1 lists the items used to construct the political space. I made sure to include variables capturing oppositions on issues of ‘new’ and ‘old politics’ (Q1-9 and Q10-15, respectively). More specifically, the analyzed variables capture positionings towards all four types of inequality conflicts identified by Mau et al. (Lux et al. 2021; Mau et al. 2020): ‘Above/below inequalities’ revolving around material distribution are captured in five items putting different emphases on questions of redistribution and social security (Q10-11); as well as items tapping into the moral economy of inequality (Sachweh 2012): These measure degrees of deservingness and meritocracy, i.e. whether welfare benefits incentivize recipients to become lazy and reliant on the state (Q13); whether inequalities of outcome, or ‘social differences’ are justified by differences in individual efforts (Q12); and more generally an egalitarian understanding of social justice as the reduction of material differences between people (Q14).

Positionings on national closure, or ‘insider/outsider inequalities’ are captured by questions on immigration and nationalism; specifically on the politically very salient topic of refugee admission (Q1); the economic impact (Q2) and cultural obligations of arriving immigrants to assimilate or adapt [*sich anpassen*] to ‘German customs and culture’ (Q3); and the need for stronger national pride (Q7). Question 3 clearly echoes debates about a German *Leitkultur*,

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<sup>72</sup> For supplementary categories, the specialized statistical software used here, SPAD, provides T-test values which, following Lebart, Morineau, and Warwick (1984), can be read as documenting the significance, direction, and relative strength of the association between supplementary categories and individual axes, where the association is significant at a test value of over 1.96 or below -1.96; the direction is given by the sign of the value in relation to the orientation of the axis; and the relative strength of the association can be assessed by comparing the test values of different categories. I generally do not report these values, but only discuss relations that are significant by this standard. The full table of values can be found in the appendix c) and B. To ascertain whether there are significant differences on a supplementary variable of special interest – here: occupational class – we can run one-sided analyses of variance (ANOVA) of the supplementary variable in question against the axes, using the coordinates of individual points on the axis as a new variable (see below).

i.e. the need for a state-sanctioned cultural ideal based on national majority culture, against a multicultural ideal of diversity (see Koopmans 2013). The phrasing of question 7 (“We should *finally* have the courage to have a strong sense of national pride *again*.”) cues the rehabilitation of German nationalism from its stigmatized association with the Nazi dictatorship. Identity- and morality-based ‘*us/them inequalities*’ are captured by a question about same-sex marriage, which had been legalized in Germany in the year preceding the survey (Q5); as well as two questions on gender inequality, one tapping into social conservatism (Q9), the other asking for positionings towards a form of affirmative action for women in the labor market (Q8). Question 6, on the need for stricter punishments of criminal offenders, a core slogan of law and order politics, does not directly link to any of Mau et al.’s inequality conflicts, but can perhaps still be meaningfully listed under this type, for reasons we shall see below. Constrained by the data, conflicts over ‘*today/tomorrow inequalities*’ are here captured only by a single question on the need for stronger environmental protection laws (Q4).

The original 5-point Likert scales were collapsed into 3-point scales (Agree, Neither, Disagree) to avoid the so-called Guttman effect, a well-known statistical artefact in MCA research by which point clouds form a ‘horsehoe’, reflecting differences between strong and moderate (dis-)agreement (Hjellbrekke 2018).<sup>73</sup>

Table 8: Active questions for constructing the political space. Marginal distributions in weighted percentages. Missing (including ‘not applicable’, ‘refuse’, ‘don’t know’) not shown.

Question	Weighted percentage
<b>1. The influx of refugees into Germany should be prevented.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	31.6
Neither	19.0
(Strongly) disagree	48.1
Total	98.7
<b>2. Immigrants are good for the German economy.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	48.2
Neither	27.2
(Strongly) disagree	22.3

<sup>73</sup> In two cases with particularly skewed distributions (Q7 and 9), four categories were coded to draw out significant differences on the more commonly selected end of the scale. Here, the most frequent category was set as supplementary to not artificially inflate the contribution of the variable (see above).

Total	99.7
<b>3. Immigrants should be obliged to adapt to German values and customs.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	79.4
Neither	8.9
(Strongly) disagree	11.4
Total	99.7
<b>4. Tougher measures should be taken to protect the environment.</b>	
Strongly agree	51.3
Agree <i>[supplementary]</i>	33.6
Neither	8.0
(Strongly) disagree	7.0
Total	99.7
<b>5. Same-sex marriages should be illegal.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	11.6
Neither	10.5
(Strongly) disagree	76.5
Total	98.6
<b>6. Criminal offenders should be punished more severely than they are now.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	66.1
Neither	16.7
(Strongly) disagree	14.4
Total	97.2
<b>7. We should finally have the courage to have a strong sense of national pride again.</b>	
Strongly agree	27.1
Agree <i>[supplementary]</i>	34.3
Neither	17.1
(Strongly) disagree	13.8
Total	92.3
<b>8. Equally qualified women should be given preference in job applications and promotions.</b>	18.5
(Strongly) agree	28.6
Neither	52.2
(Strongly) disagree	99.3
Total	
<b>9. A husband's job is to earn money, a wife's to take care of household and family.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	10.9
Neither	16.4
Disagree <i>[supplementary]</i>	24.4
Strongly disagree	48.2
Total	100*
<b>10. Income and wealth should be redistributed in favor of ordinary people.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	61.6
Neither	17.6
(Strongly) disagree	19.2
Total	98.4
<b>11. Social security should be the most important goal of government policy.</b>	
(Strongly) agree	81.2
Neither	10.0
(Strongly) disagree	7.8

Total	99.0
<b>12. Differences in social rank between people are acceptable because they essentially express what one has made of the opportunities one has had. [Original: 4-Point scale]</b>	
(Strongly) agree	47.3
(Strongly) disagree	49.5
Total	96.8
<b>13. Social benefits in Germany cause people to become lazy and rely on them.*</b>	
(Strongly) agree	48.2
Neither	25.1
(Strongly) disagree	26.7
Total	100*
<b>14. In a just society, there should be little difference in people's standard of living.*</b>	
(Strongly) agree	59.0
Neither	23.1
(Strongly) disagree	17.9
Total	100*

*N=3477; \*Split survey, items answered only by half the sample (N=1753)*

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Ideological Polarities in the German Political Space

#### The Political Space

In a first step, the MCA technique allows us to extract crucial dimensions of political positionings. As introduced, we first assess the rates of the axes, calculating the modified contributions rates according to the formula developed by Benzécri (Hjellbrekke 2018, 36f.). As Table 2 shows, the primary axis captures 70 % of the variance, though with a rate of 14,5%, the second axis is strong enough to also warrant interpretation.<sup>74</sup>

	<i>Axis 1</i>	<i>Axis 2</i>	<i>Axis 3</i>
Variance of axes (eigenvalues)	0,2097	0,1342	0,1165
Modified eigenvalue (Benzécri)	0,019126	0,003935	0,002032
<b>Modified rates</b>	<b>70,3%</b>	<b>14,5%</b>	<b>7,5%</b>
Cumulated modified rates (%)	70,3%	84.8%	92.3%

*Table 2: MCA: Eigenvalues and Rates of Axes*

<sup>74</sup> The imbalance of rates has a lot to do with the selection of variables for the analysis. The rate of an axis is linked to the number of categories of variables it bundles. Here, the exceptionally high rate of the first axis must be seen as the result of a greater number of variables on “New Politics” issues that were selected for the analysis

As the rates of axes 1 and 2 together already satisfy the Kaiser criterion, we can disregard the other axes.<sup>75</sup> We can now move to inspecting the positions of variables and categories in the space constructed by the relevant axes 1 and 2. This will help us interpret the substantive meaning of the axes we extracted. The cloud of categories in figure 9 shows us the mean positions of categories, as centers of gravity for the individuals pertaining to them. As explained, the closeness of two categories in this cloud indicates that these categories were chosen by the same respondents more frequently. The size of category symbols is scaled according to the weighted number of respondents they comprise. More commonly selected items are displayed with larger symbols.

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<sup>75</sup> A closer inspection of the clouds of individuals (see appendix b) reveals that axis 3 is a statistical artefact produced by an unfortunate but unavoidable imbalance in the data: Three variables active in the construction of the space are drawn from a split module of the survey which only half of the respondents answered. What axis 3 captures is the analytically meaningless difference between individuals with missing and non-missing values on these variables. If possible, these kinds of imbalances in the data should be avoided, as they impair the analysis. However, in this case, these disadvantages were accepted, because without the items in question a differentiated construction of the political space would not have been possible. The items from the split survey were “In a fair society, social differences should be small”, “Benefits make people lazy”, both of which are important to assess distributive conflict. This type of conflict otherwise is underrepresented in the ALLBUS, with only two variables in the main survey capturing such divisions. The third variable, “A husband’s job is to earn money, a wife’s to look after family and household”, might have been dropped more easily, but I decided to retain it to get a clearer picture of conflicts over gender issues which otherwise would have only been present in the form of the item about the preferential hiring of women, which relates to gender inequalities on the labor market, but does not directly tap into the social conservatism prominently at stake in conflicts around gender.

Factor 1

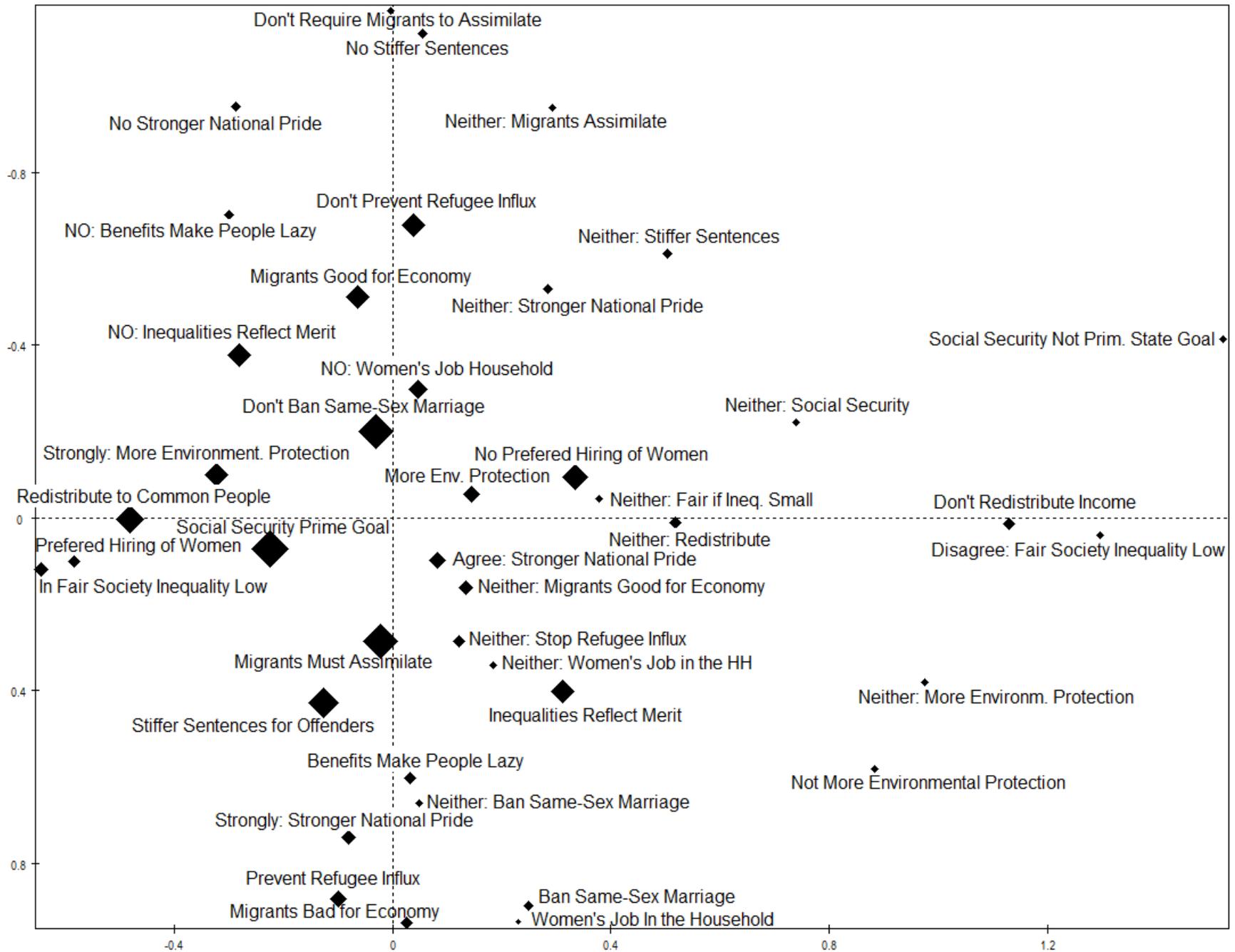


Figure 9: Cloud of categories

Factor 2

From the categories at the extreme poles of the axes, we already get a sense of the central variables for each of the dimensions. The vertical axis clearly reflects divides over migration, nationalism, law-and-order politics (“stiffer sentences”). The horizontal axis reflects divides over redistribution and social inequality (“In a fair society, inequality of living standards should be low”). Diagonal to both axes from the top left to the bottom right quadrants falls the trajectory of a variable on environmental protection, as well as those on deservingness and meritocracy (“Inequalities reflect what people have made of their opportunities”). In the following, I look at the two dimensions extracted in the MCA more systematically. I also draw on passive variables not shown here, to reconstruct two further polarities that are crucial for the structure of the German political space. The structure of four central ideological polarities reconstructed here then sets the stage for the analysis of *classed* politics in Germany. The interpretation of the four polarities also introduces some of the most important themes the later qualitative analysis looks at more deeply.

### **First Polarity: Redistribution Versus Property**

Beginning with the horizontal axis, we recognize the contours of conflicts along the lines of redistributive ‘old politics’: As shown in Table 3, which lists the explanatory points (i.e. categories with the highest contribution to the axis) redistribution, the state provision of social security, and the (un)fairness of social (in)equality in living standards are by far the most important variables for this dimension. Notably, the three highest ranking categories all capture *anti*-redistributive positionings. These positionings are minoritarian in the sample, which is marked by a pro-redistributive consensus. The distinctness of the anti-distributive positionings is also expressed by their larger distances from the barycenter. With one exception, only categories recording anti-redistributive positionings show noteworthy distances from the origin.<sup>76</sup> This means that the axis does not so much reconstruct a two-sided redistributive conflict structure but rather the divergence of a smaller, though significantly sized, anti-redistributive cluster from a general consensus in favor of state redistribution.

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<sup>76</sup> The item “In a fair society, inequality should be low”. As discussed, noteworthy distances are such larger than 0.5 standard deviations. For values see the coordinate table in appendix B.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Contribution Axis 2</i>	<i>N (weighted)</i>
Do Not Redistribute Income to Common People	15.88	667
Social Security Should Not Be Primary State Goal	11.69	269
In a Fair Society Inequality Should Not Be Low	9.82	294
Redistribute Income to Common People	9.39	2140
In a Fair Society Inequality Should Be Low	8.04	972
Neither: More Environmental Protection	5.01	279
Preferential Hiring of Women	4.12	644
No Preferential Hiring of Women	3.80	1817
Not More Environmental Protection	3.69	243
More Environmental Protection	3.61	1770
Inequalities Reflect Merit	2.98	1642
Neither: Stiffer Punishment	2.74	582
Social Security Should Be Primary State Goal	2.69	2825
Inequalities Do Not Reflect Merit	2.59	1722

*Table 3: Explanatory points axis 2*

Methodologically, this imbalance is somewhat unfortunate.<sup>77</sup> But it also reveals a real political convergence on issues of welfare and redistribution, which has been described as an extension of the welfare coalition to the center- and even the radical right of the political spectrum and a loss of conflict potential over basic questions of state intervention and redistribution (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015).<sup>78</sup> The need for social balancing is largely consensual in German political space. This is further underscored by a null result not shown here (but see appendix d), namely the non-contribution to the axis of a question asking whether “Politics should stay out of the economy”. The degree of state intervention into the economy has often been cited as the defining question for the redistributive conflict dimension in the past – or even for the positionings of political parties *tout court* (Downs 1957, 116). Yet here, the variable did not load on any of the axes strongly enough to be of interest for the analysis. In the German coordinated market economy, the opposition between economic planning and ‘laissez-faire’ economic policy seems not to be a salient dimension of redistributive conflict

<sup>77</sup> In the sense that it obscures variation on the pro-redistributive left side of the axis. That said, the fully egalitarian formulation that ‘in a fair society differences of living standards should be small’ tacks noticeably to the left of the pro-redistribution position, allowing for some nuance also on the left side of the axis. In any case, the anti-redistributive categories are large enough to allow for a meaningful analysis of the axis (e.g. 19% for ‘The state should *not* redistribute income in favor of common people’).

<sup>78</sup> Alternatively, it might be that the center of conflicts over above/below inequalities has shifted away from redistribution and towards issues like taxation or regulation (e.g. of land and real estate ownership, as in recent controversies). More nuanced items on contentious mechanisms of redistribution and inequality (e.g. different forms of taxation; different priorities and recipient groups; positionings on deficit spending) would surely allow for a better reconstruction of this dimension of political conflict.

today (see Mau 2015, Ch.2).<sup>79</sup> I interpret the axis as expressing a polarity inherent in democratic capitalism over *ideals of distributive justice* based on social equality and rebalancing on the one hand, or differential entitlements accrued by private property and individual performance on the other (Mau 2004).

## Second Polarity: Universalism Versus Particularism

The second polarity clearly presents us with the “new cleavage” of universalism and particularism (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015). Table 4 lists the explanatory points of this axis. We see that it bundles the nationalist, authoritarian, and traditionalist positionings described in previous cleavage research (see above). The first nine categories with particularly high contributions capture positionings towards refugee admission, the economic and cultural consequences of immigration, national pride, and the need for stiffer sentences. Other items that also show above-average contributions are those regarding same-sex marriage, and – more weakly – deservingness and meritocracy (“benefits make people lazy”, “differences in social rank reflect what people have made of their opportunities”).

<u>Category</u>	<u>Contribution Axis 1</u>	<u>N (weighted)</u>
Prevent Refugee Influx	10,15	1098
Do Not Prevent Refugee Influx	9,25	1671
Immigrants Not Good for Economy	8,22	777
No Stricter Punishment	7,73	502
Don't Require Migrants to Assimilate	6,65	396
Agree Strongly: Stronger Nat. Pride	6,45	942
Disagree: Stronger National Pride	5,53	481
Immigrants Good for Economy	5,25	1675
Stricter Criminal Punishment	5,01	2298
Ban Same-Sex Marriage	3,90	404
Benefits Make People Lazy	3,60	784
Social Rank Reflects Merit	3,15	1722
Social Rank Does Not Reflect Merit	2,96	1643
Benefits Do Not Make People Lazy	2,75	434
Require Migrants to Assimilate	2,69	396

Table 4: Explanatory points for axis 1

<sup>79</sup> In fact, the variable weakly loaded on the second dimension. My hunch is that this has to do with the wording of the question: The question whether “*Politics* should stay out of the economy” (rather than e.g. “*The state* should...”) can be understood to prompt anti-*political* positionings – that is, such directed against the political system and its representatives – than positionings regarding economic policy. As we will see in a later step of the analysis, this would explain its correspondence with the second polarity on the vertical axis.

Migration clearly is the crucial issue complex structuring this axis of the political space, with the highly politicized issues of refugee admission, economic consequences of immigration, and cultural assimilation (in the tradition of *'Leitkultur'* debates) forming a central polarity between pro- and anti-migration sides of the axis. Here too, a null result adds nuance to this finding. An item asking whether “the further opening of world markets will benefit everyone” did not contribute to either axis (see appendix d). This again seems to link to the specificity of the “German Model”, with its strong export-oriented growth model and a relatively generous welfare state. As discussed by Manow (2018; see also Kriesi et al. 2012), transnationalization here, as across Northern Europe, becomes an issue much more in the form of immigration than in the form of the transnational opening of markets. The constellation of migration issues and authoritarianism is familiar from previous research. On the migration-skeptic end, we find statistical affinities with positionings in favor of stricter criminal sentencing,<sup>80</sup> against same-sex marriage and in support of a conservative “male breadwinner” model of the gendered division of labor.

Recalling recent discussions of an interpenetration of economic and cultural questions on the universalism-particularism divide (see above), we also find two distributive items loading on this axis, whose response patterns lie diagonal to both axes from the upper left to the lower right. The stronger of the two items asserts that social benefits make their recipients lazy and reliant on the state. A second one states that social inequalities are acceptable because they social ranks are merited by individual effort. Both questions can be understood to concern questions of deservingness and meritocracy, one in the sense of distrust in the legitimate need of welfare recipients and the other through a quasi-meritocratic legitimization of inequality by an individual ascription of responsibility and blame. While agreement or disagreement with the need for state redistribution, social security, and the ideal of relative material equality defines the first polarity, the *terms and conditions* of social support and the ascription of blame for unequal outcomes have closer affinities with patterns of authoritarianism and migration skepticism (see Attewell 2020).

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<sup>80</sup> Notably, on issues in which majorities selected the authoritarian or nationalist categories – stricter punishments, immigrant assimilation, and national pride – “Neither” categories cluster in the upper right quadrants of the space, while the more decidedly liberal or cosmopolitan “Disagree” positionings tend to be found on the upper left.

With some caveats we will discuss below, the MCA reveals clear statistical overlaps between migration skepticism, calls for stiffer punishments, gender and sexual traditionalism, restrictive deservingness, and national pride. Yet it should be noted that the contributions of the questions on deservingness, gender traditionalism, and same-sex marriages are low, and that their oppositions lie at a diagonal angle to the axis. The core of the polarity lies in migration attitudes, especially regarding refugees, and law and order politics. As this polarity represents the “new cleavage” that much of this study circles around, we will return to its interpretation below.

For now it suffices to say that with different data and a different methodology for mapping public opinion than commonly used in cleavage research, we confirm some of its central findings. There is a powerful ideological polarity articulated around issues of refugees, migration, and, more secondarily, law and order. This polarity lies orthogonal to the redistributive divide, and also captures positionings regarding gender and sexual traditionalism, and deservingness. Without going deeper yet, we recognize the issue bundles identified in theorizing the universalism-particularism cleavage. The polarity clearly stands in the historical context of conflicts between liberalism and conservatism (Möllers 2020), formerly fought e.g. over the liberalization of sexual morality or along the secular-religious divide (Rovny and Polk 2019). Combining both polarities, we can say that both liberalism and conservatism exist in the plural. In the upper half of the space, the opposition of “redistribution plus universalism” versus “property plus universalism” brings out the divide between social and economic liberalisms (Möllers 2020, 10). Equally, we can make out more or less egalitarian variants of conservatism on the “particularist” half of the space.

### **Third Polarity: Left Versus Right**

There are two further ideological polarities that we can reconstruct from the MCA. These do not appear as axes in the analysis itself, but below it will be shown that they have an equal and independent structuring force for the political space (see 4.2.). These additional polarities concern political leanings towards the *left or right* which more closely capture positionings on deservingness, meritocracy, and environmentalism; as well as a polarity of *populism and political exclusion* that is expressed in positionings on politicians, the institutional system of representation, and degrees of political access and competence.

Figure 10 shows positionings on a left-right scale.<sup>81</sup> With noteworthy distances on both axes, this trajectory reflect a strong ideological polarity that lies diagonal to both the rights-rules and equality-performance dimensions. The left-right distinction, which once was synonymous with the distributional class conflict of the first dimension (Bobbio 1996; Mair 2007) today also centrally encompasses issues of the second, universalist-particularist dimension. As the bottom rows of table 5 show, left leaners take markedly more pro-refugee and pro-redistribution positions than the average, while the opposite is true for right leaners.<sup>82</sup>

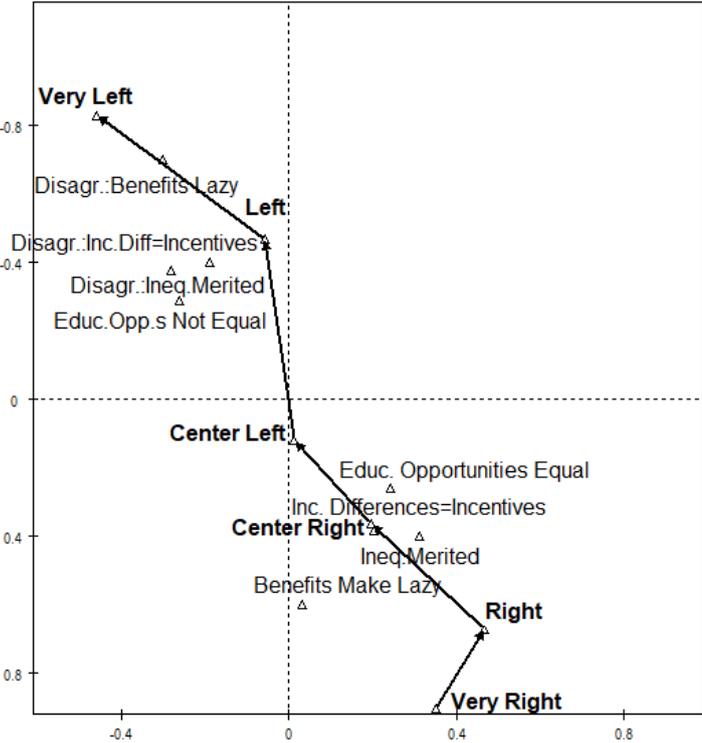


Figure 10: Left-Right orientations, deservingness, and meritocracy in the political space (ALLBUS 2018)

Interestingly, we notice that some of the issues which did not fit neatly into either of the first two polarities correspond specifically to the left-right divide. As shown in figure 10 and the top rows of table 5, this above all concerns the legitimization of inequality by deservingness and individual merit. Those leaning to the right are much more likely to state that income differences are just, and acceptable reflections of individual effort; that only these differences give people incentives to work hard; that “everyone has the chance to get the education they want”; and that “benefits make people lazy and dependent”. Those leaning left are much more likely to reject these statements. As the columns on the right of table 8 show, the left-right polarity is consistently more indicative of positionings on deservingness and meritocracy than the two defining attitudes for the previous polarities, redistribution and refugee admissions. In the reverse direction too, the left-right divide is more strongly defined by divisions over deservingness than by such over redistribution.

<sup>81</sup> Recoded from a 10-point scale: Very left=1,2,3, left=4, center left=5, center right=6, right=7, very right=8 9 10.  
<sup>82</sup> This is in accordance with definitions like Inglehart’s stressing that “the core meaning of the Left-Right dimension [...] is whether one supports social change in an egalitarian direction” (Inglehart 1990, 293; see also Bobbio 1996).

	<i>% diff. to mean</i>		<i>Difference between poles</i>		
	<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Left-R.</i>	<i>Redist.</i>	<i>Refug.</i>
<i>Benefits make people lazy and dependent</i>	-20	+17	<b>37</b>	2	30
<i>Without income differences no incentives to perform</i>	-16	+18	<b>32</b>	12	20
<i>Social rank reflects what people made of opportunities</i>	-17	+13	<b>30</b>	20	19
<i>Stricter environmental laws are needed</i>	+9	-21	<b>30</b>	11	9
<i>Redistribute income in favor of common people</i>	+12	-5	<b>17</b>	-	3
<i>Prevent refugee influx into Germany</i>	-17	+27	<b>44</b>	3	-

Table 5: Positionings on deservingness and meritocracy, environmentalism, redistribution, and refugee admissions. Rows 1-2: as differences from the population average. Rows 3-5 differences by (very) left and (very) right; pro- and anti-redistributionist; and pro- and anti-refugee positionings (in %, ALLBUS 2018, weighted).<sup>83</sup>

In other words, the left-right divide and deservingness questions form a concurrent ideological polarity that is nested into and to some degree independent of the two main axes.<sup>84</sup> Restrictive deservingness attitudes are specifically linked to right-wing, expansive deservingness positions to left-wing positionings. Left leaners most strongly diverge from the population mean in their rejection of the statement that “benefits make people lazy”.

Further, the minoritarian position that “no stricter laws for environmental protection are needed” lies close to the right-wing side of the left-right polarity.<sup>85</sup> In other words, anti-environmentalism here is less associated with issues of the “new cleavage” as such, as it is a

<sup>83</sup> Reading example: The percentage of left leaners stating that benefits make people lazy was 20% lower than the population average, that among right leaners 17% larger; creating an overall distance of 37 points between the left and right poles. By comparison, respondents with pro- and anti-redistribution attitudes only differed by 2 points on this item.

<sup>84</sup> A more technical measure of the same relation is the correlation coefficient Spearman’s rho (used as variables are not normally distributed). It shows a) that with the exception of the benefits item, the variables discussed here are most strongly (and significantly) associated with the left-right distinction, and b) that the left-right distinction correlates much more strongly with positionings on refugees than with such on redistribution.

	<i>Left-Right</i>	<i>Refugees</i>	<i>Redistribution</i>
<i>Benefits make people lazy and dependent</i>	-0.25	<b>0.28</b>	0.02
<i>Without income differences no incentives to perform</i>	<b>-0.19</b>	0.16	-0.17
<i>Social rank reflects what people made of opportunities</i>	<b>-0.19</b>	0.14	-0.08
<i>Stricter environmental laws needed</i>	<b>0.17</b>	-0.12	0.13
<i>Redistribute income in favor of common people</i>	<b>0.17</b>	0.05	-
<i>Prevent further refugee influx</i>	<b>0.3</b>	-	0.05

For all: Prob > |t| = 0.0000

<sup>85</sup> The same is true for the statements that “the job of women is to look after the household, that of men to earn money” (23 points difference between left and right leaners) and that “same-sex marriages should be made illegal” (19 points difference). (28 points difference to right leaners). See also graph in appendix g.

minoritarian and specifically right-wing positioning diverging from the mainstream. The same is true for the statements that “the job of women is to look after the household, that of men to earn money” and that “same-sex marriages should be made illegal”. On the left side we find the equally minoritarian position rejecting the need for a stronger sense of national pride.

We also notice a certain gap between more widely shared *pro-redistribution* positionings and more specifically *left-wing* positionings in favor of *expansive deservingness*. Considering the distributive nature of the items, it is particularly noticeable how independent positionings on deservingness and meritocracy are of positionings on redistribution.<sup>86</sup> Discerning between deserving and undeserving recipients, or expanding the boundaries of deservingness are ways of debating distributive relations that differ from the logic of distributional conflicts between the haves and the have-nots. As we will explore below, this gap is the product of an important social divide on the egalitarian side of the political space. This observation will also play an important role in the qualitative part, where inequality is discussed at least as centrally in the moral terms of deservingness as in terms of state redistribution or property relations. As discussed above, deservingness attitudes have been described as a part of the new cleavage, and indeed we here see that these attitudes share an elective affinity with the universalism polarity reconstructed above. Yet divides over deservingness and meritocracy form an independent third polarity that most specifically corresponds to differences between self-assigned left and right leaners.

#### **Fourth Polarity: High Versus Low**

Finally, a fourth independent ideological polarity can be detected with the help of the MCA. This polarity taps into the relations to politics, as introduced above, i.e. the dimension of political ideology concerning attitudes towards the political game as a whole. To capture this polarity, I draw on the items of the ALLBUS' *populism* scale, positionings towards the political system, and indicators of political exclusion (all shown in figure 11). As these items were set passive and thus invisible in the previous analysis, I shortly introduced them here. The ALLBUS' populism scale prompts distinct dimensions of some of the most commonly used definitions of populism (see Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove 2013), including items on anti-elitism, people-centrism, beliefs in popular sovereignty, radicalism, and anti-pluralism. Respondents

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<sup>86</sup> See also the contributions of the deservingness variables in the appendix c.

were asked to agree or disagree with a list of statements disparaging politicians for “talking too much but doing too little” and for “caring only for the rich and powerful”. Other items state that “ordinary citizens would make for better representatives than professional politicians” and that “what is called compromise in politics really is a betrayal of principles”. The scale also asks for positionings regarding the proposition that “the people [*das Volk*] essentially agree on what needs to be done” and that “the people, not the politicians, should take the important political decisions”.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to these items, figure 11 shows the trajectories of indicators of political efficacy and competences, or what, in the light of the theoretical lense introduced above, I interpret as forms of *political in- and exclusion*. These include items on *political sophistication*, as measured by scores of a multiple choice quiz testing factual knowledge about German political institutions,<sup>88</sup> an item on the subjective sense that “politics is too complicated for me”, and self-professed low or high degrees of political interest. Further they include a battery of items on *political efficacy*, including agency, participation, and perceptions of responsiveness; asking whether respondents felt able to participate in a political group; whether they generally supported a party; whether they felt they had an influence on government actions; whether they talked about politics ‘rarely’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’; whether they thought politicians cared about them; and whether they were overall satisfied with democracy in Germany.

There is a striking correspondence of the items tapping into “populism” and those measuring political in- and exclusion. Categories expressing hostility and distance towards the political system and professionalized political representatives cluster in the lower left quadrant, together with indicators of low political interest, sophistication, and sense of efficacy. While politicians are said to “talk too much”, “do not care about us”, but “only about the rich and powerful”, the people are said to “essentially agree on what needs to be done in the country”, and “ordinary citizens” or “the people, not the politicians, should make the relevant decisions”. As the MCA reveals, these statements were affirmed disproportionately by those who at the same time said that they took little interest in politics, could not be active in a political group, found politics too complicated and knew little about the institutional

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<sup>87</sup> It should be noted that in German the term *Das Volk* (the people in the singular) rather than e.g. the more neutral *Die Bevölkerung* (the population) also carries nationalist connotations.

<sup>88</sup> E.g. “Which party does Ursula von der Leyen belong to?”, “Who is the acting President of the European Commission?”

apparatus of politics, both according to their own assessment and in terms of how they fared in the quiz about factual knowledge.



Figure 11: The Polarity of “Populism” and Political Exclusion

On first glance this seems like a contradiction. Why would those with no interest in politics press for a more active role in it? The picture gets clearer when contrasting this cluster to that on the opposite pole of the polarity, where we find expressions of trust in politicians coupled with a strong sense of political efficacy, sophistication, and interest. Those who feel well-integrated into the political system reject claims in favor of a greater involvement of “the people”. But those who are excluded from it, in objective and/or subjective terms, affirm such

claims. The populist critique of professionalized representative democracy and its anti-populist rebuttal are part and parcel of relations to politics marked by higher or lower degrees of political exclusion (see above and Gaxie 2013). Survey items like that claiming “ordinary citizens to be better representatives than professional politicians” express both a *normative critique* of real-existing modes of democratic representation and a *relation to the institutions* of political representation (see also Schäfer and Zürn 2021).

This relational logic, and the *political inequality* inherent in it, is missing from most current theories of populism and certainly from public discourses on the topic. Consequently, “populist” and “anti-populist” would make for problematic labels for the sides of this polarity. Instead, I draw on the already introduced analogy used in Pierre Ostiguy’s theory of populism introduced above, which understands populism and anti-populism as expressing an opposition between “high” and “low” sociopolitical styles. As we saw, the “sociopolitical high” versus “low” distinction centers precisely on relations to the apparatus of institutionalized representation focalized here. “High” politics places trust in institutional mediation, impersonal proceduralism, and legalism, while “low” politics stands for an ideal of “shortening the distance between the legitimate authority and the people” (Ostiguy 2017, 83), through immediacy, proximity, and personalization.

### **Summary: A Wheel With Eight Spokes**

Just as Ostiguy predicts, the axis between these poles lies perpendicular to the left-right axis, with a “high left” on the social liberal top left pole and a “high right” on the anti-redistributionist pole. The particularist pole is contextualized as being on the “low right”, the purely redistributionist pole (with average positionings on universalism) as the “low left”. Naturally, political style and issue positions are analytically distinct. But the inductive empirical finding of a clear correspondence of populism and political exclusion with a specific trajectory in the political space allows us to insert these issues into the larger picture of ideological polarities. We see that the opposition between an institutional, anti-populist, and politically included “high” and a populist, politically excluded “low” forms a distinct fourth ideological polarity in the German political space. Like the left-right polarity capturing the deservingness divide, the high-low polarity maintains elective affinities with the “new cleavage”. Just as on the one hand it partly overlaps (but is not synonymous with) positionings on the left, the

universalist pole on the other hand lies closer to the antipopulist and politically included “high”. The particularist pole maintains affinities with populist positionings and political exclusion on the one hand, and right leanings on the other. But all three polarities are also distinct in their trajectories and distributions.

The structure of ideological polarities in the German political space reconstructed here confirms and extends the value space commonly used in political science. The slightly stylized model in figure 12 clarifies the relative positions of the four polarities as forming a wheel with eight spokes (or a pizza with eight slices). A first polarity is defined by distributive justice ideals, with a redistributive pole on the left and an anti-redistributive property pole on the right. A second polarity, orthogonal to the first, captures divides over immigration, traditionalism, and law-and-order and was identified as the universalist-particularist divide. At an angle to both lie the left-right polarity most specifically defined by issues of deservingness; and a polarity of ‘high’ and ‘low’ sociopolitical styles expressed by political in- and exclusion and (anti-)populist positionings toward institutional politics.

These findings enrich the picture of the two-dimensional value space commonly used in political science, and discussions compounding the “new cleavage” with right-wing leanings and populism, based on the profile of radical right parties. We here see that all three are indeed linked, yet remain distinct axes of ideological differentiation.

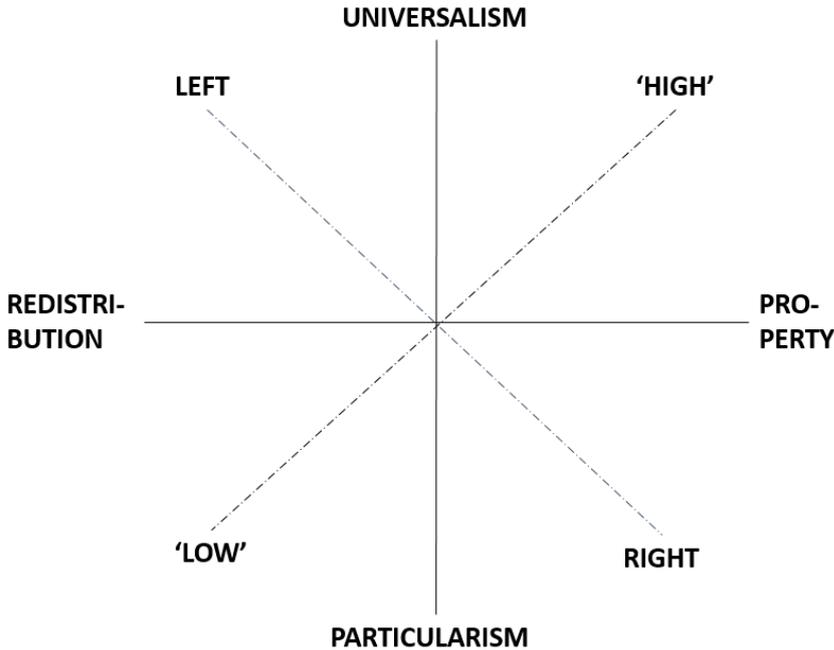


Figure 12: Ideological Polarities in the German Political Space

The type of display here may also help synthesize discussions on cleavage structures with those on populism and gives us a starting point for a specifically sociological analysis of opinion formation. Including relations to politics into the analysis of the political space underlines that ideological divides are not only characterized by the distribution of individuals along homogenous opinion scales, but by

heterogenous relations of inequality, inclusion and exclusion which create differential social preconditions for articulating political opinions in the first place. These *social* underpinnings of ideological positionings are what we turn to in the next section.

#### **4.2. The Social Logic of the Political Space**

We now assess correspondences between positionings in political space and positions in social space, by mapping sociostructural variables onto the political space constructed in the MCA. I first reconstruct the class-ideological constellation, i.e. homologies of the political space with the social space, measured by indicators of occupational class, income, education, and place. This reconstruction reorients our picture of the political space and explains its shape by vertical social stratification and horizontal differentiation. I then explore the way in which class identities figure in the space of ideological positionings. Lastly, I zoom in on the class fractions of two classes that are particularly relevant for the analysis of the new cleavage, production workers and sociocultural professionals.

##### **The Class-Political Constellation**

To show whether and how political ideologies in Germany are classed, we look at the way political divisions and class divisions align. Fig. 14 shows the constellation of Oesch and ORDC class categories in the political space (Oesch's 8-class solution appears in bold black, the 16-class solution in gray, Oslo classes in blue). The pattern is strikingly clear and shows a homology of the political and social spaces. Structural differences between occupational classes closely corresponds with the differentiation of the political space. Specifically, four clusters emerge:

- a) A *cultural middle class cluster* composed of sociocultural (semi-)professionals is situated in the left-leaning universalist-redistributionist quadrant. Of the Oesch classes, higher-grade sociocultural professionals score the highest on the universalist polarity, while sociocultural semi-professionals fall significantly closer to the average distribution on this axis but further to the left on the redistributive axis. The same pattern is captured by the ORDC categories of cultural upper and lower middle classes.

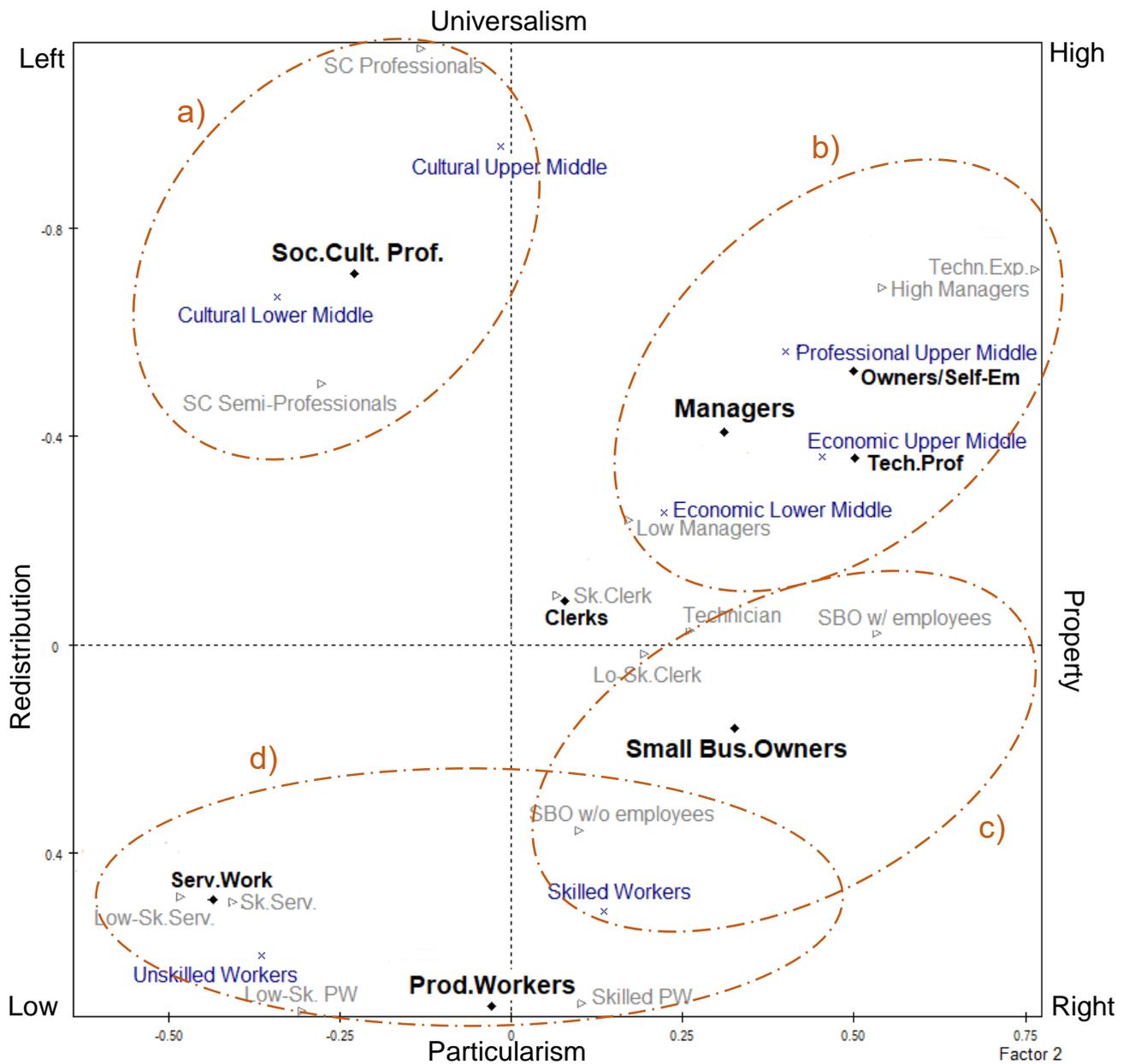


Figure 13: Oesch-8 and -16 and ORDC classes in the political space.

- b) The left positionings on the equality axis distinguish the cultural middle class from the economic (upper) middle class of a *business cluster*, positioned on the property end of the first polarity, while also scoring high on the universalist dimension. The business cluster unites higher-grade managers, self-employed and highly qualified technical professionals, as well as larger owners. Higher-grade managers and technical experts are closer to the “high”, as well as the universalist and property poles when compared to the lower-grade fractions of technicians and lower-grade managers.
- c) In the right-leaning particularist-property quadrant of the space, we find a looser *petty bourgeois cluster* made up of small business owners and skilled production workers. The cluster is loose in that there are considerable distances between its component classes. Small owners *with* employees are closer to the business cluster in their anti-redistributionist orientations than small owners without employees. The latter are closer to skilled workers who are situated on the particularist pole.
- d) Positioned significantly more towards the redistributionist pole vis-à-vis the petty bourgeois cluster but also deep in the particularist half of the space is the fourth, or *working class cluster*. It comprises service workers and lower-skilled production workers leaning towards the sociopolitical “low” and redistributive poles, and skilled production workers closer to the average on redistributive issues. Differences on the universalist polarity within this cluster are small, but notably lower-skilled production workers exhibit the most particularist response pattern of all classes.
- The lower-grade white collar class fractions of clerks, lower management employees, as well as technicians, finally, take middle of the road positions hardly distinguished from the average distribution.

We immediately notice that the two occupational classes furthest apart in their positionings on the “new cleavage” universalist polarity, are production workers and sociocultural professionals, especially higher-qualified sociocultural experts. With the graph here, we can place both classes in a richer relational picture of the class-political constellation. In this constellation, an economic and a cultural wing of the middle class diverge into ideological orientations towards economic and social liberalism. For the cultural middle class, universalist orientations are coupled with left-wing and redistributionist tendencies, for the economic middle class they are linked with positionings towards the antipopulist “high” and the anti-redistributionist property poles. The internal differentiation of the clusters follows the

hierarchy of marketable skills recorded by the class schemes. The higher respondents are positioned in the class hierarchy, the more they tend towards the liberal universalist pole. The same is true for the space overall, where respondents with lower positions consistently position themselves closer towards the particularist pole. On this side of the space, a more equality oriented cluster of disadvantaged working class categories is differentiated from skilled production workers and an anti-redistributionist petty bourgeoisie of small business owners.

As figure 14 shows, these results can be translated into a more conventional frequentist framework. For this, we derive two variables from the coordinates of individual cases on the axes and run a one-sided ANOVA which confirms statistically significant differences between the mean points of the Oesch classes on both of them.<sup>89</sup> Both the rights and the equality polarities are clearly linked to the class hierarchy, though each with a specific twist that

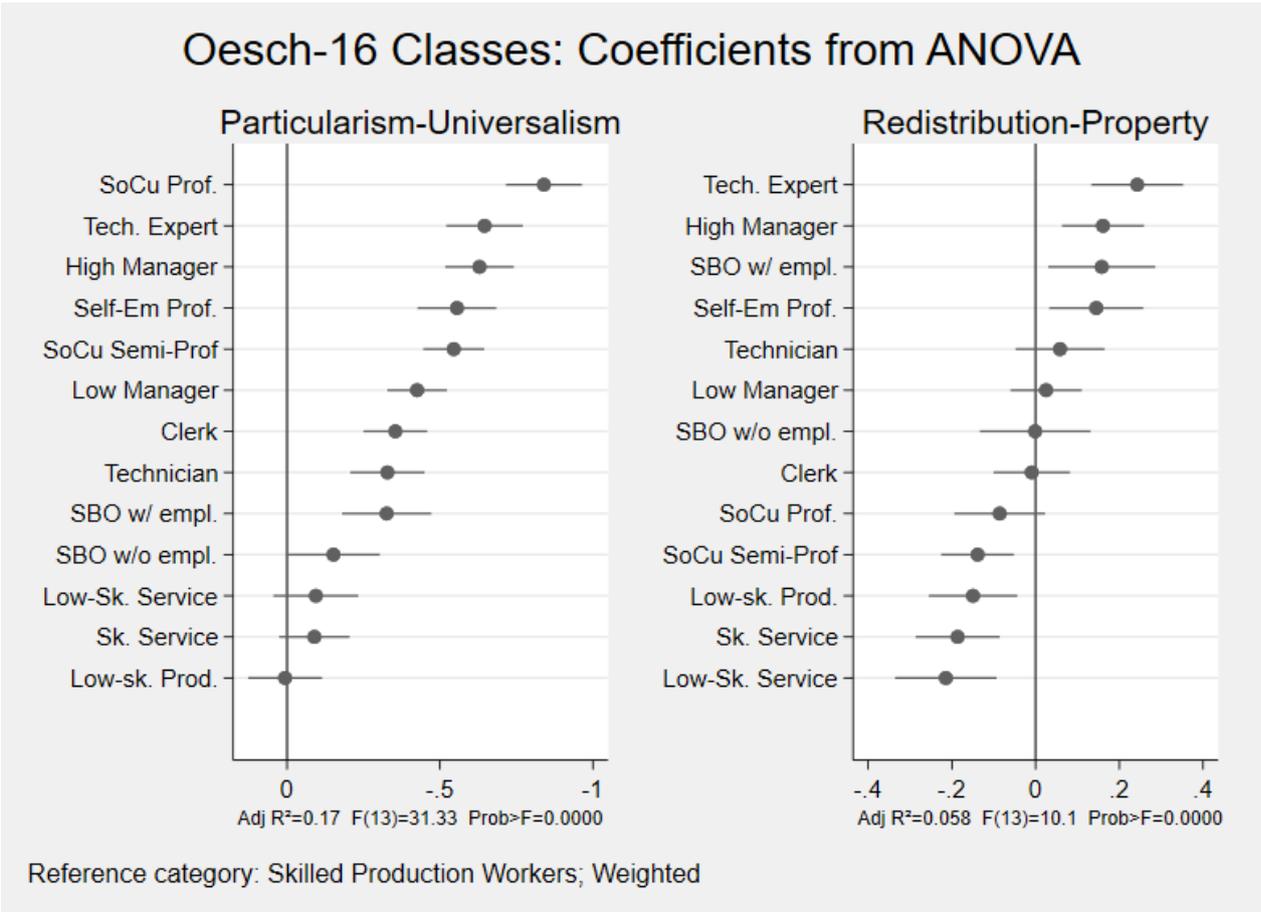


Figure 14: Regression coefficients and test values from one-sided ANOVA of Oesch classes against MCA coordinates

<sup>89</sup> For better legibility: the ANOVA of coordinates on the redistribution axis against the Oesch-16 solution, the Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.06, F(13)=10.1 and Prob>F=0.0000. For the universalist axis the values are Adj R<sup>2</sup>=0.17 F(13)=31.33 Prob>F=0.0000. Full documentation in appendix I.

reflects the division between fractions of the working and middle classes. In a strongly marked vertical gradient, the upper ranks of the cultural and the economic middle classes, higher-grade professionals, are ideologically differentiated from the working class, with a cluster of higher-grade blue-collar and lower-grade white collar occupations in between. Horizontally, redistribution issues divide an economic middle class both from the cultural middle class and the working class, particularly its most disadvantaged segments, service and low-skilled production workers.

### **The Social Stratification of the Political Space**

The picture gets even clearer when we add other indicators of positions in the social space and complete the picture of the four polarities reconstructed above. Drawing out the findings already inherent in the cloud of categories (figure 11), we can add nuance to the social logic also of the left-right and the high-low polarities. Put in a nutshell, the left-right polarity corresponds to the principle of capital composition, and the high-low polarity with that of overall capital volume. Figure 15 shows the social stratification of the political space (Sorokin 1964, 68ff.). Inequalities of income and education titles correspond to positionings along a diagonal trajectory from the working class bottom left to the business upper right. Along this line of stratification, subjective perceptions of “(not) getting one’s fair share”, or of one’s personal financial situation as “good”, middle of the road, or “bad” (bold line) align with objective measures of income quintiles (fine line). Strikingly, the hierarchy of education titles too is hardly distinguished from that by income. Indicating a social reproduction of education and concomitant positionings, the trajectory of the respondents’ education also repeats that of their *fathers’* educational titles.

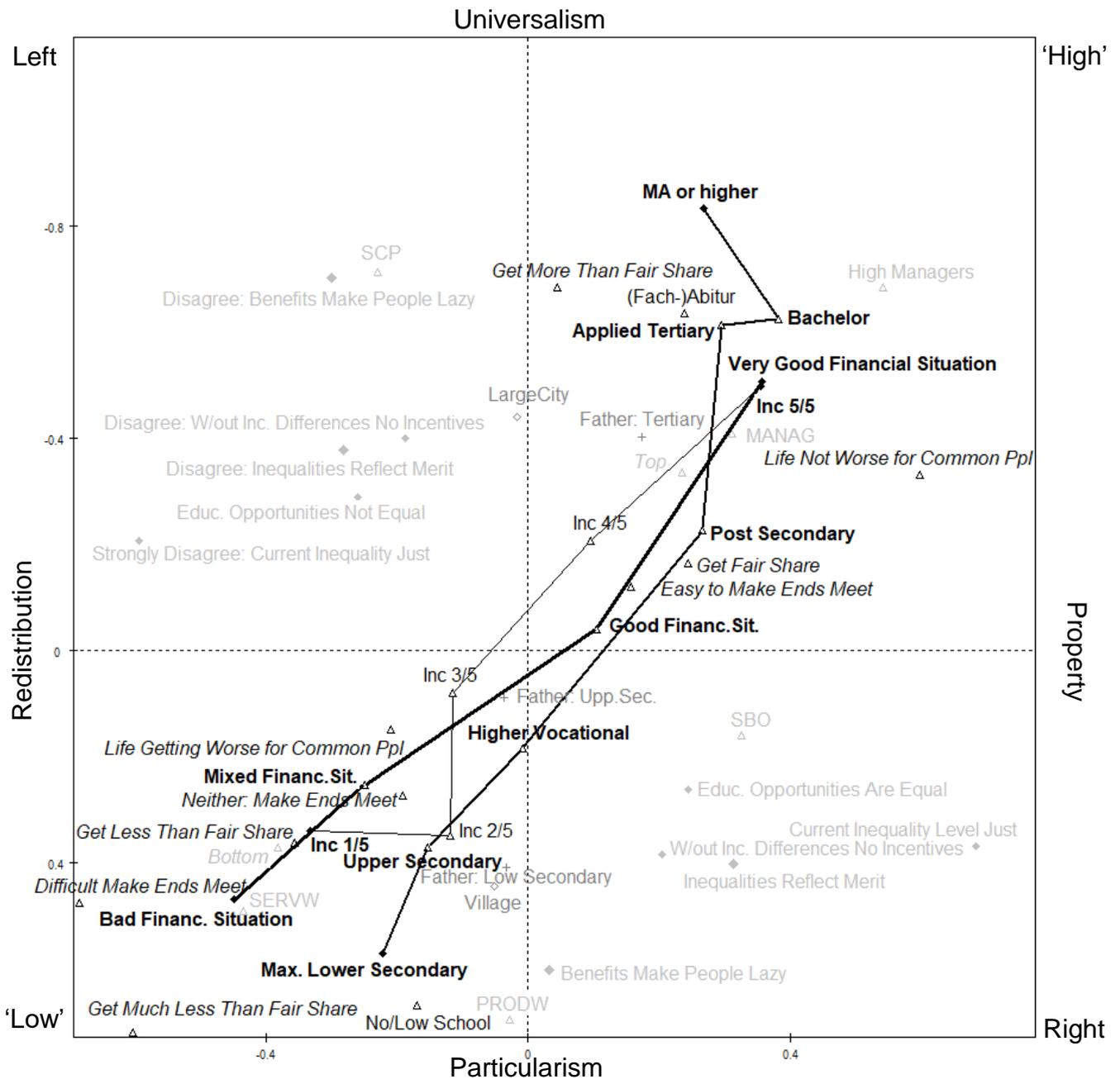


Figure 15: Education and income in political space: objective measures and subjective positionings

As we saw above, this joint trajectory of stratification in income and education most strongly corresponds with the polarity of the sociopolitical “High” versus “Low”. Indeed, table 9 shows that the higher professional classes strongly reject “populist” statements that demand that ordinary citizens or the people make political decisions in the place of professional politicians, and that it is also these classes that see themselves as most able to become politically active and show relatively greater factual knowledge about institutional politics. By comparison, both production and service workers express a very strong critique of politicians, feel that they have no influence on government policy and think that ordinary people would make for better

representatives. The high-low polarity extracted from the MCA corresponds to a gradient of higher and lower positions in the social space. Social and political inequality go hand in hand.

$\Delta$ Yes/No	The Ppl Shd Decide	Ordinary Citiz. Better Rep.s	Politic.s Only Care Ab. Rich	Cld Be Active Pol. Group	Have No Governm. Influence	% Correct Political Fact Quiz	N
SC. Experts	<u>-34.0</u>	<u>-57.4</u>	<u>-25.5</u>	<b>+17.5</b>	<u>-9*</u>	<b>63.3</b>	109
High Managers	<u>-33.3</u>	<u>-60.4</u>	<u>-40.5</u>	<b>+38.1</b>	<u>-20*</u>	<b>66.2</b>	147
SC Semi-Prof.s	-2.3	-23.4	+0.5	-16.3	+5.5	46.2	222
Small Owners	+4.9	-14.3	+7.6	-29.8	-	55.2	134
Prod. Workers	<b>+19.0</b>	<b>+7.6</b>	<b>+30.7</b>	<u>-40.2</u>	<b>+57.5</b>	43.3	366
Service Workers	<b>+23.3</b>	<b>+7.2</b>	<b>+25.7</b>	<u>-49.4</u>	<b>+48.5</b>	40.9	322
<i>Population</i>	<i>+0.4</i>	<i>-19.4</i>	<i>+6.3</i>	<i>-26.4</i>	<i>+19.8</i>		<b>3477</b>

Table 6: Differences agreement-disagreement for items on ‘populism’ and political efficacy and sophistication by class (Data ALLBUS 2018, weighted).<sup>90</sup>

By contrast, the left-right polarity lies perpendicular to this line of stratification. Comparing the black and the grey labels in figure 15, we come upon a puzzling contrast between the respondents’ assessments of *their own* position and *more general* normative positionings regarding income inequality. Respondents evaluating their share as ‘less than fair’ were mainly found in the lower left region of the space. Yet, it was the upper left that most markedly denied the justification of inequalities in response to questions like ‘Are current levels of inequality in Germany just?’ ‘Would there be no incentives for hard work without income differences?’, and ‘Are inequalities in social rank acceptable reflections of individual effort?’, while those on the lower right affirmed it.<sup>91</sup> In what may be called a paradox of inequality, the ideological consequences of *objective inequalities* of education and ideological positionings on *such inequalities* follow disjunct, even opposite trajectories.

<sup>90</sup> \*item only administered to half of the sample. Showing combined values for high and low managers (N=192)  
<sup>91</sup> The same was true for educational inequalities and their justification: While the hierarchy of educational titles is clearly linked to ideological disagreements between people at the top and the bottom of the social space, this does not correspond to a political critique of unequal educational opportunities ‘from below’ against their legitimation ‘from above’: Shown in gray among the deservingness items in figure 15 was a variable asking whether ‘everyone in this country today has the chance to educate themselves according to their skills and talents’. The phrasing of this item is somewhat puzzling for prompting a number of possible interpretations (here-elsewhere, today-in other times, etc.), but taking this as an imperfect indicator for positionings on inequalities of educational opportunity, we note that it is again disproportionately respondents in the upper left ‘rights-equality’ quadrant, dominated by the cultural middle class, who deny that equal educational opportunities exist, while the legitimating positioning has its point of gravity on the ‘petty bourgeois’ bottom right, where we also found positionings that justified inequalities of income and ‘rank’ in general.

With the help of the social indicators used here, we can understand this puzzling pattern as rooted in the distinct outlook of workers and sociocultural professionals in particular.<sup>92</sup> As we saw, both categories showed greater support for state redistribution than the average. But as recently shown by Weisstanner and Armingeon (2021), for the overall poorer members of the working class, material interests play a much more important role in shaping redistributionist attitudes than left-wing political beliefs, while the reverse is true for middle class members (see also Kitschelt 1997). We can conjecture that this also explains the differing patterns on deservingness. For the cultural middle class, expansive deservingness is motivated by *left-wing* political beliefs and synonymous with egalitarianism. For the working class, it is a question of modalities and conditions that is assessed somewhat independently of the overall question of redistribution. Though statistically united on the egalitarian half of the space, workers and the left-leaning middle class fractions are divided by ‘meritocratic’ justifications of inequality, in the sense of the individual attribution of failure or success and the fear of an abuse of social benefits, both of which were more prevalent among workers. We here glimpse a divergence in the moral economies of a ‘popular egalitarianism’ of the working class and a more ideologically ‘left egalitarianism’ of the middle class, a question we will return to in the qualitative part.

As is inherent in the already said, the vertical stratification of the political space does not find a political expression in the left-right distinction, except in the sense that individuals in the higher regions of the social space are more likely to identify both as left *or* as right than lower ones who are more likely to not respond to the question at all. Between right and left leaners, there are no differences in median net equivalent income (1860€ right, 1800€ left). The divide between left and right – once directly equated with that between high and low income groups (Lipset 1960) – today is positioned perpendicular to the division between top and bottom.

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<sup>92</sup> Only 14% of sociocultural professionals state that they receive less than their fair share, against 45% of skilled production workers. But only 24% of the former and 61% of the latter find that social differences are acceptable reflections of individual effort. Among unskilled service workers, 66% perceived their share to be less than fair, but here too a majority of 56% agree that inequalities are acceptable reflections of effort.

Instead, we can show that the positions of classes along the left-right polarity reflect differences of capital composition *within* the broader strata of the social space. Drawing on data from the SOEP (2017), we can illustrate this constellation with a look to wealth. Figure 16 orders classes and clusters by their position in the political space reconstructed here,<sup>93</sup> and shows percentages for left leaners, tertiary degrees, and mean net wealth.

V O L U M E	<b>SC Prof.</b> Left: 58% Uni: 87% 120,000 €	<b>Business</b> Left: 38% Uni: 67% 179,000 €	<b>Mid Owner</b> Left: 27% Uni: 22% 318,000 €
	<b>SC Sem-Prof.</b> Left: 54% Uni: 25% 70,000 €	<b>Clerical</b> Left: 35% Uni: 20% 104,000 €	<b>Sm. Owners</b> Left: 22% Uni: 20% 274,000 €
		<b>LoSk/Service</b> Left: 31% Uni: 7% 51,000 €	<b>Skilled PW</b> Left: 26% Uni: 3% 87,000 €
	←—————→ CULT. CAP.      COMPOSITION      ECON. CAP.		

Figure 16: Percentage left leaners, percent tertiary education, and mean net overall wealth by class fractions and clusters. Population mean: Left: 36%, Tertiary degrees 22%; wealth: 115,000€ (Data: SOEP 2017, weighted mean of imputations; rounded)

Left and right leanings distinguish a) leftist liberal sociocultural professionals from centrist liberal business professionals and more right-leaning medium owners; b) a leftist middle class fraction of sociocultural semi-professionals from centrist clerks and a right-leaning middle class of small owners; and c) a more right-leaning skilled production working class fraction from the rest of the working class. In other words, the left-right divide is the political expression of a gradient of capital composition *within* each of the broader strata of the social space. *Relatively poorer and – among the upper middle class – more educated fractions within the working, lower, and upper middle class* tack to the left, while economically stronger and relatively less educated class fractions are positioned on the right. Although the left-right distinction has ceased to be synonymous with a vertical class struggle, it still has a classed meaning, differentiating horizontally between fractions of the upper middle, middle and working classes. Ideological polarities in the German political space are classed and homologous to the divisions of the social space. This is most specifically captured by the high-

<sup>93</sup> The clustering here is oriented on the position of classes in the political space as discussed in the previous section. The business cluster is comprised of higher-grade managers, independent and technical professionals. Disadvantaged workers are service workers and low-skill production workers. The clerical cluster comprises clerks, lower-grade managers and technicians.

low polarity which aligns with the vertical stratification of the political space, and the left-right polarity which captures its horizontal differentiation.

In a striking finding, figure 17 shows that the left-right and high-low polarities are independent constitutive dimensions of the German political space. The figure shows the results of a separate MCA using the same data set. Here, the sole active variables were the item about left-right orientations and that asking whether “the people, and not the politicians, should make the important political decisions”.<sup>94</sup> Adding as supplementary, ‘demagnetized’ variables the most important items for the first two polarities found above (refugee admission and redistribution), as well as Oesch classes, income quintiles, and educational groups, we see the same constellation emerging that in the original MCA we had reconstructed from the 15 active variables. The crossing of left-right and ‘populist-antipopulist’ orientations *alone* contains the entire class-political constellation. This tells us firstly, that these are deep latent dimensions of the political space, on a par with the redistributive and universalist divides. It further tells us that both sets of polarities can be translated into each other, corroborating the wheel-shaped model of the political space developed above. And it tells us that the cleavage model of political conflict is just one manifestation of a more fundamental phenomenon: that of the classed structure of the political space.

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<sup>94</sup> For full results see appendix C.



Figure 17: Political Space drawn only from left-right orientations and variable 'The People Should Make the Political Decisions'; with positionings on refugee admission, redistribution, Oesch classes, class ID, education, city/countryside as supplementary variables

### Class Identities Matter

Going beyond existing studies, we can extend this picture of classed politics even further. Figure 18 shows that class not only structures political-ideological orientations objectively, but also in the form of *subjective identifications*. Here, the variable of self-categorizations of respondents as 'working', 'middle' and 'upper middle class' (or rather: stratum) captures significant differences with a trajectory from the lower left to the upper right, with middle

class identifiers in the center of the distribution.<sup>95</sup> The mean positionings of upper middle class identifiers coincide with those of the business cluster, while the mean positionings of working class identifiers are placed squarely in the center of the *objective*, i.e. occupational working class cluster. As we see here, they are also linked to distinct ideological positionings. The working class and the upper middle class inhabit diametrically opposed positions in the political space, regarding the rights-rules, the equality-performance, and the high-low polarities (see appendix I for ANOVA results).

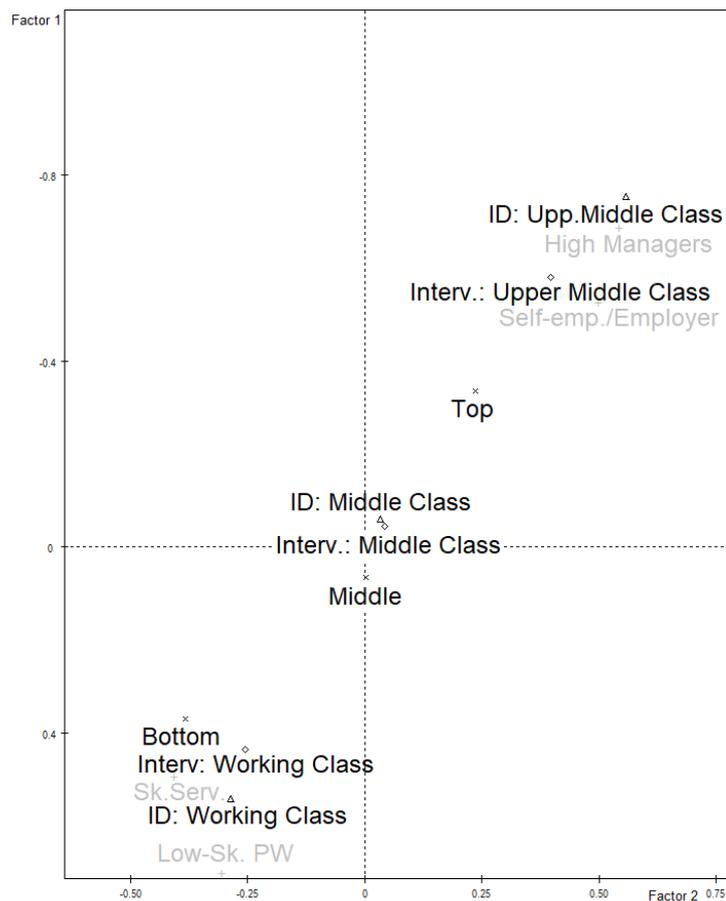


Figure 18: Respondents' Class Identification; Self-Positioning on Top-Bottom Scale; and Class Categorization of Respondents by the Interviewer in the Political Space

Though less pronounced, the same lower left-upper right trajectory is followed by self-placements on the 'bottom', the 'middle', and 'top' of society. Both scales seem to capture the same ideological dynamic of a sense of position in stratified social relations. The intersubjectivity of this "fit" between subjective position and ideological positionings is shown by the last supplementary variable shown in figure 18. As discussed above, identity can be thought of as an interplay of internal identification and external categorization (Jenkins 2014). Usefully, the ALLBUS not only features a variable on class identification but also one asking the *interviewers* of the survey to categorize the class of their respondents. This assessment was made before the start of the interview, based on their first impression in face-to-face meetings. In this sense, the variable captures class *categorizations* of a stranger. As we see in figure 18, the political distribution of these class categorizations again very closely aligns with those of class identifications and objective class positions (in gray). This means that the

<sup>95</sup> For coordinates and significance tests see the appendix B.

respondents *categorized by interviewers* as working or upper middle class ideologically positioned themselves in ways that directly corresponded to the positionings of the *objective* and *self-identified* working, middle, and upper middle classes. E.g. respondents categorized by interviewers as working class were much more likely to express migration skepticism, or pro-redistributive and law and order preferences than those categorized as upper middle class.

The political meaning of *perceived* and *objective* class positions is closely linked. This suggests that both are rooted in a relatively “accurate” sense of positions in social stratification, i.e. an alignment between subjective identifications and classes on paper. This is underscored by figure 19 which shows that a majority of production workers identifies as working class when asked to categorize themselves, and that this tendency has not been weakening dramatically over the last three decades (see also Kahrs 2018).<sup>96</sup> The share of production workers identifying as working class fluctuated between 50% and 73% in the time from 1992 to 2018. But throughout, the values for production workers were around 30 points higher than those for the rest of the population.<sup>97</sup>

As mentioned above, categories of strata and class have been found to be habitually used in everyday categorization, linked to assessments of occupation and income. The social trajectory of class identities is also reminiscent of the hierarchies theorized by Wright as inherent to capitalist societies. The clusters on either ends – workers in medium or lower-skilled occupations on the one hand; and higher-grade managers, technical experts, and owners on the other – are divided by skills, workplace

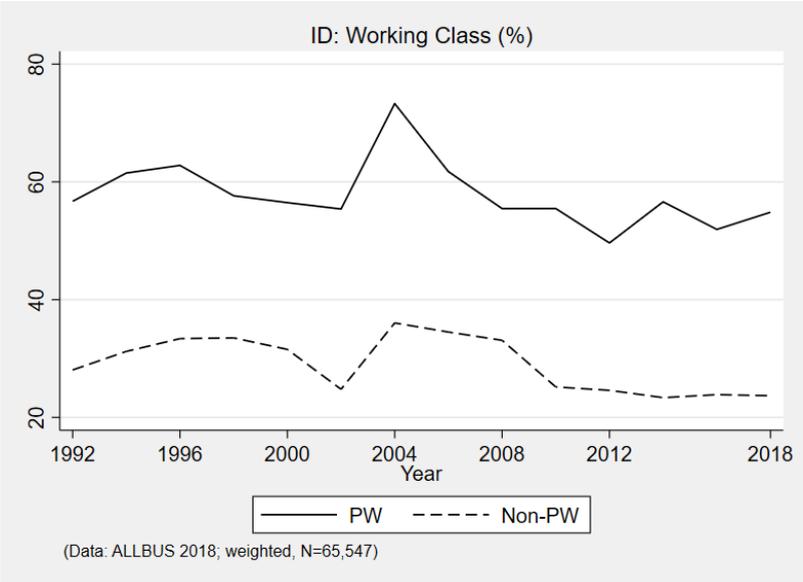


Figure 19: Self-categorization as working class [Arbeiterschicht]; Production workers (solid) and population average without production workers (dashed), 1992-2018 (ALLBUS 2018)

<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, we see a sudden peak of working class identification around 2004, this coinciding with the German unemployment crisis of that period (see graph in appendix a). Class identification seems to not only be ‘accurate’, but also diachronically sensitive to proletarianization, or, more generally, changes in socioeconomic conditions.

<sup>97</sup> For service workers they were around 20 points higher than the average (see values in the appendix a).

authority, and ownership (Wright 1997). Between them stands a large, heterogenous, and self-identified middle class.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the opacity of a pluralizing class structure, and the demobilization of class as a political principle of unification, terminologies of stratification and class are still present and reliably used as a heuristic for assessing positions of the self and others in stratified social relations, when prompted. Further, this positional sense is still involved in the structuration of ideological positionings. The items used here are certainly too crude to be counted as evidence of cleavage identities. But still there are implications for the search of nascent social identities along a new cleavage. The positionings of workers in the particularist half of the ideological space is not limited to those with a weak class consciousness, as might be suspected in a vulgar materialist interpretation. Instead, these positionings are made by workers “as workers”, so to speak.<sup>99</sup> Although eroding the classical class cleavage and its identities, the new cleavage involves class identification. *How* this happens will be explored with the help of the interviews below.

### **Standing the Political Space On Its Feet**

Summarizing and reformulating the findings about the class-political constellation shown here, we can now represent the political space in terms of its *social logic*. To do so, we tilt the diagram by 45 degrees counterclockwise (fig. 22). This simply follows the respondents’ own assessments and moves the self-identified ‘top’ to the top and the self-identified ‘bottom’ to the bottom. Methodologically, it is permissible because the orientations of MCA spaces are purely conventional. It also follows a common finding in Bourdieusian reconstructions of the political space (see e.g. de Keere 2018) beginning with Bourdieu’s own studies in *Distinction* that “[the political space] is a *systematic distortion* of the space of the classes and class fractions distributed by the volume and composition of their capital” (Bourdieu 1984, 451, my emphasis).

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<sup>98</sup> Comprising exactly 59.7% of the sample both in the respondents’ and the interviewers’ evaluations.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. among working class identifiers, opponents of a further refugee influx clearly outweighed proponents (46%/30%) while among upper middle class identifiers, this ratio was starkly reversed (16%/71%). The same was true for those categorized by interviewers as working or upper middle class (45%/36% versus 19%/67%). Among working class identifying *workers* (service and production), the ratio was shifted by 5 points in the restrictive direction (48%/27%) compared all workers regardless of identification (47%/31%; all from ALLBUS 2018).

By just a slight tilt, the political space is thus stood on its social feet. Class clusters that are high (business) and low (working class) in *both* economic and cultural capital *and* subjective status, are found at the top and bottom sides of the space. Fractions with intermediate capitals are opposed on a horizontal axis, the cultural middle class cluster moved to the left, the petty bourgeois cluster to the right.

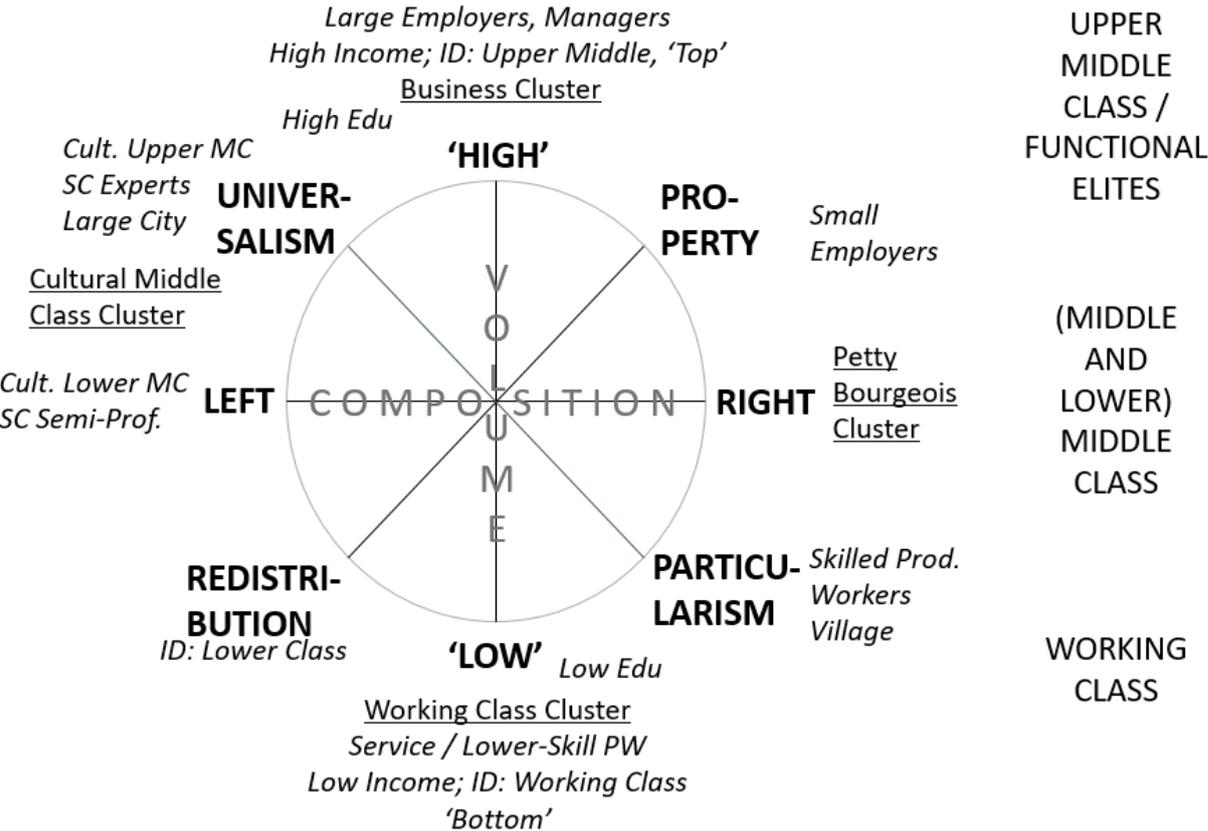


Figure 20: The Social Logic Of The Political Space: Stratification, Differentiation, Class Fractions

On the face of it, this is a cosmetic change. But in line with the specifically sociological approach chosen here, starting from classes and social stratification, it helps redirect our attention to the most relevant forms of social division in the political space. While retaining all information from the MCA graphs above, this form of representation somewhat decenters the 'second dimension' of universalism and particularism, and intuitively clarifies its place in the social logic of the ideological distribution. The universalist divide is one ideological dimension of the *stratification of the political space*. Universalist and anti-redistributionist property orientations can be understood as the progressive and conservative faces of a liberal ideology whose foremost carrier strata are the professional middle classes and functional

elites, with a cultural upper middle class of sociocultural professionals most strongly representing the ‘universalist’ pole, an economic wing of small employers (e.g. restaurant owners) representing the ‘property’ pole, and the dominant pole of the dominant class, the business cluster of owners and managers, between both, on top of the space.<sup>100</sup> In the intermediate levels of the space, middle and lower-grade cultural and middle and lower-grade economic (‘petty bourgeois’) middle class fractions are opposed. Finally, we see the working class positioned opposite the business cluster, on the politically excluded ‘low’, redistributionist and particularist side of the space.

This crossing of multiple axes allows us to paint a more precise and differentiated picture than we usually get from two-by-two tabulations, both of ideological differentiation in the German population and the class constellation underlying it. As we saw, the constituent axes of the wheel are independent but mutually translatable dimensions of ideological differentiations in the German population distinct in their trajectory and social profile. At the same time all axes also relate to each other, so that each should be read as directly linking with their most direct neighbors on either side.<sup>101</sup> Each of the poles corresponds to a typical class profile, including class identifications, which serve as a proxy of objective and subjective positions in the stratification and differentiation of the social space. The most important two structural lines of differentiation are here shown to be the volume and relative composition of capital, i.e. of assets that position their holders in hierarchies of economic power or grant differential degrees of access, as in educational titles. Sociostructurally, this presents us with an analytical, yet inductively generated map of the stratification of the political space, both by classes and class fractions positioned higher and lower in the social space, and by the horizontal differentiations of these fractions on each of the gradational levels of the space.

These findings confirm and extend the observations of cleavage research discussed above and unite them with the logic of recent advances of Bourdieusian political class analysis. The overall structure of the German constellation aligns with that found in research on the Scandinavian countries and Flanders cited above as well as Bourdieu’s own reconstruction of the French political space (Bourdieu 1984, 431f.).<sup>102</sup> This demonstrates that researchers in the

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<sup>100</sup> We note that this tripartite division echoes Savage et al.’s (1994) trias of middle class assets: property, bureaucracy, and culture.

<sup>101</sup> A very similar logic of display is also used by Ostiguy (2017, 88; Ostiguy and Roberts 2016).

<sup>102</sup> Although notably the entire space here is shifted by 45 degrees clockwise vis-à-vis that of Flemmen and Haakestad, whose analysis most closely resembles this one. Since it is only relations that count in the MCA, the

cleavage tradition and neo-Bourdieuian political sociologists, should much more closely follow each others findings (see Zollinger and Westheuser 2021), not least because their respective class schemes of choice appear as basically equivalent in this analysis.<sup>103</sup>

### 4.3. What Are We Looking At?

The structure of the central ideological polarities in the German population corresponds to the structure of horizontal and vertical *social* differentiation. Political positionings are informed by positions in the social space. This confirms central assumptions of both cleavage theory and neo-Bourdieuian approaches. In this last part of the introductory quantitative analysis, I want to explore how we are to read these facts. In a first step, I look at whether homologies of class and politics imply the polarization of political camps. I suggest that instead of a battlefield with two fronts, we should look at these findings as a gradational space with a multipolar pattern of polarization. Zooming in even further, we can then show that the stratification of the political space is also found *within classes*. Here, we take a look at intra-class differences of the two class fractions here confirmed to be most strongly divided on the universalist-particularist divide: sociocultural (semi-)professionals and production workers. The goal is to make out whether these classes contain segments positioned differently in the political space and if so, by what social logic they are differentiated.

#### Multiple Polarities, Not Two Camps

The construction of this 'bird's eye view' of the political space through the extraction of core underlying polarities is helpful for mapping the structure of core ideological divisions and their alignments with inequality and social differentiation. Yet, to not misunderstand the result of this extraction, it is important to note that the dichotomous axes here presented as *polarities* do not necessarily indicate *polarization*. The image used here is that of a gradational space

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orientation of the space is purely conventional and does not indicate substantially different findings. Interestingly however, the different tilts of the two models present two alternative perspectives on the class-political constellation: While the axes reconstructed here more neatly capture the *political logic* of the space,<sup>102</sup> the Flemmen and Haakestad orientation is more clearly aligned with the *social logic* of the political space.

<sup>103</sup> The Oslo schemes' economic middle class category captures similar positionings as those of managers and technical professionals in the Oesch scheme; the cultural upper and lower middle class categories closely correspond to differences between sociocultural professionals and semi-professionals; and the skilled and unskilled worker categories capture the same variation as that between service workers and low-skilled production workers on the one hand and skilled production workers on the other. It would be worth inspecting in more detail the overlap in the coding of both schemes and its theoretical implications.

organized by the “magnetic” forces of ideological polarities. These polarities are statistical composites reflecting a structure of *family resemblances* (Wittgenstein 1953) between response patterns, i.e. one of overlapping similarities between categories, without a single feature necessarily being common to all. The coherence and polarization of such clusters is a second question, and the degree to which these potential affinities are organized into mobilized and self-conscious political *camps* is yet another one. While it is perfectly legitimate to draw out the antagonistic core of political divides for the clarification of patterns, we noted above how this runs the risk of overstating the pervasiveness, depth, and coherence of ideological divisions, and of painting an unrealistic image of the basic form of ideological differentiation (see also Mau et al. 2020, 2021). Especially when translated into categorical pairs such as “cosmopolitans” and “communitarians” or “Somewheres” and “Anywheres”, relational and gradational polarities are erroneously reified as opposing groups encountering each other on the battle field of sociopolitical conflict.

Two forms of visualization may help dispel overly Manichaen imagery. First off, it is helpful to recall that categories are mean points derived from a cloud of individuals clustering around the origin and otherwise dispersed relatively evenly across a gradational space, as seen in figure 21.

Secondly, we can supplement the inspection of *relative* differences as seen in the axes and the space of categories, with that of *absolute*

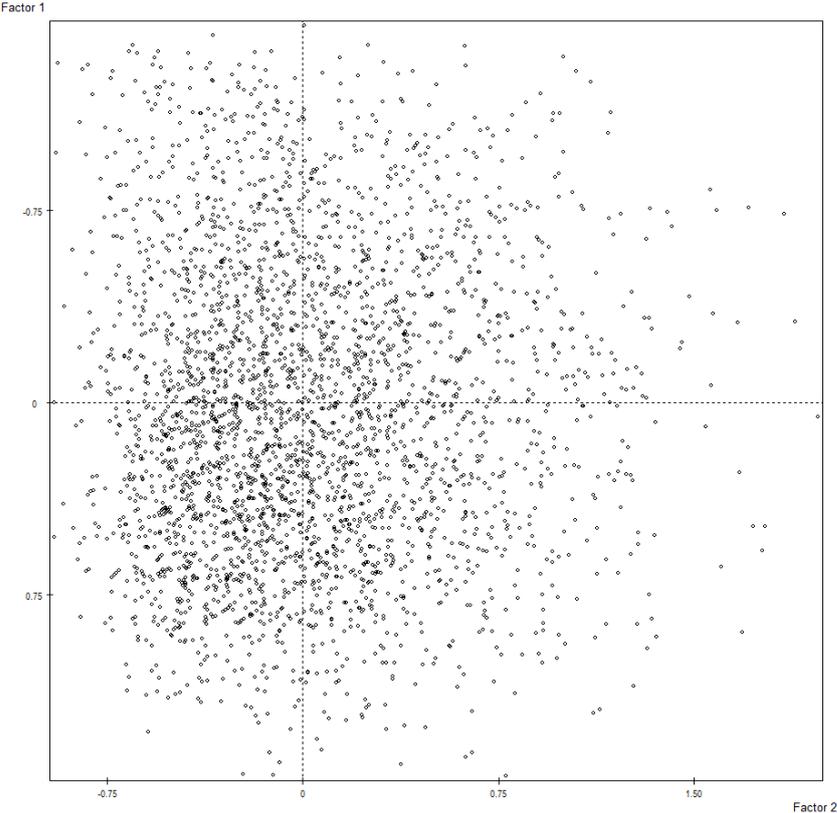


Figure 21: MCA: Cloud of Individuals

differences by redrawing the constellation of the space of categories (figure 11) with a focus on the weight of issues. Rather than the frontlines of a battle field or the neat segments of a four-field scheme, this gives us something rather like a planetary system (fig. 22), with more

polarized positionings orbiting around a larger ideological center, often obscured by factorial analyses. The dark gray center of the figure lists items on which more about two thirds of respondents or more concur.

Nearly half of the population (43%) simultaneously states that migrants have to assimilate to German culture, that social security should be the primary goal of the state, that more environmental protection is needed, and that it is fine that same-sex marriages are legal, thereby combining elements commonly assigned to the authoritarian and libertarian poles. The logic of this – historically moving – center is an underappreciated part of social conflict structures (but see Ares 2021). It describes issues that do not take the form of polarized societal camps, but that of significant fringes opposing an overwhelmingly larger consensus. Naturally, this does not make such asymmetrical conflicts politically irrelevant, but it clarifies that their structures are obscured by overly dichotomous terminologies.

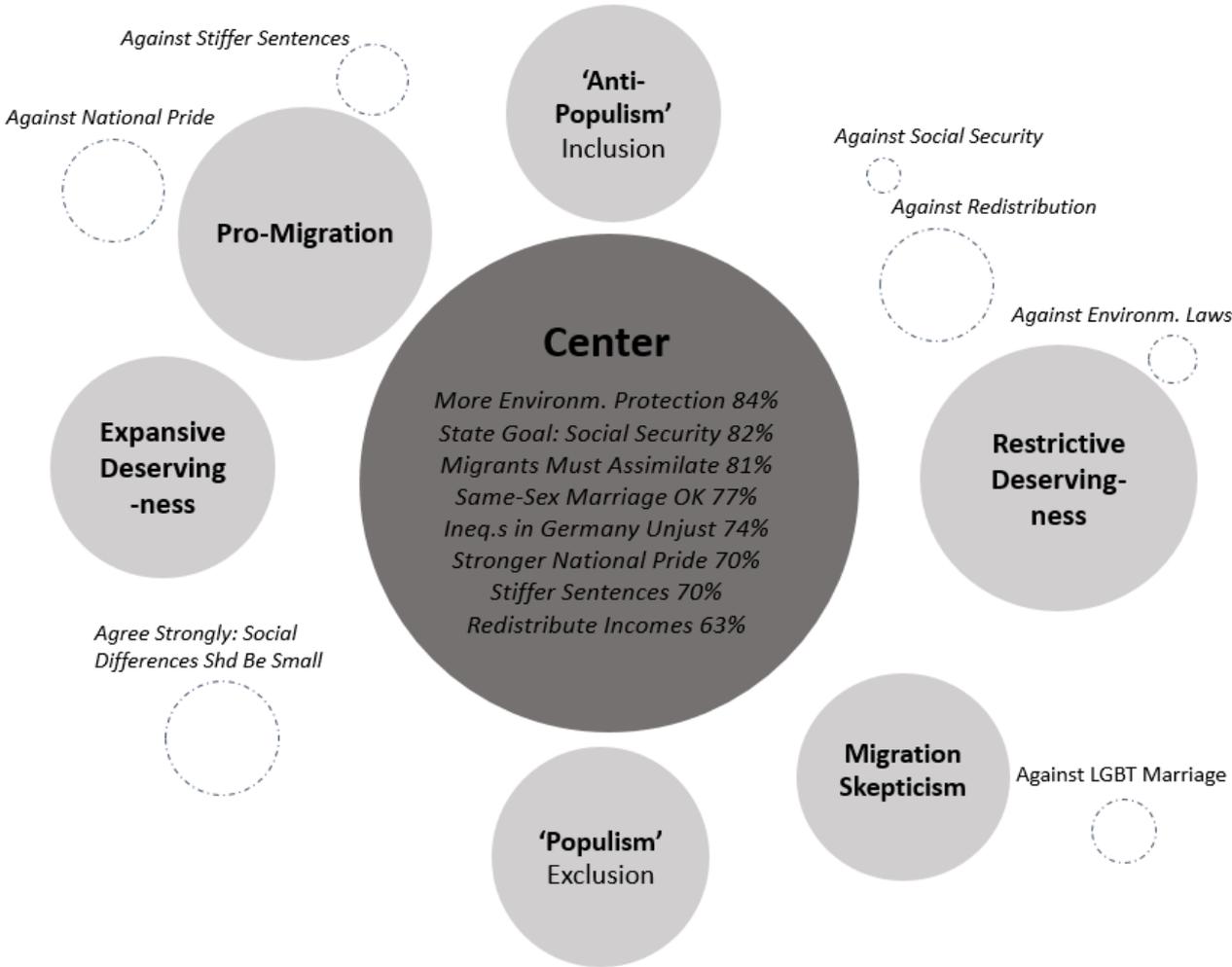


Figure 22: Which Groups of Issues are Polarized? Stylized Cloud of Categories Reflecting Relative Weight

Illustrating this with the data at hand, we see that of those agreeing that stiffer criminal sentences are needed, an above-average share of 41% call for the influx of refugees to be prevented; but an almost equal share of 37% positions themselves on the other side of the item. Of those calling for restrictions on refugee admissions, only 20% want to see same-sex marriages banned. Again, this is a value significantly higher than the population average (12%), but not what we would expect if these items were linked into a neatly contoured ideological camp. 32% of respondents want the influx of refugees to be stopped, but only 13% fall into the rather plausible set combining this stance with decided calls for stronger national pride and stricter punishments. And even of those who align on the particularist pole of all three of these items, 43% do *not* think that immigrants are harmful for the German economy.

We can further inspect the coherence of ideological positionings by combining three items that should be basic for the bundled concepts of universalism and particularism: the statements that stiffer sentences are needed, immigration is harmful, and benefits make people lazy. Here, we find that 13% of the population and 28% of production workers simultaneously affirm all three items, while 5.5% of the population and 14% of sociocultural professionals reject them all. In other words, coherently particularist and universalist ideological groupings, which may justifiably be called camps, comprise between one fifth and one sixth of the population – combined. The rest of the population differs at least on one of the items.

23% of the coherently particularist camp is made up of production workers, who thus are overrepresented and form a plurality. And the same is true of sociocultural professionals in the universalist camp (24%). Read in reverse this means that only a minority of each of the classes belongs to these coherent camps, i.e. that these camps and the two classes are not to be used synonymously. One out of four production workers (26%) reported *more liberal* positionings on the universalism-particularism dimension than the population average. One out of three sociocultural professionals (34%) on this count was *less liberal* than the average. Thus questioning the coherence of response patterns (see already Converse 1974) does not relativize the finding of affinities, e.g. between law-and-order preferences, restrictive deservingness, homophobia and migration skepticism; and of all of them with the mean

ideological tendencies of classes and class fractions.<sup>104</sup> Still, these affinities should be understood as *family resemblances of positionings in a gradational space constructed by researchers*, rather than as coherent antagonistic camps in society.

This helps avoid the ecological fallacy of compounding clusters of probabilities into reified figures, say, of homophobic and authoritarian, climate-denying, anti-migration particularist white working class on the one side, and cosmopolitan, refugee-loving, vegan, libertarian universalist urban professionals on the other. Such substantiations are suggestive because they tap into real-existing latent divides; but they commonly lead to misleading reifications, because outside of situations of both very high polarization and high partisan mobilization, clusters on latent ideological divides usually do not correspond to *groups* carrying a coherent set of ideological convictions. Both conditions at least currently are not present in the German case. Although there has been a widespread public *perception* of rising polarization in Germany in recent years, the country remains very consensual by all measures, a far cry from deeply divided societies like the US that are sometimes cited as analogies (Gidron, Adams, and Horne 2020). Indeed, a recent comparative study of affective polarization finds a steady *decline* of polarization in Germany (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro 2020), very much in contrast to developments across the Atlantic. As mentioned above, the reification of statistical affinities into groups or camps is often done wilfully by political actors in the course of classification struggles. As such they should be understood as an *object* of sociological study, but scientists should be extremely careful to demarcate such second order observations from those of political and social actors interested in the dramatization of certain divides over others (see Zollinger and Westheuser 2021).

Secondly, the reassessment of the space under the aspect of polarization also helps us see the questions on which *there is* indeed polarization, that is, on which issues attitudes do divide into clusters on the antagonistic poles not outweighed by a middle ground. Shaded in light gray in fig. 24 are the issues that Germans are divided over in this sense. As shown here, this is the case mainly for three complexes. The first and foremost is the “refugee question”, which

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<sup>104</sup> After all, it should also be kept in mind that the issues used here might simply not reflect the current state of conflict and polarization, and that response patterns greatly depend on the exact phrasing of items. For instance, the SOEP in the same year as this survey asked respondents whether they think “*It is good that homosexual couples can marry*”. Here the percentage of respondents agreeing was only 60% (instead of 77% disagreeing with *banning* the so-called ‘Homo-Ehe’), with those disagreeing amounting to 26% (instead of 12% on the other side of the divide in the ALLBUS) (SOEP 2018, my calculations, weighted).

was heavily politicized and salient in the years immediately before the survey. Positionings on refugees link to other questions around immigration, although none of them was as polarized as those regarding refugee admissions. Secondly, and to a lesser extent, there can also be said to be a polarization over the justification of inequality and expansive or restrictive deservingness, which, as we saw, aligns closely with left and right positionings. Partly an artefact of the response scale, we see sizeable groups approving and disapproving of the claim that without income differences there would be no incentive to work hard, that social benefits make their recipients lazy, and that differences in social rank reflect individual effort. Thirdly, there are significant groups on both sides of items on “populism”, each comprising about a third of the population. Compared to these issues, questions of redistribution are much less polarized, given a large pro-redistributive consensus; as are a large number of issues commonly attributed to the new cleavage (like environmentalism or LGBT rights).

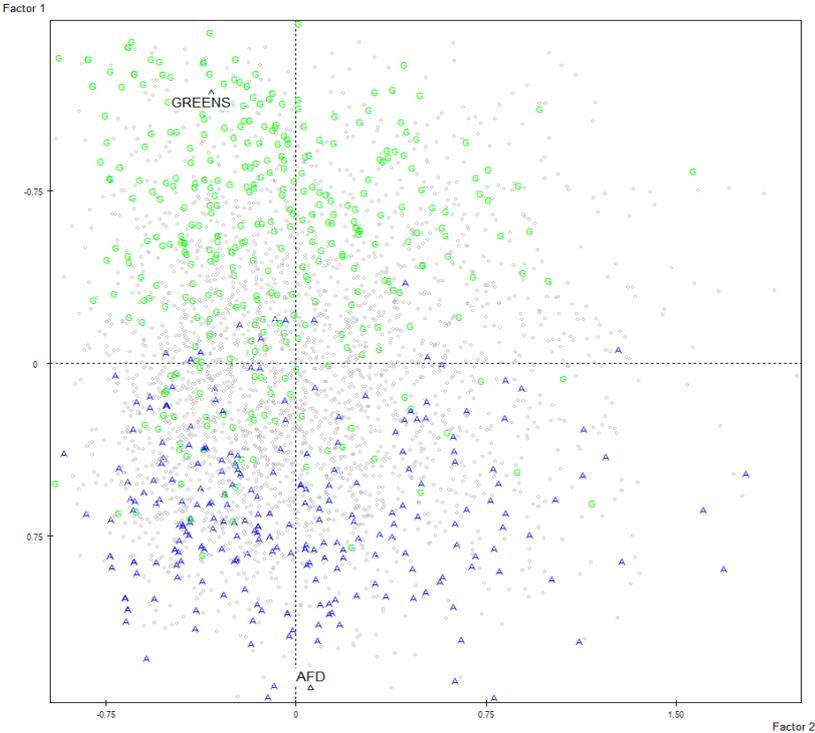
Only minorities produce response patterns that indicate ideologically coherent positions on the universalism-particularism divide. Polarization is limited to specific issues, not exceptionally high in international comparison, and even seems to be decreasing. Where polarization exists, this takes a form of multiple intersecting divides corresponding to distinct social profiles on either side. These include particularly stark differences between sociocultural experts and workers over migration and law and order; of the cultural middle class and petty bourgeoisie on the left-right divide; and between workers and the managerial economic middle class over “populism”. This is important for the analysis of cleavages and social identity, because it illustrates the diversity of interlocking divides that any class fraction is positioned in. The homology of the social and political spaces does not (automatically) entail that society is divided into antagonistic camps.

**Parties and Selective Politicization**

Does pointing out this diversity question the findings of cleavage research? Not necessarily. After all, the starting point of the cleavage diagnosis are conflicts institutionalized in the party system, and the polarities represented there might paint a more univocal picture than those of ideological leanings as such. I will restrict myself to two a briefly sketched point that might be elaborated further in future work. As was discussed above under the label of electoral equifinality, a diversity of social and ideological divides might end up feeding into one line of political conflict in the party system. Different social groups, for different ideological reasons, arrive at mutually opposing vote choices, so that a heterogeneous ideological space finds

expression in a dualistically polarized party competition.

To some degree this seems to be the case with the Green Party and the AfD who bundle multiple divides in the political space. We see in figure 24 that Green Party and AfD voters are highly polarized, with virtually no overlap in the political space. These mobilized electorates are divided along the universalism dimension, although from the dispersion



*Figure 23: Point Cloud: Voters AfD (blue) and Greens (green)*

in the space, we can gather that the two parties also bundle voters' positionings along the polarities of left-right, and high-low (see also appendix h).

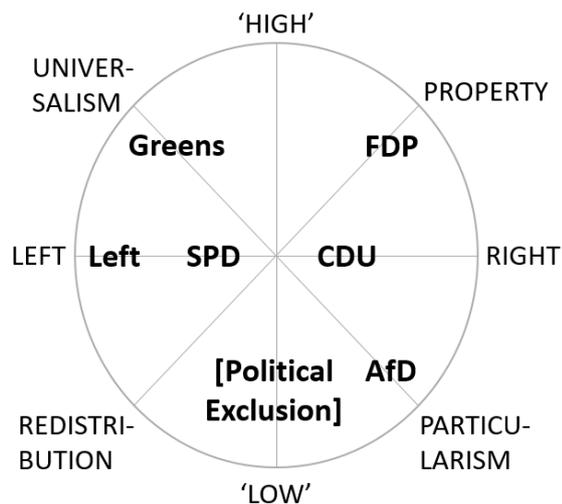


Figure 24: Voting choices (last election) in the political space (ALLBUS 2018)

Figure 25 places this polarity in the bigger picture of voting choices in the political space, here again tilted to reveal its social logic.<sup>105</sup> We see that voter positionings essentially follow a division into left and right, with the right represented by a 'high', a 'low' and a centrist variant (FDP, AfD, CDU), and the left by a 'high', a particularly 'left', and a centrist variant (Greens, Left, SPD). The universalism axis here comes out as the *only* divide besides that of left and right which is represented by parties on each of the opposing poles. This is because there

neither is a party distinctly positioned in the low left,<sup>106</sup> nor any party positioned most distinctly on the high or the low poles, i.e. on the polarity of political exclusion and 'populism'. The AfD is the only party coming close to representing the sociopolitical low, though its voters also have a distinctly right-wing partisan profile.<sup>107</sup> Otherwise, as expected from the analysis above, the lower region of the space is marked by political exclusion and non-voting.

Again, we encounter here the class-specific pattern of a political exclusion of the working class: 31% of production workers report to not have voted at all, against 19% in the overall sample. And there has been a steady trend whereby workers have been increasingly alienated from political parties. As shown in figure 26, both service and production workers report increasingly lower leanings towards any party, both absolutely and in comparison to the rest of the population. Since the 1990s, the share of workers reporting any party preference has dropped by 20%. And at the time of the survey used here, they were more than 16% less likely

<sup>105</sup> I.e. tilted by 45 degrees counter-clockwise vis-a-vis the previous graph. For the full analysis see appendix h.

<sup>106</sup> Left party voters are the furthest away from FDP voters on redistribution issues, but Left voters are overall more distinguished from the average by their universalist positionings.

<sup>107</sup> Four out of five position themselves on the right, one out of three on the far right.

to report such a preference than the rest of the population (a trend that seems to not have been reversed by a remobilization on the radical right).

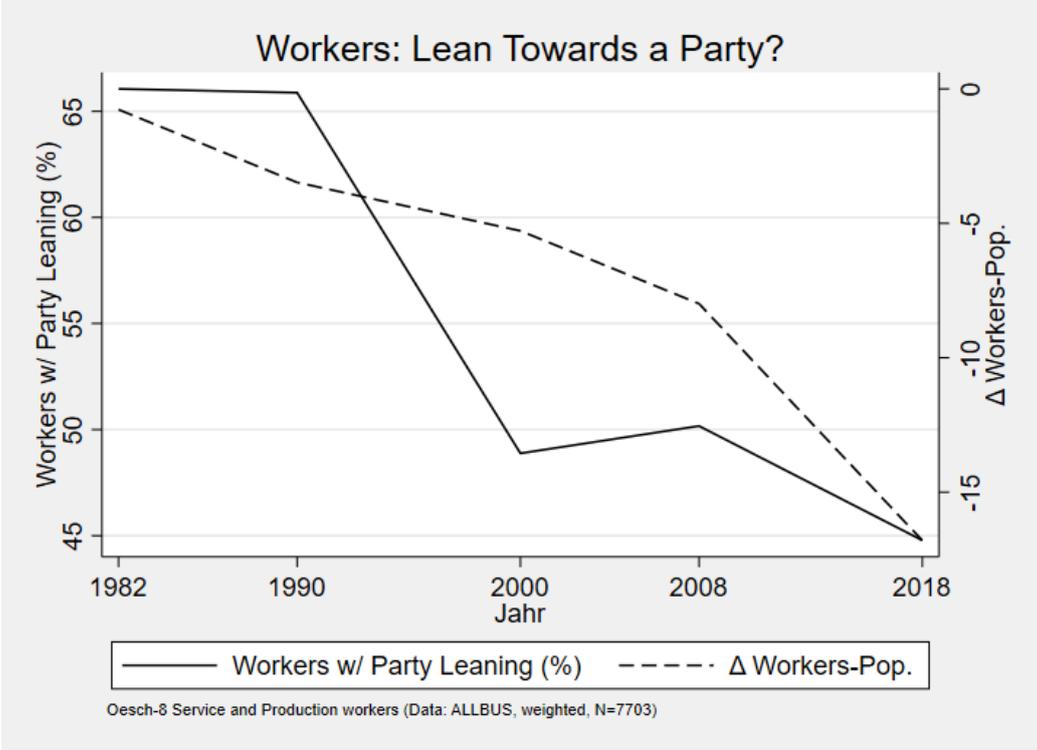


Figure 25: Rate of Workers Leaning Towards a Party and Differences Between Party Leanings of Workers and the Rest of the Population 1982-2018 (ALLBUS, Weighted)

The political exclusion of the workers does not explain the absence of a distinct party of the *high* pole. But it seems immediately plausible that in the absence of a challenge from below no such party would form. As Pepper Culpepper has explored, business elites, the dominant pole of the dominant class, do not need to mobilize the means of ‘loud politics’ of electoral competition to exert power, but do so much more effectively through the ‘quiet politics’ of lobbying and other more direct forms of taking influence (Culpepper 2010; Mach et al. 2021; Morgan and Ibsen 2021): This power is highest wherever political salience is low.

This is a useful reminder of the difference between political science and sociological approaches. While political science usually begins with a polarized voting pattern like the one in figure 24 and asks for social profiles overrepresented among the electorates, sociologists would perhaps rather approach the question of polarities and polarization by looking at ideological leanings of classes, strata, or groups in the social space, to then ask in a second step to which degree these leanings are mobilized and bundled by political parties. This is

because it may well be that socially relevant divides are barred from, crowded out, or ‘buried alive’ in institutional party competition (van der Waal et al. 2007).

**Are Workers Swinging to the Right?**

The difference between relative and absolute tendencies, and the inspection of internal diversity, are also informative regarding an alleged rightward shift of production workers in recent times, which has been much debated in light of recent advances of right-wing parties and campaigns among the working class. The diachronic data of figure 27 – looking at differences from the mean in left-right positionings by class – indeed shows a deepening of right-leaning tendencies among production workers in the last two decades (solid line). While the average of production workers was not distinguished from the population mean in the year 2000, by 2018 it markedly tacked to the right. By that year, production workers on average positioned themselves as much to the right of the population average as the consistently left-leaning sociocultural professionals did to its left (dashed line). This trend is specific to production workers and is not shared by service workers (dotted line). Production workers as a whole today might be called the ‘right wing’ of the German working class, but

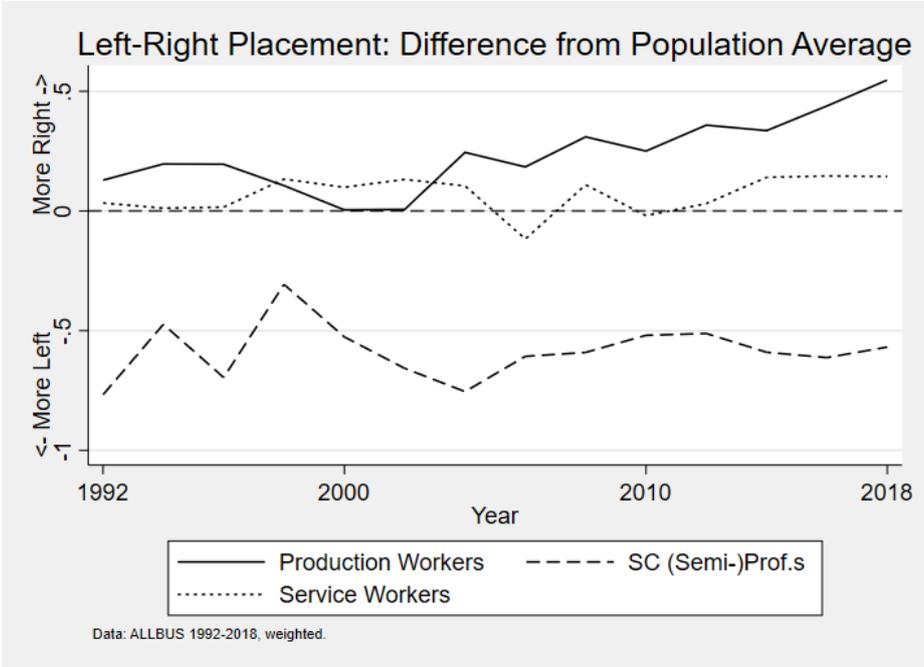


Figure 26: Left-Right Orientations of Service Workers, Production Workers, and Sociocultural Professionals 1992-2018. Differences From the Population Mean (ALLBUS, Weighted)

they only became so relatively recently. Whether this is an effect of their mobilization by the

AfD cannot be answered here, but the trend seems to have been underway before the party's founding in 2013.

We can put this trend in perspective by looking at production workers' right leanings in the longer term (figure 28). Here we see the shape of a parabola: Significantly higher values for right-leanings than today were found in the 1980s, with 64% positioning themselves on the right in 1982, the year Helmut Schmidt vowed to keep the borders shut for Turks and Helmut Kohl became chancellor.<sup>108</sup> But from that point onwards, left and center-left orientations steadily increased, so that by 2002 64% of the class reported *left* leanings. This year also marked the end of that trend however, which slowly reversed in the years after. Yet overall, we see a pattern of relatively slow-moving and anything but unidirectional change over the years. A stark shift of workers to the right, as was sometimes suggested in public debates, did not occur.

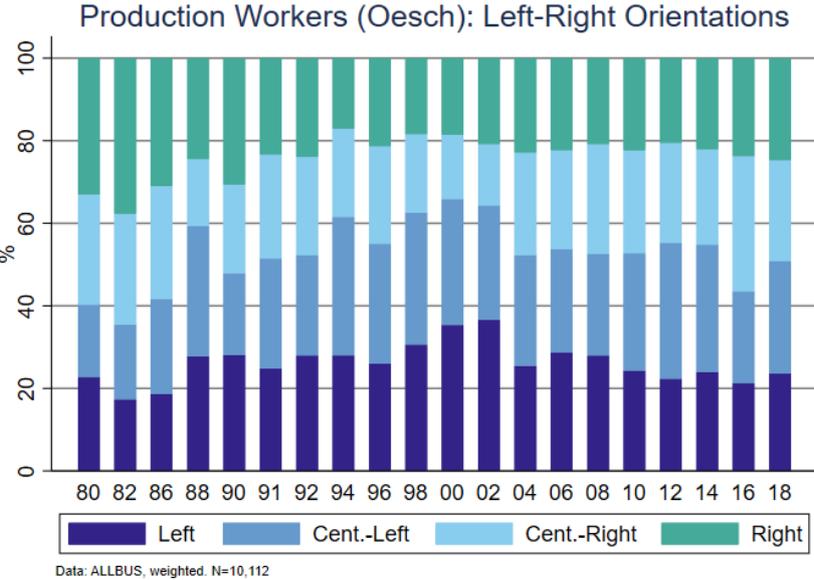


Figure 27: (Center)-Left and (Center)-Right Orientations of Production Workers 1980-2018 (ALLBUS, weighted)

The graph also allows us to contrast the relative trend with the absolute shares of left- and right leaners. In 2018, around a quarter (24%) of the production workers surveyed positioned themselves decidedly on the right of the spectrum. This value is significantly higher than the right-leaning share in the

overall population (17%), but it does not comprise a majority or even a plurality of the class, as a slightly higher share positioned themselves on the left of the scale, and the large majority in one of the middle categories.

<sup>108</sup> As in table 9, the 'center-left' and 'center-right' categories encompass the values 5 and 6 on a 10-point scale, with the more decided positionings on either side coded as 'left' and 'right'.

Interestingly, the rightward swing of production workers after 2002 is not mirrored by a similar trend among working class *identifiers* (fig. 31). We here see the same decrease of right-leaningers in the course of the 1980s. But since 1990, the shares stayed more or less constant, with an average of 30% on the left and 18% on the right. This ratio closely tracks that of middle class identifiers (31% left, 20% right, post-1990). Still, also here we see a slow rightward shift in the *relative* positioning of the class in relation to the population average, as illustrated by the slow but steady leftward shift among middle class identifiers.<sup>109</sup>

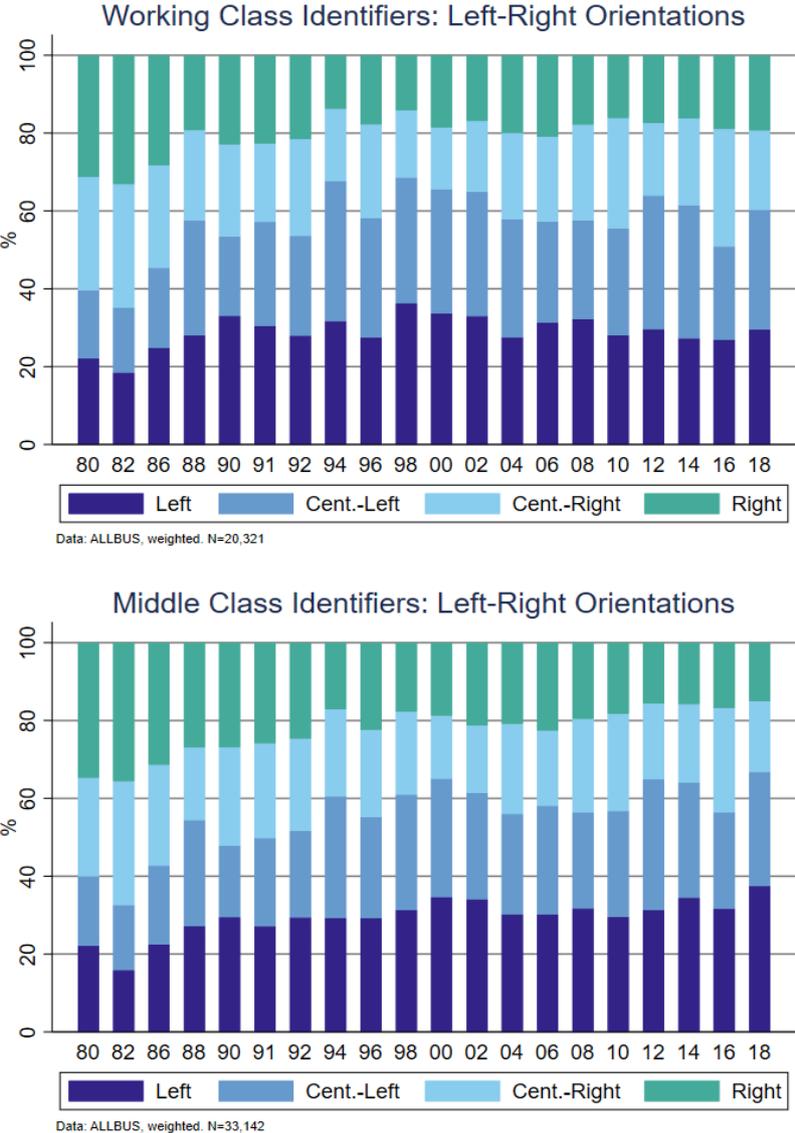


Figure 28: (Center)-Left and (Center)-Right Orientations of Working and Middle Class Identifiers 1980-2018 (ALLBUS, weighted)

<sup>109</sup> As shown in the appendix a, that shift can also be seen among *upper* middle class identifiers. Until the mid-1980s, over 40% here positioned themselves decidedly on the right, and only around 20% on the left. This ratio had exactly reversed by 2018. Still, the share of right-leaningers in this subjective class category has been significantly higher than the average since 1990, at 26%.

In summary, there are neither right-leaning majorities among the German working class, nor has there been a swing to the right of this class as a whole. But there has always been a sizeable right-leaning segment within this class. And since around the turn of the millenium, this segment has become increasingly concentrated among workers in the production sector.

Against a slow but steady shift to the self-professed (center-)left in the overall population, this makes production workers one of the most right-leaning class

fractions at the end of the 2010s, together with a petty bourgeoisie of small owners, and an above average share of upper middle class identifiers.<sup>110</sup>

### **Intra-Class Differences of Workers and Sociocultural Professionals**

We can further deepen these observations of the diversity of social underpinnings of political conflict from another angle, namely that of *intra-class differences*. As we saw, production workers and sociocultural professionals inhabit diametrically opposed positions in the political space with regard to the ideological polarity of universalism-particularism and the left-right divide. But in the Bourdieusian understanding, these occupational class categories are mere proxies for positions in a multidimensional social space, and as such present compounds of a range of social characteristics. As Bourdieu writes,

the individuals grouped in a class [...] always bring with them, in addition to the pertinent properties by which they are classified, secondary properties which are thus smuggled into the explanatory model. This means that a class or class fraction is defined not only [...] [by] occupation, income or even educational level, but also by a certain sex-ratio, a certain distribution in geographical space (which is never socially neutral) and by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated. (Bourdieu 1984, 102)

We can tease out these secondary properties by looking at the internal differentiation of the two classes focalized here, both in terms of social structure and in terms of ideological positionings. As data from the SOEP (2018) shows, subgroups within the two class categories have distinct profiles in terms of cultural and economic capital. Low-skill workers are much more likely to work for less than 10 euros an hour (i.e. at or very close to the minimum wage) and to think about money on a daily basis (fig. 33), and report the lowest degree of cultural capital in terms of the number of books they own (fig. 32). Skilled workers and sociocultural semi-professionals are closer to each other in the intermediate range. But also skilled workers score lower on all these indicators of economic and cultural capital. Sociocultural experts,

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<sup>110</sup> Among upper middle class identifiers, an above average share of 20% reported right, and an above average share of 40% left leanings. See graph in the appendix a.

finally, are here shown to be a class fraction apart, with low degrees of economic worry, and very high reported cultural capital.

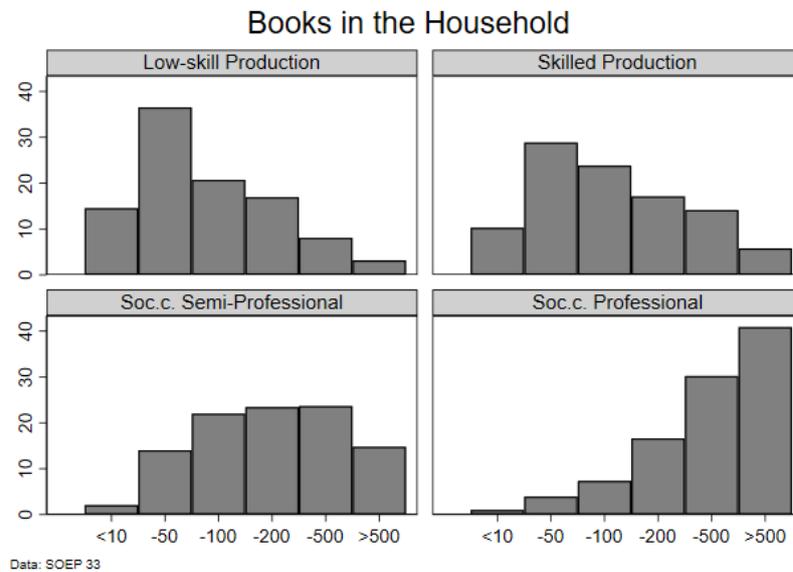


Figure 30: Number of Books Owned by (Semi-)Skilled Production Workers and Sociocultural (Semi-)Professionals (SOEP 33, weighted)

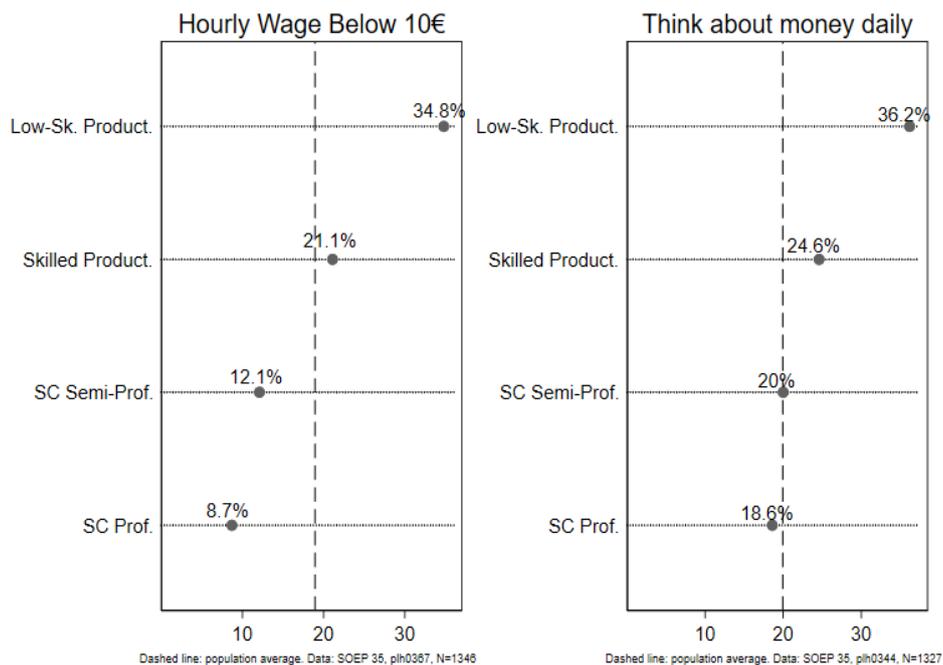


Figure 30: Percentage of (Semi-)Skilled Production Workers and Sociocultural (Semi-)Professionals Thinking Of Money Every Day; With Hourly Wages Below 10€. Dashed: Population Average (SOEP 33, weighted)

Using the MCA data, we can further reconstruct ideological positionings of subgroups within the two classes. I distinguish subgroups by their skill levels, gender, education (possession of the *Abitur*, the highest school degree; as well as tertiary education), income (higher,

intermediate, and lower), as well as more detailed occupational groups.<sup>111</sup> I further look at class identifications, rural or urban place of residence, and union membership.

Looking at figure 32, we see very strong homologies of intra-class differentiation with the overall social divides in the German political space. Among sociocultural semi-professionals, those without the *Abitur* degree and/or without tertiary education are found at very large distances on the more conservative side of the universalist polarity, as compared to the higher-grade expert categories and more highly educated members of the occupational class. The same was true for those identifying as working class, starkly diverging from the mean point of the occupational class, with upper middle class identifiers significantly higher on the universalist dimension. The intra-class division of sociocultural professionals corresponds to distinct occupational groups, reminiscent of the points made in recent scholarship on ‘micro-classes’ that identifies occupations as the central locus of class differentiation (Weeden and Grusky 2012).

The working class and lower education pole of the professional class category is associated with *nurses*, while on the upper middle class side appear higher-grade sociocultural experts, like *doctors* and *university teachers* (higher incomes also relating to higher positionings on the universalist axis). A third cluster is significantly distinguished on the horizontal redistribution axis, It comprises the mean for *social workers*, union members (and as we shall see below, decidedly *left-leaning* sociocultural professionals). Village dwelling members of this class exhibit weaker universalist orientations than their big city counterparts, but both are positioned at a significantly more liberal level vis-à-vis the population average.

The occupational class of sociocultural professionals consists of a triangle of ideologically distinct fractions: a liberal professional upper middle class wing (e.g. doctors), a left wing (e.g. social workers), and a lower middle or working class wing (e.g. nurses). This triangle is constructed both by a political logic (distinguishing the former two fractions), and a logic of social stratification that distinguishes the latter and generally structures intra-class in the same manner as in the overall population.

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<sup>111</sup> For the latter, I simply identified the most common occupations by an inspection of the frequency of ISCO codes and grouped them by sector and work profile. For ISCO codes of each of the categories see appendix f.

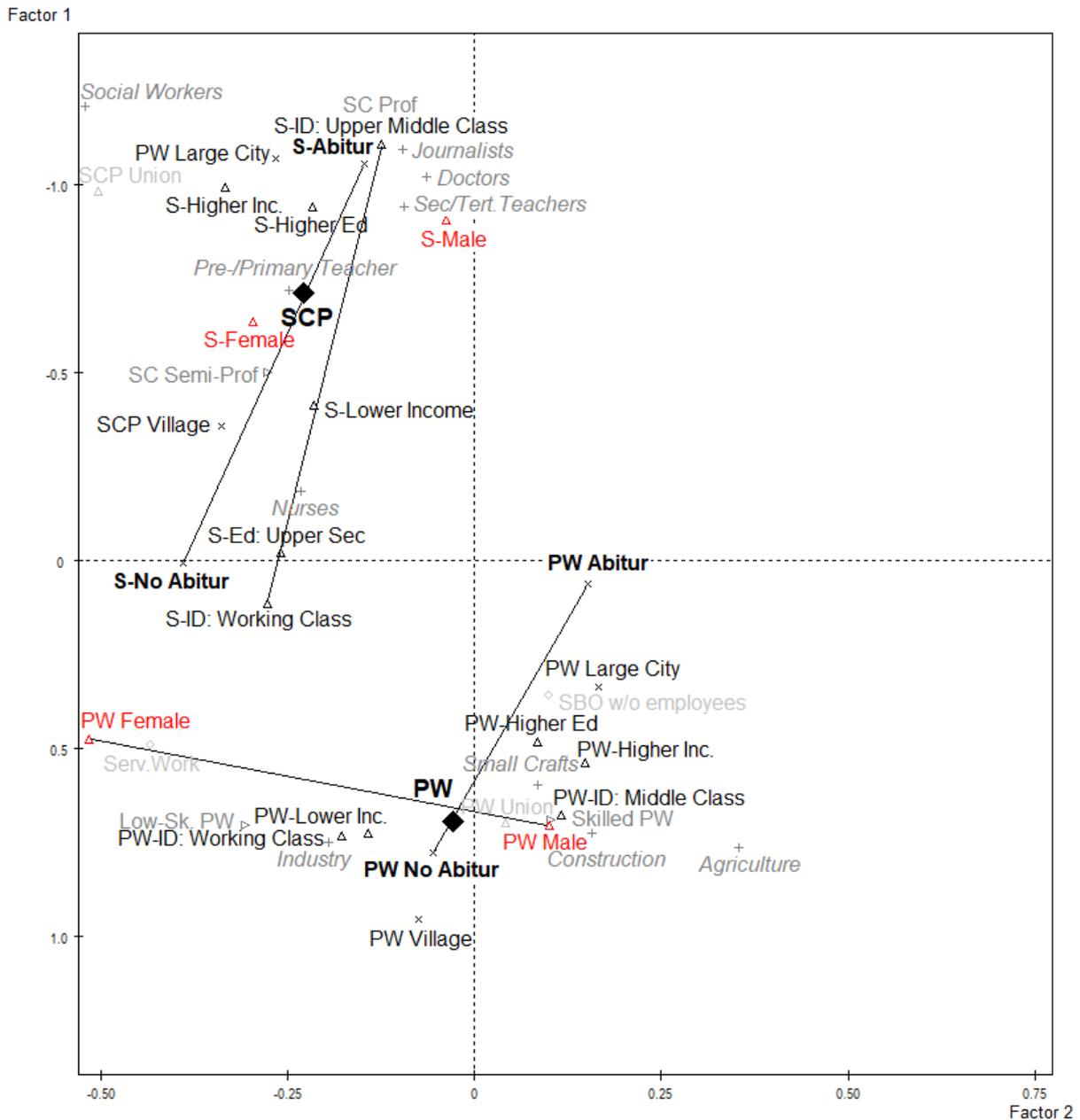


Figure 31: Structural Intra-Class Fractions of Production Workers and Sociocultural Professionals

Among production workers too, the minority holding an *Abitur* are more liberal than the average of their class, and not distinguished from the population average. But by and large, we note that intra-class fractions of production workers are mainly distinguished on the *horizontal* equality axis. The most striking difference here is found between male and female members of the class, with women on the egalitarian side, close to the mean point of service workers. Although occupational groups cluster much more closely together than among sociocultural professionals, we see two structural clusters emerging that would perhaps be more clearly contoured with better items for the redistributive dimension. On the more egalitarian side, we find lower-skilled, lower-income jobs, female production workers and

those identifying as *working class*. On the less egalitarian side, closer to the mean for small owners, we find male and skilled workers, and *middle class* identifiers, i.e. the workers we earlier identified as members of the petty bourgeois cluster. Agricultural workers in particular are positioned on the right of the space.

This resonates with the findings from above, identifying the lower left region of the space with the low-income, low-education, feminized part of the working class, distinguished from increasing (though still below average) economic capital the further one moves to the bottom right of the space. Agricultural workers, especially in distinction from industrial workers, further not only combine rural and class characteristics, but also firm sizes may play a role here, as workers employed in large firms have been shown to have more progressive leanings than those in smaller firms (Arndt and Rennwald 2017). Strikingly, neither past nor present union membership makes any difference in the ideological orientations of production workers. It was discussed in the past how trade unions, despite an avowed anti-racist commitment on the level of organizational policies, do not immunize their members against xenophobia and migration skepticism (see also the discussion in Dörre 2020, 43ff.; Bornschieer and Kriesi 2013). But perhaps even more surprising is the lack of an effect also on redistributive issues, a finding that warrants closer investigation with larger samples.

Inside of both classes focalized here, we find ideological differences that align with distinct social profiles. Within the working class, relatively disadvantaged workers in low-skill jobs are distinguished by their pro-redistributive positionings from relatively advantaged ones in skilled occupations; among sociocultural professionals, an upper middle class of expert professionals is distinguished by its liberalism from a lower middle class of semi-professionals closer to the average population. The intra-working class distinction can perhaps be illustrated as the opposition between well-earning male *Facharbeiter* in small crafts and precarious female workers in lower-qualified industrial jobs. The intra-professional distinction is perhaps best imagined as that between social workers, doctors, and nurses.

Ideologically, both classes exhibit an internal differentiation into left and right and 'populist' and 'antipopulist' high and low fractions (see figure 33)<sup>112</sup> that is directly homologous with that found in the overall space. Within both classes, both dimensions lie orthogonal to each other and diagonal to the rights and equality axes. The ideological differentiation of left and

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<sup>112</sup> Here simply approximated by the item 'the people should decide...'

right leaners is much more pronounced among sociocultural professionals than among workers, spanning large distances on both axes. This underlines the more ideological nature of positionings in this class. On the far left end of the axis, we see the occupational group of social workers, while the right pole is positioned deep in the bottom right quadrant. Notably, the mean points for positionings of workers and professionals in the *center* (left or right) are already very far removed from one another, as are the ideological profiles of left and right leaners. Centrism means different things to different classes, and these differences register first and foremost on the universalist dimension.

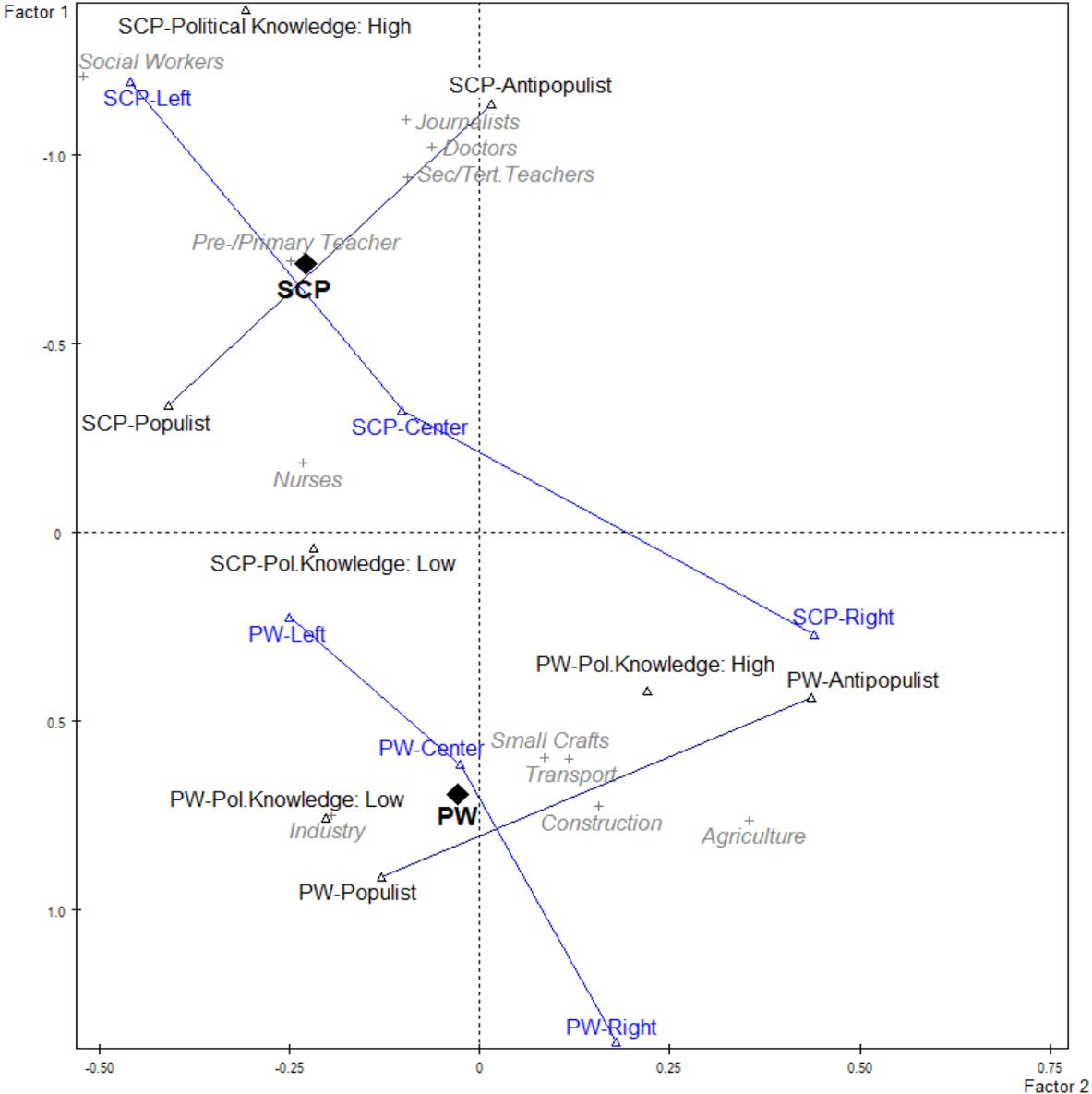


Figure 32: Ideological Intra-Class Fractions of Production Workers and Sociocultural Professionals

Positionings on the ‘populist’ item also correspond to differences on both axes for the sociocultural professional category. ‘Antipopulist’ responses here fall close to the liberal upper

middle class grouping identified earlier, while the populist side is closer to the lower middle class pole within this class. Among the workers, the left-right distinction – perhaps surprisingly – mainly registers on the universalist dimension, with left leaners significantly more liberal but both not strongly distinguished regarding redistribution. Redistribution, however, strongly corresponds to responses on the populist item, with those rejecting the idea that “the people should make political decisions” close to the overall positions of small employers.

The inspection of structural and ideological factions reveals considerable diversity within the two classes. This diversity is structured homologously to the overall social structuration of the political space. What this means is that trying to understand the sociological, pre-political roots of positionings of workers and sociocultural professionals, we must make space for an internal differentiation into groups with distinct social and ideological profiles. This is exactly what we will do in the following qualitative part.

#### **4.4. Summary and Emerging Themes**

This investigation into survey data was meant to set the stage for important themes of the qualitative analysis, as well as to clarify the overall perspective on the correspondence between social inequality and ideological differences taken here. The MCA technique allowed us to reconstruct the ideological position of classes and class fractions in a relational and multidimensional manner. We saw that sociocultural professionals and production workers are positioned on opposite sides of a universalist-particularist divide centered above all on questions of migration, as well as authoritarianism and traditionalism, making them crucial cases for an exploration of the classed dynamics of current cleavage transformations. All categories of production workers, including left-leaners, union members, city dwellers, and the more highly educated, on average exhibit more particularist positionings than the population average, and especially than their counterparts among the cultural middle class.

Yet, as we saw in a closer look at the polarization of issues and intra-class differences, issues on either side of the “new cleavage” are polarized very unevenly and concatenated in a looser “family resemblance” type of pattern, rather than that of a uniform polarization between ideological camps. Within both of the central occupational classes, we saw a great deal of diversity which essentially repeated on a smaller fractal level the inequalities and differences shown in the population at large. The overall picture painted by the MCA then is one of

multidimensional divisions in a gradational political space shaped by social stratification and differentiation. A dualistic frontline with clearly demarcated and polarized camps on either side, as intuitively evoked by the cleavage concept, only appeared when looking at voters of the two parties most clearly articulating political alternatives along the new cleavage, the Greens and the AfD. This does not disqualify the cleavage concept, but it clarifies its different status in political science investigations of the social bases of polarized and polarizing party electorates; versus that in sociological investigations into the more diffuse political consequences of social inequality.

The larger sociological picture that the differences between the two classes are embedded in is that of a socially stratified and differentiated political space with strong homologies to the structure of the social space. Vertical stratification by capital volume, as measured by class, income, subjective social position, and education corresponded to universalist and anti-redistributionist orientations in the higher ranks. Most directly, social stratification aligned with an additional ideological polarity of (anti-)populism and political in- or exclusion. Large parts of the working class, in particular, were shown to be significantly more critical of institutional political representation, and politically excluded to a very high degree, both by objective and subjective measures. The opposite was true for higher professionals, and especially the higher ranks of the economic (upper) middle class. Put in a nutshell, the political space is not just constituted by individuals and groups with different “opinions”, but by a social gradient of access to the political game as a whole.

Self-assessed status positions between the “top” and “bottom” of society, as well as class identifications and categorizations were shown to be in sync with objective class positions, and associated with ideological differences. Self-positioning closer to the “bottom”, as well as working class identifications of production workers most sharply distinguish them from upper middle class identifiers on “top”, located above all among the economic middle class and higher professionals. Those employed in a working class occupation, those identifying, and those identified as working class all position themselves disproportionately in the particularist, pro-redistributionist, and politically excluded regions of the political space. The strong overlap of ideological ‘effects’ of objective position, internal identification, and external categorization as working class is striking, and speaks against the idea of an opaque class structure.

Horizontally, the political space is marked by a distinction of left and right which corresponds to the relative capital composition of fractions *within* each of the vertical social strata of the social space. Left leaners were found disproportionately among those fractions of the working, lower and upper middle class fractions who were comparatively less wealthy and more highly educated than other fractions within their same stratum. As observed in previous Bourdieusian studies, this horizontal differentiation is particularly important when accounting for the specificities of the cultural middle class, whose left-leanings differentiate it both from the economic middle and the working class. While nominally both workers and sociocultural professionals exhibit similar and above average rates of support for state redistribution, for sociocultural professionals this is also linked to an extraordinarily strong support for expansive deservingness and pronounced left leanings. Both are not found among workers, who instead report a much higher degree of affectedness by economic hardship. We interpreted these differences as indicating distinct experiences and moral economies underlying redistributive orientations and the perception and evaluation of inequality, which warrant deeper exploration in the qualitative analysis.

This overall picture shows stark differences between the ideological orientations of classes, differences that are articulated along a number of distinct ideological dimensions, each with its own social logic. The most polarized concern the assessment of migration, and in particular refugee admissions; the moral evaluations of inequality by deservingness distinctions and a sense of the meritedness of individual differences; as well as a divide of high and low sociopolitical styles reflecting sharply differing relations to and evaluations of institutional politics. While divides over deservingness follow a horizontal left-right logic, the divide of “populism” and political exclusion has a vertical above-below trajectory. Migration issues, and the universalism dimension as a whole, lie in between and unite both.

All three complexes will form central themes of the qualitative analysis below. While here we took a view from above, mapping the distribution of positionings and their social underpinnings on the population level; there, we will ask how ideological polarities are embedded in the pre-political self-understandings and moral economies of groups and milieus among production workers and sociocultural professionals. For this exploration, the view from above brought up a whole range of sensitizing concepts and potentially significant relations. Besides the focus on moral evaluations of distribution, classed relations to politics, and issues

of migration and law and order, we saw that distinct social profiles within both classes were associated with sharply differing positionings. Among the workers, skill levels, gender, higher school education (*Abitur*), rural and urban residence, and identifications with the working or middle class were shown to be significant. Among sociocultural professionals, occupations groups of higher and lower professional status, higher education and cultural capital, and political leanings on the left-right scale were particularly important, with nurses, social workers, and doctors as embodiments of three different poles within the class fraction of sociocultural professionals. As explained in the next section, all these indicators are represented in the sample of respondents for the qualitative part of the study, and all are picked up in the analysis below.

In this way, the qualitative analysis can also draw on a basic finding of diversity and multidimensionality established in this statistical part. Centering the focus on diversity both in the political space as a whole and within the classes here followed the idea of a non-reifying and non-reductionist reconstruction of linkages between social position and ideological positionings. The multidimensionality of ideological polarities and social differentiation caution us to not move too quickly from the observation of classes and clusters “on paper” to the assumption of coherent ideological camps or identitarian groups.

As we will see in the next step of the analysis, the picture of clear-cut ideological camps is far away from the fuzzier pre-political “logic of practice” (Bourdieu 1990) characteristic for non-mobilized groups, classes, and milieus. In the talk of ordinary people, ideological divides are articulated in idiosyncratic, localized, milieu-specific, and usually much less coherent ways than is suggested e.g. by the “pro-“ or “anti-redistributionist” positionings recorded in diagrams as the ones here above. Still, the view from above and the view from below, the focus on classes and the focus on electorates, are complementary and not necessarily in contradiction. As demonstrated by Damhuis (2020) for the diverse class bases of and pathways into the radical right electorate, parties, where they are successful, bundle distinct ideological and classed outlooks and grievances into a single voter coalition. Following a mechanism of equifinality, multiple heterogeneous pathways may lead to the same political outcome. In this way, it is thinkable that the party political constellation appears as divided by a line drawn in the sand, where social reality presents a diversity of ideological divides and pre-political forms of consciousness.

## SECOND PART: THE VIEW FROM BELOW

### 5. Qualitative Analysis: Data and Method

The statistical analysis confirmed the picture from cleavage studies that two class fractions – production workers and sociocultural professionals – are placed at opposite ends of an ideological divide of universalism-particularism. But by questioning the coherence of ideological positionings and highlighting the loose, probabilistic linkage between class positions and ideological positionings, the analysis also cast some doubt on the “geological” picture of a rift sorting these class fractions into coherent and polarized ideological camps. To this we now add the missing sociocultural or identity dimension of cleavages, looking at pre-political identification to find out whether group identities relating to the universalism-particularism divide are present or emerging among the two class fractions most distant on this divide, production workers and sociocultural professionals. The logic of selecting these classes is that they are the most likely place where we should find new cleavage identification.

In the following, we explore social identities along the three dimensions of categorization, moral economy, and relations to politics theorized above. We reconstruct the “vernacular” in which clusters within of the two class fractions understand their location in social space, including the categories they use to describe themselves and the symbolic boundaries they draw against salient others. We seek out what type of moral evaluations normatively anchor symbolic boundaries and self-understandings, as well as what larger constellations of the moral economy these evaluations are embedded in. Further, we observe where people stand politically, both in terms of their political positionings, but also in terms of what “politics” means for them to begin with.

The methodology developed to do so is consciously geared towards avoiding the reductionisms and gaps in existing studies elaborated above. To get a sense of the degree to which statistical clusters in the social and political spaces correspond to group-like self-understandings, we need to collect data on the schemes of classification that respondents in the two class fractions *themselves* use. As we saw, individuals classified by researchers into schemes of occupational class, ideology and other factors, themselves apply schemes of classifications to themselves and the world around them. These schemes are highly

consequential, but beyond the grasp of closed question surveys.<sup>113</sup> Instead, interviews are a useful data source for capturing these schemes of classification and the logic of their use; specifically a form of open, narrative interviewing that is cautious to not impose the researchers' own categories on the respondents.

### 5.1. The Sample

With this goal in mind, I conducted 50 interviews with 60 individual respondents, 25 sociocultural (semi-)professionals and 35 production workers (see table 7). The differing number of interviews and respondents is due to the inclusion of three group discussions with multiple participants. As C. Wright Mills points out, "qualitative analysis cannot [...] provide you with frequencies or magnitudes. Its technique and its end is to give you the range of types." (Mills 1959, 214). Consequently, my sampling for the study was not oriented towards an unattainable goal of representativity, but at capturing as large a range of types as possible. Since the contours of these types were not known prior to the analysis, I did not sample on any dependent variable related to ideology or cleavage politics, but recruited based on the occupational scheme of the Oesch classification.

One can think of this approach as akin to the analysis of the "soil sample" of a field, where samples of sediments are taken at locations as diverse as possible so as to capture variability and then mixed together for the analysis. The 'field' in this case were the two class categories of production workers and sociocultural (semi-) professionals as defined by Oesch's ISCO-based occupational classification. Range was achieved through the conscious sampling of respondents differing by occupational sub-group, gender, age, education and qualification, region, and urban-rural location (see below). These characteristics were sampled to cast a wide net, but subsequently not used as systematic categories of analysis (e.g. for comparisons of East and West Germans in both classes), among other things because the N would have been too small.

Another important choice was to limit the sample to members of the *Millennial cohort*, born between 1981 and 1996. In this sense, the populations analysed here are what Karl Mannheim calls "class-generational units" (Mannheim 1964, see also Kumkar 2018). The reason for this

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<sup>113</sup> As Nina Eliasoph writes, "polls can find out what people can say in a poll, which is in itself interesting, but should not be assumed to be the kind of 'opinion' that can be mobilized" (Eliasoph 1990, 471).

choice is that cleavage change has been shown to not be driven by ideological switching but generational replacement (see e.g. Pappi 2002; Ford and Jennings 2020). As illustrated, for instance, by the age structure of social democratic electorates, the political orientations of older cohorts often remain structured by the cleavages prevalent in the period of their first politicization, while change mostly takes shape through the new orientations of younger cohorts (Hooghe 2004).

At the time of data collection in 2018/19, members of the Millennial cohort were old enough for having developed classed identities through their work and social positions. Yet they were young enough to have been socialized in the context described as relevant for recent cleavage transformations. Millennials came of age after the end of the Cold War and German partition, in a time of intensified transnational political and economic integration, discussions around “Islam”, immigration, and national identity, socio-structural and occupational change, and incisive labor market reforms (Hall 2020). German Millennials, comprising around one fifth of the population in 2018, have been affected by precarity particularly strongly, but report high levels of life satisfaction in international comparison (Mrozowicki and Trappmann 2021). Using the term cohort, I highlight that Millennials in the German context do not constitute a ‘generation’ in the emphatic sense, as it has been discussed, for instance, in the United States (Milkman 2017; see also Eyerman and Turner 1998).

Table 7 lists the respondents in my sample. In both classes, I recruited members of all major occupational sub-groups included in Oesch’s categorization. For production workers, these were industrial operatives, small crafts workers, as well as, more marginally, logistics workers. Workers interviewed included such employed in large industrial plants with thousands of employees, as well as in small workshops with just a few employees and led by an owner master craftsman. The qualification distribution of my interviewees matched that of the ALLBUS sample. In both, two thirds of production workers were skilled workers with occupational training in their current job.<sup>114</sup> The same was almost true for gender: 90% of the interviewed workers were male, compared to 84% in the ALLBUS sample.

For sociocultural professionals, occupational sub-groups included medical occupations (doctors and nurses), cultural occupations (like artists, teachers, and researchers), as well as social occupations (social workers, special needs assistants, and a priest). The majority, but

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<sup>114</sup> Three interviewees were currently in training. The rest working in un- or semi-skilled jobs.

not all, worked in public or para-public institutions. The sample here was slightly skewed towards the more highly educated, with 60% of respondents having attained a BA or higher tertiary degree (versus 51% in the ALLBUS sample). A bigger distortion is present with regard to gender, where 74% of the ALLBUS' sociocultural professionals, but only 56% of my interviewees were women. The average age of respondents in both classes was close to 29, coinciding with the overall age average of the cohort at the time of interviewing in 2018/19.<sup>115</sup>



Figure 33: Location of interviews

I ensured a balanced sampling of rural and urban dwellers, to capture identity dynamics across a range of social geographies, which the analysis above found to be highly significant. Just about half the respondents in both class categories lived in rural towns and villages, which with the German state classification of towns, I identified as localities with less than 20,000 inhabitants. My sampling strategy also wanted to make sure respondents raised in East Germany were included. This (e.g. through snowballing) actually led to an overrepresentation of Eastern Germans (33% of the sample versus 15% of the population, see table 7).

Geographically, the respondents were widely spread across the country. This is illustrated in figure 34, which shows some approximate interview locations (while omitting others to ensure anonymization). In an omission that was dictated by the incredible complexity already given, and calls for an additional study, migration backgrounds were not a salient feature of my sampling strategy. I only recorded it if it was actively mentioned by respondents, which four workers did, one of whom had himself migrated to Germany, the others being second generation migrants. Seven interviews, marked with an asterisk in table 7, were conducted by Linda Beck as part of a closely coordinated collaborative research project (see Westheuser and Beck forthcoming).

Table 7 (next page): List of Interviewees

<sup>115</sup> As table 7 shows, workers were slightly younger, professionals slightly older than the average.

PRODUCTION WORKERS						SOCIOCULTURAL (SEMI-)PROFESSIONALS					
#	Alias	Occupation	Age	Raised	Residence	#	Alias	Occupation	Age	Raised	Residence
1	Alex	Carpenter	25	West	Rural	1	Anna	Social worker	30	West	Urban
2	Andre	Welder	29	West	Rural	2	Anne	Medic (unemp.)	34	West	Urban
3	Anton	Industrial Mechanic	28	West	Rural	3	Daria	Journalist	27	East	Urban
4	Charlotte	Cabinet maker	28	West	Urban	4	Dennis	Social worker	31	West	Urban
5	Christoph	Cabinet maker	33	West	Rural	5	Elias	University researcher	30	West	Urban
6	Daniel	Roofer	23	East	Urban	6	Florian	Translator/author	29	East	Urban
7	Dustin*	Construction worker	28	East	Rural	7	Gabriel	Artist	29	West	Urban
8	Eric*	Electrician	22	East	Urban	8	Gregor	Social worker	30	West	Rural
9	Fred	Industrial Mechanic	24	East	Urban	9	Jana	Teacher (Lower sec.)	26	West	Rural
10	Jonas	Technician	26	West	Rural	10	Johannes	Teacher (Upper sec.)	29	West	Urban
11	Kingsley	Factory help	34	East	Urban	11	Katharina	Nurse	37	East	Rural
12	Lara	Carpenter	30	West	Urban	12	Kevin	Nurse	24	East	Urban
13	Lisa	Industrial varnisher	33	West	Urban	13	Kristin	Physiotherapist	26	East	Rural
14	Lukas	Landscape worker	35	West	Urban	14	Laura	Cultural manager	34	West	Urban
15	Marc	Electrician	25	East	Urban	15	Lena	Nurse	26	West	Rural
16	Marco*	Construction help	28	West	Urban	16	Leonie	Doctor	26	East	Rural
17	Matthias	Master shoemaker	29	East	Urban	17	Martin	Priest	31	West	Rural
18	Maximilan	Logistics help	27	West	Urban	18	Michael	Political consultant	28	West	Urban
19	Ole	Industrial carpenter	23	East	Urban	19	Nico	Social worker	26	West	Urban
20	Oliver	Shoemaker	26	West	Rural	20	Ralf	University researcher	36	West	Rural
21	Patrick*	Bricklayer	33	East	Urban	21	Sina	Special needs educator	29	West	Rural
22	Sebastian	Industrial assembler	29	West	Rural	22	Sophie	Doctor	33	East	Rural
23	Simon*	Electrician	22	West	Rural	23	Stephanie	Social worker	29	East	Urban
24	Stefan	Electrician	31	West	Rural	24	Theresa	Special needs educator	26	West	Rural
25	Steffen*	Concrete worker	31	East	Rural	25	Wiebke	Scientific assistant	28	West	Urban
26	Tobias*	Cabinet maker	28	West	Urban						
27	Vassily	Cabinet maker	25	West	Rural						
28	Werner	Carpenter	37	West	Urban						
29	Group I	Metal/crafts workers	<30	West	Rural						
<i>Female: 10%</i>			<i>Ø age</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Female: 56%</i>			<i>Ø age</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>Urban</i>
			28.5	34%	55%				29.3	32%	52%

I received the contacts of respondents through a variety of channels. The most common one were the “weak ties” of distant relations which I mobilized by mentioning my search to as many people as possible, so that e.g. the sister of a school friend would give me the number of an ex-co-worker, or a former student’s cousin signed up. I consciously tried to activate distant connections so as to avoid sampling from circles too close to my own networks. A lot of subsequent contacts were then obtained by snowballing. Other recruitment techniques included flyers which I handed out at factory gates or displayed in public places like physiotherapy practices or university buildings. The description of the study I offered to people, including at the start of interviews, was a variant of the following statement: “I am writing a book about younger people, people of our generation broadly speaking, in different regions and jobs, to find out what moves people nowadays and how they see the world.” This description cued place, occupation, and age, as relevant or neutral attributes, but explicitly did not mention politics, which I would only introduce at the end of the interview if the respondents had not themselves started to talk about it.<sup>116</sup>

As recruitment turned out to be difficult among workers in particular, I introduced a compensation payment of 20 Euros as an incentive.<sup>117</sup> Most interviews were conducted in person, at the respondents’ homes, or in cafés, bakeries or fast food restaurants, some took place over the phone. Respondents first received informations about recording, anonymization, and the terms of withdrawal from the study, which were documented in a consent form that were signed by the interlocutors (see appendix m).<sup>118</sup>

## 5.2. The Questions

The opening question of all interviews was: “How would you describe yourself, if you had to describe yourself in one or two minutes? What type of person are you?”<sup>119</sup> Respondents were

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<sup>116</sup> If there would be questions about what more precisely I was interested in, I told the interviewees, that I would like to speak about three things: “Firstly, how you would describe what kind of person you are. Secondly, about your work and the role that plays in your life. And then at the end some more general questions of how you see your place in society.”

<sup>117</sup> My impression was that the payment gave some working class men – a number of whom explicitly commented that they were not usually prone to talking about themselves – a ‘presentable’ reason to participate in the study, but did not otherwise impact the conversations.

<sup>118</sup> The declaration of consent is documented in the appendix m. To respondents who were interviewed over the phone, this consent form was read out and/or explained point by point. Their spoken, and recorded, agreement was then taken as consent.

<sup>119</sup> „Wie würdest du dich selbst beschreiben, wenn du dich jetzt in einer oder zwei Minuten beschreiben müsstest? Was für eine Art von Mensch bist du?“

invariably baffled by the question, but none took longer than a few seconds to respond. I let them speak until they expressly finished the turn (saying 'Yeah, I think that's pretty much it.', or 'Is that enough for you?'). Then I proceeded by taking up categories used in the self-presentations for probing questions ('you said you were an open person, what exactly do you mean by that?') or pointed out relations between attributes with which interviewees described themselves ('so you say you are generally very patient, but sometimes you can snap at people. What are situations where that happens?'). In doing so, I was effectively aiding the respondents to come up with a narrative frame for the following conversation.

My opening question was highly structuring for the following interview. It prompted people to talk uninterrupted for up to a minute, facilitating the flow of one-sided self disclosure characterizing the unusual situation of the interview. More importantly, the opening question anchored statements to the elaboration of personal positionings and self-understandings. In other words, the conversation was framed from the start as being about them 'as a person', rather than, say, them as countryside dwellers, workers, voters, etc., but also immediately asked for broader categorizations ('what *type* of person are you?').

In many cases, as predicted by narrative analysis (Czarniawska 2004), this early discussion yielded a central self-characterization that would be repeated in later parts of the interview. Thus, one respondent initially described herself as "someone who never dares to do what she really wants to do", a frame that would then be picked up later when talking about her difficulties of entering academia as the child of a working class family, when making sense of her uneasiness about what she perceived as a stalling career, and when voicing a sense of inadequacy related to her lack of political engagement. In the analysis, such recurring phrases, metaphors, and figures of speech were a first way into the deeper structures of the respondents discourse (see below).

Because interviews are social settings structure by the same norms of politeness, face-saving, and trust-building as other public or semi-public encounters, almost any interview usually begins with both interlocutors introducing themselves. Regardless of the topic of talk, a good part of interviewing consists in what Goffman (1978) calls 'impression management', i.e. respondents' attempts to control the impressions their interlocutor has of them. Much like strangers striking up a conversation in a train compartment or at a party, interviewees tend to present that part of their public persona they think is most likely to let them be viewed

favorably by the other person. Especially my opening question tended to elicit negotiations of *status*, either by naming characteristics displaying valued characteristics in a variety of spheres, or by defending oneself against the implicit judgment by admitting to failures (as the respondent above, see also Lamont 1992). In the rest of the interview, interviewees then tend to arrange their statements so as to appear coherent with these initial presentations, often by elaborating them in the form of developmental narratives, or by positioning various objects of talk in relation to themselves.

My method of interviewing made use of a deep social script that can be illustrated by a scene from the TV series *Mad Men*. In this scene, a group of advertising writers in the 1950s organize a focus group to help them come up with an ad for dog food. Three participants are seated behind an invisible screen and asked to describe their dogs to an interviewer. “She’s picky, nervous sometimes, but she’s very smart”, answers a young female respondent. “He’s independent you know?”, an middle-aged man says about his dog, “He knows what he likes. He’s pretty hard to fool.” Behind the invisible screen, one of the advertisers exclaims, “My God, they are describing themselves!” Another one quips, “Your first time?” This dynamic was highly useful for my purposes as the connections generated between different fields were centered on self-understandings and revealed implicit orienting frames which were central for the analysis (see below).<sup>120</sup>

I sought to stimulate and assist the informants’ narratives, but give great freedom as to where the interview was going and took great caution to minimize my own introduction of categories. This technique of questioning was inspired by work in the “everyday nationalism” tradition (Brubaker 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). The concern here is to try to minimize as far as possible the imposition of the social categories under research, but to instead see whether and how these categories are drawn on and made salient by the respondents in the course of their own narratives. Consequently I did *not* prompt any of the categories related to the “new cleavage” myself (e.g. “How do you feel about Muslims?”), but waited to see whether such categories would come up by themselves. This helps to not artificially inflate the “groupness” of categories by consistently prompting them in all interviews. Although

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<sup>120</sup> This approach is non-psychological, in the sense that I was not bothered by the question of whether what people say is “what they really feel”. In Mead’s (1934) terms, what an interview gathers is not the I, but the ‘me’, a mediated, conventional, and idealized conception of the self geared not only to the specific alter of the interviewer, but also the ‘generalized other’ or the “gallery of listeners” (Gamson 1992).

migration, for instance, was a topic that many respondents cited at some point in their discussions of current affairs, some never mentioned it at all, which in itself was interesting.

There were two important exceptions to this unstructured and cautious approach. Firstly, I made sure all interviews covered a number of domains that I heuristically deemed important for identification dynamics. The insight behind this was that identities are constructed with entirely different categorical sets in different domains, like the home or the workplace (see e.g. White 2011), which I wanted to include to increase range and observe interconnections between domains. The heuristic domains I included were the initial description of the self, the workplace, the local living environment, perception of 'society' and the respondents' place in it, and politics.

Secondly, I noticed that the political domain in particular at times needed prompting, so that I introduced a few more tightly scripted questions towards the end of the interview. Many respondents provided a point of entry themselves, and I would simply ask them to elaborate. If they did not, I would ask at a late stage of the interview, "does politics play any role for your life?" The question was intentionally kept open, so as to allow for different relations to politics to be expressed. Yet another category I introduced were the terms "left" and "right". I asked respondents whether these words meant anything to them, and if so what. Similarly, I would pick up on any instance where people mentioned "social strata" or other terms indicating social location. If this did not occur, I directly prompted those categories, asking "how would you describe your place in society? Some people talk about classes, strata, or above and below. Does that mean anything to you?"

In addition there were a few other scripted questions I asked if the conversation dried up, including "do you generally feel like things are going uphill or downhill [*bergauf oder bergab*]?" (if asked for the frame, I would add, "in the world, or in Germany, or here in the region"). This question tapped into optimistic or pessimistic visions of the future, as well as, at times, interesting distinctions between the local, national, and global spheres. While respondents talked about their work, I often asked whether they liked their job and whether they felt their work was being recognized [*anerkannt*]. Whenever people stated that something needed to change in society or at their workplace, I asked them who could effect that change, to capture their sense of agency. I also sometimes asked what were the most pressing problems, or what people would do if they were the German chancellor. Apart from that, I tried to flexibly

accommodate the narrative of the interviewees with my questions, continuing the frame of a self-presentation. The basic dynamic was that of respondents explaining to me ‘how the world looks through their eyes’.

## 5.5. The Analysis

The interviews were recorded and usually lasted about an hour and a half (between 45 minutes and almost 4 hours). Afterwards, I isolated myself and took field notes, which also included observations about the interview setting and the demeanour of respondents. The interviews were transcribed almost entirely, yielding multiple thousands of pages of material. To code and analyse the material, I used the software MAXQDA. In the analysis below, quotes are either given by time stamps (e.g. Anna, 00:12) or the segment number in the transcript (Dustin, 23).<sup>121</sup> All respondents, as well as all identifiable places, were given pseudonyms.

In my analysis, I made flexible use of techniques developed in the *documentary method* school of qualitative analysis (Bohnsack 2014; Bohnsack, Nentwig-Gesemann, and Nohl 2013; Nohl 2006; the following informed by Kumkar 2018, ch. 4.2.). The documentary method is an interpretive technique developed by Ralf Bohnsack and colleagues in continuation of ethnomethodology and the socio-genetic approach of Karl Mannheim. It is focused on reconstructing implicit “orienting frames” or *habitus structures* underlying ordinary talk. As introduced above, the habitus concept situates the use of categories in embodied and pre-reflexive “generative schemes” (Bourdieu 1977). This distinguishes the analytical approach from other perspectives in qualitative research (see Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke 2004).<sup>122</sup>

Compared to content analyses, the documentary method pays less attention to *what* respondents say, focusing instead on *how* interviewees engage in meaning-making. The method captures the difference between the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ in Mannheim’s distinction of communicative and conjunctive knowledge. Communicative knowledge is articulated by schemes available to reflexive thematization and is reconstructed in a first *formulating interpretation* of the material that records common objects of talk, as well as the “common

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<sup>121</sup> This is because of a change of software in the course of transcriptions.

<sup>122</sup> In contrast to phenomenological approaches, which center on the subjective experiences of individuals, categorization schemes are here thought of as supra-individual and largely pre-reflexive social structures, and approached by looking at the regularities of categorization across groups or milieus. In contrast to constructivist approaches, which focalize the construction of situations or the repertoires individuals draw on, the habitus is understood as a set of relatively stable dispositions deposited in the body.

sense theories” articulated by respondents (Bohnsack 2014, 219). By contrast, conjunctive knowledge is the implicit, pre-reflexive know-how of action which articulates itself through discursive production but is usually not made explicit. It is reconstructed in a second step of *reflecting interpretation*. Conjunctive knowledge usually does not appear propositionally, as *something* people say, but it can be gleaned from the textual data of interviews by observing *how* people develop their narratives. With Bourdieu we expect this “how” to reflect internalized schemes of categorization, orientation, and self-presentation, in line with our conceptualization of social identity above.

An important indication here comes from the use of homological figures across different domains. This is what we had noted before when speaking about the tendency of respondents to repeat and build on figures across different domains of talk. Such repeated figures of speech indicate basic distinctions which orient and anchor the respondents’ self-presentations, and thus offer a point of entry for the analysis of the deeper structures of the habitus. Another initial indication came from exploring what people ‘wanted’ to talk about, i.e. what they steered the conversation towards, returned to repeatedly, dwelled on at great length, with much emphasis, or with particularly vivid imagery. In reverse, I noted instances of slippage and hesitation (like stuttering or long pauses), which often indicated contradictions between an internalized categorical scheme and categories I had introduced, or the censorship imposed by the semi-public setting of the interview.

Already in the first round of analysis, I began noting down central social categories cited, as well as rhetorical figures indicating boundary work, like comparisons, distinctions, dichotomies, and oppositions. I also thematically coded passages by the five heuristic domains mentioned above (self-descriptions, work-related talk, discussions of the local environment, of one’s place in society or social change, and about politics), including sub-codes for passages that explicitly addressed key theoretical concepts of a “sense of social location” and of “relations to politics”. Within the domains, I identified recurring themes through sub-codes (e.g. for work: “recognition”, “problems at work”, “work ethos”; for politics: “instances of critique”, “relations to politics”, as well as issue-related statements on “migration”, “environmentalism”, etc.). I also began comparing accounts by auto-coding informative terms used by some respondents in the rest of the material (e.g. “Hartz IV”, “car”, “just(ice)”, “money”, “afraid”, “active”).

Having thus pre-structured and acquainted myself with the material, I selected paradigmatic or “anchor cases” for a deeper analysis. These cases were selected based on the differences they presented vis-à-vis each other. This strategy, recommended in the documentary method framework, seeks to help the building of a typology by drawing out relevant dimensions of difference between paradigmatic cases, as well as by anchoring the comparison of other cases (as more or less similar to paradigmatic cases).

In this deeper analysis, I diverged from the usual course of the documentary method, which would proceed with standardized case descriptions, to instead focus the analysis more explicitly on *categorization* (as centered theoretically above). For the ten paradigmatic cases selected, I assembled extensive summary tables of *all* categorical distinctions used by the respondents, even if they seemed irrelevant at first sight. For instance, Alex, a rural construction worker, extensively talked about the distinction between wood and metal as “soft” and “warm” versus “hard” and “cold” building materials, while Marc, an urban electrician, spoke about today’s teenagers being addicted to their phones and unable to survive “alone in the wild”. These statements were mundane at first sight, but were key to self-understandings when placed in the context of other instances of categorizations. Thus Alex used the same distinction to describe his cold workplace in distinction from his warm home which he had renovated himself. The balance between hard work and the protected home was a central moral anchor of his self-presentation. Marc’s remark, on the other hand, made sense when seen in the context of a larger insistence on individual autonomy expressed also in categorizations related to the balance of work and free time, and political non-alignment. In other words, this detailed category analysis followed Bourdieu (as well as Stinchcombe 1982) in seeking out a “deep structure” underlying categorical distinctions in different domains; assuming that this deep structure was indicative of an internalized “generative scheme”, or habitus, orienting the articulation of self-understandings. Case summaries central findings on such deep structures, which usually boiled down to just two central lines of categorical distinction (e.g. small-big, honest-dishonest), with a long corollary of applications.

After having completed this step, I went into an extended iterative process of clustering, in which I attempted to group together individuals with similar habitus forms oriented by the deeper analysis, maximizing similarities within clusters of respondents and differences

between them. The result were four clusters in the working class sample and two and a half in the more homogenous sociocultural professional sample.<sup>123</sup> These inductive clusters, presented below, are of course neither an exhaustive survey of habitus forms among the two class-generational units, nor analytical ideal types. As noted here and there in the analysis, discursive elements of one type would sometimes appear in the discourses of respondents from other types and a small number of respondents were assigned to more than one cluster. In this sense, respondents and habitus forms should be thought of as analytically separate.

Yet, by taking *individuals* as units of analysis, and presenting the types as patterns of habitus, i.e. embodied schemes of categorization, perception, and action, I seek to point out that the pre-political level I aim at goes deeper than shared scripts and discursive repertoires which individuals draw on interchangeably (Lamont and Thévenot 2000), and instead concerns the *social being* of the respondents in an expansive sense (Bourdieu 2000). As mentioned, an important part of the research process was to reflect on how respondents spoke, often also revisiting my notes on the encounter with them. Some were angry, others resigned, yet others content and saturated, some eager to show their knowledge, others gentle and demonstratively likeable. These emotional tones and impressions often yielded important sociological informations. In the analysis below, I seek to reproduce at least a hint of these more expansive impressions of the habitus by focalizing on one or two paradigmatic individuals for each of the types.

In the write-up phase of the analysis, I moved from the heuristic ordering tool of the five domains to a summary of common habitus patterns along the three dimensions identified in the theoretical part (sense of social location, moral economy, and relations to politics). This meant reapproaching the material with a different lense, generalizing and comparing aspects of the previous deep analysis of individuals. As in the two examples of Marc and Alex given above, categorical structures were always already connected to moral evaluations, just as they always contained social referents by which the sense of social location could be reconstructed. In other words, reconstructing the sense of social location and morality were two parts of the same analytical step. The third dimension, relations to politics, was approached as a last step.

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<sup>123</sup> Obviously, these types are simplifications and I note instances where it seems that further differentiation would have been possible with more extensive material. This is especially the case with the 'half' type at the end of the chapter on professionals, where heterogeneity was too large for a summary description, but differences were still relevant enough to be reported.

Here I drew out how political positionings and positionings towards politics are based on the same generative schemes reconstructed previously.

Reflecting these analytical choices, the presentation of the clusters in the following proceeds sequentially from social location and moral economy to relations to politics. The underlying claim of this form of presentation is that there are distinct and relatively coherent pre-political habitus patterns that – among many other things – also inform political positionings. In the summaries of each of the clusters, I draw out how pre-political social identities relate to the “new cleavage” and “classed politics”. With this open, inductive, and holistic approach both to interviewing and analysis, I embed the question of classed politics and “new cleavage” identities in a wider panorama of socially situated self-understandings, without analytically presupposing the salience of class nor of cleavage identities.

## **Results**

The first part of the analysis worked out central ideological polarities in the German political space and reoriented it according to its social logic. This part also clarified the *multipolarity* of the political space and the *heterogeneity* found both within ideological ‘camps’ and within social classes. The second part of the analysis can be understood as an in-depth exploration of this multipolarity and heterogeneity with other means, reconstructing the ‘thick’ context of positionings among sub-groups in the two classes most divided along the universalism-particularism divide. In the following, I reconstruct four specific constellations of sociomoral identification and relations to politics found among the working class interviewees, as well as two from the sociocultural professional sample (with a third one only sketched for a lack of reliable data).

Highlighting central characteristics, I label the four working class clusters Working Class Conservatives, Social Populists, Pragmatic Privatists, and Alternative Workers. On the side of the sociocultural professionals, I identify two clusters, Social Therapists and High Liberals, with a potential third cluster indicated under the label Ordinary Altruists. Anticipating some of the findings of this analysis, figure 35 charts these clusters in the political space reconstructed in the MCA. Although the qualitative analysis has no pretension of representativity, we can thus briefly illustrate how these clusters are situated in the ideological distributions of their wider class.

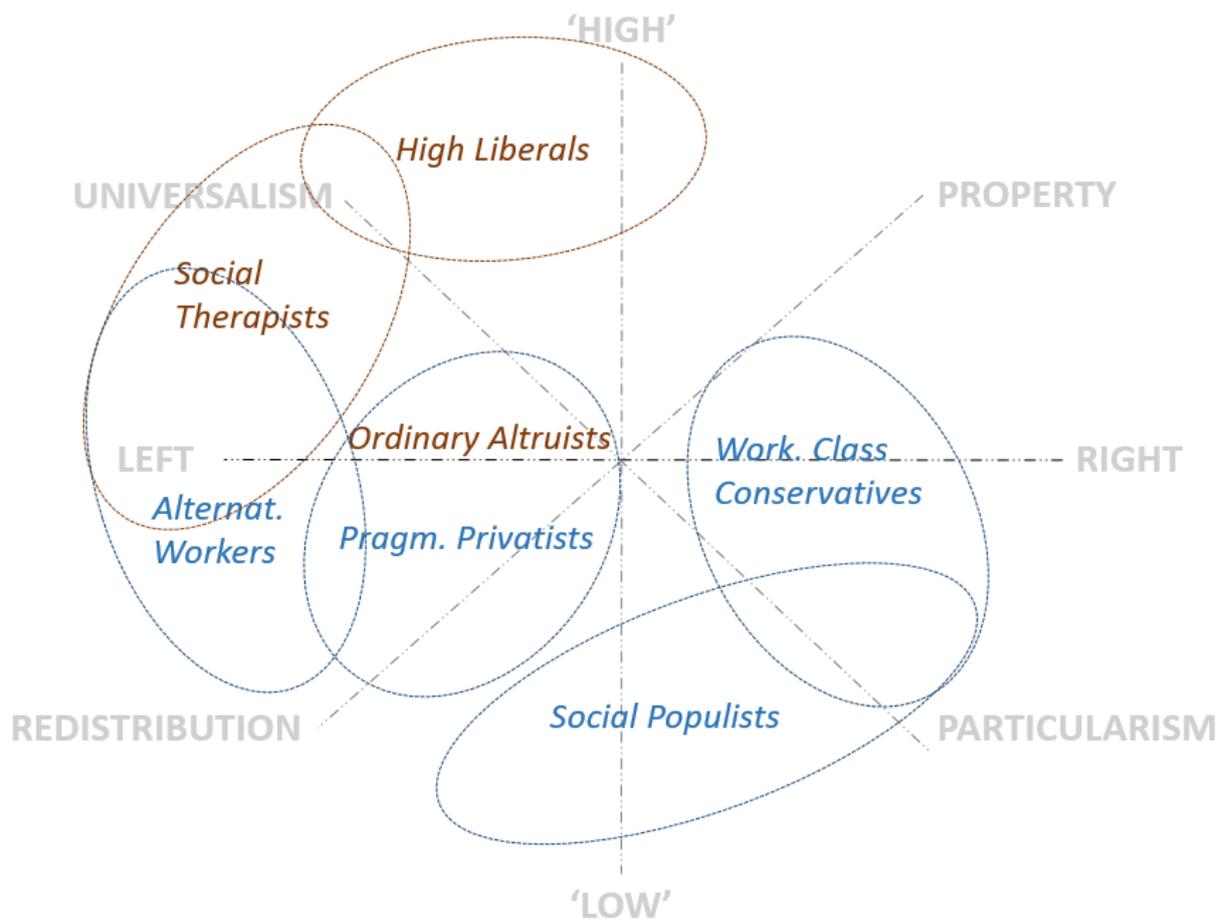


Figure 34: Approximate Positions Of Habitus Clusters In The Political Space (Working Class Clusters In Blue, Sociocultural Professional Clusters In Red)

Already on first glance, we recognize the diversity of clusters in both classes, but particularly among the working class. Along the universalism dimension, we find two clusters intersecting on the particularist pole, Conservatives and Social Populists. In the MCA, 39% of production workers were significantly more particularist than the population average. Pragmatic Privatists and parts of the Conservative cluster are situated in the relatively indifferent middle region, where a majority of 55% of production workers were situated.<sup>124</sup> Alternative Workers represent the minority of 6% of production workers that had significantly more liberal positionings than the average population (or at any rate the 27% of production workers on the universalist side of the space).

On the sociocultural professionals' side, we can already see that the clusters cover the regions of the space (high, universalist, left, and redistributionist) where most respondents of this

<sup>124</sup> Here counted as those between the values of .5 and -.5 s.d. on this dimension and thus not significantly differentiated from the population average.

class fraction were found. The graph further recalls findings about diversity also within this class fraction, which revealed a triangular structure of a 'high' liberal upper middle, a left-wing middle, and a relatively centrist lower middle class component of the class category. As we will see below, we can identify these quite neatly with the High Liberal, Social Therapist, and Ordinary Altruists clusters. As the graph anticipates, all clusters are situated not only in relation to the universalist dimension, but also in specific constellations on the other polarities of left-right, high-low, and redistribution-property identified above. By taking up these themes and exploring their bases in pre-political identities, the qualitative analysis is complementary to the MCA findings and adds depth to them. Yet, perhaps the more important point of this part will be the independent logic of the pre-political, which in many ways differs from the logic of graphs like the one above.

In the following, I mainly use the neutral term *cluster* or *type* to designate a set of interviews grouped together as similar to each other and different from the others. At times I also speak about *habitus forms*, which, as mentioned, I understand to underlie these common patterns across respondents and across the dimensions of social identity. When I speak of (sociomoral) *milieus*, I mean larger structural and sociocultural formations which we can hypothesize the clusters to represent based on observations and theoretical background. With few exceptions indicated in the text, I begin the portraits of clusters with a general introduction and a sketch of a paradigmatic individual case, followed by the reconstructions of the sense of social location, moral economy, and relations to politics found in the cluster. For both of the two classes, I provide brief summaries comparing main tendencies and differences.

## **Production Workers**

### **6. Embeddedness: Working Class Conservatives**

I begin with a cluster of what I call Working Class Conservatives, which draws on interviews with craftsmen – all male – living in Southern German villages.<sup>125</sup> What sets the accounts of this cluster apart is their focus on the embeddedness into rural communities; their comparatively content, although somewhat defensive perception of the status quo; and their

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<sup>125</sup> There were eight interviews I assigned to this type, seven individual ones, plus a group discussion with around ten participants. Unfortunately, the sound quality of the discussion was too poor to be systematically interpreted, but I drew on it through field notes, and impressions.

emphasis on stability, family, and markers of middle class accomplishments, especially house ownership. I characterize this as a pattern of lifestyle conservatism. Lifestyle conservatism is not synonymous with ideological partisanship. But the pre-political self-understandings of this cluster, centered around the opposition between an intact, homogenous, and integrated “small world” of the village and the “big world” of politics, industry, and social change; as well as an idea of belonging to “the normal people” (see below), do carry over into center-right leanings and a relatively intact legitimacy of the system of political representation.

In the regions where the Working Class Conservatives I talked to live, their qualified *Facharbeiter* occupations (e.g. as carpenters or trained workers in large metal processing factories) and their lifestyles are highly respected and, in a sense, dominant forms of life. The rural parts of the German South are among the richest regions of the country. They are home to large manufacturing plants, as well as specialized smaller-scale industrial firms producing mainly for exports. As noted above, especially among the core workforce of the export-oriented metal and car industries, wages, employment security, and unionization rates tend to be exceptionally high and many of the stately two-storey family homes, with their driveways, double garages and neat picket fences that one sees when driving through Southern villages are owned by industrial workers and craftsmen employed in local firms. Craftspeople in smaller workshops, like carpenters and especially cabinet makers enjoy similarly secure employment conditions as industrial workers, but with much lower earnings. 2015’s episode of refugee immigration had added a considerable number of newcomers to an already large foreign-born share of the population, which in the German South often encompasses around one sixth of the population.

In this context, the Working Class Conservatives present a view of the world that is both content and somewhat defensive in the face of looming change. They see the protected and – for skilled workers – beneficial local arrangement threatened by forces from the outside. And although their conservative lifestyle is relatively flexible, the rate of change in the world around them is often seen as dangerously accelerating. A paradigmatic individual for this cluster was Andre, a gentle, calm man who spoke slowly, with a thick regional dialect and without much emphasis or modulation.<sup>126</sup> I met him on a Sunday afternoon in his newly built

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<sup>126</sup> Andre seems to me like a bit of stoic. His statements are definitive and he finishes many of his sentences by adding ‘Yes.’, as though to himself confirm what he just said. Then he stays silent, waiting for me to ask further questions but without actively soliciting them. Having interviewed a group of younger workers from the same

house on the outskirts of the village. The house was big and overlooked an empty field and the drive-up of the *Autobahn*. In Andre's house, most furniture was still missing, tools were lying around, and it smelled of paint and renovation, but the couple, who had just gotten married, had moved in already. Standing on the floor, in the recess that was to become a fireplace, were collages made from printed high school pictures of the newly-weds and mounted taxidermy, wedding gifts from the village hunting association that Andre was an active member of.

Andre's self descriptions revolved around expressions of responsibility, social integration, and the sense of a settled and respectable adult life.<sup>127</sup> Andre hardly described himself in the first person, speaking instead in the impersonal form: "Here in the countryside, one [*man*] still has a bit of faith" (00:02); or through a "we" connected with the region and the manufacturing company he works for ("We produce our own model from start to finish", Andre, 00:50). Asked how he would describe himself, he said that he was "a very helpful, friendly, open, honest, motivated, young... well, kind of young man" (00:00). Andre received these values, or, as he says, "building blocks" of his life, from his family, craftsmen for generations on the male side. Another important point of reference for Andre was his region and his village. He had been active in multiple village associations, local clubs for folk customs like carnival, hunting, sports, or Christian activities, from a very young age. This was a central theme of the interview to which he returned again and again. According to Andre, the associations taught young people "to adjust themselves [*sich arrangieren*], to be team players", and passed on the skills and values he had cited in his own self description.

You need to do work services, you need to be punctual for training. And this also extends into your later life at work. You know that you have to be there at seven sharp in the morning, just like it used to be seven sharp in the evening for training. So if you go through this from early on, I'd say, you learn some things.<sup>128</sup> (Andre 00:03)

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village just the night before, I notice how the slowness and gravitas of Andre's demeanor marks him off from the youngsters (just around six or seven years his younger) which he speaks about in a friendly way, remembering how he used to do similar things when he was younger.

<sup>127</sup> See the discussion of this theme by Skeggs (1997).

<sup>128</sup> „Und durch das, denk ich, prägt das uns auch, dass man relativ offen ist, freundlich, hilfsbereit, man muss immer Arbeitsdienste leisten. Man muss zum Training erscheinen pünktlich. Und das, sag ich mal, zieht sich dann auch im späteren Berufsleben auch durch. Man weiß dann man muss morgens um sieben Uhr da sein wie abends um sieben am Training und wenn man das schon früh mitmacht, dann, sag ich mal, dann lernt man schon was.“ (Andre, 00:03)

In a triple universalization he explains that there is an association “for everyone”, “for every season”, and that membership in associations is often passed on “through the generations” (ibid). “If your father played football, your father was in the music [association], this also gets connected to you from very early on in your childhood” (ibid). The associations are a focal point of a holistic social integration into village life. They stabilize sociability across the times of the year, over the life course, and even beyond the individual’s life.

### **6.1. Sense of Social Location: “Not One of the Little People, but One of the Normal People”**

#### **“House, Family, Kids, Marriage” – Lifestyle Conservatism**

Also Stefan, an electrician in a village a few hundred kilometers away, highlighted village associations as an important part of his life and that of his region. He described himself as “down-to-earth [*bodenständig*], boring [laughs], a country bumpkin. Just an ordinary guy from next door, average, like everyone else. [...] I grew up in the countryside, I like being home, and I don’t want to leave. [...] You have your association here, your friends and parents, everything. It’s nice.”<sup>129</sup> (Stefan, 00:00) The link of ordinariness with being from the countryside was a common theme in this cluster (see below). As Sebastian, an industrial worker from another village, spelled out, “I’m a simple guy, [...] I don’t need the most luxurious food every day or whatever. [...] I’m a talented craftsman. A countryside type of guy [...] I’d say the typical cliché: house, family, kids, marriage. That type of thing.” (Sebastian, 1)

“House, family, kids, marriage” summarizes an ideal of lifestyle conservatism common to the men in this cluster. It projects a conduct of life that is focused on stability, disciplined work, non-experimental conventional partnership, and the pursuit of status in local communities. In this constellation, tradition takes the form of a common sense of normality and respectability, rather than an ideologically prescribed set of beliefs. Gramsci already observed a “crudely neophobe and conservative” dynamic inherent in common sense (Gramsci 1971, 423). Rooted in a self-evident conception of normality shared by many others, lifestyle conservatism does

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<sup>129</sup> “[I: Wie würdest du dich selbst beschreiben, wenn du dich in einer oder zwei Minuten beschreiben müsstest?] Ach du Scheiße. Ha, ja, bodenständig, langweilig, [lacht] so a Landei. Ja, aber, oh Gott, wenn ich mich selbst beschreiben müsste. Einfach so n ganz normaler 0815 Typ, so wie jeder, also, der Typ von nebenan, also nix besonderes ehrlich gesagt. Ganz schwer. [...] also aufm Land aufgewachsen, gern daheim und möchte hier auch gar nicht weg, weil er sich hier wohlfühlt. [...] Du hast hier deinen Verein, du hast hier deine Freunde, du hast Eltern, du hast alles hier. Und das ist ja auch schön.”

not need to exalt this normality as a God-given or primordially rooted order. Indeed, cultural questions that often defined conservatism as an ideology, like religion and family norms, are here approached with relative flexibility. Such as when Sebastian later came back to his initial self-presentation saying,

House, family, kids... Well, that's just how I grew up. I mean, that doesn't mean that your wife is always at home cooking. That's not how it work anymore, the old way. [...] Actually I do most of the cooking anyway, because my wife only comes home from work at seven. [...] And about marrying – I hear this from friends and colleagues, 'today you don't need to get married, you don't do that anymore'. But I said I do. Not at church though, a civil marriage was enough" (Sebastian, 18).<sup>130</sup>

Similarly, as we saw, Andre defined his region by people "still having a bit of faith"; but then added, "not in a strict way, that you go to church every Sunday. But that inside somehow you have a kind of faith."<sup>131</sup> (Andre, 00:02) Instead of the religious institutions that traditionally served as its pillar, contemporary working class conservatism is most strongly anchored in a sense of discipline centered on money and work.

In this cluster, the pursuit of respectability and moderate affluence is mainly associated with home ownership. Like Andre, also three other respondents had just completed building a house or renovating a flat they bought with a mortgage often calculated to be paid off until the time of retirement. The centrality of these projects was particularly clear in my conversation with carpenter Alex, who, right from the very start of our conversation, centered his self presentation on his and his partner's flat.

I am Alex, from Freiberg. I have been here all my life. And I redid a flat in my parents' house for me and my girlfriend. We did it all, almost all, ourselves. From demolition to finish. Ripped down the ceiling, took out the lower casing and put new insulation in,

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<sup>130</sup> "So bin ich halt aufgewachse. Haus, Familie, Kinder- Also net, des heißt jetzt net, dass Frau nur am Herd steht oder sowas. Also so isch des net mehr. Das sind mehr das Alte- Wenn ich Zeit hab oder grad noch Schicht hab, den halben Tag zuhaus bin, dann hab ich auch kein Problem, mal zum sauge oder zum wasche oder zum abwasche oder zum koche. Meistens koch eh immer ich. Weil sie erst um siebene vom arbeiten kommt. [...] Aber mit dem Heirate, weil ich hör es auch von andere, auch von Kumpel, oder vom Arbeitskollege, also ne heutzutage da brauch ma nimmer heirate, da heirate man nimmer. Aber ich hab scho gsagt- also auch nicht kirchlich hätt ich jetzt auch nicht heirate wolle. Standesamtlich hat mir gereicht. [...] Ich bin zwar noch in der Kirch drinne, aber ich hab mit denen nichts am Hut." (Sebastian, 18)

<sup>131</sup> "Dass man n Stück Glaube hat hier aufm Land ja. natürlich nicht streng gläubig dass man jeden Sonntag in Kirche geht aber dass man dann schon noch also im Innere ein Glaube hat."

closed it up again with plasterboards, spackled them over, repainted everything, ripped off the floors and put new screed in. One and a half years. After work and weekends. I spent all vacations on the construction site. But now it's done."<sup>132</sup>

My first question, "how would you describe yourself", tended to elicit aspects of the self-concept that respondents felt proud of. In this cluster, this was a sense of ordinariness linked to stability, respectability, and rural embeddedness,<sup>133</sup> all of which could well be symbolized by owning or building a house. The house also marked the achievement of a classed sense of social status. As Andre explained, home ownership was not entirely self-evident for "normal workers" like him. Asked to explain the meaning of the term "worker", he said,

Well, he [the worker] doesn't belong to the little people [*kleinen Volk*], but to the normal people [*normalen Volk*]. I mean, when I think back to when we built the house, everyone asked me, when they saw the house – that you *can* build that – everyone asked: 'So, what do you have? What are you?' And that made me- That some think that you can't achieve anything anymore as a normal worker [*normaler Arbeiter*]. Yes you can. I, as an ordinary worker, can build a house. You just have to set priorities, you can't go skiing for ten days in the winter, go on vacation twice every summer [...]. Or I have to buy a car that's not so expensive. Then this is possible, also for a worker. And the wife needs to pull her weight [*mitziehen*], also bring in her earnings. It doesn't work as a solo effort."<sup>134</sup> (Andre, 00:44)

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<sup>132</sup> „Also ich bin der Alex, [--] Jahre alt, komm aus Freiberg, bin da schon mein ganzes Leben. Und hab da jetzt in meinem Elternhaus a Wohnung ausgebaut für mich und mei Freundin. Und ja, da sind wir jetzt fertig. Haben das alles – fast alles – komplett selber gemacht. Die Renovierung von Abbruch bis Einzug alles. [...] Mir haben die Decke komplett runtergerissen, beziehungsweise also die untere Schalung haben wir runter, die alte Dämmung haben wir raus, haben da neue Dämmung rein, wieder alles zugemacht, mit Gipsplatten und und verspachtelt. Dann gestrichen, Fußboden komplett raus, neuen Estrich rein. Eineinhalb Jahre. Nach der Arbeit, unter der Woche, am Wochenende. Die letzten Urlaube komplett auf der Baustelle verbracht. Aber jetzt ist es fertig.“

<sup>133</sup> The latter was possibly emphasized in particular because the respondents were speaking to a stranger from the city. I often felt that the interviewees were introducing me not just to their own, but countryside life in general.

<sup>134</sup> „Also zum kleinen Volk gehört er net, aber zum *normale* Volk, ja. Genau. Ma, wenn i zurückdenke wie wir des Haus baud ha, jeder froagt mi halt, wenn er so dis Haus sieht, dass ma baue *kann*, fragt jeder: "joah wasch hauscht du, wer bisch du?" Und dis hat mir au a bissle- Dass manche meinen, man könnt als normaler Arbeiter nichts mehr erreiche. Man kann schon, aber man muss halt sich da Prioritäre setze. Ich kann als normaler Arbeiter schon a Haus baue, nur da kann i halt net im Winter zehn Tage Ski fahre, im Sommer zweimal in Urlaub und im Herbscht au nochmal, des gaht halt net. Das is halt immer sehr deutli. Oder da muss mir a Auto kaufe was ned so teuer ist. So muss i mir des halt, denn isch des als Arbeiter schon a möglich. Und wie vorher gesagt, dann muss die Frau au mitziehe. Ihre Verdienscht mit einbringen, dass es noch funktioniert, ja. Im Alleingang goahs net.“

Andre's statement, pairing "achieving something" with an ethos of moderation and frugality follows a pattern of boundary making in the lower middle class described by Sachweh and Lenz (2018). The sense of social location here is centrally negotiated by the means of a stable and financially secure life and the access to middle class consumption patterns. In demarcation from the poor, or "little people", this is described as the life of the "normal people".

What also becomes clear in Andre's statement that "the wife needs to pull her weight", is that a traditional family arrangement is a condition of the working class conservative lifestyle also in the *economic* sense of the steady contribution of two earners to long-term investments like that of taking a mortgage (see also below). Wealth-building in this sense forms a knot in social relations of class and gender. Somewhat typical for male respondents across classes, gender is relegated to the background of accounts that are centered on the projects of the working man, as when Andre says that "I [...] can build a house", to then note that his wife is "also" contributing her earnings (see Baur and Luedtke 2008, Scholz 2008, Westheuser 2015, 119f.). Further, herein differing from later clusters, above-below inequalities tend to be relatively dethematized by these workers. Asked for his place in society, with my usual question that also suggested categories "like classes, strata, above and below, or something", Alex said,

I know this class separation [*Klassenteilung*] only from history class, or maybe it was geography. Anyway, that thing about India. With an upper class, middle class, lower class. So if you ask me like this, then I am somewhere in the middle class. [...] Good income, your own flat... being mobile, having your own car. Work. [...] Many people in Germany are in this so-called middle class, and in my circle of friends everyone is [laughs]. But overall, I wouldn't categorize us into classes and strata. [...] If I want to buy something, then I buy it. If I have the money. If not, not. One person can afford something without saving, the other can't. So he saves, and then also buys it. (Alex, 10)

As in Andre's statement, a person's position in society is here defined by what they can afford with their income, again citing house and car ownership as central examples. But being able to secure these primary markers of a "normal" "middle class" status, the respondents' see their own social position as largely unproblematic. Desires are moderated to fit the financially possible, and money is portrayed as an object of individual prudence ("saving", "setting

priorities”), rather than problematized as a principle of social stratification. Categories of hierarchical social difference are not central to the sense of social location, as strikingly testified by Alex’ identifying class with *caste*, a phenomenon specific to far-away India.

### “Our Little Stronghold” – Rural Social Capital

Andre explicitly located this relatively contented and undifferentiated social vision specifically in his rural region. Here, as he perceived it, differences between rich and poor were “not very big”, as “our little industrial stronghold” [*Hochburg*] ensured “high standards” and “no problems” (Andre, 00:07). The firm where Andre had been working as a welder since he left school at 15, was owned by a local entrepreneur. Contracts were determined by collective agreements negotiated by the union, and there were relatively generous bonuses and regular raises. As Andre explained, this entrepreneur and other owners of mid-sized firms in the region were themselves members of the village associations, and associational networks were of great help for young people trying to find a job in the region.

That the factory is owned by a family with regional ties – “even at 72, the [former] owner used to come to the factory every single day” (ibid., 00:05) – is also important to Andre, because it signals that the owners are invested into the plant for the long term, and thus that employment is secure. In Andre’s account, the good work standards of regional family business are contrasted with those in “huge companies” (ibid., 00:05) located in the state capital Stuttgart, which have company-specific contracts with much worse conditions; as well as with sectors like retail and agriculture, where people were struggling with low earnings despite high efforts. As the former owner-cum-CEO of his firm retired, there had been a moment of uncertainty, in which a corporate consultancy was called in, and it was feared that “an investor would get involved” (ibid.) and order drastic job cuts [*Kahlschlag*]. In this moment, Andre and many of his colleagues joined the metal workers’ union, in order “to close ranks a little bit”<sup>135</sup> (ibid., 00:08). When instead the firm was taken over by the owner’s son, Andre experienced this as “a good security”.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> “A bisle zusammenhalte”. Though some proved unreliable later, as they tried to advance their interests through individual strategies.

<sup>136</sup> „Somit fühlt man sich als Mitarbeiter durchaus sicher und weiß, okay, [...] da simma, kann man sich sicher sein. Der hat keinen Investor hinzugezogen oder sonst irgendwas. Die wollen des doch noch selber weiterbringen. Und das ist relativ, für mich a gute Sicherheit.” (00:07:08)

For the workers, a “rural consciousness” (Cramer 2016) of regional embeddedness and the social capital created by ties like those of the associations are not merely folkloristic, but also part of an implicit rational strategy for advancement and security in the strongly cohesive social setting of the countryside. Throughout the cluster, the positive image of regional small and mid-sized employers is compared to larger companies or short-term profit seekers like the “investor” Andre feared to get involved (see also below).

## **6.2. Moral Economy: “It’s a Give and Take”**

### **“Character and Motivation” – Meritocratic Paternalism**

In the picture painted by the workers, regionally embedded manufacturing ensures the intactness of a moral economy that stresses the mutual obligations of employers and workers. This moral economy centers on what a common union slogan calls the exchange of “participation for performance” (“*Teilhabe gegen Leistung*”, see e.g. Vester et al. 2001, 100). According to this moral economy, which has been described as characteristic for the post-war German coordinated market economy, state regulation and mediation in the social partnership of unions and employer associations secure participation in profits and relatively extensive social rights for employees, in exchange for performance and a moderation of demands. Although overall seen to be eroding (see above), this compact is still firmly in place among the rural and comparatively privileged workers in this cluster.

Stefan told me that his father had worked in the same local company since leaving high school and was now “one of the most esteemed mechanics”. “And that’s probably why I also internalized this, that you have to hang in there. [...] Because for his esteem he also gets concessions from the company. It’s a give and take. He does his job well, and so he also gets certain freedoms.”<sup>137</sup> (Stefan, 00:12) Andre thought that, at least in his region, whoever showed “character” and “motivation” (e.g. by helping out with extra shifts, or engaging with problems in the production process), had all opportunities of “establishing themselves” [*sich*

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<sup>137</sup> “der ist jetzt einer von den angesehensten Monteurn hier im Ort, weil der halt einfach am längsten dabei ist, am meisten Berufserfahrungen hat. Und deswegen auch am meisten Verantwortung und wenn ich das jetzt mal so sagen würde, vielleicht hab ich das mitgekriegt und deswegen mit verinnerlicht, dass man halt auch was dafür tun muss.[...] Weil [er] für das Ansehen oder was dann halt da für Entgegenkommen von der Firma kriegt. Weil es ist ja trotzdem ein Geben und Nehmen. Wenn er da zum Beispiel seine Arbeit gut macht. Und deswegen kriegt er auch mehr Freiheiten.”

*etablieren*] (Andre, 00:11); that is, of advancing in the attainment of affluence and respectability sketched above.

As a consequence, workers should not make inordinate demands, but patiently work their way up. “You don’t want to arrive at a job and say, ‘I’m gonna make a top wage here’, you come and say ‘okay, with this I can make a livelihood’, because that’s the most important thing” (00:10:26). The opposite of this attitude was represented by the kind of people “who don’t perform [*nichts leisten*] but always complain, [...] [people] who are dishonest at work. Or those who don’t work at all, but then think they should get social benefits. Although they could work.” (00:48).<sup>138</sup> Andre described such people as “isolated cases”, a rare breed “with whom one has no contact. I don’t think they are in any associations. They’re living in their own world” (00:49).

The moral economy of “participation for performance” is a form of socially embedded meritocracy. “Establishing oneself” is an achievement that first and foremost depends on individual exertion and perseverance. But it is made possible by a benevolent paternalism of unequal but reciprocal exchange between employer and employee which also implies obligations on the part of the employers. Similar to the importance attached to the owner caring about his factory in Andre’s account above, carpentry foreman Christoph told me that “not all people are equal”, because bosses [*Chefs*] bore responsibilities for their workers that also justified higher salaries and pensions: “If a boss works 12 hours a day to ensure the livelihood of his employees, that means that he’s essentially responsible for feeding [*ernähren*] six or so people. So he should have more than those who just come to do their work 8 hours a day” (Christoph, 8).

Using the striking image of owners “feeding”, or providing for “their” workers – in analogy to a parental role – employers are said to deserve privileges insofar as they take responsibility for their employees. Christoph’s quote also points to a certain overlap of sociability between workers and petty owners in small crafts and rural ‘family businesses’, which we already saw for the case of the village associations. It is notable that Christoph thinks of firm owners in terms of the small company he works for (“feeding six people”). In his account, the familial relations he has with the owner-boss of his workshop, as well as to another “millionaire firm

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<sup>138</sup> “die wo bei der Arbeit unehrlich [sind] oder gar net schaffe, wenn ma da irgendwelche meine, sie müsse da Sozialleistungen beziehe. Obwohl se arbeite können, ja.”

owner” he mentions to be “the nicest person in the world” (Christoph, 2), seem to get generalized into a wider assessment.

As long as employers uphold their responsibilities – with “investors” and “huge companies” as negative counter-examples – the legitimacy of workers’ demands are tied with the motivation to perform in exchange. Oliver summarized this reciprocity of obligations as follows:

The wealth that comes out for the owners of capital or property, and those who, let’s say prostitute their labor power [laughs], if it pays off for both sides, then it is just. When one side says, ‘alright, ten Porsches are enough. You guys get a raise.’ And the other side says, ‘okay, let’s really hang in there now. We’re doing pretty well over here, compared to other places, and I’m glad I can pay the mortgage of my house’<sup>139</sup> (01:15).

“*Leistung*”, i.e. performance, achievement, and exertion, is a central term in the everyday cosmology of workers in this cluster. Andre’s boundary against those who make demands without performing indexes another outside of the moral economy of paternalist meritocracy: deviants trying to escape the discipline of hard work. We here touch on a theme discussed at greater length in the next cluster, that of a moral distinction of *deservingness* tied to the willingness to work. But where in the later cluster, this was distinction was discussed mainly as question of distribution, here undeserving non-performers were mainly introduced as negative counter-examples of the workers’ work ethic.

The gendered connotations of work and morality became clear where the work imperative was thematized not only in comparison to social benefit recipients and migrants (see below), but also to young workers not yet socialized into the discipline of work. Electrician Stefan (himself in his early thirties) complained about incoming apprentices in his firm “Back in the day, the youth had more integrity. Now they just have a big mouth. [...] No balls [*kei Arsch in der Hose*], probably got pampered too much in their youth”. He approvingly recounted how these young workers were severely scolded by their superiors. “First thing was that they all got bawled out and put in their place [*zusammengestaucht und zusammengewurzt*]. Some

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<sup>139</sup> “Das Vermögen, das für die Besitzer von Kapital oder Besitz raus springt und die, die ihre Arbeitskraft dafür, sag ich mal, die sich dafür prostituieren [lacht], ... wenn beide Seiten ordentlich was davon haben, dann ist es gerecht. [...] Wenn der eine sagt, jetzt halt "Ja, zehn Porsche reichen mal. Ihr kriegt ne Gehaltserhöhung." und die anderen sagen "Ja, lass uns mal richtig ranklotzen, uns geht's ganz gut hier, im Vergleich zu woanders und ich bin froh, dass ich mein Haus abzahlen kann."

endure that, and then they become smart people.”<sup>140</sup> (Stefan, 00:10) He later used the same image of beneficial discipline at work when talking about youths loitering at the local bus station. “They’re playing loud gangster rap on their cell phones and try to be cool. Where I think, ‘for God’s sake, you go and earn your own money, then you’ll be put in your place [zusammengestaucht], and you’ll come back down to earth” (Stefan, 00:27)<sup>141</sup>. Sebastian thought that the general military draft should be reintroduced for young people “to get some discipline. [...] To give them some values. [...] It’s only getting worth with them, if you look at how cheeky they are! [I: Why do you think that is?] Because of their education probably. [...] They should be taught some order, to fold their clothes and clean the house and all.”<sup>142</sup>

### “The Impacts are Coming Closer” – Defensiveness and the Conservative Social Critique

In Sebastian and Stefan’s assessment of a loss of integrity among youths, which called for disciplining, we encounter a sense of decline that is common in this cluster and that contrasts with a generally contented perception of the status quo. Respondents see an erosion of standards in a whole range of fields. At times, this is equated with the intrusion of a threatening outside into what is presented as the socially integrated and intact sphere of one’s own or one’s region’s way of life. Asked whether he thought things were generally going up- or downhill, Stefan said,

Things are rather going downhill. But I’m not affected by that. The media wants you to believe the world will end tomorrow. [...] But I think, around here that’s not going to affect me for the time being. But the impacts are coming closer [*die Einschläge kommen näher*]. When you read that in Neustadt they beat up a 34-year-old, in

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<sup>140</sup> “Kei Arsch in der Hose [...] da sind vielleicht verhätschelt worden in ihrer Jugend, keine Ahnung. ... Oh Gott, so alt bin ich gar noch nicht, aber ich würd sagen, früher war des einfach anders. Da hat die Jugend noch Anstand gehabt, heutzutage sind die Jugendlichen irgendwie alle daneben. Das ist mir aufgefallen als ich auf [Firma] gearbeitet hab, so das, die waren rotzfrech, wo nachgekommen sind, die Stiften, sind im erschten Lehrjahr aber ... haben so die große Klappe. Da wurden se erschtmal zusammengestaucht und zusammengewurtzt. [...] Manche halten des aus und san dann gescheite Leute”

<sup>141</sup> “die wo da mitm Handy megalaut am Busbahnhof oben hocken und die irgendwelche krassen "Deuschrap oder (imitiert Stimme) Gangsterrap" hören und dann einfach cool sein wollen. Wo ich mir so denke, ‘Oh, um Gottes willen, komm du mal in mei Alter verdien mal euer Geld und dann dann werdeta zusammgestaucht’ dann kommta irgendwo in de Tatsachen zurück.”

<sup>142</sup> Also zum Beispiel die Wehrpflicht, das war okay, dass es des gegebte hat, also ich denk das könnt wieder na. [...] Dass man *Disziplin* und das alles kriegt. [...] Dass man halt a die Werte vermittelt. [...] Das wird ja immer schlimmer mit denen, die werden ja immer frecher. [I: Woran liegt das?] Ich denk an die Erziehung, von dene Kinder oder Jugendliche. [...] Dass man auch einfach n bissle.. die Ordnung. oder das vermittelt. Dass- dass- Wäsche zsammelege und so weiter. Einfach, putze und so weiter.”

Weilersdorf they stabbed three women. [...] Then you think, well, the impacts are really coming closer. But here in my little bubble in Freiberg I'm just very content [laughs]. I can't imagine anything happening here. [...] When I'm in a big city, then I'm afraid, I must say. There are just too many seedy figures around. Here you know everyone [both laugh] and the sidewalks are rolled up at night and then it's closing time and everyone's at home".<sup>143</sup> (00:31)

Stefan describes his village as a small idyll, but cites violent crime in the nearest towns as a sign that "the impacts" are coming closer. His choice of words here evocatively paints the picture of an menacing and uncontrollable outside danger drawing nearer to this otherwise protected and harmless world. Stefan's fear of the big city and its "seedy characters" echoes the accounts of other respondents describing the city as "dirty" (Sebastian, 7) with undertones of social decay.

From a different angle, Andre developed a critique of social change that highlights a different threat to the moral economy of the rural world. Throughout the interview, he returned to a lamentation of the decline of small crafts amidst an increasingly "fast pace of life [*Schnelllebigkeit*]" (Andre, 00:13). Butchers, bakers, and smallholders were being displaced by industrial agriculture and discount supermarkets "who open all year round, including on Christmas day, and I think that's not really necessary" (ibid., 00:13). New materials in construction allowed work to continue throughout the winter, leaving bricklayers out in the cold for hours in the cold. "This works for all, but not for human beings"<sup>144</sup> (ibid., 00:42). The quick innovation and obsolescence of industrial and agricultural machines, now getting replaced every other year, spelled doom to the craftsmen trained to repair and service them. Higher demands on qualification took away the time for play in childhood: "Back in the days, we would come home from school, eat, do a bit of homework, but then go outside to the pitch, or bike around. Nowadays kids are kept in. They have a whole different schedule, they're

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<sup>143</sup> "Es geht eher bergab, aber i merke nix davon. Wenns den Medien Glauben schenken darfst, dann geht ja morgen die Welt unter. [...] da denkst dir, also, das betrifft mich jetzt hier erschtmal nicht. [Aber] teilweise kommen die Anschläge dann doch näher. Wenn des jetzt halt liest, in Neustadt ham se einen 34 Jährigen verprügelt, in Weilersdorf haben se drei Frauen abgestochen. ...[...] Joah, da denkst dir, gut, die Anschläge kommen näher, aber, ich hier im meiner kleinen Blase in Freiberg bin eigentlich sehr zufrieden (lacht) Ich kann mir net vorstelle, dass hier was passiert. [...] Also wenn ich mal in ner großen Stadt bin, da hab ich Angst, muss ich sagen. Hier net. (lacht)) jetzt da irgendwo am Bahnhof stehst oder irgendwie so. Da sin mir zu viele Gestalten unterwegs, hier kennst die meisten (alle lachen), das ist positiv. [...] Hier werden abends dann schon die Bordsteine hochgeklappt (alle lachen). Da is dann jeder daheim, joah und hat Feierabend."

<sup>144</sup> "Des machen alle mit außer der Mensch."

confronted with much higher expectations. Because they simply need to know more, so they can study and earn proper money” (ibid., 00:42).<sup>145</sup>

Sebastian – as Andre earlier – noted that compared to “back in the day”, it was not possible anymore for a family to get by on the wages of a male breadwinner alone. Sebastian explained this trend saying “the main reason, that I always hear at the factory – I don’t know if they only say this to scare us – is that in other countries, in Turkey or China, they produce the same stuff for half the price. Because the minimum wage is lower than ours.” (Sebastian, 42).<sup>146</sup> Female labor market participation is here linked to a decline of buying power caused by international wage competition.

What these stories about social change as looming decline have in common is that they register an erosion of the protected spheres that form the basis of respondents’ self-understandings and moral horizon, both in the sense of protected and comparatively privileged employment conditions, and in the sense of the village and region as a protected sphere of social integration and trust. Crime, technological change, monopolization, the development of a low-wage service sector, occupational upgrading, and international competition are all described in terms of threats to the social landscape of the village, the future prospects of respectable careers in crafts, and implicitly the compact of “participation for performance”. While in the here and now, things are mostly perceived as fine, the comparison to “back in the days” occasions diagnoses of decline, and a sense of defensiveness centered on a rural world that respondents are eager to present as essentially intact to the interviewing visitor from the city.

### **6.3. Relation to Politics: “Germany Should Be An Honest Model”**

So far, we have assembled the picture of a lifestyle marked by the pursuit of stability,

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<sup>145</sup> “Wenn man sich vorstellt, dass mir früher hoim gekommen sind von der Schul, denn Mittag esse, hem Pause gemacht und sind Hausaufgabe mache gegange und danach noch kurz weiter gemacht [unverständlich] Hausaufgabe, sin ma auf de Sportplatz gegangen, habe Fahrrad gefahren oder sonst was. Heut kommen die Kinder heim, die müssen nachsitzen (unverständlich), die müssen, die hem e ganz anderer Stundenplan, die hem ne ganz andere Erwartung, die trimmt man gansch anders, woil die einfach mehr wisse müssen, dass se später studiere könne, um ordentliches Geld zu verdiene.”

<sup>146</sup> “Früher ist ja nur der... der- Also früher war nur mei Opa schaffe und mein Oma ist daheim halt Hausfrau. Mei Mutter ist so halbtags arbeite gange. Ja weil, entweder isch, also der Hauptgrund ist ja, das höre ich a immer bei uns im Geschäft, ja, weiß jetzt nicht ist vielleicht auch um uns Angscht zu mache, dass halt im Ausland, jetzt in de Türkei oder andere Standorte oder China oder was weiß ich wo, die produzieret halt das gleiche für die Hälfte. Weil einfach der Mindestlohn, ja, geringer ist, wie jetzt bei uns.”

respectability, and rural embeddedness; of a moral economy of meritocratic paternalism centered on a reciprocity of performance and rewards; and of a defensive view of social change that opposes the intact small world of rural life to threats that often arrive from the outside. In clustering respondents and statements into this picture, my analysis presents them as bearing family resemblances close enough to be described as a common pre-political habitus, here labeled as lifestyle conservatism.

In the next step, I now show that the logic by which respondents formulate *political* positionings draws on the structures of this pre-political habitus. Respondents' relations to politics mirror the paternalist form of patron and client (see also Vester 2017, 12), with workers accepting a passive client role in exchange for competent administration and the securing of growth on the part of politicians. At the same time, they articulate discontents that signal fissures in the legitimacy of this model. Workers criticize the increasing distance of politics to their concerns, and specifically a colonization of politics by corporate interests. Big industry is contrasted with the smaller and mid-sized companies of the regional economy, the big politics of "Berlin" to "the little guys" "fighting" in local and regional politics (Andre). Following the same distinction of the big and the small world that situated self-understandings and moral economy, migration is problematized as a disruption of social homogeneity and economic protection, though accepted under the aspect of humanitarianism and integration.

### **"Big Industry Is Taking Over the Power" – Paternalism and Its Discontents**

Especially in comparison to the much less contented and much angrier workers we will encounter in the next "Social Populist" cluster, the legitimacy of political representation, in the sense of a "belief in the existence of a legitimate order" (Weber 1978, 31) is relatively intact among Working Class Conservatives. Carpenter Christoph, for instance, who told me he voted for the center-right FDP, strongly rejected the anti-politician sentiments he encountered in "pub counter discussions" [*Stammtischgespräche*] in his village. He said, "I elect *deputies* of the people [*Volksvertreter*] who are specialists [*Fachpolitiker*] so that I don't have to think about all these things and take the responsibility. Because I wouldn't want to have to make those decisions" (Christoph, 3). We note the parallelism of Christopher's statement here with his defense of company bosses taking the responsibility for their employees. What Christoph envisions, in technical terms, is a trustee model of representation

(Pitkin 1967), in which politicians act as independent actors who make informed decisions based on expertise.

Similarly, Alex entrusted political matters to the village's center-right mayor whom he knew personally. He said, politics "is not for me. I'm not the one to speak in front of a mass of people. [...] If I want to change something, I have a good connection to our mayor. His parents' house is in my street, and I know him since I learnt how to walk. So with him I could talk about these things"<sup>147</sup> (Alex, 17). Alex approvingly told me that the mayor "is out in the village a lot. When there's celebrations, or Christmas concerts of the music association. [...] He does his welcoming speech, he talks to people. He's there, he's present, and he's working for the economy here in Altenbrück."<sup>148</sup> (ibid., 18). Alex credited the mayor with the fact that "here in the region things are going uphill. [...] We've been able to attract some new companies to the town, thanks to the mayor" (ibid.).<sup>149</sup>

Five respondents mentioned voting for a center-right party (CDU/CSU, FDP or the regional *Freie Wähler*).<sup>150</sup> Electrician Stefan explicitly linked his vote to the preservation of the protected sphere he had described before ("here in the village, I am not affected"). Asked who he usually voted for, he said,

Something conservative. So that things stay the way they are. I'd like to keep my status quo, because I'm content with how it is. [...] And no great changes, which would mean that in the end I *might* be affected after all [*dass es mich nicht dann doch irgendwann mal betrifft*]. [...] No changes please! [laughs] Because if things do change one day, and it affects me, I don't know what's going to happen to me.<sup>151</sup> (Stefan, 00:33)

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<sup>147</sup> "Es ist nicht meins. Und ich bin auch keiner, der vor großen Menschenmassen reden möchte, ganz einfach. Ich könnt's zwar, aber ich mogs einfach nicht. Und wenn ich jetzt da irgendwas ändern wollte- ich hab an ganz guten Draht zu unserm Bürgermeister, sag ich mal so, der hat bei mir in der Straß' sei Elternhaus und den kenn i ach scho, also seitdem ich laafe ka so ungefähr. Und mit dem könnte ich sowas mal ansprechen."

<sup>148</sup> „Der ist sehr viel im Ort unterwegs, also wenss Feiern, wenss Feste sind, Weihnachtsfeiern vom Musikverein zum Beispiel, irgendwelche Konzerte, ist er immer vertreten. Und wenn er am Toch drei Veranstaltungen hat, dann ist er auf drei Veranstaltungen. Halt immer a Stund annerthalb Stund, aber er war do. Er macht sei Grußwort, er spricht dann mit vielen noch a weng. Er ist da, er ist präsent, er bringt dem Markt von Altenbrück was."

<sup>149</sup> "Naja bei uns in der Region...gehts denk ich schon aufwärts, weil-. Zumindest in [Ort], also wir haben da jetzt wieder a paar neue Firmen ansiedeln können, dank dem Bürgermeister. Also der macht viel, sehr viel für die Wirtschaft in Altenbrück und da geht es scho aufwärts." (17)

<sup>150</sup> One expressed sympathies for the SPD, one didn't vote.

<sup>151</sup> "Eher was konservatives, damits so bleibt, wie es ist, ich hätt gern meinen status quo, weil ich damit zufrieden bin, so wie es ist. Und des wär ma recht, weil ich habs jetzt halt meine 31 Jahre so kennengelernt und bin zufrieden und komm damit zurecht, deswegen hätt ichs gern so wie es ist. Und keine großen Veränderung, dass nicht dann doch irgendwann mal das mich auch betrifft. Ich hätt's gern einfach kontinuierlich so weiter. Weil des

Politics, like social change in the wider world, are kept at arm's length, and the village is presented as a non-political space. Referring to laws relevant for his hunting association, Andre said, "you speak about politics when you get regulations, otherwise not." (Andre, 00:47). For him the distinction of the political left and right was overridden by the moral principle of performance, *Leistung*. When asked whether he would position himself on the left or right, he replied, "a middle way would be the best. If he achieves something [*wenn er was leistet*], he should have it. It would be unjust if he doesn't achieve anything [*wenn er nichts leistet*] that he should still have something." (00:48).<sup>152</sup>

Yet Andre also developed a trenchant critique of politics that illustrates discontents in the conservative model of political delegation. Picking up on his complaint about the creeping death of small crafts, Andre said, "we in Germany are still far ahead of other countries. But Germany is not an honest model country [*ehrliches Vorbild*]. [...] Today, it's not even possible anymore to train as a butcher. I think that's sad. Not sad, I think that's terrible actually"<sup>153</sup> (Andre, 00:54). This assessment was linked to a political critique, in which Andre complained about

"a split (*Spalt*) between the citizen and the government, between Berlin and the general citizen, that is too large. The closer contact is between the government and Daimler [Mercedes-Benz] and the big industrial firms, Thyssen or whatever, which sometimes are really taking over the power [*Macht ergreifen*]. There, the communication is relatively good, but with the little citizen [*kleinen Bürger*] it's not existent anymore. [...] Because they notice that Germany earns more with its industry. And grows faster. [...] Because the government stands behind the industry, much more than behind the farmers, for example. If Daimler is in trouble and their CEO knocks on the door of Angela Merkel, she will have an open ear for that. While if there's some

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bin ich gewohnt, dis mag ich, ich komm damit zurecht, ich hab mich dran gewöhnt. Bitte net ändern. [lacht] Ja. Das wär mir wichtig. Weil wenn sich doch irgendwann mal was ändert und mich betrifft, dann weiß ich nicht, was auf mich zukommt."

<sup>152</sup> „Genau in der Mitte, also so a mittlerer Weg wär am beschte, ja. Wenn er was leischtet soll ers au habe. Wär ja ungerecht, wenn er nichts leistet, dass er was hat.“

<sup>153</sup> "Mit Sicherheit sind wir immernoch mit Deutschland weit vorne dran wie über andere Länder, aber man kann net, man is net so ein ehrliches Vorbild als Deutschland. Man wär ehrliches Vorbild wenn ma sage würd "hör her, Landwirtschaft des funktioniert, da läuft, da kannschte di traue da was zu lernen, an Beruf, weil du mit dem dann später weiter kommscht". Heut muss man ja sagen, du kannst kein Metzger mehr mache, wenn du mit zwölfhundert Euro ausg'lernst und dann dann da kriegschte nichts na. Mietskoschte is zu hoch, egal was es für Koschte sind, sind alle zu hoch. Du kannschte de Beruf ni mehr lernen, dis find i schade eigentlich. ja. Net schade, sondern des find i scho schlimm, ja."

guy who comes and says, 'listen, we haven't had any rain in three months and we can't produce food because our cattle has no fudder', or whatever, then it would be an awful procedure [*Mordsprozedur*] until they provide some money. " (00:15)<sup>154</sup>

Andre – who himself worked in industry and said he had generally voted for the CDU – explains the neglect of small crafts by the political overweight of big industrial interests. Big companies had a much more direct channel of influence on the government politics in “Berlin”, than the neglected “little citizens” in the region. “On the local, the municipal, or the state level”, Andre said, “there are many who fight. But [...] they have a hard time getting to the top. Because up there it's a nepotistic society [*Vetterlewirtschaft*], where the places are reserved for the next generation, even if they don't even have the necessary competence” (Andre, 00:20).<sup>155</sup>

For the German context, Andre's perception of a hereditary structure of political inequality is striking.<sup>156</sup> But the overall disenchantment with the state of democratic representation articulated in this and similar statements echoes themes found by Weisskircher and Hutter (2019). Already in the 1970s, Kudera et al. (1979) had found among industrial workers a common critique of the state being overpowered by big business interests (see also Offe 1975), a theme that also animated the original rural populists of late 19<sup>th</sup> century USA (Jäger 2019). The privileged political access of industry interests compromises the state's function as an impartial mediator and administrator of the common good. Alex, while content with the work of his mayor, thought that “the politicians should not sit in the managing boards. They're

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<sup>154</sup> “I denk der der der der Spalt zwischen dem Bürger und der sag ich mal schon Regierung ist schon zwischen Berlin und dem Bürger allgemein, der is zu groß, ja. Der nähere Kontakt isch wie i vorhin gesoagt hab, zwischen der Regierung und dem Daimler und den große Induschriebetriebe, Thyssen oder sonstwas, wo mitunter schon a bissle machtergreifend sind, doa isch die Kommunikation relativ gut, aber zum kleinen Bürger isch sie ne mehr vorhanden, ja. [...] Weil da ich sage mal Stück weit Regierung schon mehr hiner steht wie zum Beispiel bei der Landwirtschaft. Ich denk, wens dem Daimler schlecht geht und da Vorstandsvorsitzende bei der Angela Merkel anklopft, dass der, dass die da viel besserers Ohr für hat als wenn jetzt einer kommt und sagt, ja, bei uns hats schon seit drei Monaten ni mehr geregnet, mir können koine Lebensmittel mehr erzeuge weil usner Vieh kein Futter hat, oder sonscht was, dann isch der eine Mordsprozedur, bis dort sag ich mal Gelder freigestellt würde. Da denk ich halt die Induschtrie, Autoinduschtrie, was weiß ich, scho mehrere Möglichkeite hat.”

<sup>155</sup> “Im örtliche Bereich, im kreisweite Bereich, im landesweite Bereich, da gibts scho viele, wo kämpfe, mit Sicherheit, aber [...] die hän e verdammt harter Weg bis sie mal obe ankomme, klar. Weil des da oben sag ich mal scho so, sag ich mal, Vetterlewirtschaft ist, wo wieder der Platz für den näschte schon freigehalten wird. Obwohl da die Fähigkeit gar net dazugehört, daran teilzunehmen. Aber der schon joahrelong Mitglied bei deren Verträge isch un Generation, sag ich mal Generations vorher scho drin war und so weiter und so fort, dann wird der halt dadurch auch, ja, da nei gehobe, ja, mehr oder weniger. Ja woa sich's erkämpfen muss, der kommt fascht gar nichts bis ganz nach oben, ja.”

<sup>156</sup> It is also interesting to note here how the social closure and nepotism criticized on the higher levels in a sense mirrors the social closure that defines the regional model of social integration, with comparatively privileged jobs and belonging via associational life and village status being passed on through the generations.

already earning enough! [laughs] I think these politicians on corporate boards think more about themselves, or about those companies, than about Germany” (Alex, 16).<sup>157</sup> Noticeably, the critique of a representation gap is directed at the national level (“Berlin”) just as the “huge companies” undermining employment standards were located in the big city (“Stuttgart”).

Both big business and big politics are described as breaking a moral economy that on the local level of is still seen as relatively intact. That this regionally embedded, meritocratic and paternalist moral economy of “participation for performance” forms the implicit counter-image of the workers’ critique, instead of, say, the aim of a larger share of profits won by labor, following a collective interest antagonistic to that of owners, is ideologically relevant and links the pre-political anchoring of the big world-small world divide with political positionings. The power of big business is seen as excessive against the ideal of small ownership, and a benevolent balancing of interests between employers and workers mediated by an impartial state. As such, the diagnosis of an imbalance does not necessarily lead to demands for increased redistribution. Jonas denied the need for a political approach to wages and benefits. “Higher wages? Good lord, maybe go to your boss first. Many people complain, but they never go to their boss to ask for a raise. And our social benefits here in Germany are pretty good, if you compare them to other countries” (Jonas, 00:44). And asked whether subsidies for farmers should be financed by increased taxes on big industry, Andre negated: “I think that there is a lot of money already, you see this from the kind of money we can give away to Greece or other countries. The money is there but [...] the little one [*der Kleine*], who is struggling and who actually needs it, there it never arrives” (Andre, 00:39).<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> „Was sich auf jeden Fall ändern müsste... [...] Dass verschiedene Politiker nicht in zig... Vorständen mit drinsitzen. Die kriegen so schon genug! [lacht] Und dass sich diese Politiker dann auf die Politik konzentrieren und nicht nebenher noch in fünf Vorständen sitzen und da eigentlich mehra mit ihrn Kopf sind wie bei der Politik. Das ist auch ein großer Punkt wo sich ändern müsste. [...] Ich glaub mal, dass diese Politiker in den Vorständen... mehr für sich arbeiten beziehungsweise für die Firma wo se mit drinsitzen, als für Deutschland. Obwohl se ja, wenn se schon in der Politik sind, und im Bundestag und was weiß ich wo, in was für Gremien, dass se im Sinn von unserm Land quasi denken sollen und auch so in diesen Vorständen sprechen sollen.“

<sup>158</sup> “...ich glaub schon, dass relativ viel Geld, Gelder da sind, moan siehts ja, was mir hergebe können an Gelder, egal ob das Griechenland ist oder in was für Länder, ist ja ganz egal, aber die Gelder sind schon da, nur die kommen net dahin wo sie sollten. Und das sind die Entscheidungsträger, wo wieder obe (unverständlich) sagen wir mal vom Name her mitmische und der Kleine, wo es eigentlich braucht und wo der dafür kämpft, der, da kommts gar net an.”

## “It Will Take Time to Get Used to Them” – Immigration As Normality and Disruption

A similar ambivalence of rural working class conservatism is encountered in matters of migration. Andre brought up “the refugee topic”, one of the two main challenges the country currently faced (the first one being the low pay of service workers and nurses). He explained that especially people with children were understandably worried, because the refugee influx meant that there would not be enough traineeships to guarantee the kids safe employment.<sup>159</sup> The problem in his eyes was “that we are way too small [*zu klein*] for all the people we take in” (ibid., 00:33). Refugees “don’t flee out of boredom, it must be horrible there. [...] If there wasn’t war and famine, they would just stay down there. They come because the governments down there are fucking it up [*es verkacke*]” (ibid., 00:35). Still, their arrival threatened to “ruin the prices”, i.e. wages.

“For the boss it’s a simple calculation: He doesn’t have to pay the training of the worker. [...] [And] if someone from Bosnia who comes for a year and a half works for 14 Euros an hour, he’ll do it alright. And if then someone here, from our region, who has learnt it properly, and wants 19 Euros, well, then it’s clear that the boss says: ‘I’ll rather take the one for 14 Euros.’ Because then he has taken off those 5 Euros, or rather, added it to profits.”<sup>160</sup> (ibid., 00:33)

The solution for this would be “regulations and wage standards [*Regulierungen und Tarife*]” (ibid.), Andre said. And Jonas thought it was important to separate between “those who really need help, [...] and economic refugees [*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*] who just think ‘alright, I’ll jump on that wave’, even though they aren’t doing so badly” (Jonas, 00:46). Although all respondents reject the AfD, which is described as “too right-wing, almost NSDAP-like” (Alex, 7) or “extremist” (Oliver, 01:20), many understand that there is a resistance against the influx of migrants, especially in places housing large reception facilities. Refugees are not only seen

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<sup>159</sup> „Und wenn du da Kinder hascht dann änderts sich au nochmal, ob deine Kinder überhaupt ne Ausbildungsstell kriegen, ob ob oder ob die Ausbildungsstelle da dort weniger werden und ja. I mein mit Sicherheit wird da der eine oder andere schon e Ausbildungsstelle kriege aber vielleicht net die, wo er sich gar vorstelle. Oaber so isch halt. Ja.”

<sup>160</sup> “Der Chef, für den Chef isch ne einfache Rechnung. Die Ausbildung braucht er net bezahle für den Facharbeiter und seine, letzschendlich, klar isch des net die gleich Arbeit, wo der verrichtet, aber der bringts auch hin. Bin i überzeugt. Ja. Sei's für Fliesenlegen in a Wohnhaus. Schafft einer mit 14 Euro die Stunde Lohn, wo aus Bosnien kommt für anderthalb Jahr, der bringt des auch hin und wenn dann so einer kommt bei uns in der Region und der will 19 Euro oder so, nja, dann is schon klar, dass der Chef sagt, "dann nehmen wir lieber den mit 14 Euro", weil dann hat er halt die 5 Euro natürlich weggespart. Beziehungsweise gewinnorientiert.”

as a threat to wage standards, but also as a disruption of the cultural homogeneity of the region, and perpetrators of crime. Again using as a setting the village associations, which more and more “refugees” are joining, Andre portrayed their arrival as a “shock”, that takes time to adapt to.

You can't- you don't want to, how shall I say,... stop them from joining the associations. But yes, I would say, everyone is a little bit... shocked. You have to put up with that [*sich damit abfinden*]. [...] Also in the schools, the color palette [*des Farbespiel*] has changed. There are not anymore only the blonde or the light-skinned Germans, but also others. I think it's simply going to take a certain time to get accustomed to that [*sich daran gewöhnen*].<sup>161</sup> (Andre, 00:35)

The quote illustrates the ambivalent positionings on migration issues of workers in this cluster. Migration is problematized as a disruption of the economically protected and culturally integrated local world. This disruption needs to be regulated, by limiting the speed and volume of arrivals to the cultural capacity for integration on the local level, and by regulations ensuring the protection of economic standards. Yet, Andre also addresses the integration of newcomers as a matter of time and habituation. As mentioned, the conservative strongholds especially in the rural Southwest have large shares of migrant populations, a long history of immigration already before recent refugee arrivals, and many immigrant groups (like Croats and Turks, or earlier Italians) that are well-integrated and considered “from here” for all practical purposes. This became clear in Sebastian's account of his childhood friend and best man at his wedding being of migrant origin, and a point in a group discussion of young workers from one of the villages,<sup>162</sup> where multiple individuals discussed the migration backgrounds of their families, including the informal ‘spokesman’ of the group, a young man who spoke most frequently and in the name of the group. Although ethnic and racial boundaries certainly do play a role (as palpable in Andre's consternation at the changing “colour palette”), and

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<sup>161</sup> “Und auch die Vereine kriegen zulaufend Flüchtlinge. Sei es Fußballverein, sei es de Feuerwehr oder so und man könnt se ja net ab-, man will se ja net, wie soll ich sagen, abbringen davon, zum in den Vereineneintritte, aber sag i mal so, jeder is scho a bissle ... erschrocke! Das muss jetzt erschtmal muss man sich damit abfinden, so ja. Hier da in der Schule und so weiter und des is relativ sag ich mal, des Farbespiel hat sich schon geändert, dass da net nur mehr die blonde Deutsche oder die hellen Deutschen sind, sondern dass da auch andere gibt, ja. Aber des denk des isch halt ne zeitlang, wo man sich da dran gewöhnen muss, ja.”

<sup>162</sup> As mentioned in a footnote above, the group discussion was not mentioned here earlier, because the sound quality of the recording was unfortunately too poor to be systematically interpreted. But much of what was said in this chapter draws on impressions, observations, and field notes from the discussion.

immigrant culture is much less visible on the group level in the countryside than in the bigger cities, cultural homogeneity is mainly pegged to behavioral assimilation.

As Alex put it, taking refuge was “justified in 95% of the cases. [...] [But] I hope that the asylum seekers who are acting up [*sich aufführen*] are... well deported is maybe too strong, but that they are told, ‘listen, it doesn’t work this way. If you want to build something here with us, you have to behave accordingly’. And those who want to work should be allowed to earn their own living.” (Alex, 6)<sup>163</sup> Upholding a sense of normality based on relative economic stability and an intact moral order is the central concern of workers in this cluster, and migration is explicitly cited as a threat to both. Yet a relative extensive sense of economic leeway and trust in the integrative capacity of the region made it seem thinkable for the respondents that migrants could be successfully absorbed into the existing lifestyle. Many shared success stories about individual refugees motivated to work or learn German. Oliver, who thought that economic refugees should be sent back, said with a view to Syrian war refugees, “we can afford humanitarian aid, we’re doing fine. We don’t need to count every penny” (Oliver, 01:24).<sup>164</sup> And Christoph, continuing his vindication of expert politicians, said in response to a critique of the AfD he cited, “they say that the refugees got all the money which instead could have gone into the pension fund. But if the politicians calculated this and they found that actually we can spend that money on the refugees, then I believe that” (Christoph, 3).

#### 6.4. Summary

This section explored the sociomoral worlds inhabited by a cluster of male rural workers. It drew out connections between a pre-political commitment to local embeddedness, respectability, work-centered meritocracy, and a conservative paternalistic relation to politics. Working Class Conservatives understand themselves as “normal people” of the respectable middle. Their conduct of life is marked by a lifestyle conservatism expressed through work discipline, the prudent use of money, a relatively traditional family model, and the ideal of house ownership. This lifestyle is embedded in a moral economy of “participation for

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<sup>163</sup> „Die Flucht ist zu 95% gerechtfertigt, [...] [aber] ich hoffe, dass die Asylbewerber, die sich aufführen, ja... abgeschoben ist vielleicht gleich a weng krass, aber dass die auf jeden Fall zur Rechenschaft gezogen werden und gsagt wird ‚pass auf so geht’s nicht. Wenn du bei uns was aufbauen willst, dann verhalte dich auch entsprechend‘. Genau, dass die die wirklich was arbeiten wollen und arbeiten können auch arbeiten dürfen und quasi ihren eigenen Lebensunterhalt verdienen dürfen und können.“

<sup>164</sup> “Ich denke, uns geht's gut genug, dass wir humanitäre Hilfe und dergleichen stemmen können. Uns geht's da echt noch gut genug. Wir müssen da nicht schauen, wo unser Geld bleibt.”

performance” that has been typical for the German corporatist model and here is still largely intact. In this moral economy, employers and employees have a set of complementary though unequal obligations, which for the workers holds the promise of status attainment through hard work.

In the specific rural settings captured here, Working Class Conservatives also define their position via the embeddedness into local communities and the social capital these communities offer. The opposition of a ‘small’ and ‘big world’ is a recurring structural feature of these narratives. It is used to compare the ‘little stronghold’ of local industries with protected employment relations and responsible, socially embedded owners to “huge corporations” and investors. But it also reappears in the idea of a protected local sphere of safety and trust that is endangered by the “impacts” of crime and immigration (“we’re too small for the people we take in”, Andre 00:33), threats already associated with the “dirty” cities. Within the rural moral economy, migrants appear as an intrusion of the big world, part of an overall infringement on a local sphere of social and economic integration that is seen to be working but under threat. Yet, respondents articulate an ambivalent sense of migration skepticism, accepting immigration as such, but demanding limits based on the capacity for integration of the economy and the social life of the region, as well as assimilation and rule-following from newcomers.

Further, the small world-big world distinction reappears in the powerless “little citizen” in the “little region” which the “decision-makers” “above”, in “Berlin”, lost touch with. Workers express a great distance to politics, which is delegated to specialists and plays little role in everyday life. This pattern of political paternalism resonates with the meritocratic paternalism cultivated in workplace relations. Conservative *ideology* is attenuated, neither linked to primordialist ‘blood and soil’ discourses, nor anymore to the religious institutions it historically derived from. Decisive for the workers’ conservatism is a lifestyle of respectability and local embeddedness that is pegged to a corporatist moral economy.

Although largely intact and politically associated with the center-right, there are rifts in this legitimacy constellation. One sign of this is the critique of the self-interestedness of politicians and the excessive power of big industrial interests. Against these, Working Class Conservatives identify with small and mid-sized owners that understood as part of the same moral world as that of the workers. In the terms of the MCA results, we here remember the

overlap in the positionings of skilled workers, especially middle class identifiers and rural dwellers, with small business owners in what we called the 'petty bourgeois cluster'. This cluster reconstructs one form of how this connection plays out in social reality. In terms of direct sociability, but also in the centeredness on (house) ownership, and paternalistic status quo orientations (including hesitant stances on redistribution), these workers are close to, or part of the petty bourgeoisie. The observations also suggests another mechanism for the link between smaller firm sizes and conservative voting among workers found by Rennwald and Arndt (2017). The authors show this link to be mediated by the lower unionization rates of smaller firms. With the pattern reconstructed here, we can also suspect that smaller shops aid the development of paternalistic identifications with small businesses and their owners.

In terms of new cleavage identities, we see clear openings for particularist identifications in the defensive economic and social protectionism of the workers; in their strong insistence on the localist small world-big world divide; and in a moral economy of meritocracy and deservingness tied to work, which legitimizes the disciplining of alleged free riders. But the picture is not entirely clear-cut. The same moral economy that legitimizes migration skepticism also foresees the possibility of newcomers to prove themselves worthy through acculturation and work. And workers drew strong boundaries about the AfD whose "extreme" appeals ran counter to their legitimist status quo orientations. As Fitzgerald (2018) shows, the link between local ties and the radical right are strong but not unequivocal. Feelings of rural local attachment and local cohesion are strong predictors of voting for the radical right, but local *associational* involvement, highlighted by respondents here, actually lowers the likelihood of supporting the radical right. In the pattern examined here, it is particularly the mental figure of a small world *in opposition to* a larger world outside that anchors particularist identification. If activated, e.g. in conflicts over socioecological transformation, would seem to provide an opening for mobilization especially by a more normalized and respectable radical right.

It can be speculated that much hinges on the continued legitimacy of the paternalist model of conservative representation, which here is shown to be intact but hollowed out. If especially the CDU loses its legitimacy over workers like the ones interviewed here, they would seem likely candidates for future AfD supporters. In the current mixture of contentment and defensiveness, the promise of "participation for performance" ties the workers' self-understandings to status quo commitments. But a crisis in the economic arrangements

underpinning this moral economy could also turn the opposition between small and “honest” firms versus big business, the perception of one’s own social location as ‘little guys’, or workers’ “closing of the ranks” against investors into a source of identification along a gradient of economic power. As noted above, a similar pattern was historically seen among the US Populists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or other currents of conservative socialism. Yet, observations of the social bases of the more recent Tea Party mobilization in the US (Kumkar 2018) suggest that petty bourgeois identifications with the moral economy of meritocracy run *especially* high in moments of capitalist crisis which reveal the objective structural limitations of self-reliance; while others show that the beliefs in meritocracy increases with rising inequality (Mijs 2019).

## 7. Deservingness: Social Populists

I continue with a cluster that represents a working class milieu which recently has received a lot of the attention in sociology and public discourse. This is a cluster of workers who, already before deeper analysis, I grouped together by the fact that the tone in which they articulated their views of self, society, and politics was angry and indignant. Highlighting the strong sense of injustice and a pervasive discontent with politicians and parties, and taking inspiration from Goes (2015), I call this the *Social Populist* type.<sup>165</sup> This cluster is formed by interviews with eight respondents, all but one of whom are male, six craftsmen of different qualification levels,<sup>166</sup> five of them working in trades related to construction; two routine industrial assembly workers.

At the core of these workers’ self-presentations is the attempt to prove their deservingness in response to a feeling of social devaluation as “poor” or “little people” in general, and manual workers in particular. Drawing on the evocative term used in Rehbein et al.’s classification (Rehbein et al. 2015, 43ff.), these respondents can be described as *fighters*, both in terms of their limited means and sense of status and security, and in terms of their narratives of resilience in a world replete with hardships and difficulties. This corresponds with a sense of social location closer to the bottom of the social hierarchy. At the core of this sense of position

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<sup>165</sup> Parts of this section were developed in collaboration with Linda Beck (forthcoming as Westheuser and Beck forthcoming), and I also thank her for letting me draw on interviews she conducted in this context.

<sup>166</sup> Non-supervisory workers with occupational training, apart from one foreman and two workers without training.

was the dichotomy of above and below, a dichotomy that is often elaborated with a moral sense of indignation and bitterness.

Social populist respondents feel wronged by politicians who are cited interchangeably with bosses and owners as embodiments of “those above”. A moral economy of *deservingness* is central to these workers’ accounts. Workers dramatize the insufficiency of their own resources and status by comparing them to the unjustified gains of outgroups like migrants and benefits recipients. Under conditions of competition, deservingness discourses amount to claims to one’s rightful piece of what is felt to be an inherently limited or shrinking cake. As will be shown, this moral economy is inseparable from the respondents’ sense of a threatened and devalued social location. In a form of producers’ pride, their own “working and slaving” in physically demanding manual work is seen both as a mark of devaluation (*vis-à-vis* office work) *and* as justifying a heightened sense of moral entitlement (*vis-à-vis* non-producers and non-contributors).

A respondent whose account was paradigmatic for this cluster was Lisa, a young woman employed by a temp agency in a huge car factory close to a big city in the West of Germany. I interviewed Lisa at a McDonalds next to the factory, which spanned multiple thousand square meters.<sup>167</sup> Trucks thundered down a six-lane street towards the highway outside the window, and Lisa arrived from her early shift in her work clothes with a tired and somewhat wary expression. She had been up since 3 am and was not really in the mood for talking. “You’re constantly under pressure”, she said about her work, “because no one wants to be kicked out. [...] You need to be good at your task after a short while. If not, you’re gone very very quickly.” (Lisa, 00:16). Amidst mounting rents in the city, Lisa was currently without a flat of her own and living temporarily at a friend’s and her partner’s places. Lisa hinted at a recent spell of mental health troubles, which statistics show to be disproportionately and increasingly prevalent among low-income workers (Lorant et al. 2003; Siegrist 2013). “I have seen too much in my short time”, she said (Lisa, 00:01).

Yet she also described herself as “not the moaning type” and emphasized her ability for hard work: “I’m not shy to pick up a hammer or an axe. And I don’t need to be all dolled up when I go to the factory. It’s not a catwalk, I go there to do my work. I guess this makes me an unusual

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<sup>167</sup>Not without pride Lisa tells me to look the factory up on Google Maps: “it’s *mega*” (Lisa, 00:04).

woman” (Lisa, Memo I). Lisa’s self-description stressed resilience in the face of hardship. “I made it my motto to smile even if I’m feeling bad. After all, it’s not the other people’s fault that I’m miserable. But many take it out on us. On us little people [*kleine Leute*]. Like Merkel and whatever they’re all called” (Lisa, 00:25).<sup>168</sup> As in this quote, Lisa often connected her personal struggles to a larger sense of injustice, which identified politicians and other “higher people” (see below) as culprits. Despite her tiredness, she became increasingly animated when elaborating this social and political critique. In a longer segment that introduces central themes of this cluster, Lisa said:

Seriously, if I would earn... around 10,000 Euros a month, I would give a part of it to others. [...] And the others should do the same. [...] I mean, the higher people, who go home with... 50,000 a month, they still say that they are struggling. Where I always think: ‘Just try living *one* month like we do. Then you know who’s really struggling!’ I know what I’m talking about. I used to have 600 Euros a month, of which I paid my rent, the bills, my phone... right? That doesn’t leave much to live. [...] But I got through. You can get through *everything*, if you really want. [...]

I: When you say, ‘they should try living like we do’, who do you mean by ‘we’?

L: The poorer people [*die ärmlichen Leute*]. Who... really don’t have much to live. Okay, everyone chooses their own life, sure. But some people really have the rug pulled from underneath their feet and don’t even get support. Our pensioners, for example... I think this is *unjust*. The money they earn is... nothing. Sorry for being so frank, but an asylum seeker [*Asylant*] gets more than that. Though he isn’t doing *anything*. Hasn’t even worked here for a year. This I find very unjust. I really pity the pensioners.

I: And why do you think that is?

L: Because they are not planning right. They could do more for our pensioners. Or our homeless people. Build better houses or something like that. Instead they rather give... *smartphones* and God knows what to people who have been here only a quarter of a year. Because apparently they’re *struggling* so much. Actually many of them are not struggling at all. They’re getting everything [*die kriegen ja alles*]. But still they steal

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<sup>168</sup> “Ich habs mir zur Devise gemacht, ick lächel trotzdem egal wie schlecht mir geht. Weil was können die andern dafür wenns mir schlecht geht. Bloß viele lassens leider an uns aus, an uns kleinen Leuten sagen wa’s ma so... Sieht man an der Merkel und wie auch immer se alle heißen.”

here, steal there, bump off a guy here- Not all of them, good heavens! I don't want to put them all in the same box. There are asylum seekers who really hang in there [*die wollen wirklich*], who learn German, who work and slave [*machen und tun*]. But there are also idiots. But German ones as well. It's... fifty-fifty. But I really really pity all these pensioners. Who toiled for years, worked and slaved [*gemacht und getan*], helped build the wall, took it down again and so on and so forth. And then they get 600 Euros. I find that *sad*. When they start collecting deposit bottles, that *hurts*. [...] And now my mum is also starting to do that" (ibid., 00:33, orig. emphases).<sup>169</sup>

Lisa's account links the proud presentation as a fighter who "got through", a self-location among the "the poorer people", and a strong sense of injustice about the hardship of those who, in spite of their "working and slaving", lack adequate support. This injustice is presented by comparisons to undeserved privileges, firstly of the "higher ones" who are said to be complaining despite achieving exorbitant incomes; and secondly of asylum seekers who "get everything" although they "haven't even worked here for a year". The agents responsible for this maldistribution are "se", "them", later personified by Angela Merkel and "those people in the chancellor's office" (see below).

Lisa – who herself has what in German officialese is called a 'migration background'<sup>170</sup> – distinguishes between good migrants who "hang in there" and "idiots" associated with

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<sup>169</sup> "Also ganz ehrlich würde ich... Pi mal Daumen 10.000 Euro im Monat verdienen, würd ich was abgeben. An Kinder zum Beispiel, die Krebs oder Erkrankungen oder so... würde ich sogar was abgeben. Und das könnten manch andere eigentlich auch machen. [...] Das sind ja eher die etwas höheren Leute, die mit... 50.000 im Monat na' hause gehen und sagen denen jehts immer noch schlecht. Wo ick mir dann auch denk: Lebe ma einen Monat oder drei vier Monate so wie wir... dann weeßte wem's schlecht geht. Weil ich kenns auch anders, ich hab im Monat 600 Euro gehabt, davon hab ich aber noch Miete bezahlt, Nebenkosten bezahlt, meine Handyrechnung... ja. Zum Leben war nicht viel.[...] Und ick habs hinbekommen. Man kriegt *alles* hin, wenn man will. [...] [I: Wenn du sagst 'die sollen mal leben wie wir', wen meinst du dann mit *wir*?] L: Die... ärmlichen Leute. Die... wirklich... nicht viel zum Leben haben... Okay, jeder sucht sich sein Leben selber aus, ganz klar. Aber manche, die werden so aus dem Leben gerissen und kriegen noch nicht mal Unterstützung dafür. Unsere Rentner zum Beispiel... find ich *ungerecht*. Was die an Geld verd- kriegen, dis ist... nichts. Da kriegt n – 'schuldigung wenn ich ick dit jetzt sag – n Asylant mehr. Und der macht *gar* nichts. Der war noch nich mal n Jahr hier arbeiten. Und dis find ick *sehr* ungerecht. Also mir tun unsere Rentner leid, hier in Deutschland. [I: Und was meinst du woran das liegt?] L: Weilse falsch alle planen. Die könnten mehr für unsere Rentner machen, oder für unsere Obdachlosen. Paar bessere Häuser bauen oder irgendwas anderet. Ne, da geben se lieber den Leuten... n *Smartphone* und weiß Gott was, die grad ma n Vierteljahr hier sind. Und denen *geht* es so schlecht. Obwohls denen nicht wirklich schlecht geht. Die kriegen ja allet. Aber klauen hier, klauen da, murksen hier ein ab– nicht *alle*. Um Jottes Willen, ick will nicht alle übern Kamm scheren. Es gibts auch Asylanten, die wollen wirklich, die lernen Deutsch, machen und tun, gar keine Frage. Aber es gibts halt och Idioten. Aber gibts Deutsche genauso. Also... Fifty-fifty. Bloß, mir tun halt diese ganzen Rentner extrem doll leid. Die jahrelang arbeiten, haben gemacht, getan, Mauer mit aufgebaut, abgebaut und und und. Und dafür kriegense bloß 600 nochwas, find ich traurig. Dass se dann Flaschen sammeln... tut *weh*. [...] und meine Mutter fängt auch damit an." (00:33)

<sup>170</sup> „Ick bin ja selber nicht komplett deutsch“ (Lisa, 01:01)

stealing and violent crime. Interestingly, she immediately hedges, saying that there are “German idiots as well. It’s fifty-fifty”. Still, the focus of her account consists in the comparison between asylum seekers who do not work but still receive enough money to buy expensive smartphones; and native pensioners, like Lisa’s mother, who have worked hard all their lives, but are now forced to collect bottles on the street, for the few cents of deposit to supplement their slim pensions. Lisa uses the same – hard to translate – term to establish the worthiness of pensioners and good migrants, their *machen und tun*, i.e. incessant and arduous labor, a term that reappears in multiple accounts and which I here translate as “working and slaving”.

### **7.1. Sense of Social Location: “On the Bottom of the Chain”**

#### **“The Higher Ones Take It Out on the Lower End” – Dichotomized Consciousness**

With these elements, Lisa’s segment already brings together many elements of the wider constellation of social identity, morality, and political habitus typical for this cluster. The most crucial ordering principle of the Social Populists’ social sense is the dichotomy of above and below, with oneself on the lower (though not lowest) end. As in Lisa’s opposition of the “poorer people” and the “higher ones”, the sense of being closer to the bottom of the social hierarchy is articulated with a sense of indignation and critique. “The higher people take it out on the lower end”, Lisa said, “they earn a ton of money, go home with a pension that every normal person only dreams of. [...] I really can’t get this into my head. When I think of my pension – I won’t even have one. I will go to work until the end of my life.” (Lisa, 378).<sup>171</sup>

This dichotomized consciousness has long been noted in studies of workers’ consciousness (Heil and Kuhlmann 2016; Kudera et al. 1979; Popitz et al. 2018; Vester, Teiwes-Kügler, and Lange-Vester 2007; Dörre 2020). In recent times, this dichotomy was said to have shifted from being linked to workplace hierarchies to a more general societal opposition of the very rich and the lower or normal people (Dörre, Happ, and Matuschek 2013, Kap. 1, 7). In my material, both forms were prevalent, as respondents often drew also on workplace hierarchies, and their own subordinate position in them, to describe their sense social location. Indeed, it is

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<sup>171</sup> “Die höheren Leute, die lassens am unteren Ende raus. Verdienen sagen wa ma Unmengen an Jeld, gehen mit einer Rente na’house davon träumt jeder normale Mensch. Und die Rentner kriegen gar nichts. Und dis is dis was ich absolut gar nicht verstehe. Dis geht nich rein in mein Kopf. Wenn ick dann so an meine Rente später denke- ick werd keine mehr haben. Ich werd bis zu mein Lebensende denk ich ma arbeiten gehen.”

mainly in the light of hierarchies and recognition that positionings on the bottom in this cluster became plausible, as many worked in jobs that, for their segment, were relatively well-paid.<sup>172</sup> As concrete worker Steffen put it, “the management [die *Führung*] makes decisions without even asking us, [...] the lowest ones, the endmost [*das Letzte*], right? We are the foot soldiers, all the way down on the bottom of the chain. But without us nothing would work. That’s how it is” (Steffen, 28).<sup>173</sup> And landscape worker Lukas, who described himself as “someone who executes orders” [*ausführende Kraft*], explained his position in society saying, “I’m in the very lowest stratum [*ganz unterste Schicht*] right now. I know what I do and I do it pretty well. But in the end it’s a service and I can be replaced by others who have learnt it. [...] I’m a small fish [*ein kleines Licht*]. I don’t make the decision of whether something is built, [...] that is always decided by others.” (Lukas, 70).<sup>174</sup>

In direct contrast to Andre’s insistence above, that he as an “normal worker” did “not belong to the little but to the normal people”, in this cluster identifications as workers are primarily associated with a sense of devaluation. Being a worker here is *not* understood as a normal position, but as a fate borne with gritted teeth for a lack of alternatives, and linked to the social devaluation of low income, control, and status, as well as a sense of replaceability (see also Kern and Schumann 1970). Though respondents articulate individual strategies for their advancement, being a worker is not linked to hopes for collective upward mobility as it had been regularly observed in studies until the 1970s (e.g. Popitz 1958, see Dörre 2020).

Dustin, an eloquent construction foreman, elaborated this class sociology as follows:

Working class [*Arbeiterklasse*] [...] are all those who work their asses off for a meagre [*mickrig*] life. [...] You work and slave [*machst und tust*], right? In my eyes it’s like a colony of ants – work work work – that’s the working class. [...] And then there’s the upper class. There’s also a middle class, those are the ones with passable incomes. Who go like, ‘I’m taking a week of vacation’, because they are the firm bosses. Not all

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<sup>172</sup> Dustin, for instance, who is extensively cited below, was a construction foreman, a job whose average earnings of around 60,000€ pre-tax are well above the average income.

<sup>173</sup> “[Wir sind] die untersten, ja wir sind ja halt das Letzte, ne? Wir sind ja das Fußvolk, ganz unten an der Kette, aber ohne uns würde es ja wiederum nicht gehen. Ist ja nun mal so”.

<sup>174</sup> “Ja, jetzt bin ich ja grade ganz *unterste Schicht* sag ich mal. Also ich weiß zwar, was ich mache und das kann ich ganz gut. Aber es ist halt ne Dienstleistung und es ist halt auch ersetzbar durch andere, die es gelernt haben. [...] [Ich bin] irgendwo n kleines Licht. Also ich hab jetzt nicht die Entscheidung *ob* das jetzt gebaut wird, [...] letztendlich entscheiden dann auch immer andere Leute und ja. Deswegen bin ich Dienstleister.”

firm bosses are super rich, but if they say, 'Listen, I will take a week of holidays and fly to the Maledives', then they just fly there. [...] I think if you could choose, you would also rather be on the Maledives now, get served by some Juan, and enjoy your life than sit here and talk to me, wouldn't you? [...] And then there's the upper class. Who just sit in a highriser, let's say in Frankfurt, and put a rubber stamp on something once in a while. And the money rolls in by itself, they don't even have to do anything. (Dustin, 00:45)<sup>175</sup>

Uniting comparisons of income, autonomy, and leisure, Dustin compares the heteronomous, straining, and work-centered life of the working class to two other classes: a middle class associated with (small) firm owners, who work but whose higher salaries give them more individual room for maneuver in terms of consumption, including of the labor of others ("get served by some Juan"); as well as to an upper class of bankers and CEOs who "do not even have to work at all". In a striking set of metaphors for vertical hierarchy, the small, low, anonymous, and hectic worker "ants" are compared to higher classes that are placed in higher, quieter, and more individualized spaces, the highriser and the plane to the Maledives (see Graham 2016, Savage 2021, 56f.).

Where in the previous cluster we noted how various social hierarchies were interpreted using the – equally dichotomized – localist distinction between the big and the small world, here the categorical deep structure that organizes the respondents' sense of social location is the opposition of above and below. As we saw, the sense of social location of the rural workers also contained a sense of being lower and hierarchically "smaller" than others "above". But in Fourcade's (2016) terms, the mode of social categorization of Working Class Conservatives overall came closer to a *nominal* logic of comparison, oriented to essences, while the one here is an *ordinal* one, oriented to relative positions. The Working Class Conservative's big-small

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<sup>175</sup> "Arbeiterklasse sind alle die arbeiten. Die, die sich den Arsch aufreißen für, für so ein mickriges Leben, doof gesagt, ja? [...] Also du arbeitest, du machst und tust. Ja? Das ist sozusagen, in meinen Augen ist das wie so ein Ameisenvolk, machen, machen, machen, machen, das ist für mich die Arbeiterklasse, für geringes, oder für ein, ja Normalleben. Und dann gibt es halt sozusagen diese Oberklasse. Es gibt noch eine Mittelklasse, das sind sozusagen diese, die einigermaßen verdienen, ja? Die so sagen: "Ich nehme jetzt eine Woche Urlaub", weil es Firmenchefs sind, und dann sind sie weg. Nicht jeder Firmenchef ist stinkreich, aber wenn er sagt: "Pass auf, ich nehme jetzt eine Woche Urlaub, ich flieg zu den Malediven." Dann fliegt der da halt hin. [...] Ich glaube auch, du würdest anstatt dich mit mir zu unterhalten, würdest du jetzt lieber auf den Malediven sitzen, dich von Juan bedienen lassen und würdest dein Leben genießen, oder? [...] Und dann gibt es die Oberklasse. Die einfach irgendwo, ich sage mal jetzt Frankfurt, oben in so einem Tower drin sitzen, und vielleicht mal einen Stempel irgendwo drauf drücken und das Geld läuft von ganz alleine, die braucht nichts mehr machen." (Dustin, 00:43)

distinction was tied into a spatial imaginary and moral economy that revaluated the small as the familiar and respectable, imagined to exist at least somewhat separate from the big world. The dichotomy of above and below, placing the workers in an inferior position in hierarchies of income, power, and status, does not afford such a revaluation. This leads to a fatalism present in many of these workers' accounts, in which the desirability of higher incomes and status is as self-evident as it is unattainable – “If you could choose, you would also rather be on the Maledives now”.<sup>176</sup>

### **“Definitely Not Lower Class” – Downward Demarcations**

Although – or rather because – Social Populists see themselves as closer to the bottom of society, they stress that they are not the lowest of all. Dichotomized consciousness implies the possibility of extending the hierarchy further also in a downward direction. This is what Klaus Dörre calls “dichotomy plus” (Dörre 2020): above, below – and even further down. Between the fighters, who encounter life as an incessant struggle for respectability and a secure livelihood, and the even lower region of the social space inhabited by the marginalized (e.g. the homeless, unemployed, and poor) lies the “threshold of respectability” (Rehbein et al. 2015, 43ff.). This threshold, and one's location above it, is a central preoccupation of respondents in the Social Populist cluster.

A common point of comparison below this threshold were recipients of the social security benefits *Hartz IV*. Hartz IV, the social assistance scheme introduced in the reforms of the early 2000s, often functions as a shorthand for the stigmatized side of the the German status order (Dörre 2014). “I'm definitely not lower class”, said Eric, an electrician from Eastern Germany, “lower class would be Hartz IV for me, and all that. Having a nice life at the cost of the state. And the upper class is all these suit people who can just casually buy themselves a nice, fat,

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<sup>176</sup> On the degree of generalization of the status order – between many localized sources of status with equivalent claims to validity on the one hand, and a single status hierarchy binding for all on the other – and the consequences for political identification see Zollinger (forthcoming). In certain instances, workers directly criticize and deconstruct the link of moral worth and income or position, and draw on universalistic arguments to counter the overall validity of material above and below hierarchies – and not just their current form and distribution (see also Lamont and Aksartova 2002). “People categorize themselves by their income [...]. I find that retarded. A homeless guy can be as intelligent as someone with a million in the bank” (Simon, 48)<sup>176</sup>; or “if I drive a FIAT and the guy up there drives a Mercedes – when we are buried we end up in the same hole. And all his money won't serve him for anything there” (Steffen, 70). But the more common form – as explored in the next sections – are status claims articulated in a tone of indignation and protest. Using a comparative logic, these claims center on the unjustified privileges both of those above and those even further below.

new Porsche” (Eric, 19).<sup>177</sup> Dustin elaborated, “in financial terms, and also in terms of how people look at me when I run around in my work clothes, [I’m] on the very bottom [*ganz unten*]”, to then add, “I mean, of course not compared to a drug addict or a homeless person. But considering I have work, it’s definitely not recognized [*anerkannt*]. [...] I’m somewhere between the middle and where Hartz IV starts” (Dustin, 58).<sup>178</sup>

It is a well-established finding in boundary studies that the strongest downward demarcations are drawn by those who see themselves as *just over* the threshold to the more highly valued category (e.g. Rozin et al. 2014). As we can glean from the final sentence in Dustin’s self-positioning (“between the middle and Hartz IV”), it appears that the demarcation from the lower class is particularly prominent in this cluster because the subjective sense of devaluation makes the lower class seem close enough to be a threat (see Bents et al. 1984; Goes 2015). As we will explore in the next section, recent migrants, depicted as freeriders are another important category of downward boundary drawing (see also Lamont 2000). These become particularly meaningful in the context of a moralization of both upward and downward boundaries.

## 7.2. Moral Economy: “Working and Slaving”

The moral economy of this cluster centers on the respondents’ deservingness as “working and slaving” manual producers, which is demarcated against both the more privileged, imagined as inactive (like the rich CEO “who only puts a rubber stamp on something once in a while”), and against marginalized outgroups depicted as lazy freeriders. Two interconnected sides of this moral economy are here distinguished: The first is centrally concerned with the misrecognition of manual vis-à-vis office work; the second with maldistributions of resources and recognition between groups in violation of moral principles of deservingness. As we showed in the statistical analysis, the deservingness distinction constitutes a basic and pervasive polarity in German public opinion. This polarity is familiar from other countries

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<sup>177</sup> “Definitiv, ich bin nicht Unterschicht, weil ich jetzt sage, sage ich mal, Unterschicht wäre jetzt für mich Hartz IV, und sowas alles. Schön auf den Staat leben. Und Oberschicht halt die wirklich die ganzen Anzugleute, die sich einfach mal so einen schönen dicken neuen Porsche oder Audi oder was auch immer da holen können.”

<sup>178</sup> “Vom finanziellen sowie auch wie, wie ich das wahrnehme wie mich Leute angucken, wenn ich in Arbeitsklamotten rumrenne [...] ganz unten. Also jetzt natürlich nicht mit so, mit so nem Drogentypen und wie einem Obdachlosen, so verglichen. Aber dafür, dass ich arbeiten gehe, wird's auf jeden Fall nicht anerkannt. [...] Ich sehe mich so zwischen Mitte und sozusagen kurz bevor es sozusagen mit dem Hartz 4 losgeht

(Lamont 2000; van Oorschot 2000; Petersen et al. 2011; Prasad et al. 2009) and can be found also beyond this type (e.g. in the previous cluster). Yet the insistence on one's own deservingness and worth, and the indignant comparison to less worthy others was particularly strong among these respondents, who were overall markedly more pessimistic about their situation than others (resembling the type described in Damhuis 2020, Ch. 6).

### **“Those on the Bottom Are the Foundation of Society” – Producers’ Pride**

As we saw in Dustin's statement that he was on the bottom both “in financial terms, and in terms of how people look at me”, social devaluation is described both as material relations and recognition deficits. Dustin later recounted how, taking his lunch break in a café during works on the canalization system, he and his colleagues were asked to eat outside the café because their work clothes smelled of sewage. He generalizes this scene of misrecognition to the more general devaluation of a male habitus of hard manual work.

They think you're dirty, crappy [*mistig*]. Some think you're trash [*Assi*], because you're around men more than anything else. You talk differently than if you worked in an office. You quickly realize that you're in the lowest drawer [*unterste Schublade*]. [...] Back in the days, construction workers were highly esteemed. Now it's like, 'ah, you haven't achieved anything in your life'. Am I right? In today's society, if you haven't studied or sit in an office and do some written stuff, you're not worth a thing anymore (Dustin, 36).<sup>179</sup>

Dustin decries was the devaluation of “dirty” manual labor “around men” in comparison to “clean” and feminized office work. The alienation of production workers from the world of the office is a general phenomenon, already described by Heinrich Popitz. “[The worker's] own activity has an unambiguous bodily expression which makes its character as work immediately plausible. [...] The office atmosphere is alien and may remind [the worker] of that of his coffee breaks. He may ask himself what so many people can busy themselves with behind their desks

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<sup>179</sup> “Die finden einen einfach nur dreckig, mistig. Teilweise ist man in deren Augen ein Assi, weil man ist mehr mit Männern unterwegs als alles andere. Man redet halt auch anders, als wenn man in einem Büro wäre. Und, da kriegt man halt ganz schnell mit, dass man halt unterste Schublade ist. [...] Früher waren die Bauleute hoch angesehen, jetzt ist es so: "Aha, also nichts im Leben erreicht." Ja? Und das ist die Gesellschaft, wenn man nicht studiert hat oder irgendwie im Büro sitzt und was Schriftliches macht oder je nachdem, ist man in meinem Empfinden nichts mehr wert heutzutage.”

all day” (Popitz et al. 2018, 238). What is specific here is that this alienation is part of a historical narrative of status loss and decline. From the context, it can be conjectured that Dustin reflects on a specifically Eastern German experience when he says that “back in the day construction workers were highly esteemed”. In contrast to the rise of higher education and service or knowledge economies in other rich countries, the rhetoric and social structure of the GDR continued to place manual work at the center of its social ideal throughout.

Drawing on a moral repertoire that has usefully been called *producers’ pride* (Heil and Kuhlmann 2016) the resulting sense of status loss is countered with a demarcation of productive, physically demanding, and socially useful manual labor from ostensibly unproductive office work; as well as a revaluation of the practical skills of manual workers vis-à-vis the merely theoretical knowledge of clerical and managerial employees (see also Teiwes-Kügler and Vester 2007). Images of the hard and exhausting work on the construction site, in the factory, or in the workshop are contrasted with "air-conditioned offices" (Dustin, 70). Bricklayer Patrick thus described office work as “taxing only for the head. A little bit. Nothing exhausting. Sorting files, a little here, a little there, a lot of browsing around on the internet. I’m sure that also needs to get done. But crafts work, that is physically demanding, and it needs just as much – if not more – wits” (Patrick, 106).<sup>180</sup> And the young provincial electrician Simon criticized, “I have to say, I find it unfair that someone breaking his back [*Knochenarbeit*] here only makes, say 1.5 [thousand Euros]. And someone in the office suddenly makes 3.6, just because he clicks around on his mouse a bit. [...] I see it in my granddad, who walks around crippled and has pains in his knee all day, [...] he never made much money (Simon, 64).<sup>181</sup>

In protest against a sense of status loss, by which manual work is increasingly relegated to the bottom of the occupational structure (Kurer and Palier 2019), discourses of producers’ pride reevaluate the workers’ labor by insisting on its physicality and skill, but also by its specific function of creating tangible social use value. Patrick said:

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<sup>32</sup> “Aus meiner Sicht ist es halt nur so ein bisschen mit dem Kopf also nichts Anstrengendes und die Akten sortieren, ein bisschen hier ein bisschen da. Viel im Internet irgendwie was machen. Sicherlich muss das auch gemacht werden, aber Handwerk ist körperlich anstrengend, Handwerk hat mindestens genauso viel, wenn nicht sogar mehr mit dem Kopf zu tun.“

<sup>181</sup> “Also ich muss sagen, da finde ich's schon unfair, [dass] jemand, der hier körperlich Knochenarbeit macht, der nur, so jetzt mal grob gesagt 1,5 verdient und dann jemand im Büro auf einmal 3,6 verdient nur weil der ein bisschen auf der Maus rum tippt. [...] ich sehe das selber bei meinem Opa, der geht nur noch verkrüppelt und einfach noch Knieschmerzen und beide schon operiert wurden, an der Hüfte, der hat nicht viel verdient.“

Those on the bottom [*unten*] are the foundation of society. It's that simple. And those are the ones with the normal jobs. [...] The baker, the hairdresser, the garbage collector, the street cleaner, the bus driver, the trucker. [...] Without them it doesn't work. And then the ones fresh out of university come along and think they should earn hundreds of thousands and what not, only because they were trained five years longer. [...] The wages are unjust. [...] That's why so many do the *Abitur* and go to uni. (Patrick, 100)<sup>182</sup>

Manual workers make everyday life possible and “keep the cart rolling” (Patrick, 211, see also Hürtgen and Voswinkel 2016) but are unjustly overtaken by the academically trained in terms of pay and recognition. In a striking reversal of valence, the bottom pole of the dichotomous social hierarchy, encompassing production as well as lower- and medium-skilled service work, is here reinterpreted as the “foundation of society”. Patrick and other respondents attempt to reverse the classificatory principles of a status order that increasingly places them in a disadvantaged position (Tyler 2015; Savage 2015, ch. 12). As we saw in Lisa's and Dustin's account, the rich, who are wealthy enough to not have to “work and slave” figure as an extreme form of this type of injustice. But in line with a focus on work as a moral criterion, the undeserving rich (Prasad et al. 2009) are also at times contrasted with “self-made” millionaires whose fortunes are seen as legitimate.<sup>183</sup>

### **“They Get Everything” – Deservingness as Social Critique**

As already mentioned, another crucial part of the moral economy of this cluster are distinctions of deservingness. The distinction of deserved or undeserved recipients of state support or other forms of gain is a central moral heuristic shown to be active across Western countries (Attewell 2021; Cavallé and Trump 2015; van Oorschot 2000; Petersen et al. 2011). The five most common criteria of deservingness introduced in the theory section were already

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<sup>182</sup> “Die, die unten sind, ist das Fundament in der Gesellschaft. Ganz einfach. Und, das sind die [mit] den normalen Berufen [...] Also, sei es nun der Bäcker, sei es der Friseur, die Müllabfuhr, die Straßenreinigung, der Busfahrer, der LKW-Fahrer. [...] Ohne die geht's nicht. Und dann kommen die, die mit dem Kopf denken, frisch von der Uni, sind der Meinung, sie müssen irgendwie Hunderttausende aufwärts verdienen, nur weil sie 5 Jahre länger gelernt haben. Und aber keine Berufserfahrung haben oder die nicht ausreicht. [...] Und [die handwerklichen Berufe] wollen halt einfach viel zu wenige machen, weil es einfach ungerecht entlohnt wird. Deswegen gehen so viele nach dem Abi auf die Uni.” (Patrick, 100)

<sup>183</sup> “I think it is just if someone has worked for their wealth”, Eric explains, “There is a rapper who grew up in a foster home and worked his way up from absolute nothing. [And] this guy definitely deserves his fortune. Others just make a big inheritance [...] where I say, they didn't earn it!” (Eric, 42).

encountered in the extensive quote by Lisa cited at the beginning of this section. These are *control* (i.e. whether claimants are at fault for their difficult situation or had “the rug pulled from underneath their feet”), *attitude* (such as the motivation to “work and slave” that demarcates the good migrants and the pensioners from the asylum seekers who “don’t do anything” but steal), *reciprocity* (as in the pensioners’ claims to state support being justified by their hard work in the past), *need* (in the question of “who is *really* struggling”), and nationally demarcated social proximity, or *identity* (“our pensioners, our homeless people” versus “people who have only been here for half a year”).

The workers’ deservingness discourses use a comparative rhetoric of more or less justified claims to recognition and support by the state to scandalize performance-related injustices. Implicit is a hierarchy of group positions and their legitimate needs. As Bobo and Hutchings write, “feelings of competition and hostility emerge from historically and collectively developed judgements about the positions in the social order that ingroup members should rightfully occupy relative to members of an outgroup” (Bobo and Hutchings 1996, 955; see also below). Dustin said,

I heard that in Berlin there are something like 18,000 homeless people. That’s as if my entire home town was homeless. [...]. And the German state can’t even help its own people [*Landsleute*]? They stick thousands of Euros up the asses of people who probably don’t even need it. Or rather who are not entitled to it [*denen es nicht zustehen*]. [...] [I: And who would you say is entitled to support from the state?] Old people, sick people. And then of course refugees [*Fluchtsuchende*]. But you clearly need to categorize who needs it and who doesn’t. [...] Pensioners, 100 percent, they need to be helped, doesn’t matter whether they worked or not. I can’t let an 80-year-old grandma search for deposit bottles in the trash. She’s a German citizen, surely in her 80 years she has done something to boost the economy. If just by going shopping, right? So she should not be up to her shoulder in a trash can, just to feed herself. But if someone is 25 and says ‘I’m going to enjoy my life at the cost of the state’, he would not get a cent from me. He can work. (Dustin, 122)<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ich habe gehört in Berlin gibt es, was war das, ich glaube 18000 Obdachlose. [Das] ist als wär ganz [Heimatstadt] obdachlos. [...] Und der deutsche Staat kann seinen eigenen Landsleuten nicht helfen? Weißt du was ich meine? Da werden tausende von Geldern werden Leuten in den Arsch gesteckt, die, die das

The form of this criticism is that of a zero-sum competition for scarce resources between contributor-producers on the one hand and various competing groups of recipients on the other. Again we encounter not only migrants but also young people unwilling to submit to the work imperative as a social categories suspected of living at the expense of workers contributing to the “cake” of national wealth. Such categories, who receive state support without “performing”, appear as embodiments of a violated reciprocity between contribution and entitlement (see Damhuis 2020, Ch. 6). The legitimacy of their needs is denied, their supposed privileges criticised as excessive.

Two distinct deservingness notions can be distinguished in the material. What may be called *culturalist deservingness* rests on moral principles of ingroup solidarity, seniority, and the horizontal comradeship of co-nationals (see Anderson 2006). Entitlements stem from membership in the national community (“She’s a German citizen”, “the German state can’t even help its own people?”). Recent migrants are excluded here, although there is an implicit sense in which assimilation offers a moral pathway towards entitlement, as for those migrants “who are motivated to learn German”. A second form, which may be called *producerist deservingness*, builds on a moral economy of reciprocity and performance not unlike the one described in the previous cluster. Entitlements here are justified by previous contributions, be it in the shape of labor, money or time (“She has done something to boost the economy”; Mau 2004, Adloff and Mau 2005). Here migrants gain access by proving themselves to be hard workers, as in those migrants “who hang in there, who work and slave”.

Both notions are connected, because the “cake” of distributional goods, which is the object of competition, is imagined as a *national* treasure, amassed by the labor of national producer-citizens and distributed by politicians (see below), an imaginary rooted in the reality of citizenship as social closure (Mackert 1998). In this sense, the centrality of deservingness

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wahrscheinlich nicht mal brauchen, beziehungsweise nicht mal, ja nicht brauchen ja, ja denen es nicht zusteht. [...] [I: Und was würdest du sagen, wem steht das zu, dass man vom Staat unterstützt wird?] Alten Menschen, kranken Menschen und dann natürlich Fluchtsuchende. Da muss man aber wieder klar kategorisieren, die es wirklich brauchen und die es nicht brauchen. [...] Rentnern hundertprozentig, denen muss geholfen werden, scheiß egal ob sie arbeiten waren oder nicht, aber ich kann keine 50 oder 80jährige Oma Pfandflaschen suchen lassen. Das geht nicht. Die ist eine deutsche Bürgerin, die hat bestimmt in ihren 80 Jahren hier irgendwas gemacht, um irgendwie ein bisschen sozusagen die Wirtschaft mit anzukurbeln. Und wenn sie nur einkaufen war. Dementsprechend hat die Frau auch, in meinen Augen, nicht bis zur Schulter in einem Mülleimer rumzusuchen, um sich irgendwas zu fressen zu holen. Wenn jetzt aber jemand 25 ist, oder 20, und sich sagt: "Oah, ich genieß mein Leben, ich genieß mein Leben auf Staatskosten." Der würde von mir kein Pfennig kriegen. Ne? Der kann arbeiten" (Dustin, 122).

distinctions in this cluster highlights the collision of the moral economies of *national* welfare states with the globalization of capital and labor (Kriesi 2015; Kymlicka 2015). Yet, the distinction of two forms of deservingness also helps us see that the moral conditionalities of deservingness cannot entirely be equated with national and ethnic demarcations of “us” and “them”. Culturalist deservingness (or the *identity* criterion, in van Oorschot terms) is often paired with, or even overruled by, the work criterion defining *producerist* deservingness.

Implicitly it is this duality that allows respondents to distinguish between deserving and undeserving migrants while also stressing their sympathy with many, or even most migrants. “It’s not their fault”, explained Dustin, “they come from countries where things are even more shit than here. [...] Maybe they don’t even have a car and go to work on a donkey. Or walk 40 kilometers to get to work. So for them it’s the greatest stroke of luck [to migrate]. If there’s someone our age, why shouldn’t he try to make the best of his life? (Dustin, 01:06).<sup>185</sup> And Lisa said, “honestly? I think it’s a pity that they have to migrate. I really understand that, no question, with those wars and all that. But then they should behave accordingly, [...] go work for a Euro, sweep the streets. As long as they do something, instead of just sitting at home with their smartphones”<sup>186</sup> (Lisa, 00:59).

Deservingness distinctions do not preclude far-reaching identifications with migrants, nor do they imply self-understandings purely or even primarily based on national demarcations. Instead, the social critique of which deservingness distinctions are part is primarily rooted in a moral sense of turbulence in a status hierarchy based on work. The ambivalent connection of deservingness and national social identity categories is also shown by the fact that the same deservingness criteria are commonly applied both to migrants and native unemployed and benefit recipients. Recalling the insistence on work discipline reconstructed in the previous section, assembly worker Sebastian said with an angrily raised voice,

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<sup>185</sup> “die Leute können nichts dafür. Ja? Die kommen ja aus, aus ihren Ländern, da wird, denen geht's da wahrscheinlich noch beschissener als uns in dem Moment. [...] Die haben vielleicht kein Auto, die gehen vielleicht mit einem Esel zur Arbeit. Oder müssen 40 km laufen oder weiß ich irgendwas um irgendwie arbeiten zu können, ja? Und die sehen halt einfach nur ihr großes Glück, wenn da jetzt zum Beispiel jemand wäre in unserem Alter, warum, warum soll der denn nicht versuchen nicht aus seinem Leben das Beste zu machen?”

<sup>186</sup> “Ganz ehrlich? Es ist eigentlich schade, dass die Leute hierher einwandern müssen. Auf der Seite versteh ichs, gar keine Frage, durch die ganzen Kriege und und und. Aber dann solln se sich auch dementsprechend hier verhalten. [...] Solln se fürn Euro arbeiten jehen, solln se Straßen fegen oder sonst irgendwas. Hauptsache die machen irgendwat. [Anstatt] den ganzen Tag zuhause sitzen mit ihre Smartphone.”

When I see this on TV, 'keep calm and collect benefits'... Some people scratch a living with *two* jobs! And then there's some unemployed guy doesn't feel like doing a thing because he thinks, 'ah no, for that money I'm not going to work'. That's the limit. Such people should be- Water and bread! No money, there's not a even a... question of whether I go to work or not. He just has to, otherwise there's no money. It's that simple. If someone has worked for 50 years, that's who this is for. Not that someone who never worked... gets benefits. My foot in his ass, that's what he would get.<sup>187</sup> (Sebastian, 90)

In the moral logic of deservingness, a semantics of equality (everyone has to work) coincides with the use of social group distinctions. Welfare recipients, the unemployed, foreigners, and asylum seekers are measured by one and the same moral criterion, that of an ascribed willingness to work. In this way, the demands of the workers' "disciplined self" (Lamont 2000) are generalized to others. Open to ethnicised attributions of performance and laziness (see Hürtgen 2019; Grasmeyer 2019), the deservingness critique is directed against all kinds of social categories that are suspected to avoid the disciplinary demands of work. Even more clearly than in the previous section, the discipline demanded from others is here related to the respondents' own struggles for a livelihood. Dustin thematized both criminal sentences and the work imperative as instances where others should be made to play by the same "rules" he himself followed. "If you fuck up, you go to prison or whatever. [...] I would be ice cold about this. Or not ice cold, but I would say: 'Listen, you're not playing by our rules. *We have to play by the rules too, we also have to work and slave [machen und tun]*'"<sup>188</sup> (Dustin, 118, emphasis added).

As the data in the previous sections, including the MCA, illustrated, deservingness distinctions as such are not specific to workers in this cluster. But here they form the core of the moral

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<sup>187</sup> Wenn ich das immer seh im Fernseher, 'Stempeln, Abwarten'... Manche Leute haben zwei Jobs und kommen grade über die Runde. Und ein Arbeitsloser, der hat gar kei Bock, weil er sagt „Ah, für des Geld geh ich net arbeite.“ Das ist der Hammer! Die Leute gehöret... ja... Wasser und Brot! Kei Kohle, da gibts gar kei... Frage ob ich arbeite gang oder net, der muss einfach, sonst gibts kei Kohle. Fertig. Dass wenn einer 50 Jahr scho g'schafft hat, für des soll des da sein. Aber net [dass] einer, der nie g'schafft hat... Arbeitslosegeld kriege. Der tät von mir n Schuh in'n Arsch kriege.

<sup>188</sup> "Wenn du Scheiße baust, du gehst dann weiß ich wie lange in den Knast oder irgendwas. [...] da wäre ich eiskalt, also da-, nicht eiskalt, aber würde ich sagen: 'Pass auf, du benimmst dich nicht, du gehst nicht nach unseren Regeln.' Wir müssen ja auch nach den Regeln gehen, wir müssen auch arbeiten und machen und tun. Und dann ist gut. Man kann nicht immer sagen, 'ach die Armen, die Armen, die Armen.'"

economy and the sense of injustice that is articulated by the workers. In my interpretation, this has to do with the more precarious sense of social location and the need for downward demarcations. For fighters in particular, the idea that others enjoy a livelihood that they did not have to struggle for violates a central clause of the implicit social contract by which the respondents can distinguish themselves from a “lower class” that is drawing dangerously near. This clause concerns the expectation of reciprocity of contributions and entitlements (Lefkofridi and Michel 2014; Mewes and Mau 2012). In the deservingness critique we encounter exactly the type of negative, ad hoc, and situation sense of injustice that Honneth theorized as typical for dominated classes. Feeling themselves to already be “on the bottom of the chain” despite their “working and slaving”, these workers are highly sensitive to instances of violated reciprocity that relativize the sense of status and entitlement connected to their toil.

### **7.3. Relation to Politics: “We Get Kicked in the Ass No Matter What”**

Again, we can now show that the political positionings of the Social Populists directly flow from these pre-political patterns of social identity and moral economy. In a continuation of the above-below dichotomy, political agency is ascribed exclusively to politicians who appear as embodiments of the “higher people”, or an “upper class”. In this populist dichotomy, the plight of the “poor” or “little people” goes unnoticed in politics, which is seen as a sphere monopolized by “those above”, and respondents harbour a deep distrust of institutional politics and particularly of political parties. In line with the fatalistic streak observed above, social Populists are abstentionist and disaffected, lack political competence in both the senses established by Bourdieu, and exhibit what Vester et al. call a “disappointed-apatetic” political style (Vester et al. 2001, 464f.). Their attempt to reevaluate their low and/or declining position through the comparative and competitive insistence on their deservingness supplies a form of moral proto-politics of distribution. This proto-politics is centered on competing zero-sum claims on a finite national cake of wealth administered by politicians. In this vision, social demands and extensive expectations of social balancing addressed to the state are central. But throughout, these appear in a negative and passive register. The failure of the state and elites to adequately fulfill their societal role are criticized but this critique is not linked to a sense of agency. The fierce and indignant critique of this cluster is articulated *from the outside* of the political game.

## “Merkel Never Gets Her Hands Dirty” – Populist Dichotomy and Politicians As an Upper Class

Where in the Conservative cluster a distance to politics was counter-weighted by a sense of paternalism that partly accepted the delegation of political competences to expert politicians, we here see what might be called a form of *disappointed paternalism*. Here too, politicians are addressed as the only agents responsible for political action, but they are seen as self-interested and untrustworthy. On the side of the workers, this leads to a withdrawal from politics as a whole. As Lisa put it when asked whether politics played a role in her life, “I don’t even care anymore. No matter what we do, we only get kicked in the ass anyway. So I keep out of all of this. I really don’t need that” (Lisa, 01:03).<sup>189</sup> Non-voting or protest voting are the most common voting behavior reported in this cluster. Dustin thought the AfD could bring “fresh wind” into the vested interests of political parties.<sup>190</sup> Still, he said he would invalidate his ballot, “because, as I said, they are all crap” (Dustin, 00:54). Eric, who voted for the tiny pensioners’ party *Die Grauen*, explained, “I don’t think of voting as such a great thing. [...] I just do it so I can say I have voted. But I don’t vote for the big parties. [...] They say you should vote for the party that represents you, but none of them represents me. So they don’t get my vote”<sup>191</sup> (Eric, 130). For Sebastian, it was non-sensical that the parties had different profiles, instead of forming one party that could encompass all the important issues. An ambivalent alternative to representative democracy was expressed by Dustin, who said,

I don’t want to allude to any particular person here, but there should be someone who gets up there, and then there is a plebiscite, right? So he says- Or for all I care, [...] the Bundestag says, ‘Guys, we want to privatize this road’. But then it’s not just those who can afford to buy a road, wo say, ‘Sure, let’s do that’. But instead we vote. [...] And if 51% say ‘yep, we privatize’, then that’s how it is”<sup>192</sup> (Dustin, 90).

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<sup>189</sup> “Mich interessiert dis auch eigentlich gar nicht mehr, egal was wir machen, wir werden eh nur in Arsch getreten, also halt ick mich da och raus. Muss ick nicht haben.”

<sup>190</sup> Using the AfD’s catchword of the *Altparteien*, the old, or outdated parties, he said hesitantly, “to vote for the AfD out of spite [*aus Trotz*]? I don’t know, I mean, maybe it’s a new party, right? Surely there are stupid people in there. [...] But it’s also just a party that hasn’t been in the game for so long. So they need familiarize themselves with all the stuff that the old parties [*Altparteien*] already know” (Dustin, 94)

<sup>191</sup> Ich finde wählen eh, nicht so toll. [...] Ich mache es gerade so, weil, damit ich sagen kann, ich habe gewählt. Aber ich wähle keine großen Parteien oder sonst irgendwas. Man sagt ja immer, man soll das wählen, was einen vertritt, aber, die vertreten alle nicht meine Meinung. Dann kriegen die halt nicht meine Stimme, so.

<sup>192</sup> “Ich will jetzt hier nicht irgendwas auf jemanden anspielen, aber da sollte es einen Menschen geben, und dann, der stellt sich da hin... und dann gibt es diesen Volksentscheid. Ja? Der sagt zum Beispiel, so von mir aus kann das auch mit diesen Parteien funktionieren, aber das dann, da wird dann im Bundestag gesagt: ‘Mensch, pass auf, wir wollen die Straßen privatisieren.’ Und nicht, dass die dann da sagen, die sich eine Straße leisten

There are interesting ambivalences in this account. Citing the person he “doesn’t want to allude to”, i.e. Adolf Hitler, Dustin seems to partly gesture towards a dictatorial alternative, but at the same time calls for more plebiscites. As his remark about “51%” sufficing for a legitimate decision show, the point is *not* a totalizing, anti-pluralist claim Müller (2016b) identifies as the defining feature of populism. Yet both the personification of government in the person who “gets up there” and the people’s voice articulated directly in a vote, represent a plebiscitarian vision of greater closeness between the people and the authority. With Ostiguy we can understand this as the defining feature of the sociopolitical low, which above all stresses *immediacy* as a criterion of legitimate representation (Ostiguy 2017). This immediacy is associated with a more direct voice for those below. The central critique of the existing model of representation is against the privileges it gives to those with money.

This cluster illustrates the correspondence between working class position, political competence, and mistrust in political representation shown in the MCA. Respondents express both a great distance to, and little knowledge of the institutional mechanics of the political system. Dustin said, “we vote for the Bundesrat and then the Bundesrat votes for the Bundestag, so already at that point I have no control anymore” (Dustin, 00:27). In some instances, this distrust veered towards conspiracist positions, such as when Sebastian suggested the counting of election votes was probably rigged, because he didn’t believe that the CDU could be so strong although nobody he knew had ever voted for them (Sebastian, 23). He also said “I don’t watch the news. [...] I think half of it is a lie anyway [*zur Hälfte alles geloge*]” (Sebastian, 24). Respondents also agreed on a rejection of the left-right distinction. “It’s nonsense”, said Lisa, “I’m neutral, I don’t take sides” (Lisa, 01:17). And Sebastian warded off the distinction saying,

I’m not the right one to ask about these things. [...] It’s complicated stuff and all. [...] The ones on the right are against the foreigners. And the ones on left are for-. In fact, I don’t even know. But in any case, I don’t belong to any group. Neither left nor right. [...] If I have made an experience with a guy, say at work, a foreigner or a German, and I say, I don’t like him, then it’s not because he’s Turkish or because he’s German. I’m

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können: ‘Ja, machen wir so.’ Sondern, dann wird eine Wahl gemacht. Meinetwegen jeden Samstag wählen. Dann wird das ausgezählt und das heißt es, ja, das Recht der Mehrheit, und wenn dann halt 51% sagen: “Jawohl, wir wollen die Straßen privatisieren.’ Dann ist es so.”

not left or right in these things. If I don't like him, I don't like him, end of the story.  
(Sebastian, 109)

Common statements like "I'm not the right one to ask" are examples of the type of political exclusion theorized above, an admission of a lack of competence tied to social positions. In Sebastian's statement, we see how, with ideological differentiation and integration low, the abstract left-right heuristic is replaced with an experiential common sense logic of interpersonal likes and dislikes. The social logic of this anti-political exclusion and self-exclusion becomes particularly clear in this cluster's critique of politicians. As we already saw in Lisa's statement that "people like Merkel are taking it out on us poor people", politicians are seen through the lense of dichotomized consciousness as belonging to an upper class who, because of their privileged material position, have lost their sense of the concerns of those below. Construction worker Dustin illustrated this with implicit recourse to the imagery of his own "dirty" work:

The people who have something to say see the upper class. If you're doing well, why would you worried about me little fart? Honestly, [...] I might be the same way. If these people who sit up there and govern [...] were paid humanely, then they would think very differently. But because [...] decisions are made by the so-called upper class, let's just say, the rich people. I don't think someone like Merkel would ever get her hands dirty. Nor did Gysi back then, or whatever they're all called. They dig around in the soil when they really feel like having an organic carrot in their allotment on the weekend, right? But apart from that, they never get their hands dirty. Because they're doing fine.<sup>193</sup> (Dustin, 88)

The privileged lifestyle of politicians alienates them from the grievances and the prosaic working life of the normal population, and especially the "dirty work" of manual producers. For Dustin, this is true for the entire political class, including even Gregor Gysi, the popular

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<sup>193</sup> "Die Leute, die was zu sagen haben, sehen die Oberschicht. Wenn es dir gut geht, dann machst du dir doch keine Gedanken um mich kleinen Furz, oder? Ganz ehrlich, [...] ich wäre vielleicht genauso. Würde man diese Leute, die da oben sitzen und regieren [...] human bezahlen, dann würden die ganz anders denken. Und ich denke mir dadurch, dass [...] entschieden wird von der sogenannten Oberklasse, ich sage mal einfach von reichen Leuten- Ich glaube eine Merkel macht sich nicht die Hände dreckig, ein Gysi damals auch nicht. Und wie die alle heißen. Die, die grabbeln in der Erde rum, wenn sie vielleicht wirklich mal Bock haben auf eine Biomöhre in ihrem Schrebergarten. Ja? Aber ansonsten machen die sich nie im Leben die Hände dreckig. Weil es denen gut geht. (Dustin, 88)

former East German politician of the left whom Dustin had cited sympathetically just before: “Him you could at least understand [...] he still thought in a normal way” (Dustin, 87).

Claims to representation are already disappointed at the descriptive level: “I think that politics generally lacks craftsmen, [...] people who stand with both feet in real life. Who, I would say, know what is important and what moves the people” (Eric, 134). The lack of grounding of politicians, as those “at the top”, also appears as an explanation for the loss of recognition of the producers “with a hunched back” (Eric) at the bottom (see also Noordzij, Koster, and Waal 2021). As the ALLBUS data reveals, the criticism described here is widespread: 50% of production workers agree with the statement that “politicians only look after the interests of the rich and powerful”.<sup>194</sup> “Those above have their ideas”, Patrick said, “and here below, you can go protest and complain all you want. That will be noted, and that’s it”<sup>195</sup> (Patrick, 92).

### **“A Sign That Says ‘Help Me!’” – Deservingness and Misrecognized Needs**

Besides the critique of politics as monopolized by the rich and powerful, the core critique of this cluster is articulated by comparative assessments of deservingness (“*They get everything*”). In Nancy Fraser’s (1989) term, this can be understood as a form of *needs talk*, i.e. a dramatization of legitimate but neglected needs achieved through the comparison with the illegitimate claims of others. “Needs talk functions as a medium for the making and contesting of political claims. It is an idiom in which political conflict is played out and through which inequalities are symbolically elaborated and challenged” (Fraser 1989, 291). As we saw, deservingness comparisons always functioned by a scandalization of groups having it too easy *compared to others* having it too hard. In all statements that cite undeserving groups and their unwarranted privileges, the respondents also highlight the deservingness of worthy but neglected groups, like bottle-collecting pensioners, single mothers, workers in the low-wage sector working in multiple jobs. As Dustin illustrated with a vivid and emotional image,

If there is some Marcel, who has lost his mother in a car accident and his father too, and who starts taking drugs because he doesn’t have anything else to hold on to. Then he’s left to rot on the street. And if he stands in front of the Bundestag with a sign that

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<sup>194</sup> Compared to 34% of the working population.

<sup>195</sup> “Also, da bin ich von überzeugt, dass die da oben ihre Meinung haben. [Da] kannst du hier unten auf die Straße gehen und machen, was du willst. [Das] wird zur Kenntnis genommen, das war's dann.”

says “Help me!”, then the security guards will chase him off. But let some Abdul stand there with his three friends and his two little kids, who all hold out their hands, and they will immediately get invited in.<sup>196</sup>

Especially in light of the connection between the deservingness discourse and the critique of a subordinate social position, the “sign that says ‘Help me’” part of this dual narrative should not be discounted as mere rhetorical window dressing legitimizing prejudice. At the core, Dustin’s story of Marcel and Abdul highlights the invisibility and neglect of one person’s urgent needs by contrasting it to the attention given to the needs of another. While the difference in empathy is striking (what about Abdul’s parents?), Marcel functions as an embodiment of neglected social demands. This becomes especially clear in the context in which Dustin tells this story, which is a critique of the fact that care for the homeless in his home town is run by volunteers and charities, instead of the state.

As in the case of the bottle-collecting pensioners and other deserving figures of suffering, the supposedly generous and unconditional support of migrants and those unwilling to work appears as scandalous against the backdrop of unfulfilled demands for social support by the state. Not only do people unwilling to perform receive unmerited support, but they receive it even though the state at the same time denies support to those who do “work and slave” and those who would need help more urgently. Poverty and social suffering are very much understood as concerns of the state. But the compact has been broken from the side of the powerful people running it. Asked what she would do if she was the chancellor of Germany, Lisa said,

Try to treat all people equally, money-wise. So that no one has to go hungry, no one has to collect deposit bottles or live on the street. [...] There are so many beautiful things that could be changed and that would make people more positive, happier in their lives. [I: And why do you think they are not done?] Because they’re stupid, I think. Because they want to earn more and more money for themselves. Whatever they want

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<sup>196</sup> “Ein Marcel, der seine Mutter verloren hat durch einen Autounfall, der Vater ist gestorben und, und, und. Der an die Drogen gegriffen hat, weil er einfach keinen mehr hatte, wo er sich festhalten konnte, jetzt doof gesagt. Der, der wird dann auf der Straße verwahrlosen gelassen. Und wenn der sich vor den Bundestag stellt mit einem Schild “helft mir”, dann wird er weggejagt von, von den Sicherheitstypen. Steht dann aber jetzt ein Abdul mit seinen drei Freunden und zwei kleinen Kindern da, die die Hand aufhalten, die werden sofort reingebeten.”

it for, because they're certainly not sharing it. [...] It's like Trom- Trump or whatever that weird guy is called. He only sees his fucking money.<sup>197</sup> (Lisa, 00:50)

In this context, the deservingness critique highlights a double violation of the moral economy connecting the “worker ants” and “those above” making the decisions. The latter are upsetting the hierarchy of legitimate needs and neglecting the legitimate demands of the worthy producers below. In this way, the discourse of deservingness mixes demands for redistribution with restrictive attitudes towards free riders. The critique of a disturbed hierarchy of needs leads to a proto-political sentiment of “state-centered social populism” (Goes 2015), and “exclusive solidarity” (Dörre et al. 2018), which demands moral order to be restored through the disciplining and exclusion of unentitled beneficiaries on the one hand, and through an improved care of the state for worthy producers and deserving claimants on the other. Premised on competition and comparison, the moral economy of deservingness formulates extensive – but frustrated – claims concerning the redistributive function of the state. Distribution, recognition, and representation are inextricably linked (Dahl, Stoltz, and Willig 2004).

#### **7.4. Summary**

Identification in the cluster of Social Populists operates along the master distinction of above and below. This vertical social dichotomy reflects a sense of social location on lower end of society that is met with anger and indignation. Respondents portray themselves as deserving but misrecognized fighters, strongly demarcations both against the “higher ones” “sitting in highrisers”, and those even lower, beneath the threshold of respectability (“Hartz IV”). Efforts to highlight the workers’ own deservingness in the face of a feeling of devaluation as manual workers, and as occupants of the lower end of workplace and societal hierarchies, lies at the core of this cluster’s discourses. The central medium in which these recognition struggles are articulated is that of the material distribution of money, e.g. incomes, pensions, and benefits.

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<sup>197</sup> “Versuchen, fast alle Menschen gleich zu behandeln, geldmäßig. Dass keiner mehr hungern muss, keiner mehr Pfandflaschen sammeln muss, oder auf der Straße leben muss. Des würde ich versuchen zu ändern. [I: Wie stellst du dir das vor? Wie würde das aussehen?] Besser. Positiver. Lebenslustiger. [...] [I: Und wer könnte das ändern?] Im Prinzip die alle im Kanzleramt, die da sitzen. Denk ick ma. [...] Man könnte eigentlich so vieles Schönes verändern dass die Menschen auch positiver sind. [I: Und warum wird das nicht gemacht?] Weil se blöde sind, denk ick ma. Weil se mehr und mehr selber verdienen wollen. Für was auch immer. Weil die geben ja trotzdem nichts ab. [...] So wie mit dem Traum-, Trump oder wie der .. komische Typ da heißt. Der sieht nur sein scheiß Geld.”

Deservingness is mostly claimed negatively, through comparisons with undeserving recipients above and below. With Honneth, we can understand the negative moral critique of workers – focused not on an ideal of distribution or social order, but on instances of violated reciprocity – as typical for the dominated populations under conditions of demobilization and disempowerment.

Responding to experiences of domination, and a perceived loss of recognition for manual work, a critique of illegitimate entitlements is articulated to shore up positions above the threshold of respectability dividing workers from a devalued lower class (see also Hochschild 2016, Dörre 2021). But the deservingness distinction is also used to criticize the undeserving (e.g. non-working) rich, as well as to underline legitimate needs and expectations neglected by the state. Deservingness, or legitimate needs, are centrally defined by a *culturalist* frame of national belonging, as well as a *producerist* frame of contributions and work. Workers in this cluster stake their identification on their capacity of “working and slaving”, encapsulating resilience, the immediate tangibility of use value produced, and sacrifices made, e.g. by damages to the workers’ bodies (“bone breaking” “broken knees”). Producers’ pride symbolically reevaluates social classifications that places workers below more highly paid office workers, but also serves as a critique of politicians who “never get their hands dirty”.

The moral economy at the heart of the workers’ critique consists of the idea of a zero-sum game of distributing a nationally bounded pool of wealth created by the country’s producers below and (mal)distributed by politicians above; both by channeling wealth into their own pockets, and by handing it out to unworthy recipients. Here, the culturalist and the producerist frame of deservingness converge, legitimizing a critique of state distribution based on the neglect of national citizens and hard workers. But both principles also interact in idiosyncratic ways, e.g. where migrants are granted the chance to redeem themselves through work, or national pensioners are considered deserving also beyond their contributions.

I named this cluster Social Populists, because distributive social demands (rather than, say, the critique of foreigners as culturally alien, or of cultural change) formed the central vocabulary of their critique whose central addressees were politicians. The indignation of the Social Populists stands in stark contrast to the relative contentment of the cluster of Conservatives, but both have in common that political agency is exclusively attributed to politicians, who here are seen as representatives of an upper class removed from the troubles

of the “working and slaving” little people below. Workers in this cluster criticize politics from the outside; neither drawing on an integrated or differentiated set of ideological categories situated in the political field, nor perceiving themselves as possessing political agency (“I’m not the one to ask about this”).

The deservingness logic is the central knot in which politically demobilized social indignation is entangled with a logic of competition and social division. The exclusionary critique of unworthy claimants is *also* a scandalization of neglected needs vis-à-vis the state, which is invested with high (though frustrated) expectations of social balancing. As Dörre’s (2020) writes about a similar sample of right-leaning workers, “demands of justice were addressed predominantly to a national welfare state, which was less and less able to satisfy these demands. With the limits of social-democratic distributive politics in clear view, these young wage dependents tended to wage the struggle for status preservation or improvement with the means of resentment.” (Dörre 2020, 19).

These observations very obviously link to the question of cleavage identities. We know from many recent studies that restrictive deservingness notions and the producerist opposition of “makers” and “takers” form central avenues of radical right appeals among workers (e.g. Rathgeb 2020). Indeed, many statements cited here ring familiar from recent works on radical right supporters among the working class (e.g. Damhuis 2020; Gest 2016; Hochschild 2016; see critically also Knowles, McDermott, and Richeson 2021). For most of the interviewees here, the AfD did not appear as an exception to a political game which was rejected as a whole; but the structures of social identities reconstructed here make them a likely reservoir of potential (protest) votes. That said, the core of self-understandings, e.g. as “little people” or “bottom of the chain”, are predicated on societal and workplace hierarchies and recognition struggles articulated via distributive claims. What we do not find is a cultural sense of ‘groupness’ based on particularist values, nor a demarcation from a liberal cultural elites, an urban middle class or the like. Educational devaluation too, which would form an obvious link, is here negotiated through a *workplace-* and *wage-*centered moral critique of the privileges enjoyed by office workers (often located within their same companies).

The fierce critique of vertical inequality directed against the “higher ones”, the workers’ keen sense of injustice, and their extensive social demands on the state also present clear openings for a politicization from the left. But a leftist political horizon of redistribution or working class

empowerment is strikingly absent from these accounts, which are dominated by a negative form of critique via comparison and competition. As in Sebastian's quote shown above, for a number of respondents the only anchorage of political (left-right) distinctions overall was that "the right is against the foreigners"; while, as he continued, "the left is for-. In fact, I don't even know".

### **8. Autonomy: Pragmatic Privatists**

This next section presents a third cluster of nine working class interviewees which I call *Pragmatic Privatists*. In the analytical process this cluster first originated as a puzzling residual category. All of them male and mostly living in larger cities, they belonged to an individualized and non-affluent 'traditionless working class' (Vester et al. 2001) of skilled routine workers not embedded in a strong local or occupational milieu. But unlike the workers in the previous section, these respondents were relatively content with their positions and saw themselves as doing moderately well by their own lower middle class standards. Rather than taking migration skeptic or pro-refugee positions, these respondents tended not to thematize migration at all, or, when prompted, respond with an evasive universalism that insisted that it "depends on the person" and refused to "put people in boxes" (see below). They were both fiercely critical of distributional inequality and fatalistic about its malleability, but this did not distinguish them from the overwhelming majority of the other workers.

Like many others, the young workers of this cluster were deeply critically about "politics" and wanted no part in it. But here this sounded less like the righteous anger of the "hard-done-bys" (Damhuis 2020, Ch. 6), against the deafness of someone above who might at last begin to listen (as in the Social Populist cluster). Nor was the exclusion and self-exclusion from politics rationalized by a quasi-paternalist sense that someone above would take care of things (as in the Working Class Conservative type). Rather, these respondents seemed equally disenchanted with and detached from politics and the wider social order, in a sense that corresponded to an apolitical liberality and a distanced and depersonalized social critique. Respondents criticized "the system" but sought to navigate it individually, or individually escape from it. Identities among this cluster were organized around a *pragmatically moderated* and above all *private* conduct of life. What emerged in the deeper analysis is that all these characteristics were linked to a pragmatic pursuit of *autonomy* in private lives that lay at the core of these workers' self-understandings and moral pursuit. Pragmatic privatists

focused on “the little things that really matter”, like family and friends, based on an implicit pact that their work should afford them the space to be left alone to live their lives, while they themselves treated the outside world with an attitude of tolerance and indifference, according to the maxim “live and let live”.

A paradigmatic worker in this cluster was Marc, whom I interviewed at his home in a central Berlin neighborhood on a late weekday morning. Marc had forgotten our appointment and greeted me with profuse apologies. Wearing jogging pants and an oversized T-shirt, he ushered me into his room in which clothes and electronic equipment were lying around. Grabbing a large quantity of them from the sofa and throwing them onto the bed, he offered me a seat. It was his day off and a faint smell of weed hung in the air, but Marc appeared lucid, zipping around the room and offering me coffee. On the corridor, I saw Marc’s girlfriend passing by. He explained that the two met on the internet and she moved across the country to live with him and his two flatmates. Now they were planning to get married, though he was still hesitant: “Just a little bit of calm” he laughed, “we’re, like, at 95%. So let’s just wait for those missing 5%.” (Marc, 32). “My girlfriend always lives in the future”, he continued, “my flatmate lives in the past. I live in the here and now. [...] Solving problems in the here and now, that’s my thing” (Marc, 35). Marc was trained as an electrician; after years of working for a temp agency, they hired him permanently and he became something like a foreman for on-site installation jobs in the event sector. “I take seriously everything I start”, he told me, “whether it’s on the job, or cleaning at home, or learning something new. You don’t want to do things half-heartedly. I’ve never felt aimless in my life. I just ask people what needs to be done, and bam bam bam, I have five tasks on my hands.”<sup>198</sup>

In a key passage, Marc proposed “zones of law” for people with different ideas of life, as an institutionalization of the principle that everyone should live as they individually wanted:

We would need law zones [*Gesetzeszonen*], so to say. Like, you’re into, whatever, fistfighting all day? Okay, go into the law zone where people are fistfighting all day! [laughs] Knock yourself out. I mean, I can’t tell you that that is a shit idea, because apparently it *does* something for you to get you face smashed in, but please just do it

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<sup>198</sup> Like here, Marc seemed to enjoy the stage the interview offered him, often exaggerating his statements into a form of comedy performance that included cartoon sounds (“bam bam bam”) and the Germanized English words typical for internet humor. E.g. “*purgend*” in the quote cited in the footnote below, or “Was zur Hölle ist falsch mit dir?”, an unusual literal translation of “what the hell is wrong with you?”

where people like it to get their faces smashed. And that's the same in all things: You should not run around killing people. But apart from that let's have a bit of tolerance for everything. This tolerance is something that is missing today" (Marc, 50).<sup>199</sup>

Marc's insistence on individualism and his plea for tolerance correspond to a liberal principle of "thresholds of legitimate indifference" (Möllers 2021), that is, private spheres of non-interference.

### 8.1. Sense of Social Location: "Nothing Excessive"

#### "Enjoy the Little Things" – Middle Class as Moderation

The theme appeared right away in Marc's introductory self-presentation, in which he described himself as

a person who is open towards whichever view one might have. I don't really see that there is good, bad, right, wrong. As long as it's good for you that's what matters. I think one should enjoy the little things... you should see what is really important for you and concentrate on that. You shouldn't try to branch out as much as possible. Sure, you can travel around the world, [...] [but] I've been living in the same city for more than 20 years and still haven't seen all the corners, you know? [laughs] So in that sense, I try to keep it local as far as my things are concerned (Marc, 2).<sup>200</sup>

Marc specifies the 'little things that are really important' as the close relations to a small, selected group of friends, and the domestic environment [*häusliches Umfeld*] of his relationship and family which he compares to a 'harbor' that he can always return to (Marc,

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<sup>199</sup> "Du bräuchtest Gesetzeszonen sozusagen. So 'du hast Bock, keine Ahnung den ganzen Tag zu prügeln, okay, geh in ne Gesetzeszone, wo sich die Leute die ganze Zeit prügeln!' Bitte! Ich mein, ih kann dir nicht sagen, dass es scheiße ist, weil irgendwas *gibt* es dir ja, dass dauernd eins in die Fresse kriegst, aber dann geh doch bitte dahin wo's gern gesehen ist, eins in die Fresse zu kriegen. Und das kannst du überall so sehen, klar du solltest jetzt nicht mordend durch die- und purgend durch die Gegend ziehen, aber sowas: Bisschen Toleranz für alles haben. Und die Toleranz ist halt was, was es irgendwie nicht mehr da ist. Entweder du bist in meinem Team oder du bist im Gegnerteam, so ist es doch, Alter!" (00:58)

<sup>200</sup> [Ich bin], n... offener Mensch, gegenüber jeder Art von Ansicht, die man so haben kann. Ich seh nicht wirklich, dass es gut, schlecht, richtig, falsch gibt, so, es gibt diese Ansicht und diese Ansicht, solange man für sich n Nutzen hat, hat man seinen Zweck. Und... ja, und ich find aber, man sollte die kleinen Dinge genießen, und... man sollte sehen, was ist einem wirklich wichtig und sich darauf konzentrieren. Man sollte nicht versuchen, sich möglichst weit auszufächern in dem Sinne. Klar, man kann um die Welt reisen. [...] [Aber] ich wohn seit 20 Jahren in der gleichen Stadt und hab immer noch nicht jede Ecke gesehen, weißt du? [lacht] [...] Dementsprechend versuch ichs möglichst lokal zu halten, was meine Sachen angeht.

14).<sup>201</sup> These relations are central to Marc's self-presentation, as well as that of other respondents in this cluster.<sup>202</sup> Contentment in the private sphere is contrasted with economic success, so as to criticize the latter's predominance for discerning worthy lives. Fancy cars are a recurring object for this boundary work. When asked about his position in society, Vassily, a soft-spoken provincial carpenter that I interview in his lunch break, replied,

financially, I would say middle class [*Mittelschicht*], because I'm not badly off, but also not- let's say *excessive*, like *too* well off. [...] I don't need to drive the most pretentious car. [I: What type of people do that?] Condescending ones, who need to prove to themselves what financial possibilities they have. [...] It's for the reactions of other people, I guess. Like, 'uhh, he can afford such a big car'. But after 2 minutes of amazement you don't even care about it anymore, right? You keep doing your work. You think to yourself, 'I can't afford that anyway', right? [laughs]. [...] And the person behind you still don't know. It's just a car. [...] So [middle class] are the ones who are content, I think. (Vassily, 00:44).<sup>203</sup>

This link of ordinariness, moderation and a social position in the lower middle follows a sense of social location that we already saw in the first working class cluster, and which Sachweh and Lenz (2018) identify as typical of the lower middle class (see also Savage 2010). Being couched between the troubles of a poor underclass and the excesses of the rich is reevaluated in terms of the virtue of moderation, ordinariness, modesty and responsibility. Asked whether he felt recognized in his occupation, Marc hesitated: "Mhmm... yes and no. I mean it is looked at as a lowly activity [*niedere Tätigkeit*], which makes me a bit angry. Nowadays, low and high

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<sup>201</sup> „Die Menschen, die mich begleiten in meinem Leben, definitiv. Weil, wenn du alleine dein Leben lebst- für was lebst du? Wenn du nur für dich alleine, das bringt dir ja gar nix. Dementsprechend, wenn du keine Begleiter hast, ob Freunde, Kumpels Familie, brauchst du alle, dementsprechend. Man sollte jetzt nicht versuchen, möglichst viele Kumpel zu haben [...], aber du kannst dich auf die wenigen konzentrieren. Und das ist halt mir wichtig.“

<sup>202</sup> Lukas, for instance, begins his self-description by saying that he cares for his mother, his girlfriend and his dog, also talking extensively about not wanting to lose the flat he lives in (Lukas, 00:01, and see below).

<sup>203</sup> „Finanziell würd ich Mittelschicht sagen, weils mir nicht zu schlecht geht, aber auch nicht- sag ich mal, übertrieben, zu gut. [...] Mir gehts nicht schlecht, aber auch net so, dass ich jetzt alles mögliche ausgeben muss, um um die protzigste Karre zu fahren. [...] [Wie die, die] herablassend, auf die Leute sind und sich mit [ihren] Autos oder andern Gegenständen beweisen wollen, was die halt an finanzielle Möglichkeiten haben. [...] [Denen geht es] um das Staunen von den Leuten wahrscheinlich: "Uh, er kann sich so ein Auto leisten", ne? Aber da staunst du 2 Minuten und im Nachhinein ist es dir ja dann eh wieder egal. Weil du machst deine Arbeit weiter, ne? [...]. Denkst dir: "Kann i mir eh net leisten", ne? [lacht] [...] Aber die Person dahinter kennst ja dann eh nicht. Ist halt so 'n Auto. [Mittelschicht wären] denk ich so, die zufrieden auch sind.“

esteem are equated one-to-one with your income. But you can see this whichever way you want.” (Marc, 21).

The ambivalence between Marc’s sense of anger and the distancing device he uses (“You can see this whichever way you want”) captures how in this cluster, inequality and one’s place in it is criticized, but are also taken to be an inevitable feature of a world which needs to be navigated rather than analyzed. Marc speculated that “this upper versus lower class thing” probably is “something biological”, because it already existed “in the times of the Romans” (Marc, 68).<sup>204</sup> The young Berlin cabinet maker Tobias highlighted the importance of individual choices: “There are trades and occupations who earn a little less, say hairdressers; others more, like managers. I would say craftsmen are in the healthy middle [*gesundes Mittelfeld*]. [...] But everyone has learnt the trade they wanted to learn. I would never say one is worse or better than mine” (Tobias, 00:12). Demarcations against those below are strikingly absent in this cluster.

### “They Don’t Look Each Other In the Eye” – Moral Critique of the Rich

Instead, as in Vassily’s account, inequalities of income and recognition are personified by the rich whose conspicuous consumption (e.g. cars) reveals them as phony, alienated, and/or irresponsible. In a particularly vivid passage, Marc told me about a corporate gala he worked at, highlighting the social meaning of a door between the ‘front stage’ of the gala and the ‘back stage’ of the supply rooms and kitchen:<sup>205</sup>

On the one side of this door you have people working for 12, 13 Euros an hour. And then you go out and suddenly there are people who earn 12, 13 *thousand* a day. You know? Where you think, *man*, [exclaims] *who in God’s name decided that the things they do is so much better than what we do?* [...] Just because I live in the system doesn’t mean I find it great. And when they’re like, ‘Here, boy, take a hundred Euros as a tip’, then I know that I don’t take that hundred Euros to the next bar, but... I don’t know, I put it in the box for the wedding or on my bank account. Just because for *them* it means

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<sup>204</sup> “I: Woher kommt das? Marc: Gute Frage, ich mein das ist ja leider was, was auch schon so war bevor ich geboren wurde. Dementsprechend geh ich davon aus, dass das Problem länger besteht. Und da ich immer noch, da ich weiß, dass das auch schon zu Zeiten der Römer oder sonstwas auch dieses Oberschicht-Unterschicht-Ding und so schon gab, geh ich davon aus, dass das auch damals schon bestand. Dementsprechend muss das was entweder was Biologisches sein oder was, oder was schon echt lange falsch rübergegeben wird.”

<sup>205</sup> See Goffman 1978.

nothing doesn't mean it's worthless. You know if these people don't redistribute, you need to take that into your own hands [laughs].<sup>206</sup> (Marc, 66)

The opposition between rich and poor is here linked to a moral divide between the responsible lifestyle of the worker saving for his wedding and the carelessness of the rich for whom "it means nothing". "The system" of material inequality between "us", manual employees working in the back stage sphere, and "them", the managers, is emphatically criticized. Yet this critique does not lead to a political but to a moral conclusion, which reevaluates the relation by describing oneself as poorer but happier and better in ethical terms. As in Vassily's dismissive statement about pretentious big car owners, the apparent good fortune of the rich is relativized with a view to the workers' own standards of a fulfilled and authentic private life. "Supposedly [they] are on top", Marc continued, "but actually that's not the top. Maybe in terms of the income ladder. But they all look *sad*. I'm not shitting you. Sure, they laugh and all that, but they are not looking each other in the eyes when they speak" (Marc, 66).

This moral reevaluation of inequality is linked to a lifestyle centered on the autonomy afforded by the workers' private lives. While "the system" is what it is, workers in "lowly positions" – by tending to the "little things that really matter" – have the chance to surpass the rich in terms of the fulfilment they reach in their lives. Doing so means both to not stretch out too far, aim too high, nor take too much, but to take responsibility for yourself and others within the means afforded by one's income and social relations. Everyone "has only a very small radius of action. And if you managed to keep that radius clean and, and you could also trust that others manage to do the same, then we would have a more sane world" (Marc, 70).<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> "Auf der linken Seite deieser Tür hast du Leutem die für 12 13 Euro die Stunde arbeiten, du gehst raus aus der Tür und hast plötzlich Leute, die 12 13 *Tausend* am Tag verdienen. Weißt du? wo du dir denkst so Alter [ruft] wer in Gottes Namen hat bestimmt, dass das was *die* machen so viel besser ist als das was die machen. Wo ich denke, nein Alter, das ist nicht besser was die machen, das ist as anderes, aber- Nur weil ich in dem System lebe, heißt das nicht das ich das gut finde. Und wenn die dann meinen, 'Hier Junge, hast du n hunderter Trinkgeld', dann weiß ich dass ich mit dem 100er Trinkgeld nicht in die nächste Bar ziehe, sondern davon... keine Ahnung... 50 in die Hochzeitsdose tue, oder 50 auf irgendn Sparkonto oder irgendwas, weil nur weil es für *die* nichts wert ist, heißt es nicht, dass es wertlos ist. Du musst, weißt du wenn die Leute nicht umverteilen, musst du selber mit den Händen anfangen, es umzuverteilen! [lacht]"

<sup>207</sup> „Wenn du es schaffst, den Aktionsradius sauber zu halten und, und- ich davon ausgeh, dass andere es auch schaffen können, dann hätten wir irgendwann vielleicht mal ne vernünftigere Welt.“

## 8.2. Moral Economy: “Live and Let Live”

### “A House by a Stream” – Individualism and the Quest for Autonomy

The notion of responsibility articulated here is decidedly individualistic, rooted not in communitarian orders of propriety and status as in the conservative type, but in individual choices and obligations to a small number of close relatives and friends. As Tobias says:

Everyone is the master of their own fate, as they say. So a lot depends on you, how you approach things. You need to decide that for yourself. [...] I won't let others tell me what to do and I also won't do that to others, that I tell them what they should or should not do. Everyone should do what he thinks is right. And then also live up to the consequences when something goes wrong.<sup>208</sup> (Tobias, 00:45)

Mike Savage writes of the social logic of this emphasis on ordinariness and individuality as “articulating a strong naturalistic and individualistic ethic. Ultimately, people are individuals, and leaving aside the special case of the upper class, everyone is in the same boat. [...] This is a basic, elemental individualism, with little conception of the individual as a social product, but rather an insistent declaration on the individual as ‘natural’ sovereign of their own lives. Within this conception, the class structure exists in a shadowy way, not as a social system differentiating occupational groups, but as the stage on which the individual necessarily acts” (Savage 2005, 939).

If the discourse of Working Class Conservatives was shown to center on the defense of a sphere of embeddedness; and that of Social Populists on reclaiming the recognition as deserving ‘makers’; the discourse of Pragmatic Privatists revolves around the private achievement of *autonomy*. Although recognition deficits are criticized, work itself is not thematized in a negative way. Indeed many respondents explicitly emphasize their commitment and work ethic.<sup>209</sup> But it is made clear that the center of life lies outside of it. Marc, fictively addressing his employers, said “five days are yours. You tell me where to go

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<sup>208</sup> “Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmieds, sagt man ja. Also, es kommt halt viel von einem selber drauf an. Wie man Sachen angeht, oder wie halt nicht. Das muss man alles für sich selber entscheiden, ob das jetzt gut fein ist, oder wie er es machen möchte. Da lass ich mir von anderen nicht reinreden und ich will auch nicht, dass da... oder ich mache es auch nicht bei anderen, dass ich denen sage, was sie zu tun oder zu lassen haben. Jeder soll halt das machen, was er für richtig hält und dann auch mit diesen Konsequenzen leben, wenn es irgendwie mal schief geht“

<sup>209</sup> This was true for Kingsley, Marc, Anton, Oliver, and Lukas.

and I don't mind. The rest is mine" (Marc, 42). Similarly, Marco, a semi-skilled construction help stressed his independence from the demands of the workplace in a play on words with the terms employer (in German literally "work giver", *Arbeitgeber*) and employee ("work taker", *Arbeitnehmer*). "I do it for myself. I'm not taking work, I'm *giving* it, God damn it [*nicht der Arbeitnehmer, sondern der Arbeitgeber*]. And the people I work with get that. [...] I would never hunch my back, never bow down to anyone, never do a job I don't feel like doing, just because it pays better. [...] So I can be really relaxed"<sup>210</sup> (Marco, 99). Asked for career plans, Tobias waves the question aside: "Career, pfff. I'm not going to do the master [craftsman certificate]. Not my thing. Sure, do a few courses, learn new things. Privately, I want to get along, family-wise, to settle down. [...] The main thing is to be happy." (Tobias, 00:41).

The idea of a house of one's own plays a central role in the respondents' imaginary, including among some whose income will not easily allow for this idea to be realized. As we saw, building a house for one's family was also central for many of the respondents in the Conservative cluster, but there is a subtle difference in emphases here, whereby the (overall poorer) workers in this cluster cite a house as the ultimate symbol of self-determination and independence. Although work as such is an important pillar of identity, there is a palpable sense that the autonomy sought outside the work sphere is directly linked to a sense of heteronomy in the work place and the wider social sphere.

Lukas, for instance, a Berlin landscape builder in his mid-thirties explained his plans of a self-sufficient farm in the countryside saying, "you never have space to do things without people telling you what to do. [...] There, no one would tell me what to do" (Lukas, 22). Throughout the interview Lukas returns to the house he dreams about, which should be close to a stream of water and with solar panels to be as self-sufficient as possible. The house is a contrasting device through which Lukas criticizes his sense of heteronomy and dependence on money, his employer, the state, technology, and consumption, all of which he summarizes as 'the system': "If the system falls apart, I could feed myself there. [...] Right now, I am always creating things for *other* people. I mean that's being honored and paid for and all. But overall it's something

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<sup>210</sup> „Also ich mache das für mich. Ich bin, nicht der *Arbeitnehmer*, sondern der *Arbeitgeber*, verdammt nochmal. Und so ist das. Und das checken Menschen, die mit mir arbeiten, ich bin immer gut drauf auf Arbeit. Ich bin immer so, aber so, ich würde mich niemals krumm machen. Niemals buckeln. Niemals was arbeiten, wo ich kein Bock drauf hab, nur weil's mehr Geld gibt. Und deswegen bin ich ganz entspannt.“

where I say, 'I do this for others'. In a way, I'm sacrificing myself [*aufopfern*]. I would like to try to go my own way, and be independent" (Lukas, 22).<sup>211</sup>

In direct contrast to the exigencies of 'the world', the house is the (often imaginary) place of individual autonomy and care for the intimate relations that matter. Most drastically this is expressed in a post-interview conversation by Maximilian, a trained service worker who has been working for the minimum wage in a logistics facility for a while: "I'd like to have a house in the countryside [...], where no one comes and bends my ear about some bullshit. I'll get a gun [*Knarre*] and if someone comes that I don't want to see I'll say 'piss off'. I mean I don't want to be alone, but only with the people that I really want to see" (Maximilian, Memo 1).<sup>212</sup>

### **"It Depends On the Person" – Tolerance**

The corollary of this insistence on autonomy and individual independence is a sense of *tolerance* regarding others. A sense of 'live and let live' is common to all respondents in this cluster. As Marc explained with a humoristic delivery,

For example, I don't accept that the Indians, [...] that the cow is a sacred animal. They don't accept that I eat cows. But when I'm in their country, we tolerate each other. Because I'm a nice guy, he's a nice guy, and, yeah- You just don't have this simple *tolerance* anymore, this 'Just let him do whatever he wants, as long as he doesn't bother me'. [...] You don't need to think well of it, but- You as a person act within what seems logical to you: If someone wants to balance at one hundred meters height without a net, if he thinks that's the shit, please go ahead! I'm just not gonna scrape you off the floor afterwards [laughs]. That quote describes it pretty well: you just do

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<sup>211</sup> "Aber überhaupt [...] hast du nie n Platz, wo du irgendwas machen kannst, wo dir da keiner reinreden kann. [...] Und da ist das so ein Gedanke, 'da kann mir keiner reinreden, was ich da mache' [...] Also gerade wenn das System zusammenbricht, würd ich mich da selbst versorgen können. Also weil ich jetzt halt grade immer für *andere Leute* etwas schaffe oder pflege. Und, ja, da ist zwar auch ne Honorierung und das wird honoriert und so. Aber auf Dauer ist es dann was, wo ich immer sagen kann, 'das ist für die Anderen'. Und n bisschen opfer ich mich da halt auf. [...] Ich würde es gern mal ausprobieren, [...] so seinen eigenen Weg zu gehen und unabhängig sein."

<sup>212</sup> For Kingsley, a help in a factory for car parts who emigrated to Germany from an African country a decade ago, the prospect is to go back to his home country and build a livelihood there.

it, man. Everyone makes their own fate. You just can't expect everyone else to follow you." (Marc, 56)<sup>213</sup>.

This tolerance is also borne out in a refusal to "put people in boxes" (see below), which also marks a different attitude towards migrants in this cluster. Strikingly, respondents here barely talked about migration. In two of the interviews (including the one with Lukas), the topic did not come up at all; in others, the interviewees showed a wariness of generalized judgments that also came out in political questions. Cabinet maker Tobias thought that in the refugee crisis, Germany could have "paid a bit more attention to its own people [*das eigene Volk*]". But he immediately hesitated and adds, "I mean, 'the people', what does that even mean [*was heißt 'das Volk'*]? But the pensioners, old age poverty, they could have also put a bit more money into that as well, not only the refugees." (Tobias, 00:33). Speaking about the Polish and Turkish workers on the construction sites he works on, Tobias repeatedly states that

it depends on the person. It varies from person to person, how they contribute or behave. You can't lump them all together. It always depends on the person. [...] [The same] with these clichés. That the Poles are cheap and the Southerners only work with their families and so on. We should get this cliché thinking out of our heads, then everything will be alright.<sup>214</sup> (Tobias, 00:30)

### **8.3. Relation to Politics: "Between a Douche and a Turd"**

#### **"You Can Do Your Thing Without Me" – Political Privatism**

Already in the 1950s, Richard Hoggart observed a strong sense of tolerance in the English working class. He describes it as arising "from the unexpectant, unfanatic, unidealistic group

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<sup>213</sup> "Ich akzeptiere nicht, dass die Inder- [...] dass die Kuh da n heiliges Tier ist. Sie akzeptieren nicht, dass ich Kuh esse. Aber trotzdem, wenn ich in ihrem Land bin tolerieren wir uns. Weil ich bin bestimmt n netter Mensch, er ist n netter Mensch und ja. Aber du hast halt nicht mal mehr diese simple Toleranz, so 'lass den mal machen was er will solange er mich dabei nicht stört'. [...] Man müsste da hinkommen- man muss ja nicht gut darüber denken, sondern- du als Mensch handelst ja in dem was dir logisch vorkommt. [...] Wenn jemand jetzt auf hundert Meter Höhe balancieren will ohne Sicherheitsnetz. Wenn ihm das geil scheint, bitte! Ich kratz dich aber nicht hinterher auf. [lacht] Dieser Spruch beschreibt es ziemlich gut. So: "mach es doch, aber Mann, ne. Ich mein jeder ist seines eigenen Glückes Schmied, aber du kannst nicht erwarten, dass alle dir folgen".

<sup>214</sup> "Kommt auf die Person drauf an, genau. Das ist halt von Person zu Person unterschiedlich, wie sie sich einbringen, wie sie sich verhalten. Das kann man jetzt nicht so pauschalisieren, also. Das kommt halt auf die jeweiligen Personen immer drauf an [...] Klischees. Die Polen sind halt, von wegen immer Polen sind billig oder die Südländer halt nur familiär unterwegs oder sowas. Aber dieses Klischeedenken sollte man eh aus seinem Kopf rauskriegen und dann geht das schon alles."

sense, from the basic acceptance by most people of the larger terms of their life” (Hoggart 1957, 70f.). Hoggart continues, “working-class people are generally suspicious of principles before practice. [...] Life is never perfect: avoid extremes; most things are ‘alright up to a point’, and, after all, ‘it all depends’. [...] Views never matter enough, but people do” (ibid.). This sketch, citing figures of speech common among the English working class of the 1950s, comes strikingly close to the political talk I observed in the Privatist cluster. Respondents here presented themselves as emphatically unideological and distant from political creeds. If reconstructed in terms of opinions and preferences, the cluster of Pragmatic Privatists would appear as center left-leaning or liberal, and all seven respondents who mentioned past voting decisions named center-left parties like the SPD (as well as the satirical party *Die Partei*) who were identified with ‘the social side’ (Marc), or being ‘the only ones who are still kind of human’ (Lukas).

But the same individualism that lead respondents to tolerant stances towards foreigners also informed an anti-political stance, eschewing positionings according to distinctions of the political game. Asked about what ‘right-wing’ mean to him, Anton, a tight-lipped mechanic in an industrial plant in rural West-Germany, replied: “I don’t know, stupid people? [laughs] I can’t understand that, how someone is against foreigners and thinks they’re stealing all the jobs and all this right-wing hogwash [*Gelaber*]. You don’t need to label [*abstempeln*] people like that. Human is human. Whether you’re black, white, yellow, doesn’t matter.” But, Anton continued, “I also find it really stupid to divide things into left and right, that people always need to divide and label everything” (Anton, 150).<sup>215</sup>

Here again, the demarcation of private life against the wider world became relevant: Indicating the flat where I interviewed him, Marc said,

For me politics is like: ‘You guys can do your thing without me’ [*Macht euer Ding doch alleine*]. I take care that *this* house-political space [*hauspolitische Raum*] here works. And if everyone would take care of their house-political spaces, we wouldn’t have problems! [laughs] [...] You have a limited area of influence. Even if you’re a – what are

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<sup>215</sup> „Da hab ich ehrlich gesagt keine richtige Vorstellung. Müsst ich mich mal mehr mit beschäftigen. Ich beschäftige mich da schon n bisschen damit, aber... was aktiv... mich zu beteiligen, beschäftige ich mich leider nicht so viel mit. Mir fehlt leider auch so'n bisschen die Zeit weil ich leider echt viel arbeite. Es gibt Zeiten, da arbeite ich jeden Tag zehn Stunden, und den Samstag.” (Anton, 109)

they called now? – *influencer* [...], you take away their smartphones and they will notice that their influence is v-e-e-e-ry limited” (Marc, 63).

The political system and particularly parties are met with distrust and disenchantment. When talking about voting in past elections, Marc referenced *South Park*, a show about teenagers in a US high school whose dark and cynical humor his own is modeled on:

Do you know the episode ‘vote or die’? You should check it out. There, the kids have to vote for a new school mascot. And they must choose between a douche and a turd. And the main guy doesn’t understand the difference, because both are shit. And his father says, ‘That’s how it always is. It doesn’t matter what you want, it’s always a choice between a douche and a turd’. And I think that’s exactly how it is.<sup>216</sup> (Marc, 63).

The respondents’ political self-presentation resembled what Eliasoph (1990) describes as ‘irreverent speakers’; i.e. such who “tried to sound witty and irreverent, as if they themselves, and not larger political issues, were the real referents of the discussion. Such people used their words as a wedge between themselves and the world of politics; [...] absolving themselves of responsibility for that they saw as the absurdity and corruption of political life” (Eliasoph 1990, 466). In line with their individualistic self-understandings, interviewees cared about presenting themselves as critical and independent people making up their own minds, instead of thinking in the ‘boxes’ of political categories or following the ‘herd’ manipulated by the media and phony politicians. But without the means of actually replacing the dominant political vocabulary with an independent one, this seemingly unbothered position above the fray effectively collapsed into a cynical and undifferentiated apoliticism. “The AfD are just other screaming monkeys”, Marc said, “and right now they’re screaming the loudest. But a few years ago the CDU and the SPD were the loudest monkeys. Now the Greens have found a microphone that they want to scream into as well”<sup>217</sup> (Marc, 63).<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Indeed, like the makers of *South Park* (see Harkinson 2007), Marc can essentially be described as a *libertarian* in the ideological sense. “Politiker sind wie die Teamleiter von meiner Firma, sorgt dafür, dass alles einigermaßen läuft. Die Politik sollten nicht darüber entscheiden, wie die Polizisten ihren Job zu tun haben, sondern die Polizisten sollten darüber entscheiden, wie sie ihren Job zu tun haben.”

<sup>217</sup> Of the AfD, Marc says, „das sind halt andere Affen, die brüllen, weißt du, das sind halt derzeit die lautesten Affen, die brüllen. Aber vor n paar Jahren waren es noch die CDU und die SPD, die lautesten Affen. Jetzt haben die Grünen n Mikrofon gefunden und wollen auch nochmal reinschreien”

<sup>218</sup> This pattern is a variant of what has been described as ‘idle’ or ‘dissatisfied democrats’, citizens who hold basic democratic values but are critical about ‘real existing democracy’ (Schmitter 2011), and who reject both conventional politics and movement alternatives, with the exception of individualized and local action not directed at state authorities (Weisskircher and Hutter 2019).

A striking elaboration of this pattern can be found in the account of Lukas, the landscaping worker we had earlier seen thinking about building a house for when “the system breaks down”. He returned again and again to this nameless ‘system’, which in the following passage encompassed surveillance, the intensification of work, environmental destruction, and inequality. Lukas formulated elements of an extensive social critique dissociated from political action.

One is somehow a *marionette*, I think. You have to function. It’s like we said earlier, with these surveillance systems, that one can really get scared about a, a computer government. [...] That everything is getting faster, always more controlled and more and more pressure is piled on people.

I: Why is it like that, you think?

Because probably there is a competition in the whole world. [...] And somehow [sighs] there is no great readiness to help others. Because money and property... yes... it’s all in the heads. I think we simply ran off the rails somewhere. Can humanity even feed itself without the suffering of nature? [...] Probably not. Somewhere something went off the rails and-. But in the end, I’m not the guy [laughs] who really knows about the exact problems. All that politics is difficult from the outside. I don’t think I could wrap my head around how-. Yeah, and so I rather look at my own little world. What I can do for my family. Without someone telling me what to do, or saying, ‘now the rent has risen and you have to move to *Marzahn* [peripheral area of East Berlin].’ And then suddenly your world falls apart, because you haven’t thought earlier about maybe [laughs] building a world for yourself.” (Lukas, 50)

This striking passage presents something like the elemental process of political exclusion and self-exclusion. Lukas develops a fragmentary but wide-ranging social critique, united into a menacing depersonalized system of exploitation, competition, control, and environmental destruction. Then suddenly he switches gears and laughs, seemingly thinking he has gone out of his depth and is “not the guy” to talk about this “from the outside”. This acknowledgement of de facto political exclusion qua lack of statutory competences (Gaxie 1978) and power is then answered with a form of self-exclusion that follows the privatistic ethos described above: Where “politics” is all overwhelming structure, “my little world” is all agency. Combining

escapism with the taking of responsibility, the task “building a world for yourself” consists in saving the family from the destructive impact of the system.

What is remarkable in Lukas’ segment is that he acknowledges how the individual and the wider social world are intertwined, using the example of being pushed out of his flat in a middle class West-Berlin neighborhood due to market dynamics (a very real threat for him, as he told me). In Lukas’ case, we witness cool, irreverent apoliticism give way to an open engagement with fears, doubts, and anger about social realities. Yet it seems that the self-evident unassailability of the system – at times expressed in conspiracist terms of “powers that tell the politicians where to go” (52) – makes private escapism the more rational response. Explaining why he could not see himself becoming politically active, Lukas said: “I find it difficult to waste my energy there. I feel too *small* for that. [...] I’d have the feeling [sighs] that you become a little... you just end up becoming *criminal*. You just get all worked up and angry and like... in the end you just distance yourself even further from society” (Lukas, 52).<sup>219</sup>

#### **8.4. Summary**

The cluster of Pragmatic Privatists is above all marked by the struggle for private autonomy under conditions of heteronomy and limited means. While the realities of work and social position are met with “pragmatic acceptance” (Mann 1970, 435) and a lower-middle class ethos of moderation, the moral focus lies on building and tending one’s own “little world” and achieving independence, e.g. by a self-determined “giving” instead of “taking” of work, or escapist dreams about a self-sufficient “house by a stream”. Pragmatic Privatists mainly orient their self-understandings by a divide between the individual sphere and the wider world. On first glance, this appears like a variant of the big world-small world boundary of the Working Class Conservatives, but both strongly differ in that the post-traditional, individualized logic of the Privatists does not carry connotations of communitarian embeddedness or local identity.

This is relevant also for the elaboration of social identities along the universalist-particularist divide. Here we saw that Pragmatic Privatists generalize their own quest for independence into a worldview of “live and let live”, whereby difference is accepted and ethnic and other

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<sup>219</sup> “Find ich halt schwierig für mich jetzt also da jetzt Energie zu... *verschwenden* sag ich mal. Also da fühl ich mich zu *klein* für. [...] Also da hab ich dann eher so das Gefühl [seufzt], dass man so'n bisschen.. da wirst du am Ende nur *kriminell*. Weil du da deine Kraft so auspowerst und dann wütend wirst und so und.. letztendlich distanziert man sich nur noch mehr von der Gesellschaft.”

classifications are rejected as overly schematic. This undogmatic, experience-based form of 'liberal' identification perhaps depicts a more mundane pathway of diffusing cleavage antagonism than outright antiracism, especially because we saw elements of the differentiation e.g. of migrants ("it depends on the person") also in statements of the earlier clusters. Workers like the Pragmatic Privatists have not received much attention in recent discourses about the working class. But there is reason to believe that they represent a very common pattern of post-traditional working class identities. Using the MCA coordinates found above, we can show that 30.6% of production workers are situated within the range of .5 standard deviations around the barycenter on the universalism-particularism dimension. In other words, almost a third of this occupational class is not distinguished from the average population in terms of the "new cleavage".

While the Privatist cluster can be described as habitually liberal in the categories of analysis of outside observers, its respondents are every bit as distant from institutional politics as the previous ones. Yet here too, there seems to be a diversity that would warrant deeper study. While political exclusion was negotiated via an ambivalent paternalistic delegation among the Conservatives, and indignant protest against "those above" among Social Populists, Pragmatic Privatists embody a form of depoliticization that, in a sense, bears the direct heritage of liberalism, i.e. that of a strong divide between private happiness and the political, individual and society. Below the level of depoliticization, workers also in this cluster articulate a deep critique of inequalities. But these are ultimately relegated to an environment which lies beyond the individuals' reach and therefore must be navigated as best as one's means allow.

## **9. Solidarity: Alternative Workers**

If the Privatist workers could be described as liberal or left-leaning only from the standpoint of an outside observer, a fourth and last cluster of workers is formed by respondents whose habitus and self-understandings are explicitly shaped by a socialization in left-wing or alternative subcultures. The cluster, which I call *Alternative Workers*, consists mostly of larger city craftspeople. The contact to half of its 10 interviewees resulted from snowballing outwards from one respondent<sup>220</sup> who sent me text messages with phone numbers saying

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<sup>220</sup> I choose to sample like this because this respondent's account differs quite starkly from the other working class interviewees recruited before. Snowballing in this context helps to increase the diversity of the sample. On the other hand the relatively limited sampling of this cluster makes it internally very homogenous. In this sense,

things like: “Jackpot! Here’s a really solid guy [*korrekter Typ*] to talk to”. As I came to realize, this already expressed a significant characteristic of the clusters’ self-understanding. Although respondents generally like their work and get along well with most colleagues, they often draw boundaries between a relatively small group of “solid” or “cool people” (terms used by Matthias, Lara, and Ole), “with something in their heads” (Werner) in their occupations, and the majority of their co-workers.

“It’s just a fact that a lot of peasants [*Bauern*] work in the manufacturing trades”, the industrial carpenter Ole told me, “who kind of unite everything from classical antisemitism via misogyny to xenophobia. [...] I even have this colleague who is pretty smart actually, but then one day said to me, ‘the *Wehrmacht* were all good people, it was only the SS that was bad’. And I’m just thinking, ‘du-u-ude’ [lays his hand on his forehead]” (Ole, 16).<sup>221</sup> The term *Bauern* – literally peasants, figuratively fools or idiots – is humorous and derogatory slang for what essentially functions as the counterpart of the “cool people”. It evokes a lack of cultivation and sensitivity, closed-mindedness and stupidity – ‘primitive’, as three respondents put it. Such characteristics of the sociocultural low are often directly conflated with right-wing political views. As the progressive workers define themselves by a lifestyle linked to leftist political identities, Nazis, as well as right-wing tendencies among many co-workers are the central points of demarcation. Respondents often quite drastically oppose their orientations to that of ‘your cliché craftsmen’ (Charlotte) reading tabloids, making sexist jokes, and complaining about foreigners.

Socially, the respondents essentially stand with their two feet in different worlds: Through their political activity, alternative lifestyle (“long hair and a VW bus”, Werner), or the desire to “look beyond one’s nose” (Matthias) these workers are embedded in circles of sociability and socialization outside the milieu of their workplace. From squats belonging to the left political scene, to studenty flatshares, to the hedonistic alternative milieu centered on nightlife and self-realization in the big cities. The boundary between these circles and the “normal” workers is based on lifestyles, morality, and politics; but it is also quite explicitly defined by education.

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the following should not be read as reconstructing ‘progressivism among young workers’ writ large, but rather as a portrayal of a habitus form that strongly contrasts with those of the other types.

<sup>221</sup> “Es ist halt ein Fakt, dass halt in so Baugewerben total viele *Bauern* einfach arbeiten. Die halt so von klassischem Antisemitismus über Frauenfeindlichkeit zu Ausländerfeindlichkeit alles irgendwie vereinen. Keine Ahnung, ich hab n Arbeitskollegen, der ist ziemlich ziemlich schlau. Aber der hat zu mir gesagt, ‘die *Wehrmacht*, das waren alles gute Leute, nur die SS war scheiße’, wo ich so denke ‘Al-I-Iter’.”

While hailing both from middle and working class families, 9 out of 10 respondent in this cluster had earned the *Abitur*, the highest degree of the three-tiered German school system. According to ALLBUS data of 2018, this was true only for 15% of production workers in the Oesch classification.<sup>222</sup> As we saw in the statistical analysis, education is as powerful an ideological differentiator *within* classes as it is for the population as a whole.

### **9.1. Moral Economy: “That Could Be Me As Well!”**

As I arrived at the station of a larger city in East Germany Friday evening, Ole greeted me in a black hoody and baggy pants, looking tired. He had been in the factory since six in the morning, “happy the week is over”, he said, while he kept smiling absent-mindedly. We passed by Ole’s room in a flatshare, which he let me sleep in for two nights, surrounded by posters of burning cars, hooded people in black, and bold threats against Nazis. Bypassing the city center – “nothing to see there, just mindless shopping” – we made our way to the interview location in the city’s “nice”, “alternative” neighborhood. Indian and Korean take-aways, and an organic bakery were gathered around a small square, young people were smoking outside a dark bar with brick-lined walls and loud guitar music. In a backstreet lay the leftist squat that Ole picked for the interview. A young woman wearing shorts over a pair of leopard tights opened the door, behind her, a bald muscular man covered in tattoos was washing glasses at a bar counter. As we climbed down to a basement room, the woman followed us, telling me she had been studying sociology as part of her degree in social work. Downstairs, it smelled of cigarettes and synthetic paint, from a long row of spray painted pink and silver placards drying on the floor, showing all-caps slogans for a feminist demo.

Ole was one of the youngest of my interviewees. Chainsmoking throughout the evening and wobbling on his chair, he exuded a rebellious, restless energy. “I’m someone who can’t sit still” he introduced himself, “And I don’t like to laze around. But what I also don’t like is to do nonsensical jobs at work. I don’t know, mow the lawn because there’s nothing else to do. Or some pointless cleaning where things will be dirty again tomorrow anyway. I can be quite short-tempered when these things aren’t done right” (Ole, 5). Refusing to do senseless work was important for Ole, and connected him with other workers in this cluster, who were much

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<sup>222</sup> 17.8% if including equivalent higher vocational certificates, according to the SOEP (2016).

more critical of their employment conditions and the idea of a work ethic than most other interviewees.

Lara, a resolute carpenter from West-Berlin, described working in a firm in the East of the city, saying, “They have this, I wouldn’t call it work ethic, because ethic is so positively connotated. It’s really more of a disorder [*Macke*] in the East. To go to work half dead and... be like [...] ‘the company *needs* me!’ Where I look at them and say, ‘my dude, the company is *fucking* you over! You’re working too much and they’re refusing to pay for your overtime.’” While others were too afraid to complain, Lara said, “I went up [to the management] and shat on their table. That’s a no-go” (Lara, 22).<sup>223</sup> Ole, an active member of the metal workers’ union, also went ‘up’ to the management’s office once, waving an envelope and demanding “this and that money. Otherwise this is my resignation”. He got what he wanted, he told me with a broad smirk, although the envelope was empty. “We are the capital of the company. If they don’t have workers, they also can’t produce anything” (Ole, 20).

He complained that “many people sell themselves under their value” (Ole, 6) and rather fight amongst each other over wage differentials than to confront the management: “Many people are fixated on ‘What do the others have, what do I have?’ [...] Where it’s like: [moans] who cares?” (ibid.). A particularly bad case was “the temp system”, Ole explained. Temp workers continually worked in the factory where Ole was employed, and only nominally got shifted from one temp firm to another every half year to (illegally) forego employment rights. “They do their job well”, Ole said, but compared to the normal workers, their conditions are like those of “paupers” [*Tagelöhner*] or “migratory laborers in China or the States” (Ole, 3). It often is other, permanent workers who send the temps to do the dirtiest and hardest jobs. “How sick is that?”, Ole asked. He directly parallelized the competition and envy between workers to the anger fueling the opposition against refugees:

That anger isn’t even always unjustified, but it’s directed against the wrong target. It’s like saying, my boss is shit, so I’m going to annoy my colleagues. [...] I think it’s people who for twenty years have been in a loop of social assistance, who are totally left

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<sup>223</sup> “[Da gibt’s] ein bisschen so- Ich würde es gar nicht Arbeitsethos nennen, weil Ethos so positiv konnotiert ist, finde ich eigentlich. Weil das ist ja richtig so eine Macke, schon. So halb tot zur Arbeit zu gehen und ähm... im Osten- [...] Und das ist so, die Firma braucht mich. Und ich stehe da und denk so: "Digga, die Firma verarscht dich." Du arbeitest zu viel, du wirst nicht bezahlt so... [...] Ich hab denen so auf den Tisch gekackt, so... das geht gar nicht so.” (Lara, 22)

behind [*abgehängt*], who want something and don't get it. And then someone comes and gets it immediately. But then it's totally wrong to attack the people who got it! You should attack the ones who distribute it. You know? That's like if I am angry with my colleague for earning more money than me. [...] But of course that's exactly how it works. I think that's exactly what a company or a company management wants to achieve. The more the employees are divided... the easier it is (Ole, 8).<sup>224</sup>

Ole was also part of the local Antifa, a life-defining decision in a region in which the radical right had been strong for decades. Like the day following our interview, he and his friends spent many weekends driving to counterprotests against the countless marches of AfD and skinhead groups in the city's hinterland. Speaking about attacks on foreigners he said, "that's something that really drives me to despair sometimes. How people can get on each other's nerves so much?" (Ole, 7). For him it was important not to "look weirdly at people who look different, or who come from another country. Or to make space for them on the train when they want to get off." Being on the left meant to acknowledge that "these are totally normal people. That they, that... [exclaiming] *That could be me as well!*"

"That could be me as well" is something like a core tenet of the Alternative Workers' moral compass, who insist on solidarity across national and ethnic boundaries. Universalist moral intuitions are largely articulated negatively, by highlighting instances in which solidarity is violated or obstructed by social divisions and competition.<sup>225</sup> Marco, a construction worker who had just returned from a year working and travelling in Australia, recounted how at construction sites he worked on, over-exploited workers from Poland or Romania were not allowed to take breaks with German co-workers, "so for these boys it's super hard to organize

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<sup>224</sup> "Ich würde auch gar nicht sagen, dass die Wut immer unbegründet ist, aber das... das Ziel ist halt das falsche. Also was kann *der* denn dafür? Das ist so, 'Mein Chef ist scheiße, deswegen nerv ich meine Arbeitskollegen', das ist doch- [Woher kommt die Wut?] Ich glaub schon, dass Leute, die seit zwanzig Jahren in so'ner Sozialhilfeschleife sind und total abgehängt sind, irgendwas wollen und es nicht kriegen- Und dann kommt jemand und kriegt es sofort. Aber dann ist es ja total falsch, die Leute, die's sofort gekriegt haben, anzugreifen. Sondern die Leute, die's verteilen, n bisschen. Also weißt du? Ich kann doch auch nicht böse auf meine Arbeitskollegen sein, dass der mehr Geld verdient und deswegen auf den böse sein, das ist ja, das funktioniert ja nicht. Also natürlich funktioniert das so: [...] das ist ja, das ist ja genau das, was, was in meinen Augen ne Arbeit... oder n Betrieb oder ne Betriebsleitung erreichen will. Also umso gepaltener... die Belegschaft ist, umso einfacher ist das-".

<sup>225</sup> Ole, for instance, deconstructed the 'foreigner' category by narrating how xenophobia shifted from being directed against the Vietnamese, to Eastern Europeans, and now to Arab and African migrants: "I have a Russian colleague at work, [...] whom the people don't consider a foreigner. Where I think: And just because someone else is from Syria, he's a foreigner now or what?" (Ole, 10)

themselves, and even to realize that it's not cool at all what is happening to them" (Marco, 74).<sup>226</sup> And Lara explained,

the system is designed to distract people and drive them apart. The state has no interest to bring people together [...]. They are not supposed to talk to each other. Many work contracts say that you can't talk about your wages, for example. So this prevents [...] information, fraternization. And if everyone is doing their own thing, stuck in their own everyday, their suffering, their love [...], there's no point of overlap. This makes it really hard.<sup>227</sup> (Lara, 01:14)

Ole was rather resigned about the prospects of organizing in his workplace. "It's a deadlocked process. It's hard to overcome a class society [*Klassengesellschaft*] with these people [...] They managed to make it so, over the years. [I: Who did?] The management. But not only them, this also happens all by itself" (Ole, 7).

## 9.2. Sense of Social Location: "Not Your Cliché Craftsman"

### "What Do You Even Call *Working Class* Nowadays?" – Disidentification From Class

Significantly, despite Ole's use of the term "class society", the universalist stance of the alternative workers is not articulated from a class standpoint, as was the case among many politicized workers in the past (see e.g. Popitz et al. 2018). Instead, there is a great deal of ambivalence and confusion about class, both in terms of one's own sense of social location, and politically. Picking up on Ole's mentioning the "class society", I asked him which class he

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<sup>226</sup> "Und die Leute [...], die durften nicht zusammen Pause machen. Damit sie sich nicht austauschen, wie viel die verdienen, damit die nicht checken, dass die komplett über's Ohr gehauen werden. Und solche wilden Sachen passieren einfach gerade bei uns. Und auf jeder großen Baustelle ist das so. Da sind halt 400 Leute, diese ganzen Häuser, die sie hier hochziehen, so schnell. Das sind super viele Menschen, die da jetzt arbeiten, die aus Rumänien, die aus Polen kommen, die absolut nicht gerecht behandelt werden nach unseren Standards, die es eigentlich gibt und die eingehalten werden sollten. Und für die Jungs ist das halt super schwer sich zu organisieren und überhaupt zu checken, dass das überhaupt nicht cool ist, was mit denen passiert. [...] Eigentlich ist deutsches Handwerk schon sehr geschützt und sehr gut geregelt. Also eigentlich sind alle Sicherheiten da. [...] aber Schweinerei halt mit den ausländischen Arbeitern."

<sup>227</sup> "Es [ist] vom System her drauf angelegt, Dinge zu dezentralisieren. Also die Leute abzulenken und auseinanderzutreiben. Es ist kein staatliches Interesse, dass mit wirtschaftlichem Fokus unterfüttert wird, die Menschen zusammenzubringen. Die sollen sich nicht unterhalten. Ich glaube ein Großteil aller Arbeitsverträge steht drinne, ... es wird nicht über Lohn gesprochen, zum Beispiel, untereinander, ne. Also das verhindert ja [...] Information, Zusammenschluss. Und wenn jeder halt sein Süppchen kocht und ja auch in seinem Alltag, in seiner Not, in seiner Liebe, in seiner Freude steckt, dann ist da kein ... ja keine Schnittmenge gibt, ne [...] ist das super schwer."

belonged to. He stayed silent for four seconds, then began hesitantly: “Do- do you want me to-?... I don’t know whether I would count myself as part of the working class [*ArbeiterInnenklasse*]. Or whether one can still- These terms are a bit outdated at times. I mean, of course one could still support class struggle and... believe that... that one is strong and many. But-”

Although I had not used the term, Ole assumed that I (as a sociologist, or perhaps what he reads as a fellow leftist) expected him to identify as working class. Yet he kept this term at a distance by using the impersonal pronoun “*man*” (one), instead of the personal ‘we’, and speaking in subjunctive (“one could”). Noticeably, he also immediately interprets class as concerning a *political* claim and uses the rare, non-colloquial gender-inclusive form *ArbeiterInnenklasse*. This attests to the primacy of the political register, and specifically of ‘New Politics’, in the accounts of workers in this cluster. Uneasy with class terminology, Ole subsequently refocused his statement on a gradational, systemic image of inequality, continuing, “But- what I find so annoying is that this gap between poor and rich has exploded to such an extreme degree. [...] I think the thousand wealthiest people keep 50 percent of the... of whatever. [...] What kind of logic is that? A thousand versus seven billion?” He explained:

“I don’t know... I feel that’s a bit like in the days of the *knights*, you know? You’re the feudal serf and the gov-... Yea, but it’s difficult to say it like that. It’s difficult, it’s not easy to put this in words.

I: Why is it difficult?

Well because you would first have to define class somehow. How do you- For me it would- I can’t really explain that... but-... how do I define class? But if I had to, I think I would definitely put myself in the middle stratum [*Mittelschicht*]. Yea.

I: What does that mean, *Mittelschicht*?

*Mittelschicht*? ... I don’t know. That I can do what I want. A little bit. [...] When I’m hungry, then I sometimes go and eat outside somewhere. Or... when I want to have a beer, I go have a beer, instead of... having to go to Penny [discounter] and buy the

budget brand canned stew and... drink beer for 19 cents because it's on offer. [...] Which I think is different for a lot of people.

I: And would those be the working class? Or would it be wrong to put it like that?

Mhm... I mean, what do you even call working class nowadays? Is... the bar woman a worker [*Arbeiterin*]? Is she a service employee [*Servicekraft*]? What is an IT guy? Is that working class? I mean he also works. So that's what I mean. You can't really keep these things apart these days... In a way, a banker also goes to work every day. Though he does things where I wonder: Was that really necessary that you just did that? [laughs] (Ole, 12)

There is a strong ambivalence about class and a disidentification with the terms worker and working class: In Ole's sociology, the term is discarded as dated and unprecise. For his personal positioning, it is replaced with the same income- and consumption-based *Mittelschicht* identification we already saw in most other clusters, and which here again is demarcated against the struggling poor below and the excessively rich above. By contrasting the term to the bar woman and the IT employee, the working class is implicitly associated with an older model of (male) industrial work. As such it is treated as a nostalgic, dated reference, also in political terms. Lara, who said she came from a working class family [*Arbeiterfamilie*], speaks about listening to songs of the 1930s workers' movement:

My puberty consisted of listening to [...] Ernst Busch, Brecht songs and all this workers stuff [*Arbeiterkram*]. There's something I like about it. This togetherness, this, yea, solidarity... the closing of the ranks and so on. [...] But back then there were also [...] different worker societies, you went to the workers' choir, you were in the workers' sports club, so there was much more of a network. [...] Today, some perhaps still go to do sports, or sing, but it's not anymore 'FC Sparta' or something [laughs]. You don't even have working class neighborhoods today, because work functions so differently. There are still crafts and trades and so on, but there as well you have a lot of digitality, much more is done on the computer. And, I think many people are also just incredibly tired. (Lara, 01:13).<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> "Also, meine Pubertät bestand darin, dass ich [...] Ernst Busch und so gehört [habe], die ganzen Brecht-Lieder und den Arbeiterkram. Und da mag ich, irgendwas mag ich daran. Weil der Zusammen- also, ja, Solidarität ist

Strikingly, in these unique moments where interviewees situated themselves in terms of a larger social history, this was done negatively. The heyday of the workers' movement in its political and social organizations, here embodied by an emblematic working class football club "Sparta", serves as a contrast for exploring the current decomposition and demobilization of the working class. We can read Laras and Ole's accounts as reflections of the opacity or pluralization of the class structure reconstructed by Oesch (2011) and Vester et al. (2001), as well as the demobilization of class as a political category.

In the following it becomes clear that the left-right distinction, too, is unmoored from questions of class for these highly politicized workers. As I tried to further probe Ole's initial *political* understanding of the term class, he again redirected his discourse from class conflict to a conflict between the rich and the (extremely) poor, which he located on the relatively far removed plane of global inequality (instead of, say, the union struggles he had talked about earlier). In the same segment, Ole then replaced the alien category of class –which I had pressed – by an opposition more comfortable for him: that between left and right.

I: And are there class *conflicts*?

Yes, of course there are class- I mean there are always conflicts between rich and poor. I mean, I don't know, if people are still dying of hunger on this fucking planet, then I would say there's always something-... Yea. And right now the big conflict is between Right and Left, I think. [That's] what is happening in the world.

I: And what does that conflict consist of?

I think for many, this conflict consists of discontent and of 'those people can take my piece of cake'. If someone like Orbán can come to power in Hungary. [...] That's all discontent and social fears. That people somehow... act against my ideas of life and... I cannot understand that, and dislike these people.

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halt ... der Zusammenschluss der Reihen, so. Dieses, sich bewusst werden über deine Situation, [...] wahrnehmen, wer du bist und dafür einstehen, ne. [...] Und früher gabs ja auch [...] verschiedene Arbeiterverbände, du warst im Arbeiterchor, du warst im Arbeitersportverein, also es gab viel mehr... Netzwerk. [...] Manche gehen [heute] vielleicht trotzdem zum Sport oder singen trotzdem oder so, aber das ist dann nicht mehr irgendwie FC Sparta [lacht] oder sowas [...]. Es gibt ja auch nicht mal mehr die Arbeiterbezirke, weil Arbeit ja auch ganz anders heute funktioniert ... Klar gibt es Handwerk und so weiter und sofort, aber .. es gibt auch in ganz vielen handwerklichen Branchen super viel Digitalität ... Maschinen, viel mehr findet am Computer statt oder sowas und ich glaub ja, viele sind einfach auch unheimlich müde."

In Ole's narrative, the conflict of left and right, which is seen as one of competition and social division versus solidarity, and first and foremost linked to questions of migration, replaces class as a logic of conflict and positionings. As we explore next, an important reason for this shift can be found in the fact that the Alternative Workers' primary point of identification – being left-wing or alternative – divides them from the majority of other workers. Throughout the cluster, self-understandings were most extensively defined by boundaries against other workers, their right-wing tendencies or lack of cultivation. Linking back to the fact that the workers in this cluster nearly all have the highest school degree *Abitur*, education and political sensitivities are the central themes here and mark a strong line of division between the Alternative Workers and their colleagues.

### ***“Us, Coming From the Abitur” – Politics and Lifestyle As Cultural Boundaries***

This already becomes visible in these workers' relation to their work. As we saw, workers in this cluster were proud to approach their work circumstances with confidence<sup>229</sup> and a critical stance. This also extended to higher expectations concerning the *meaning* of work. Deep relationships with one's work are of course very common among craftspeople. But where others mainly stressed their practical skills (see above), in the accounts of this cluster, work is embedded into a more extensive and generalized ethical picture: Lara said “I think I do most things because I find them personally aesthetic” (00:48) and continued, “for me it is about crafts with *attitude* [*Haltung*]. [...] it's like a *manifesto*, I would say. And with that attitude I can also enter a room” (Lara, 01:00). Matthias, who has just finished his training to become a master shoemaker, is proud to say that compared to others, he has “engaged with his job [*sich auseinandersetzen*] on another level” and “invested more thought effort [*Denkleistung*]” (Matthias, 5). Charlotte, a carpenter and woodcarver, mused that she chose to work with wood “probably out of a connection with nature. It makes most sense to me, because it just has a kind of meaning [*Sinnigkeit*] for me. In terms of the feeling, [...] but also in terms of sustainability” (Charlotte, 00:09).

At the same time, she often wondered, “What am I doing with my carpentry? I could study medicine and work with Doctors Without Borders. I mean, [...] that's clearly not my calling. But this is all so meaningless [*sinnfrei*]! Why am I doing woodcarving while somewhere in the

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<sup>229</sup> Perhaps bolstered by a very favourable pre-pandemic labor market for skilled workers.

Mediterranean people are drowning?” (Charlotte, 00:44). An ethical vision like Charlotte’s, which seeks to deepen the meaning of one’s work by embedding it in projects of personal or political development, was rare among the other workers, who largely treated their work as a straightforward fact of life and a sphere *sui generis*, not requiring elaboration in the terms of other spheres outside of it.

Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, this way of relating to work, however, was very common among the *sociocultural professionals* I talked to. This convergence of habitus is not a coincidence, I think, but reflects the fact that left-wing political and subcultural spaces, like Ole’s squat, the left-wing activist flatshares Charlotte and Lara speak about, or the alternative subcultures Matthias, Marco, and Werner felt close to, are populated to a significant degree by students. Like the sociology student who greeted us at the squat, Ole’s partner is enrolled at the university, and students are repeatedly mentioned by respondents as points of demarcation in the immediate circle of friends. As Charlotte complained, they “end up only talking about Marx and some super-duper concepts, and you stand there and are only able to talk about door frames and everybody couldn’t care less” (Charlotte, 01:07). For her, it was this subtle devaluation in comparison to the standard set by her university-going circle of friends that first prompted her “to identify as a craftswoman. As a direct demarcation [*Abgrenzung*]. [...] In order to say, ‘Hey, I’m here. This is what I do. You can be interested in this as much as I am interested in your Foucault!’” (ibid.).<sup>230</sup> Lara, talking about political circles she frequented, marked the boundary against “those who always make great speeches”, saying that she makes political connections via people’s attitude (again: *Haltung*), “of which a police trooper can have more than someone who puts on an Antifa shirt or holds a lecture about mining in Nicaragua at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation or something [both laugh]” (Lara, 194).<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> “Dann redet man nur über Marx und irgendwelche superduper Konzepte und du stehst daneben und kannst denen was von Türzagen erzählen und niemand will's wissen. Und dann fängst du, glaube ich an, dich explizit, entweder wirst du leise oder du musst halt gucken, dass die Leute dich ernst nehmen oder du suchst dir ein anderes Umfeld, ich weiß nicht. [...] Und auch als Abgrenzung dazu hab' ich mich doch als Handwerkerin identifiziert. [...] [Um] zu sagen, ‘Hey ich bin hier, das ist das, was ich mache. Und ihr könnt euch genauso interessieren, wie ich mich für euren Foucault!’”.

<sup>231</sup> „Mir gehts mehr um Haltung [und] da kann mir ne Person, die irgendwie beim SEK arbeitet mehr sein als so jemand, der da sein ... sein Antifa T-Shirt gerade anzieht oder bei ner Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung nen Vortrag über ... den Bergbau in Nicaragua hält oder sowas (beide lachen).”

The complicity shown in Lara's mentioning of academic talks at the left-wing Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation signals an overlap of cultural references between my interviewees and me that was uncommon in the other interviews with workers. This overlap of social horizons also appeared in demarcations directed at categories with lower education, e.g. when respondents spoke about "simple" (Matthias), "primitive" (Werner), "non-enlightened" [*unaufgeklärt*] (Maximilian) co-workers. Matthias, for instance, told me about seminars that were part of his vocational training and brought him together with other trainee shoemakers: "As these things go, when you're 19 or 20 and sort of ambitious, and you like to read and listen to a bunch of different music and then you arrive there with a troupe of 16-year-olds from Saxony who spend all day talking about- ... what's the name of this awful comedian? [I: Mario Barth?] Yes, exactly! My go-o-d [groans; both laugh]." (Matthias, 5).<sup>232</sup>

Rereading this quote, I was struck by the complicity Matthias and I developed over a shared cultural sense. This complicity is already inherent in the way Matthias presupposes my knowledge of 'how these things go' if you are a teenager interested in books and music. Cultural consumption is here cited as a proxy for a range of properties, from education, age, and regional origin, to politics: "The youngest [in the training] was 15, *Hauptschüler* [graduate of the lowest tier school], from Leipzig, a fascist [*Fascho*]. To a career changer in his late 20s, a Berliner, leftist and so on. [...] And in between those of us coming from the Abitur, [...] where we found our clique and then it was all cool<sup>233</sup>" (ibid., 8).<sup>234</sup> Perhaps even more striking was the fact that I could complete Matthias' statement and provide the name of the "awful" comedian he wanted to cite as a social marker of the 'sociocultural low'.

In these ways, the interviewees maintained a sense of social location that was marked by the identification with a small group of 'cool people' defined culturally as well as politically, and a disidentification from the predominant milieus they encountered in their workplaces. Maximilian, who, after training in a service occupation, found temporary employment in a logistics depot, said he wouldn't want to meet his colleagues outside of work:

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<sup>232</sup> "Wie das halt ist, wenn man mit 19 oder 20, so halbwegs ambitioniert, und gerne liest und n Haufen Musik hört und da hinkommt und da mit nem Haufen 16-Jähriger aus Sachsen da rumsitzt, die sich den ganzen Tag nur über- wie heißt nochmal dieser schlimme Komiker? [I: Mario Barth.] Ja, genau! Oh Gott [stöhnt; beide lachen]."

<sup>233</sup> Matthias himself grew up in a village in Eastern Germany which he describes as 'parochial' and 'limited', "very few possibilities to develop yourself, no night life, few cool people, many *Faschos*" (Matthias, 8).

<sup>234</sup> Der Jüngste war 15, der kam aus Leipzig, halt Hauptschüler, Fascho. Bis hin zu nem Umschüler, Ende 20, Berliner, und keine Ahnung links und so. Und dazwischen [...] dann so wir, die irgendwie vom Abi kamen, so 19 20-Jährige, wo wir dann so unsere Clique gefunden haben und da wars dann auch cool".

I rather have to do with musicians. I don't know, relaxed people with a positive mindset, than only frustrated workers [*Arbeiter*] who are a bit... hardcore [laughs]. [...] They're just- They are actually these people that you see sitting with a bottle of beer on the metro after work. I know some who are really nice, right? But also there are those real workers [*Arbeiter*]. [...] They want a house and then they want a pond in the garden of that house, and a dog... That's what they are after. [...] I like to work, but I don't see myself as a worker in the depot for the rest of my life." (Maximilian, 00:23).<sup>235</sup>

Charlotte, who herself came from a lower middle class family and described her situation as "precarious", put it equally bluntly:

"I see myself as a craftswoman. But I think many think [...] of crafts as construction work or roofing. Beers after work and dumb jokes [...] That's not the type of crafts I see myself in. I [do] quality crafts, where I create something with my hands that gives me joy and that gives joy to the people who have it. Without those stereotypes of someone from, I don't know, the lower middle class, who drinks beer and calls it a day at 4 pm" (Charlotte, 01:07).<sup>236</sup>

Repeatedly, respondents clarified that this demarcation was mutual and that they were treated as "freaks" [*bunter Hund*] (Matthias) by colleagues. Ole told me that he was being bullied at work for being a leftist, "like when I enter the hall, someone yells 'Germany!' because they think this provokes me. [...] You just have to stay tough and yell back: 'You lost the war!', then everyone shuts up again [laughs]" (Ole, 16).

Werner, who came from a family of academics and became a carpenter after a failed university degree, described his arrival in the new line of work as marked by mutual

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<sup>235</sup> "Einfach nicht meine Charaktere da. Ich habe lieber mit Musikern, relaxten Leuten, die n positives mindset haben zu tun, als nur frustrierte Arbeiter, die n bisschen... hardcore sind [lacht]. [...] Das sind einfach. Das sind echt die Leute, die dann wirklich mit der Bierflasche dann nach der Arbeit direkt in der S-Bahn sitzen, ne? Das sind diese- Aber ich kenn auch andere die sind richtig nett, ne? Aber das sind auch so richtige Arbeiter halt. Ich mag zwar arbeiten, aber ich seh mich jetzt nicht so als Arbeiter im Lager, dass ich das mein Leben lang machen will. Und die haben auch alle andere Wünsche, ne? Die wollen halt irgendwann n Haus, dann wollen die irgendwann n Teich in dem Garten von dem Haus, die wollen n Hund und darum gehts denen eher".

<sup>236</sup> Ja, ich fühl mich schon als Handwerkerin. Aber ich glaube, viel denken, und das ist ja auch mein Vorurteil, viele denken bei Handwerk an Bauarbeit oder Dachdecken, weiß ich nicht. Sowas wie Bier nach dem Feierabend und dumme Witze und zu spät kommen oder so. [...] Das ist nicht das Handwerk, in dem ich mich sehe. Ich seh mich schon als Handwerkerin, aber in einer qualitätsvollen Handwerk, de facto, in dem ich was schaffe mit meinen Händen, was mir Spaß bringt und den Leute Spaß bringt, die das Ding dann haben. Ohne diese ganzen blöden Stereotypen von jemandem aus der, weiß nicht, unteren Mittelschicht, der Bier trinkt und um vier Feierabend macht."

“prejudices”: “I had long hair, an old VW van and spent years bumbling about at the university [...] so of course it was clear to them that I was only going to smoke weed, hang around. That I am a leftist *Zecke*” (00:13). *Zecke* – literally: tic, parasite – is a derogatory term for autonomist leftists suggesting a ‘parasitic’ unwillingness to work. Werner parallels these prejudices with his perception of his co-workers as having

very rough and... primitive manners, [...] with a bit of a sexist, racist touch. Just primitive. I wasn’t surprised that it is like that in the construction worker milieu, but I still found it unpleasant. [...] The people I meet in that milieu work a lot, [and] just don’t have the energy, the power to engage deeper with things that would make them have fewer prejudices. [...] They also have a different educational background. To have discussions or something, they’re not familiar with that. (ibid).<sup>237</sup>

For him, this boundary between him and his co-workers is ‘insurmountable’, the prejudices “dissolve a little bit when you get to know each other, but they never really disappear. Even with good colleagues that I see privately as well, I sometimes think, ‘okay, this is fun and we share a lot here, but in the end when I go home, I am still going to be interested in completely different things than you’” (ibid., 00:15).

For other respondents, the duality of spheres and mindsets appeared somewhat less problematic. Maximilian recounted how he spent three quarters of a year “educating” one of his co-workers who would talk disparagingly about foreigners. “I looked up on the internet how to argue against people like that. I was well prepared [laughs].[...] And yea, later on he didn’t agitate [*hetzen*] so much anymore. And I brought him *Börek* [Turkish pastry] to work. [laughs]” (Maximilian, 00:12). “It’s simply not a given to find people [in] a normal crafts job like this, who are able or willing to look beyond their own noses [*über den Tellerrand*

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<sup>237</sup> “Ich hatte halt lange Haare, hatte n alten VW Bus und hab jahrelang an ner Uni rumgeeiert [...] dann war natürlich klar, dass ich irgendwie nur kiffe und rumhänge und irgendwie ne linke Zecke bin oder sowas.” ...“ein sehr rüder und... primitiver Umgangston, [...] so n bisschen sexistisch, rassistisch angehaucht irgendwie. Einfach primitiv, so. Also das hat mich nicht überrascht, dass das im Bauarbeitermilieu so ist, aber ich fand es trotzdem unangenehm. [...] die meisten Leute, die ich da kennenlerne in dem Milieu, die haben, die arbeiten viel. [...] und... haben dann nicht so viel Energie, Kraft, sich mit irgendwelchen Dingen auseinanderzusetzen, die sie vielleicht dazu bringen würden, weniger... Vorurteile zu haben. [...] Die haben halt alle auch n anderen Bildungshintergrund. Da mit irgendwelchen Diskussionen, das kennen die nicht, da sind die nicht so mit vertraut.” “Und ja, die [Vorurteile] lösen sich so n bisschen auf, je mehr man miteinander zu tun hat, aber so wirklich verlieren tun sie sich nicht. Also so wirklich aufgelöst werden sie nicht. Selbst gute Kollegen, mit denen ich dann doch auch privat Sachen mache, bei denen denke ich mir och manchmal, okay das ist zwar lustig, wir teilen jetzt hier viel, aber am Ende beschäftige ich mich zuhause doch mit anderen Sachen, als du dich beschäftigst.”

*schauen]*”, Matthias said, but “I feel very much at ease with the craftsmen in the workshop. I’m of that same breed [*vom selben Schlag*] to some degree, I know how talk to them perfectly well and all that, you know?” (Matthias, 5)

For Lara, there remained a difference “between the crafts [people] and the stratum [*Schicht*] in which you move, the other people that you also see” (Lara, 50), but this was not problematic for her, and she “loved” her work and the people she worked with. Although highlighting the decomposition of the working class before, she later included herself in a succinct and multi-dimensional definition of the working class: “The people who have roughly the same money in their pockets as you, who speak your language, who recognize the tiredness of your body – that’s the working class, definitely” (Lara, 50).

### 9.3. Relation to Politics: “I Care About Attitude”

#### “My Politics Is Being Human” – Everyday Politics

As workers across the clusters, alternative workers criticized material inequalities. Yet uniquely, six respondents in this cluster named *capitalism* as a target of critique. In a striking contrast to the personalized, mindset-centered critiques of intolerance, respondents generally sought to give systemic, de-personalized explanations when talking about inequality. Thus Lara criticized how in the aftermath of the economic crisis, “capitalism moving with its fang [*Reißzahn*]” (Lara, 00:44) had been destroying small and medium-sized firms in her sector, through private take-overs and the drying up of credit. Matthias predicted that “capitalism as it is practiced today... simply cannot go on like this forever. [...] If it’s always about more growth and on and on, it’s a natural thing that at some point you hit a limit. [...] It’s like a bubble that grows and grows until at some point it can only burst” (Matthias, 14).<sup>238</sup> And Marco summarized: “No one gives a damn about human beings in capitalism. It’s [all]

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<sup>238</sup> “Die Menschheit richtet sich ja selbst zugrunde, das ist ja nun offensichtlich. Da haben wir vor 120 Jahren sehr effektiv mit angefangen, [...] und das denk ich ist auch ne Entwicklung, die sich nicht aufhalten lässt, so: Es wird zu ner Katastrophe führen. [...] [I: Wie würde das aussehen?] Naja im Prinzip ne, ne Kapitalismuskrise [...] das seh ich durchaus als Chance, da dann... positive Konsequenzen draus zu ziehen und dann, ja- auf diese harte Art und Weise irgendwie zu sehen da muss man dann doch da und da was anders machen. Weil ich bin klar der Meinung, dass der Kapitalismus... also das ist jetzt sehr groß und sehr plump und ich hab da jetzt auch nicht den Über-Info-Background, aber dass der Kapitalismus, wie er jetzt so grade praktiziert wird... einfach... also das wird so dauerhaft nicht weitergehen können. [...] [Wenn] immer noch weiter und immer nur auf Wachstum geguckt wird und immer weiter und immer weiter, das liegt doch in der Natur der Sache, dass irgendwann Ende ist. [...] Wie so ne Blase, die sich ewig aufbläht, bis se irgendwann nur platzen kann.”

about capital. [...] At some point the shit will spill. [...] And the one up on Wall Street will be saved, and you or I work for that. For the money. Bullshit.” (Marco, 23).<sup>239</sup>

However, this anticapitalist critique was not linked to any definite political project. Nor did the political system play a role in the political talk of this cluster. Politicians, who were so important to other accounts seen before, were here *not* chosen as targets of critique, the term not even being mentioned once in the entire sub-sample. Apart from critical references to the AfD and a few dismissive remarks about the SPD,<sup>240</sup> institutional politics was nearly absent from these workers’ accounts. “Party politics would never be my political home”, remarked Charlotte, “I see more purpose [*Sinnhaftigkeit*] in smaller structures, low level, low hierarchies, direct help”, like anti-eviction campaigns in her neighborhood, where she could “directly see the value of my contribution in relation to what is going on in the world.” (Charlotte, 00:47). For the most part, respondents spoke about their politics in connection as a personal attitude, one that went deeper even than even terms ‘left’ and ‘right’, which were repeatedly rejected as overly schematic and superficial.<sup>241</sup> Lara summarizes her politics:

My politics is being human. I think that’s it. [...] People would say that I’m a political person, sure. I would say: I am Lara. [laughs] [Left and right] are no categories that I think in, but I encounter them. And it’s that false conclusion: if you don’t want to be on the right, then you should better be on the left. As soon as you [wear] the wrong hoodie [...] you are left. *Radical* left even. I actually care very little about this. I care about movements [*Bewegungen*] [...] I care about attitude [*Haltung*]” (Lara, 01:10).<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> „An dem Menschen ist kein Arsch interessiert im Kapitalismus. Es ist nur Kapital. [...] Der Kapitalismus funktioniert nicht [...], irgendwann kippt die Scheiße um. [...] Und der an der Wallstreet wird da oben gerettet. Und du arbeitest dafür, oder ich. Halt für Geld, also. Schwachsinn.“

<sup>240</sup> Matthias notes that ‘you can forget the SPD’; Daniel remarks that it ‘is only driving itself deeper and deeper into the shit’ (Daniel). Ole criticizes: “you have people slapping themselves on the backs for introducing the minimum wage – do they even know how hard it is to live off of minimum wage?” (Ole, 17).

<sup>241</sup> Ole says, „Dass ich links bin ist mir nicht wichtig. Also dass mich jemand als Linker einordnet ist mir total wumpe. Aber irgendwie für son paar Ideen, die man in sein Kopf hat, was machen, find ich wichtig.“ (Ole, 7)

<sup>242</sup> “Man würde über mich sagen, dass ich ne politische Person bin. Ja. Ich würde sagen "ich bin Lara" [lacht] [...] [Links und rechts sind] keine Kategorien, in denen ich denke, aber die mir begegnen. Und das ist ja gerade so ein Trugschluss von: wenn du nicht rechts sein willst, dann sei mal ganz schnell links. Und sobald du gegen bestehende Ordnungen agierst [...], wenn man [...] schwarze Klamotten und den falschen Hoodie anhat oder sowas [...] bist du links. *Linksradikal* auch... Bedeutet mir tatsächlich wenig. Mir bedeuten Bewegungen was [...] mir bedeutet Haltung was”.

## “Don’t Just Read the Tabloids and Start Barking” – Politics as Distinction

Overall, ‘second dimension’ issues of racism and sexism, understood through a lense of universalistic solidarity and/or in opposition to the radical right, take a central position in the political talk of workers in this cluster. Perhaps prompted by the feminist placards around us, Ole illustrated becoming a leftist as a process of increasing sensitivity to everyday sexism: Becoming left-wing “begins when you take a stance and not leave it uncommented on [...] when you’re standing in a club and you see people groping a person, harrassing them. [...] Or just learning from people about why it’s important to use gender-sensitive language [*gendern*]” (Ole, 7).

Here again, education is a core boundary, including what might be called movement cultural capital (Leondar-Wright 2014), i.e. knowledge and cultural socialization acquired in left-wing political spaces. Right-wing sentiments, by contrast, are identified with a lack of education, sophistication, and sensitivity. When I asked Ole whether he had conversations about gender themes also at work, he laughs: “Oh no, that’s way too high [*zu hoch*] [laughs]. That’s too far away for these people... These conversations we are having are like up here [holds his hand above his head]. *They* are down here [lowers his hand to the floor]” (Ole, 7).

The intellectual and emotional prerequisites of being on the left are here juxtaposed to a ‘low’ habitus of most ordinary workers, a logic that was also applied to the success of the radical right. Illustrating how being an antifascist is linked to territorial boundaries in his part of the country, Ole drew a map of the city for me. Only the center and especially the alternative quarter are “nice” [*schön*], he explains. Around it were the *Platten*, the GDR era housing blocks, of which he says many are inhabited,

“not exclusively, but rather by people, who... don’t have the most rosy social prospects [*Sozialprognose*]. Especially here [points at the map] it’s pretty unpleasant, [...] super ugly [*unschön*], only Nazi stickers, nothing, absolutely nothing apart from a school, and some... little passage between the blocks with three shops, half of them fitness studios and fast food shacks” (Ole, 8).<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> “Nicht ausschliesslich, aber auch eher Leute, die ... nicht so die rosige Sozialprognose haben... Doch ja, vor allem hier in dem Stadtteil [tippt auf seine Zeichnung] ist es ziemlich unangenehm [...] total unschön, nur Naziaufkleber, nichts, rein gar nichts außer ne Schule und ma...so ne kleine Passage zwischen den Blocks wo drei Läden drin sind, wo die Hälfte Fitnessstudios und Imbissläden sind.”

He conjectured that the Nazi presence in these neighborhoods was strong “because the people have no other distraction but to spill their guts [*sich auskotzen*]”; then immediately corrected himself, “ah no, but you can’t say that, that is super stupid and social chauvinist [*sozialchauvinistisch*] to say that” (Ole, 9).

As hinted at here, Ole directly problematized the link of social position (class and education) and political ascription (left-right) which structured his account. After our interview, Ole also took part in a group discussion with two other young workers close to the squat and its politics, Fred, an industrial mechanic, and Daniel, an apprentice in a large carpentry. Unprompted by me or Ole, Fred said he did not want to stay at his workplace much longer, because there were “a lot of brown people [Nazis], or people who are pretty careless with their words”, illustrating this with instances of casual racism against a black colleague. As Daniel agreed and shared a similar story, Ole interjected to interrogate their common equation of production work and right-wing leanings:

Ole: “But do you think-? It feels like in our trades it is like that everywhere. I mean we come from completely different sectors, but-

Daniel: You just need more muscles, right? [everyone laughs, Fred makes a joke pointing at his biceps] No, I don’t know, it’s just, it is no university degree or something. Of course you need to master the stuff you learn there, [...] I don’t want to say that. But I think-... Sometimes I look at these people and there are some who... I don’t want to say, they aren’t made for anything else, but- I don’t know. It sounds mean, but maybe they are more suited for physical work than for intellectual work.

Fred: I think so too.

Ole: But does xenophobia or amputated social thinking have to do with physical work?

Fred: Nah, I wouldn’t- Well, indirectly maybe. Because for many... physical jobs you don’t need much brain mass. *Overall*. I also didn’t want to say that they are all like that.

Ole: Yeah but many are. I just find it super interesting because in the end we’re all struggling with this.

Fred: Sure... I mean, I notice that among the younger ones and the apprentices there are many who think differently, who also reflect more on what they say and engage

with things further than just reading the [tabloid] headlines and starting to bark. [...] The ones who are really competent [*wirklich viel drauf haben*] rarely make the stupid comments. [...] But we are living in a special time, where everything is a bit polarized and turning around [*im Umschwung*]. [...] It often happens when there's an event that polarizes society, I think. It's always there, but then it comes out in particular" (Group II, 00:19).<sup>244</sup>

At least two things are remarkable here: Firstly, politics is intellectualized and relatively individualized, centered less on institutional change or larger constellations of power than on the civilization of everyday behavior. Left-wing political identity consists first and foremost in heightened forms of understanding, reflexivity, and social sensitivity demonstrated in a deeper grasp of social processes, as well as a reflexive, non-prejudiced behavior towards social outgroups. "Showing tolerance and humanity", Fred defines being left-wing, and Daniel adds, "tolerance, and to question things, to look for new perspectives" (Group II, 01:02). While for most of the other workers interviewed, politics was synonymous with the far-away and suspicious institutional games of politicians, here politics is located in everyday life encounters, and the development of one's own subjectivity and knowledge. As we will see, this very much overlaps with the relation to politics found among a core segment of sociocultural professionals.

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<sup>244</sup> "D: Du brauchts halt mehr Muskeln eigentlich, ne? [alle lachen, F: 'Du musst et nicht nur *hier* haben [zeigt auf rechten Bizeps], du musst et auch *hier* haben [zeigt auf linken Bizeps], wolltest du das sagen?' [fortgesetztes Lachen] Ne, also weiß nicht, es ist jetzt halt kein Studium oder sowas, klar du musst das schon können was du da vermittelt kriegst, das ist auch teilweise nicht immer ganz einfach, das will ich auch gar nicht sagen, aber- ich glaub... wenn ich mir die Leute da teilweise anguck, also einige, die-... die, also ich will jetzt nicht sagen, für nichts anderes gemacht, aber- weiß nicht, hört sich böse an, aber die können halt eher körperlich arbeiten als geistig so. [F: Ja, seh ich auch so]. O: Ja, aber hat denn Ausländerfeindlichkeit oder verkürztes soziales Denken irgendwas mit... [F: meinst du mit mangelnder-] mit körperlich arbeiten zu tun? F: Ne, das würd ich nich- Naja, indirekt vielleicht. Eben gerade dadurch, dass für... viele körperliche Arbeit nicht soviel Hirnmasse notwendig ist, im Großteil. Also ich will ja jetzt auch nicht sagen, dass alle so sind. O: Ja aber viele... Also find ich halt super interessant, weil- also im Endeffekt fällt's uns ja allen dreien auf die Füße. F: klar... .... also was mir auffällt wo's besonders auffällt ist das bei vielen Leuten die jünger sind und auch bei den Azubis da fällt das auf, dass viele da auch anders denken, oder vor allem auch anders darüber nachdenken, was sie sagen und sich auch mehr damit befassen, als nur die Schlagzeile in der BILD-Zeitung zu lesen und dann rumzubrüllen. [...] Es sind halt die Leute, die wirklich viel drauf haben, geben auch selten so ne dämlichen Kommentare ab. [...]. I: Ja ich find die Frage auch interessant. Weil es war ja früher eher nicht so, da waren Arbeiter ja vielleicht per se eher links? F: Nur leben wir halt auch gerade in ner sehr besonderen Zeit, wo alles irgendwo n bisschen polarisiert und im Umschwung ist. [...] Also sprich wann immer so n Ereignis eintritt, was irgendwie auch die Gesellschaft polarisiert, find ichs oft. Also wahrscheinlich ist es immer so da, aber da kommts besonders dann zum Vorschein, würd ich sagen."

Secondly, a left-wing subcultural or alternative socialization – at least in this sample – tends to go hand in hand with a disidentification with large parts of the real-existing working class. As becomes visible e.g. when Daniel contrasts the low cognitive demands of his own occupation with that of university studies, the emphasis on reflection and a broadening of consciousness leads these workers to effectively identify with the more highly educated.

#### **9.4. Summary**

The last working class cluster presented here reconstructed material from interviews with what I call Alternative Workers, socialized in left-wing or alternative subcultures. These workers see themselves as part of a group of ‘cool people’ in a “a stark contrast [*krasser Gegensatz*] to most” of their co-workers (Daniel/Group II, 01:01), at times living a sort of double life between the workplace and the squat (Daniel, Ole, Fred), the student flatshare (Charlotte, Werner, Lara), or hedonistic urban subcultures (Matthias, Maximilian, Marco). Although respondents get along with a variety of people, they define people like themselves by an implicit cultural code tied to left-wing political attitudes, a “universalistic” openness, and subcultural cultural capital, all of which are ultimately associated with education.

In historical perspective, it is remarkable that at least in this very limited sample, all of the most politically articulate workers on the left have a very ambivalent and distanced relation to their class. In terms of social location. In terms of their sense of social location, they distance themselves from the social connotation of their occupations (“...but not your cliché craftsman”), or at any rate certain social types described as dominant in their occupations, which respondents see as embodiments of regressive tendencies and narrow-mindedness. Character traits and political beliefs are seen as quite closely connected with education, the alternative ones being those “with something in their heads”. Nazis is the central organizing node of these connections, with right-wing sentiments depicted as stemming from pernicious forms of competition and social division, as well as a lack of cultivation, sensitivity, and openness on the part of many co-workers, especially older ones.

Against this, alternative workers position a moral sense of solidarity that is universalistic and egalitarian and is mostly fought for on the small scale of everyday interactions, as well as through subcultural or movement activism. Their politics is firmly embedded in the universalism-particularism divide. Politically, respondents articulate a sharp critique of

capitalism and inequality, but do not understand class as a particularly relevant dimension of conflict or political identification aside from a nostalgic references to the workers' movement.

These observations confirm expectations of the "new cleavage" diagnosis in an unexpected place. Commitments to openness articulated by Alternative Workers, especially regarding migrants but also gender equality, go deeper than political preferences and define their bearers as a whole. Such commitments are articulated predominantly by demarcations against a majority of other workers identified with right leanings especially in matters of migration and racism, but also a more general lifestyle. As such, the Alternative Workers are certainly the cluster with the most pronounced "groupist" conception of social identities, in which forms of habitus, education, and politics related to openness and racism divide their environment, but also society as a whole into relatively clearly demarcated groups. Even though they joke about it, it becomes clear that the alienation from other workers is a real problem for many of the respondents, both personally and in terms of their politics, which they feel is often too insular and reactive to the advances of the right.

This strongly affirms the idea that education-based closure is a central mechanism by which cleavage identities are shaped, a mechanism to which the qualitative perspective adds nuance. Education here does not just play a role in terms of degrees and life chances, but especially as a division of outlooks and habitus. Given that respondents in this cluster do the same work as those in the previous ones, it would seem that a deeper mechanism than socialization by work logics is at play in cleavage identifications here. For the accounts analyzed, this seems to be a mechanism of sociability in groups and milieus. As noted, the young workers of this sample are socially close to students and student life, and the relevance of education is expressed in particular through a form of subcultural or 'social movement cultural capital' (Leondar-Wright 2014), i.e. the knowledge and habitus acquired in leftist and alternative spaces. While milieus are not confined to a single class, within each milieu specific classed habitus forms can be said to be hegemonic. Especially in younger alternative and left milieus, the hegemonic habitus is that of students and social workers, or other sociocultural professionals. For respondents, socialization in these milieus means an alienation from the working class milieus they encounter at work.

## 10. Summary: The Moral Materialism of Production Workers

### 10.1. Moral Projects Under Constraint

Deepening the MCA findings of considerable structural and ideological diversity among production workers, we here reconstructed four distinct clusters of Millennial workers. Each connected patterns of socially located self-understandings, moral commitments and concerns, and positionings in and towards the political realm. Table 8 shows a summary of the four type here developed inductively. What emerged in the subtext of the analysis above, is how respondents in each of the four clusters share a basic moral ideal or project which they identify themselves by and orient their lives towards. These moral projects are the core around which central categories of self-understandings and political positionings crystallize.

In the case of the rural Working Class Conservatives, who see themselves as “normal people” of the respectable middle, this ideal can be named as one of *embeddedness*. On the one hand, embeddedness describes an ideal of respectability and social integration into a local “small world” marked by strong social capital, trust, and a conventional common sense. The opposition between the “small” and the “big world” of the city, big business, and investors is the central boundary of accounts in this cluster. On the other hand, it stands for the ideal of a paternalistic moral economy marked by a “give and take” between employers and employees, and a reciprocity of performance and participation. *Work* stands at the center of both meanings of embeddedness. As a meritocratic pathway to status, moderate material affluence, and security (e.g. in house ownership), work forms the heart of the workers’ lifestyle conservatism. It is also the performance or contribution on which reciprocity claims can be staked.

Largely situated on the ‘other’ side of this boundary, politics is a far away business which is irrelevant for these workers’ self-understandings. But where it does appear, it too is informed by the ideal of and worry over embeddedness. A conservative social critique rests on the defensive sense of threat to the small world, through structural change (e.g. acceleration, monopolization), as well as crime and migration. Mirroring the paternalist moral economy of the workplace, political responsibility is delegated to expert politicians in exchange for patronage (“doing something for the local economy”). Although they are no conservative partisans, and overall relatively undogmatic traditionalists, workers habitually tend to the

center-right. But there are limits of the paternalist model of legitimacy and respondents in particular criticize corruption and the outsize influence of big business.

An entirely different moral project stands at the center of the Social Populists' accounts. This is the project of defending their *deservingness* against what they perceive as an erosion of recognition, and the enormous pressures of a low position in societal and workplace hierarchies. As we saw, deservingness in this cluster is the knot that holds together indignant self-descriptions as wrongly devalued producers at "the bottom of the chain"; a comparative logic of critique by which the undeservingness of outgroups (migrants and benefit recipients) is scandalized to bolster one's own claims to legitimate needs; and an angry and disenchanting critique of politicians as a self-interested, socially distant upper class mismanaging entitlements and societal resources. The central boundary in this cluster is the social dichotomy of above and below, and respondents show a great concern with social hierarchies and their misrecognized place in them. Politically, they abstain or protest vote, and keep a fatalistic distance from the political sphere, whose categories they reject (and do not know), and which they identify as monopolized by "the higher ones".

The third cluster reconstructed here, Pragmatic Privatists, crystallized around self-understandings that revolved around an ideal of *autonomy* or independence, a moral project of "building your own world". This contrasted with the heteronomy of relatively low-paid occupations. Although critical of inequality, respondents pragmatically accepted the rules of work in a lower middle class habitus of moderation ("it's not much, but all I need"). Their self-understandings centered on "the little things that really matter", especially close social relations. These were situated in the private sphere, whose greater significance and space for agency vis-à-vis the wider world formed the central boundary of this cluster's self-understandings. Pragmatic Privatists generalized this self-image into a "tolerant" judgment of others, rejecting stereotyping and group demarcation by the maxims of "live and let live" and "it depends on the person". A critique of "the system" without clear group referents corresponded to center-left voting. But respondents maintained a cynical distance from politics, which was perceived as fake and outside of the individual's sphere of influence.

The last cluster reconstructed were Alternative Workers, whose self-understandings, moral outlook, and relations to politics were marked by the adherence to the political left or alternative subcultures. This cluster's moral project can be described as one of universalistic

*solidarity* with socially excluded outgroups, especially migrants, which are positioned against competition and social divisions creating hatred and exclusion. Respondents draw a boundary between an imagined community of “cool” or like-minded people sharing the left-wing or alternative habitus linked to this solidaristic commitment, and what they see as a majority among workers in their occupations ensnared in a prejudiced, limited or “unenlightened” worldview (with Nazis as the most emphatically rejected outgroup). The Alternative Workers explicitly link this boundary to education. They themselves hold higher school degrees and maintain a closer (albeit ambivalent) identification with alternative student milieus than with the working class milieus they navigate but overall disidentify from. Politically, these workers engage in an everyday politics of universalist decency and resistance to regressive tendencies in their surroundings, as well as movement or subcultural forms of involvement. Although respondents vote for the political left, parties do not play a role in their political cosmology.

Throughout the four clusters, we saw how the moral projects at the core of self-understandings are closely linked to negotiations of social location. More than mere “value clusters”, the four types sketch symbolic strategies of responding to diverse realities of the German working class. We saw this in Privatist Lukas’ descriptions of a ‘house by a stream’ as a place of freedom and “not sacrificing my life for others but doing something for myself and my family”. Here, the quest for autonomy reflects the considerable challenge of realizing a self-determined, individual life under conditions of workplace heteronomy, a strong dependence on limited wages, and prospects curtailed by a subordinate position in the class structure. Bumping into Lukas again three years after our interview, the house still had not materialized. Instead, he indeed had to move to a smaller flat, as he feared, where he now lived with his wife and a newborn child. The focus on independence is central among some of the respondents precisely because of the elusiveness of this promise. It is a moral project developed in response to social constraints.

Similarly, the Social Populists’ defense of their deservingness redrew the line of a “threshold of respectability” and clarified their own position above it, against a feeling of social devaluation. As such, the workers insistence on deservingness can be read as one of the subjective symptoms of the partial erosion of the German Model mentioned above. Embeddedness, by contrast, was shown to link to the sources of social capital, material and status attainment open to workers in rural areas, and in the comparatively secure zones of

the German employment regime where a corporatist social compromise is still largely intact. Lastly, even the altruistic commitment to solidarity and openness, we saw, was entangled in forms of social distinction on the part of workers with higher school degrees, whose identification with the more highly educated afforded them subtle claims of status vis-à-vis other workers.

What all worker clusters had in common was their distance from institutional politics, and their largely negative form of moral critique, which aligns with Honneth's and Bourdieu's predictions introduced above. Across the board, workers articulated political positionings negatively, by flagging violations of unwritten moral economies of reciprocity, equality, or state impartiality. With few exceptions (like the village mayor or, to some degree, leftist movements), the workers did not place hope in political actors. Even though the majority voted, they largely saw their demands and critique as politically homeless. And – whether stated in a tone of lamentation, rejection on their part, or as a simple statement of fact – they understood themselves as outside the game of institutional politics, as political non-agents criticizing powerful others from the sidelines. We will return to this below.

	<b>Working Class Conservatives</b> <i>Embeddedness</i>	<b>Social Populists</b> <i>Deservingness</i>	<b>Pragmatic Privatists</b> <i>Autonomy</i>	<b>Alternative Workers</b> <i>Solidarity</i>
<b>Self-understanding / Sense of social location</b>	<p>“The normal people”, respectable middle</p> <p>Small world – big world</p> <p>Embeddedness, protection, rural social capital; Demarcation from big business and big city</p> <p>Contented and defensive</p>	<p>“The bottom”, deserving but misrecognized fighters</p> <p>Above – below</p> <p>Dichotomized consciousness, Demarcation from “high ones” and lower class (“Hartz IV”)</p> <p>Devalued and indignant</p>	<p>Independent Individuals “building their own world”</p> <p>Private sphere – wide world</p> <p>Moderation; Pragmatic acceptance; Critique of inequality</p> <p>Individualized and tolerant</p>	<p>(Island of) “Cool People”, “with something in their heads”</p> <p>Like-minded – narrow-minded</p> <p>Disidentification from (working) class; Subcultural habitus; Education</p> <p>Distinctive and universalistic</p>
<b>Moral Economy</b>	<p><i>Lifestyle conservatism</i>: work discipline, prudent use of money, family, house ownership</p> <p><i>Meritocratic paternalism</i>:, mutual obligations, social embeddedness of owners, work-centered ‘participation for performance’</p> <p><i>Rural consciousness</i>: countryside protected sphere under threat; Pessimistic view of social change</p>	<p><i>Producers’ pride</i>: “work and slave”; physical labour, resilience, use value; versus: office work, abstract education</p> <p><i>Deservingness critique</i>: Neglected needs of worthy producers vs. privileges of unworthy recipients; violated reciprocity; culturalist (nation) and producerist (contribution)</p>	<p><i>Privatism</i>: Autonomy and independence sought in private spaces and relations</p> <p><i>Tolerance</i>: Indifference as corollary of independence (“live and let live”)</p> <p><i>Individualized morality</i>: “It depends on the person”, rejection of ethnic categories (and political divisions)</p>	<p><i>Everyday universalism</i>: practical solidarity with the weak, against competition and social division</p> <p><i>Political distinction</i>: Openness, leftist views and habitus linked to cultural and moral group boundaries</p>
<b>Relation to politics</b>	<p><i>Paternalist delegation</i>: but gulf between “Berlin” and “little guy”</p> <p>Critique of big industry political influence</p> <p>Center-right vote</p>	<p><i>Disappointed paternalism</i>: protest, plebiscitarianism</p> <p><i>Populist dichotomy</i>: Politicians as upper class</p> <p>Abstentionism or protest vote</p>	<p><i>Political (self-)exclusion</i>: cynical distance to politics</p> <p>Systemic critique without group referent</p> <p>Center-left vote</p>	<p><i>Everyday Politics</i>: politics as attitude and direct action, distance from political parties</p> <p>Abstract anti-capitalism</p> <p>Left vote</p>

	<b>Working Class Conservatives</b> <i>Embeddedness</i>	<b>Social Populists</b> <i>Deservingness</i>	<b>Pragmatic Privatists</b> <i>Autonomy</i>	<b>Alternative Workers</b> <i>Solidarity</i>
<i>New cleavage identity potentials</i>	<p>Protectionist defense of local economy and social idyll against encroachment from outside (global markets, crime, migration)</p> <p>Migrants as burden on social integration</p> <p>Authoritarian streak of work-centered meritocracy: disciplining freeriders</p>	<p>Strong deservingness distinctions, authoritarian generalization of work imperative</p> <p>Nationally framed zero-sum competition over wealth and welfare</p> <p>Producerist identification against higher education</p> <p>Right populism as “fresh wind” in oligarchic politics</p>	None	<p>Politically and culturally demarcated <i>universalist</i> group identity with high degree of groupness</p> <p>Right-wing tendencies associated with ‘cliché workers’ and low education</p> <p>Politics defined by antiracism and gender progressivism, centered on everyday habitus</p>
<i>Counteracting tendencies</i>	<p>Anti-radicalism, respectability, paternalism (link to center-right)</p> <p>Flexible conception of tradition; pragmatic acceptance of (some) immigration and cultural change</p> <p>Critique of big business and monopolization</p>	<p>Strong sense of injustice, extensive social demands; deservingness critique against the rich</p> <p>Crucial dichotomy above-below; cultural differences not central</p> <p>Universal political mistrust</p>	Habitual liberalism: tolerance, individual choice, refusal of stereotyping and group demarcation	(runs counter to social bases identified for new cleavage)

Table 8: Summary of the Working Class Clusters

## 10.2. Cleavage Identities?

For the question of new cleavage identities, these inductive findings paint a picture that is anything but straightforward. We here profit from the fact that the design of the study did not prime new cleavage categories in its prompts, nor inflated the sense of groupness by directly asking about social groups. Instead we reconstructed both from a more holistic picture of social identities centered on the question “what type of person are you?” (not e.g. “do you feel close to cosmopolitans?”). In the following, I tease out some points in which self-understandings recur on categories relevant for the new cleavage (e.g. open-closed, down-to-earth-cosmopolitan, traditional-liberal, authoritarian, deserving, etc.). And I also situate these categories in the wider picture of self-understandings, asking how salient these categories are and in how far they are seen to be endowed with groupness, i.e. constituting specific relational bonds and cultural differentiation. Following the triad of cleavage theory, I further ask to which degree respondents (implicitly) associate cleavage-related categories of identification with *sociostructural* positions and with a societal *conflict dynamic*.

As we saw, Working Class Conservatives’ social identities mainly rest on a respectable work-centered lifestyle conservatism and local involvement. Both of these elements provide clear pathways to particularist social identities, i.e. through localist economic and social protectionism, a skepticism against migrants as embodiments of social disintegration, and an authoritarian streak of work-centered meritocracy which mandates the disciplining of freeriders. At the same time, the category with the strongest sense of groupness, that of “normal people” of the “middle class” has a very unclear sociostructural anchorage, and a sense of a wider cultural conflict between social groups over lifestyles and moral outlooks is absent from these accounts. Moreover, the workers’ conservative lifestyles are not defined by ideas of primordial rootedness or religious fundamentals, but by a conduct of life centered on respectability and embeddedness, making them relatively flexible e.g. in accomodating (a certain amount of) migrants as well as (some) changes in gender relations. Following a materialist logic, sociostructural change, disembedded big business (“investors”), undisciplined youngsters and benefits recipients, or self-interested politicians appear as negative or outgroup references, while cultural elites, for instance, do not figure.

In its political logic, the moral project of embeddedness – for now – is tied to non-radical status quo orientations on the center-right, against which the far right appears as extreme and dangerous. This may change where a more respectable radical right takes root, especially in local politics. Moreover, the self-understandings reconstructed here could easily form part of a cleavage conflict dynamic. This might happen where the Conservative’s sense of defensiveness acquires a sense of urgency, e.g. through a crisis in the underlying moral economy or some form of real or perceived external shock. The statement that “the impacts are coming closer” provides a powerful image here. In another form, Conservatives’ social identities could almost certainly be mobilized for cleavage conflict where embeddedness *as such* becomes politicized through a salient and polarized issue. This seems to have happened in the Brexit referendum and the US ‘culture wars’, and it is one of the chief objectives of radical right mobilization across Europe (see also Girard 2017). But in my German sample such a dynamic was not present. Social identities here provide clear *potentials* for alignment on the new cleavage, but were lacking the conflict dynamic necessary for these potentials to be actualized.

This was different among Alternative Workers, which formed an unexpected example of a group with very strong cleavage identities. Here we found self-understandings which extensively drew on categories of universalism-particularism (“open-mindedness” versus ) and which were connected with a clearly articulated link to social structure in the form of education and class (“enlightened” people with an Abitur and “something in their heads” and “workers” “with more muscles than brains”). The Alternative Workers accounts saw the confrontation between the two camps as the defining conflict in current society, also placing their class sense secondary to a left-right distinction almost entirely staked on new cleavage issues. These demarcations also exhibited a relatively strong sense of groupness, in the sense of special bonds of and markers of cultural differentiation between “cool people” insiders and narrow-minded “peasants”. Of course, the only problem with regard to the new cleavage diagnosis is that these identities are here found among an occupational class not usually placed on the universalist end of the new cleavage.

The picture again looks different in the case of the Social Populists. Here, conflict was omnipresent, mainly expressed as “the higher ones” taking it out on the little guys, but also as a competition of the latter with others even further below, as in the glaring contrast between

the care reserved for refugees and the neglect shown to themselves and other deserving categories. As we saw, anti-immigration sentiment and restrictive deservingness are central to and interconnected in the Social Populists' accounts, both relating to a nationally framed zero-sum competition over wealth and welfare. In combination with producerist demarcations from higher education, these orientations provide a very fertile ground for identifications along the universalist-particularist cleavage. Seen from this perspective, the Social Populist pattern stands for a separate pathway of identification along the new cleavage. Rather than the defense of an intact island against the outside, here this takes the shape of the social protest of workers struggling with a sense of status loss. This theme has received a lot of attention recently (see e.g. Gidron and Hall 2017). For future studies, it might be useful to differentiate between a conservative-respectable and an angry-populist pathway of identity realignment in the working class, each pertaining to different fractions of this class.

Yet here again, it is notable that – against the idea of a new *cultural* class conflict – recognition struggles are articulated through a distributive, *materialist* logic; and that the devaluation of lifestyles only played a role very indirectly, insofar as they touched upon the *occupational* recognition of producers vis-à-vis more highly educated or office workers (and not e.g. as complaints about vegan moralizers or frequent flyers). Cultural resentment against the cultural middle class might have been censored due to the cultural middle class interviewer the workers were faced with in the interview. But respondents had no qualms articulating sharp anti-immigrant positions, on which they should have ascribed a pro-immigration position onto their interlocutor by the cultural conflict logic.

In my understanding, the absence of cultural distinction is due to the fact that the sense of groupness among Social Populists is much more strongly focused on the common social position of those “on the bottom”, than on the cultural differentiation of traditional, rooted, or down-to-earth people from liberal cosmopolitan opponents. This fundamental materialism also illuminates why this cluster, which in a sense presents the archetypical image of workers cited in discussions of new cultural conflicts, also voiced the strongest perceptions of conflict along the *class* cleavage. As we saw, the sense of social location was here structured first and foremost by the above-below dichotomy. And the critique of “those above”, especially politicians, but also bosses, and the rich, was as structuring for the workers' sense of location and conflict perceptions, as complaints about the privileges of migrants. Indeed we saw that

both were integrated in the workers’ social critique. As observed by Damhuis (2020, ch. 6), identifications as deserving but misrecognized producers often lead *both* to exclusionary demarcations against weaker outgroups *and* usurpatory demarcations against the rich and powerful. Both are predicated on a zero-sum distributive logic which mainly operates on the basis of material goods taken by one group and not another. In this way, the Social Populists’ self-understandings simultaneously contain the logic of the new cleavage, and also exceed it.

The Pragmatic Privatists’ social identities, finally, can be said to lie diagonal to the new cleavage divide. This cluster’s sensibility was described as liberal by the observer’s categories, its “tolerant” attitudes clearly tacking towards the universalist pole. But as we saw, *self*-understandings are structured by an opposition of self and society that is at odds with the core idea of cleavage identification, for eschewing group identification and positionings in societal conflict. Where there is a sense of conflict linked to social structure and salient for the workers’ self-understandings, it is that between a nameless ‘system’ run by politicians and corporations, and the individuals trying to build their own lives. Again this logic is a variant of the class cleavage, and at any rate does not fit the logic of the new cleavage.

As a simplifying tool for summarizing results, table 9 shows the different forms in which cleavage identities are present as potentials or realities in the four clusters identified here. Only in the Alternative Workers cluster do we find such identities realized. In the others they are present as potentials (in the form of salient categories) but not actualized in the form of cleavage identities linked to groupness, conflict, and social structure; or they compete with another logic of conflict perception which is important for the workers’ self-understandings.

	Cons	Popul	Pragm	Altern
<i>Cleavage ID potential: new cleavage-related categories salient</i>	x	x	(x)	x
- linked to social structure				x
- linked to societal conflict		x		x
- linked to sense of groupness				x
<i>Other cleavage logic dominant for self-understandings</i>		x	x	

Table 9: New cleavage identities as potential and reality among the working class clusters (Working Class Conservatives, Social Populists, Pragmatic Privatists, Alternative Workers)

## **Sociocultural Professionals**

Next, I turn to the interviews I conducted with sociocultural professionals, among whom I primarily distinguish two distinct clusters, which I label Social Therapists and High Liberals for reasons explained below. In addition, I briefly review contrastive evidence which seems to point to a third cluster that to explore would need further data. Again, the sense of social location and moral economies are presented first, followed by an exploration of political positionings and relations to politics.

### **11. Flourishing: Social Therapists**

The first section here reconstructs the discourse of a cluster of eleven sociocultural professionals that I call *Social Therapists*. This label reflects the fact that this cluster is marked by a subjectivized and ethical concern for altruism, recognition, reflexivity, and self-expression, which connects self-understandings, morality, and political habitus. The socioculture of this cluster is a late successor of the quest for “authenticity and community” cultivated in the alternative milieus of the 1970s (see Reichardt 2014, ch. 2). Disproportionately female (seven women and four men) and for the most part employed in caring occupations, the self image of respondents revolves around the cultural, psychological, and emotional work on a deepening of one’s own subjectivity and that of others, centrally through egalitarian “encounters” (Martin). Fitting with this habitus, respondents articulate a culturalized image of society as consisting of horizontally differentiated “milieus” or “lifeworlds” of equal worth but with distinct “cultures” (see below). Respondents identify as “left” and “green” and see politics as a form of social engagement essentially equated with processes of social recognition, especially in the context of migrant integration. Society appears as an object of potential development and growth, and social transformation is imagined as a collective “changing of minds” fostered by smaller-scale social action in movements and initiatives.

The respondents’ benevolence at times contains patronizing tendencies, by which the lives of others are seen as needing enrichment and deepening along the lines of the respondents’ own middle class culture. Yet overall, vertical inequalities are de-thematized and the drawing of boundaries against those below is inhibited. An exception are boundaries against two social

others which form direct opposites to the social therapists' self-understandings. The first are strong anti-materialist demarcations from money as a center of the conduct of life, also including a distinction from economic middle class fractions. The second are boundaries against the radical right, who are situated socially below and psychologized as lacking the social and emotional skills that the social therapists pride themselves to cultivate.

A paradigmatic respondent for this cluster was Leonie, a young hospital doctor, who, after finishing her studies in a large city in West Germany, had moved back to the rural Eastern German region where she had grown up. Leonie arranged an interview over the phone for the time she was waiting for her kids to finish their lesson at a sports club. She spoke slowly, carefully choosing her words. In a pattern described as feminized conversational labor (Fishman 1978), she kept the conversation going without prompts from my side and often expressed doubts or laughed when making general judgements. Especially in political matters, she forwarded me to her husband or a website, 'where you find all of this expressed much better'. In her opening self description she stated:

So I think in terms of type, I'm... a person that... radiates calm? [laughs] ... Right, but also very open, and active, and very busy. I like to have a lot of things to do. I like to invest myself in people and in nature. I am creative, I like to do things with my hands, and experience nature in all its aspects. [...] I'm involved [*engagiert*] and motivated, I also volunteer a lot. I really like to be of service to other human beings [*diene dem Menschen*], and I think that all this is very compatible with the profession of a doctor, where you also have a scientific component or you read a lot of books, which I also really like to do. [...] And apart from that I'm also happy to be a mother and a wife. Is that enough? [laughs] (Leonie 00:05).

Like other respondents in this cluster, Leonie in her self-presentation emphasizes activity and experience (*active, busy, involved, motivated, creative, experience*), an altruistic ethical conduct of life (*invested in people, open, service, volunteering, mother*), as well as knowledge and expertise (*books, science*). In the following elaboration, Leonie mainly wanted to talk about her volunteering work, which was a crucial source of ethos, social capital and integration in her life and the pivotal point of her self-narrative as active, invested, and "*engagiert*", i.e. involved, dedicated, and committed. Significantly, it was also the place where

a lot of classed boundaries were negotiated, so that I here begin with an exploration of moral positionings that also contains important elements of the sense of social location.

### 11.1. Moral Economy: “Learn to Perceive Yourself Emotionally”

#### “My Parents Taught Me Social Competences” – Altruism and Privilege

Leonie worked as a volunteer in two settings. In her village she organized educational programs for village children. In the closest town, she directed a youth group for teenagers from a nearby poorer neighborhood of *Plattenbauten*, the iconic type of housing blocks already mentioned in an earlier cluster as a cipher of poverty and social stigma (Mau 2019).<sup>245</sup>

Leonie described these activities as motivated by a sense of “privilege”:

After the Abitur I went to Simbabwe for a year and did voluntary service and during my studies I also traveled a lot. So I feel pretty privileged compared to the rest of the world. Also in terms of education and the social competences that my parents taught me. Where now when I work with patients or kids, you notice that they haven't received that, haven't been socialized like this, or were socialized in a different way. (Leonie, 00:10)<sup>246</sup>

Leonie told me that her mother stayed at home and “drove us to music school, sports class, did arts and crafts with us, gardening, and so on” (ibid., 00:15). All this was lacking among the teenagers of the *Plattenbauten*: They “do not get much positive input from their parents”, Leonie said, “singing is an alien experience to them”. Their parents “do not go outside with their kids, or to the swimming pool or something, they only sit at home and watch TV” (ibid.). Leonie linked this with the parents' low social status. They “have no money, or they don't know how to keep track of it” [*es sich einteilen*], because “they didn't learn it from their own

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<sup>245</sup> In a study of local inequalities in Britain, Koch et al. echo the observations in the following when they describe how “sometimes entire towns [...] and at others, particular neighborhoods (usually the outlying housing estates) [...] come to be defined as places of both abject failure and paternalistic control by the town's local establishment who see residents in need of moral guidance and sometimes outright disciplining.” (Koch et al. 2020, 12).

<sup>246</sup> “Nach dem Abitur war ich ein Jahr in Simbabwe und habe da irgendwie so einen Freiwilligendienst gemacht und war jetzt auch im Studium oft auf Reisen. Und so fühle ich mich irgendwie so recht privilegiert, im Vergleich zum Rest der Welt. Viel jetzt auch durch Bildung zum Beispiel und auch das, was mir meine Familie an sozialen Kompetenzen mitgegeben hat, wo ich echt in vielen Situation, auch wenn ich jetzt so mit Patienten arbeite und auch Kindern, man merkt, dass die das nicht so mitbekommen haben, oder nicht so, oder anders geprägt wurden.”

parents". Many of them are "Hartz IV recipients [who] don't go to work, don't go anywhere where they would get some inspiration on what to do with their kids" (ibid.).

As we saw above, in the language of the German status order, *Hartz IV* serves as a shorthand for poverty and social disrespectability, or what Leonie calls "social poverty" [*soziale Armut*], a term that unites sociological and moral evaluations. Materially deprived, the poor are also seen to lack the means for self-development and expression, the means for a flourishing life. The social housing neighborhood is a moralized space (Savage, Bagnall, Longhurst 1994): There is "not much to do, and what there is to do is usually not very good. They [the kids] just hang out between the blocks, fool around [laughs], smoke grass" (Leonie, 00:13). In her volunteering, Leonie effectively seeks to pass on a middle class education style of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2003) that she was brought up with.

Recalling Lareau's (as well as Kohn's) observation that middle class socialization tends to be internally rather than externally oriented, i.e. geared towards the cultivation of feelings rather than the conditioning of behaviors (Kohn 1959; Manstead 2018), Leonie's interventions sought to teach the teenagers, "to just perceive yourself in a reflexive way, on the emotional level. To be able to work in teams. Generally communication, feedback rules, group rules" (Leonie, 00:11).<sup>247</sup> These "social competences" that Leonie wants to pass on to the lower class teenagers neatly capture central moral intuitions of respondents in this cluster. Morality is personalized, or rather *subjectivized*, in the sense that the deepening of one's subjectivity (through reflexivity and variegated experiences) and the capacity to recognize others as equals form core moral concerns. Interpersonal relations, communication (e.g. in encounters with other "cultures" (see below), here "people who were socialized in a different way"), and the feelings and perceptions of others are central sites of moral negotiation.

Here too we make out a moral economy, in the sense of an entanglement of morality and unequal social relations. Although social therapists seek to de-emphasize and overcome hierarchies, their benevolence and care implies a social gradient between the carers and the cared for, as well as a diagnosis of deficits and developmental potentials in others. This again became visible in Leonie's description of activities in her village. Here she helped organize

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<sup>247</sup> "Einfach reflektiert sich selbst auch wahrzunehmen, also auf der Emotionsebene, irgendwie Teamfähigkeit, Kommunikation einfach so Feedbackregeln und überhaupt so Gruppenregeln."

activities for children in the surrounding villages, teaching them to grow crops and keep a healthy and sustainable diet. The core diagnosis about the village children, as for the *Plattenbau* teenagers, was one of alienation. “They have lost the connection [*den Bezug verloren*] to the way pigs are bred today, what factory farming looks like, how much food is thrown away, and what other cultures eat”. Villagers “have some ducks, geese, chicken”, Leonie remarked, “but just out of tradition, not because they have ever thought about questions of consumption” (Leonie, 00:30). “It’s just something people do without reflection, and also without involving and educating their children. If you live in the countryside, you just have some animals and your potato fields”, she told me and laughed, “that’s just tradition. And then you go to the voluntary fire brigades and that kind of thing” (ibid.).

Leonie, together with a “circle of friends of others who also grew up here and then went to bigger cities to study”, set up an association to “help kids in these rural areas to look beyond their own nose [*über den Tellerand schauen*]. [...] Preparing cool, tasty dishes in a vegetarian and sustainable way, so that it’s not scary for, let’s say, the normal village kids, that’s quite a challenge, but it actually works super well!” (00:35)

Thinking back to the rural craftsman Andre’s narrative, the village here has an almost inverse function. Instead of forming the source of moral order, Leonie’s moral project centers on a reform of the village according to standards imported from its outside. In this Leonie maintains a double boundary which is typical for sociocultural professionals moving to rural places: All of them first left these places to go to university in bigger cities. If they live in the countryside again, this is the result of a conscious choice of going back, which they discuss in a slightly defensive manner.<sup>248</sup> Having moved from the village to the city and back to the village, these professionals maintained a double boundary: Against the city, the village was revaluated as a rich and haptic, authentic and free place, closer to nature and ideal for the development of a balanced self, especially for children.<sup>249</sup> But against the villagers who stayed, the returning ones marked a second boundary that Leonie’s statements were paradigmatic for: What she

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<sup>248</sup> “It does feel a bit strange” (Ralf), “We didn’t take the decision to come back lightly” (Katharina), “It’s a different mentality” (Theresa), see also Wiebke and Sophie.

<sup>249</sup> The city being loud, hectic, inauthentic and lacking space. As we saw, this boundary was also prominent in the narratives of rural workers, and the fantasies of some urban ones about ‘dropping out’ and moving to a farm.

valued about the countryside – the connection to nature, sustainability, etc. – is something the original villagers were unable to see.

Implicitly, it was the villager returning from the city who was charged with the mission of cultivating the village to achieve its fuller, more authentic meaning. This was supposed to be done through “culture, community, and educational offers” (Leonie, 00:21), or “cultural events for the village, [...] but without finger-wagging and lecturing people [*erhobener Zeigefinger*]” (Theresa, 00:12), as described by Theresa, a special needs educator who lived on a former farm with other young pedagogues. In this vision, rural traditions, like small scale agriculture, are not just a given mode of conventional social integration, but related to projects of conscious reappropriation, geared towards more authentic and sustainable relations to one’s environment. The village is portrayed as both an idyllic and a deficitary, a more authentic but culturally constrained place.<sup>250</sup>

### **“I Want to Become Active Beyond My Own Personal Process” – Subjectivized Morality and the Expressive Self**

As brilliantly reconstructed by Reckwitz (2017), the moral economy of the Social Therapists continues a cultural heritage typical for the cultural middle class. It derives, on the one hand, from *Romanticism* and its idea that each individual, group, or place should be enabled and cultivated to realize its unique innate potential. This heritage was reappropriated in the twentieth century by life reform movements and the counter-cultural movements and subcultures of the 1970s (Reichardt 2014). On the other hand, the cultural middle class continues a *bourgeois* cultural tradition that emphasizes the pursuit of status, including through high demands on individual development and self-improvement. Although often in a tension with one another, both lines of tradition converge in a sense of aspiration, expectation, and demands on the self, all of which are captured by the term *Anspruch* that many respondents mention.<sup>251</sup> The centrality of psychological vocabulary used to express expectations of the self were another motivation to label this cluster *Social Therapists*.

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<sup>250</sup> “We have a neighbor who practices organic agriculture, but doesn’t find support in the village”, she complained. “He makes his own cheese and sells his milk, but you go to other neighbors and you see the supermarket milk standing on the table. These kinds of things are highly problematic” (Theresa, 00:16).

<sup>251</sup> For instance: Sophie, Theresa, Kristin, and Martin.

Anne, a trained medic and social worker, for instance, described herself as “very self-reflexive about my own psychology, [...] more empathic than the average, sensitive” (Anne, 19). And physiotherapist Kristin told me,

I have many interests that I would like to live more intensively. I often think, ‘ah, I should be practicing my instrument every day, and paint every day and have some kind of creative... eruption [both laugh], and to cook something great every day, but also sit alone on a rock, and also meet loads of people and so on. That’s often pretty exhausting. [...] And again and again I have a moment where I think that I would like to become involved [*engagieren*] even more in things that go beyond my own personal process. So I thought about which topics are important for me. And I noticed that it always really affects me when I hear of people who make bad experiences because of their sexual orientation. [...] That’s something where I would like to help more. (Kristin 4)<sup>252</sup>

In the Social Therapists’ self-understandings, high ethical demands on personal life, expressive individualism (Reckwitz 2017) and therapeutical discourses (“my own individual process”) meet with altruistic commitments. These demands are the pivotal point of the orientations to activity, experience, and an ethical conduct of life that we already saw in the self presentations of this cluster. As in Kristin’s account, both personal development and social injustices are primarily understood as something *felt and experienced*. Just as subjectivity stands at the center of personal ethical labor, also politics and the social order are primarily looked at through the lense of other people’s feelings, perceptions, and frames of mind (see below). Sophie, another young doctor, spoke about working on her feelings when she recounted a conflict with a superior in the hospital:

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<sup>252</sup> Ich habe viele Interessen, die ich alle gern intensiver leben würde. Also, ich denke dann oft so, hach, ich müsste eigentlich jeden Tag mein Instrument üben und jeden Tag malen und jeden Tag irgendeinen kreativen Ausbruch haben (beide lachen) und jeden Tag richtig geil kochen, aber auch gleichzeitig alleine irgendwie auf so einem Felsen sitzen und auch noch ganz viele Leute treffen und sowas. Das ist oft dann eher anstrengend. [...] Ich hab auch immer mal wieder einen Moment, wo ich denke, dass ich mich gerne noch mehr engagieren würde, auch für was, das nicht um meinen individuellen Prozess geht. Und dann hab ich immer mal wieder überlegt, was eigentlich Themen sind, die für mich da wichtig sind und ich merke, dass es mich immer wieder sehr trifft, wenn ich von Menschen höre, die aufgrund ihrer sexuellen Orientierung irgendwie blöde Erfahrungen machen. [...] Da würde ich gerne mehr unterstützen können.“

Our team in the hospital has a strong arabic presence [...] and I notice, 'Oh God, Sophie, you're not free of stereotypes, you're also thinking racist things!'. But then I think, 'no [...] it's not bound to nationality, it's about seeing the boundaries of the other. [...] And if people do not do that, then this becomes a trap, where you begin thinking stupid things.'<sup>253</sup> (Sophie, 00:59)

This logic of emotional reflexivity, and the underlying ethic of care are positionally female in the gendered division of labor, and, as in Sophie's case, was often linked explicitly to occupational ideals of care and presence by the respondents (Gilligan 1993; see also Hebson 2009). Nine out eleven respondents in this cluster worked in caring jobs that involved the permanent contact to clients and patients, e.g. as social workers and educational assistants, doctors and physiotherapists. There was little or no distance between their occupational ethic and the ideals they sought to follow in their general conduct of life. Theresa said, "what is important for me concerns- I studied therapeutic pedagogy and that revolves around questions of inclusion and exclusion. That is very important for me" (Theresa, 00:27). And Sophie paralleled the demands she places on herself regarding her patients and her two young kids: "My expectations of myself [*Ansprüche*] are similar for both: That I can maximally engage with the other person and see them in their needs. Because everyone, kids or adults, come to me with their needs." (Sophie, 00:09)

## **11.2. Sense of Social Location: "There Are Many Different Lifeworlds"**

### **"It's Super Important That We Have People Who Empty the Trash Cans" – Dethematizing and Culturalizing Inequality**

As this section explores, the respondents reconstruct social differences as a *horizontal* tableau of equivalent but different life forms, with little explicit boundary drawing towards neither the

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<sup>253</sup> "Unser Team jetzt im Krankenhaus ist sehr international, sehr arabisch geprägt viele Syrer, viele aus Palästina auch und das dann zum Teil auch Klischees, die gesagt werden, auch stattfinden, im Hinblick auch Frauenbild usw., wo ich dann merke "Ach Gott Sophie du bist auch nicht frei davon, du denkst auch jetzt irgendwelche Stereotypen, du denkst auch irgendwelche rassistischen Sachen", dann merke ich aber "Ne, eigentlich geht es nicht darum, es geht darum, dass wir uns respektvoll behandeln und in dem Moment, in dem das nicht passiert wird das Miteinander einfach wahnsinnig schwierig!". Das ist aber nicht an der Nationalität gekoppelt, das ist einfach die Grenzen des anderen wahren oder so. Das ist wichtig und, egal welche Nationalität, schafft das, dass eben nicht hinzukriegen und das ist dann eben die Falle, dass man doch in diesen doofen Sachen denkt."

above nor the below. Where the folk sociology of many of the workers we encountered was predicated on an above-below dichotomy, the folk sociology of social therapists is essentially one of *milieus*. In a paradoxical turn, the discourses about social inequality of this highly reflexive and egalitarian cluster *dethematize* and/or *culturalize* social differences. This pattern extends similar findings on the contradictory dynamics of middle class egalitarianism in the UK, the Netherlands, and Norway. All but two respondent in this cluster had parents with university degrees, many of whom were described as relatively affluent.<sup>254</sup> All but one had studied, and seven had an M.A. or higher degree. Some, like doctors, worked in occupations with higher incomes than others, like social workers. Five explicitly mentioned that they were precariously employed.

A respondent whose account illustrated the culturalization of social differences was Martin, a gentle and progressive young priest, who, after studying and spending years abroad in several countries of the Global South, had returned to his native region to work as a pastor in a small rural town. Martin's self presentation in the interview revolved around the concept of "encounter" ("All real life is encounter", Martin, 00:04). As a person making and creating encounters, Martin saw his role as someone who fosters understanding and connections between different "cultures", so as to "think further in the direction of human equality" (01:18). Strikingly, he used the figure of different cultures for three relatively heterogeneous sets of relations.

Recounting his experiences abroad, he first developed the concept speaking about the need for a mediation between Christian and pre-Christian cultures. He then drew a parallel to his current ministry in rural Germany, where as a pastor he needed to integrate himself into the "village culture" [*Dorfkultur*], and sought to foster a dialogue between the village and recent refugees from other "cultures". Citing the labels used in the sociological studies of the SINUS research institute— he then further distinguished the village culture into five different social milieus. These encompass the "popular milieu" ("brass band", "sausage breakfast with beer

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<sup>254</sup> As we glimpsed, for instance, in Anne's account of coming home to her parents (her father is a higher-grade technical professional) and their friends with "houses and money". Elias mentions that his parents are "upper middle class" who support him financially, and that he frequently retreats to their large house to work in peace and quiet. Both Sophie's and Kristin's parents are doctors, Leonie's father is a psychotherapist, Martin's a priest like him. Ralf's father too is a studied theologian employed in a higher administrative church position. Dennis mentions that his parents have studied. Theresa and Anna hail from lower middle class families, their parents working as kindergarten teachers and artisans. Stephanie does not mention her background.

on fathers' day"), the "academic milieu" ("classical liturgy", "church service out in nature"), the "hedonist milieu" ("looking for kicks"), and the "precarious milieu" (Martin, 00:30).

Depending on where you are going around in the town, you encounter people with different cultural imprints [*Prägungen*]. [...] I have some blocks [*Hochhäuser*] in one part of our town, where there are completely different people in these houses. That's what I find so thrilling, you come for a birthday visit and you really don't know who will open the door. It can be a super neat flat with a doily, a coffee set, and home-baked cake. Or you come into a messy household, where someone is totally out of it and doesn't really understand that you would rather not sit down on that big armchair with the strange stains. So yes, there are different life worlds [*Lebenswelten*]. And I see that as a privilege of my profession to get these insights. It's about encountering people without prejudices, even though I know I also have prejudices within me. But I want to see the human being [*den Menschen sehen*].

I: And in which milieu would you place yourself?

I don't really know the literature [...]. Of course, I from a certain social-ecological milieu-, I probably got a strong socialization [*Prägungen*] there as well...<sup>255</sup> (Martin, 00:32)

Martin's account is exemplary for the circumspect way in which respondents in this cluster express a sense of social location. Cultures – be they tribal customs or social milieus – are described in an anthropological register of cultural relativism, as groups equal in worth but

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<sup>255</sup> "Ja, also je nachdem, in welchen Vierteln man dann auch in einem größeren oder kleineren Ort unterwegs ist, kann man zumindest bestimmte Prägungen feststellen. [...] Ich hatte jetzt zum Beispiel so ein paar Hochhäuser, die da in einem Viertel unseres Dorfes waren. Ja, wo es ganz unterschiedliche Leute in den Häusern gab. Das finde ich ja immer so spannend, man kommt dann zu einem Geburtstagsbesuch und weiß jetzt echt nicht, wer auf macht. Kann sein, man kommt in eine super schnecke Wohnung mit Spitzendeckchen und einem Kaffeeservice, dass schon da steht, wo einen jemand erwartet und auch noch was gebacken hat. Oder man kommt in einen Messihaushalt, wo jemand gerade völlig durcheinander noch ist oder es vielleicht gar nicht so wahrnimmt, dass man sich lieber jetzt nicht auf diesen großen Sessel mit diesem komischen Fleck setzten würde, oder ja, da gibt es eine wirklich unterschiedliche Lebenswelten und das seh' ich auch schon als großes Privileg in meinem Beruf, dass ich da Einblicke bekomme. Deswegen dieses Bild so als jemand, der einen ein Stück begleitet, dem es um Begegnungen geht. Ohne Vorurteile auf Leute zugehen, auch wenn ich weiß, dass ich in mir drin auch immer wieder Vorurteile trage. Aber mir geht es darum, den Menschen zu sehen, den Menschen kennenzulernen. [I: In welches Milieu würdest du dich selber dann einordnen?] Ja, also ich muss gestehen, dass ich die Milieustudien nicht intensiv genug kenne, um das auch fundiert zu beschreiben. [...] Natürlich habe ich auch ein ökologisch-soziales Milieu, wahrscheinlich habe ich da selber auch ganz schön viel Prägung mitgekriegt. Es ist ja immer auch leichter, andere irgendwo in eine Schublade zu stecken [beide lachen]."

distinct in values and social organization (King 2019; see also Wrong 1997). Martin's account also shows a typical *culturalization* of social differences as horizontally differentiated "milieus", "life worlds", or "cultural imprints" [*Prägungen*]. In Martin's account, the differentiation between classes and status groups is treated in the same way as differences between faiths or local and immigrant cultures, i.e. through the lense of recognition for different cultural forms of life.

Vertical differences of unequal status and resources form the tacit "conjunctive" background knowledge of discourses, but these differences are de-emphasized or even denied by contrasting them with discourses of horizontal equivalence and diversity. Note, for instance, how Martin draws on the social meaning of architecture by citing the "blocks", but immediately emphasizes the "completely different people" living in them. Through their people-centered professional life and social engagement, respondents often have an extensive practical and reflexive knowledge of social stratification and milieus. But speaking about these differences, social therapists carefully avoid making judgments, to a degree that is not present in any of the other clusters. When I asked Anne, an unemployed medic retraining as a social worker, about her position in society, she replied:

I don't like that a person is always put in boxes [*Schubladen*]. Somehow for me that always implies an evaluation. I mean, I experience that in our society, worker is somehow a lower job. And I don't see it that way. It's super important that we have people who empty the trash cans, who serve us at the restaurant... Okay, I mean, is the *banker* really so important? [both laugh] But yes, he's important too, of course! He also has his value and his legitimacy [*Berechtigung*]. Also in terms of different skills. I could not balance on steel beams and build roofs. Tthat's something where I think: 'Chapeau!'"<sup>256</sup> (Anne, 01:14)

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<sup>256</sup> "Ich mag es nicht, wie ein Mensch in Schubladen gesteckt wird. Irgendwie klingt da für mich immer eine Wertung mit. Also ich erlebe das in der Gesellschaft so, dass der Arbeiter irgendwie ein niederer Job ist und das sehe ich nicht so, es ist natürlich total wichtig, dass wir die Menschen haben, die die Mülltonnen leeren, die uns im Restaurant bedienen. Naja, ob der Bankier jetzt so wichtig ist? [beide lachen] Doch der ist natürlich auch wichtig. Das hat alles auch seinen Wert und seine Berechtigung. Auch was die unterschiedlichen Fähigkeiten angeht. Ich könnte nicht auf einem Dachbalken balancieren und irgendwelche Dächer zusammenbauen. Da denk ich mir auch 'Hut ab'."

Speaking about hierarchies is seen as itself involving an act of hierarchization and symbolic violence, and hence avoided. As in Martin and Anne's case, Social Therapists often countered the thematization of social differences by egalitarian discourses of recognition, or stressed the diversity of their own social circles: "My friends and neighbors are no academics, they are simple people [*einfache Leute*]. [...] In think my life in a sense ranges across all social forms and strata. My parents also work with alcohol and drug addicts" (Leonie, 00:51).<sup>257</sup> Anne's insistence that "we need people who serve us at the restaurant" and Leonie's illustration of the diversity of her circles that juxtaposes "academics" and "simple people" or "drug addicts" show an awareness of social boundaries. Yet, common vocabularies used to describe inequality (like "above" and "below", "the poor", "higher" education, etc.) are avoided whenever possible. Material inequality at times formed a positively embarrassing object of discourse. This was exemplified by Ralf, a university researcher. In response to my usual question "how would you describe your position in society" in which I also offered a range of potential conceptual tools, "like classes, strata, above and below,..." , Ralf became so visibly uneasy that I felt compelled to apologize for my question.

Those terms I wouldn't use [laughs], for that kind of thing. [...] Those aren't categories I would think with. ... Yea... I don't know, I'd rather, I don't know. If I'd describe-, because,... yea... Well, [...] like I said, similar-, similar political views, points of reference in one's life world [*lebensweltliche Bezüge*], similar conceptions [*Vorstellungen*], about things that play a role normatively [*normativ*].

I: I'm sorry, we can also talk about something else in a moment [both laugh]. But just because I find this interesting, how would you describe these similarities?

[sighs] Yeah, how people have been socialized, perhaps. [...] Most people [around me] just simply went to the *Gymnasium*. They didn't go to a private school. (Ralf, 46).<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup>"Ich glaube, da kann ich nicht einordnen, also ich habe auch von Soziologie nicht so viel Ahnung. [...] Meine Freunde und auch unsere Nachbarn sind keine studierten Leute, keine Akademiker, sind auch nicht reich, sondern sind einfache Leute, die Ausbildungsberufe haben oder bei der Bundeswehr hier arbeiten in der Nähe. Also ich glaube, irgendwie zieht sich mein Leben schon durch alle Schichten und alle Gesellschaftsformen dann auch im gewissen Sinne. Meine Eltern arbeiten zum Beispiel mit Alkohol- und Drogenabhängigen zusammen"

<sup>258</sup> "Die Begriffe würde ich tatsächlich nicht verwenden [lacht] für sowas. [Das] sind keine Kategorien in denen ich jetzt denken würde. ... Ja.. keine Ahnung, ich würde dann eher, weiß ich nicht, es so beschreiben weil,... ja... Naja, Einkommen ist vielleicht auch schon relativ weit, aber eben wie gesagt, ähnliche, ähnliche politische Einstellungen, ähnliche lebensweltliche Bezüge, ähnliche Vorstellungen, von Familie vielleicht, von Dingen, die

It is notable here how Ralf mentions “simply” going to the *Gymnasium* as a as a sign of ordinariness— only a third of German Millennials (35%) graduated from this highest school tier (Verbrauchs- und Medienanalyse (VuMa) 2020) – and then demarcates this school form from elite private schools, which are a very rare phenomenon in Germany, instead of from the much more common lower-tier *Haupt-* or *Realschule*.<sup>259</sup> Among the respondents here labeled as Social Therapists, we find not only the common ambivalence about class or an insistence on one’s ‘ordinariness’ (Savage et al. 2001), but a cluster-specific unwillingness to speak about socioeconomic stratification and hierarchies.

This dethematization or downplaying of social differences in the cultural middle class has been observed in other national settings (Ljunggren 2017; Jarness 2013) and the pattern found here strongly resonates with these findings. Interpretations differ as to whether this attests to a cultural pattern of middle class ‘Good Samaritanism’ (Sakslind and Skarpenes 2014, 319f.) or a defense of privilege “under the moral cover of egalitarianism” (Jarness 2013, 269ff.). As Harrits and Pedersen (2019) suggest, moral egalitarianism may even bolster inequalities by leaving them implicit.<sup>260</sup> Indeed we can see here how both might be the case. Following Jarness and Friedman (2017), we can understand the underlying dynamic as a clash of socialized affects between an “honourable self” trained to avoid social distinction, and a “visceral self” that is socially discerning and invested in the status order and its codes.

As we saw, professionals in this cluster consciously train their emotional responses, thoughts, and language so as to cultivate an egalitarian non-prejudiced approach to others.<sup>261</sup> With Hochschild, the prohibition to overtly articulate vertical social differences appears as a *feeling rule*, a “social guideline that direct[s] how we want to try to feel” (Hochschild 1979, 563). This observation is important, because it corrects a stereotype which casts sociocultural

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vielleicht normativ ne Rolle spielen. [I: Sorry, wir können auch gleich über was anderes reden [beide lachen], nur weil es mich interessiert. Wie würdest du diese Ähnlichkeiten beschreiben?] R: [seufzt leise] Ja. In was für einer Weise man vielleicht sozialisiert ist. [...] Also die meisten sind einfach aufs Gymnasium gegangen, sind nicht auf Privatschulen gegangen.”

<sup>259</sup> The Federal statistical office reported that 8% of pupils went to private schools in 2020 (DESTATIS 2020). However, this calculation included confessional and Steiner schools. In everyday language, these relatively common and socially not distinguished school forms are usually not designated as ‘private schools’, a term that is reserved for the much rarer socially exclusive elite (boarding) schools with school high fees.

<sup>260</sup> “Even though moral categorisations are seemingly drawn to challenge the social order, they seem to carry a legitimising rather than a competing function since they allow an opportunity to negotiate inequalities without actually being critical of these distributions” (ibid., 18).

<sup>261</sup> This is similar to the pattern of graduate ‘conviction liberals’ described by Sobolewska and Ford 2020, 43f.

professionals like these respondents as arrogant moralizers looking down on the simple people. Indeed doing so would violate the self-understandings of the Social Therapists. But, as we saw in Leonie's account of the *Plattenbau* teenagers or Martin's image of the stained armchair, cultural middle class respondents do make extensive use of indexical statements about social stratification, and in this sense clearly "know" about social hierarchies and their moderately privileged position in them. Above, we also see this come out in some instances of patronizing, which, as a tendency, is inherent in the basic pedagogical or therapeutic vision of the existing as worthy of deepening and improvement.

Yet what is even more important, in my understanding, is the analytically prior level of objective *social* boundaries, e.g. such inscribed into institutional hierarchies. Different from symbolic boundaries, social boundaries do not primarily rely on distinction (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Social boundaries afford middle class individuals a comfortable sense of position independently of whether they engage in overt *symbolic* boundary drawing or not. Put bluntly, if your position is safe, *not* denigrating those below actually offers a further source of symbolic profit. Leonie, for instance, recounted how she had been struggling with her relations to the nurses in her hospital ward. "It's difficult, this hierarchical thing, that you are supposed to stand above them" (Leonie, 00:45), because the nurses commanded greater knowledge of the work processes than she did as a young doctor. Again, Leonie was careful to parallelize this knowledge with her own expertise, "they are quicker in the practical implementation and organization. But sometimes I also know more facts and aspects from my studies" (ibid.). Her solution was "to be open about this, and say that you recognize them for what they are. [...] To give feedback about how this feels for you", as well as to strike a balance between "somehow being empathetic [*emfühsam*], but also a little authoritarian [*autoritär*] with certain things" (Leonie, 00:48).

We here see Leonie navigating a social hierarchy between employee categories, qualifications, and practical versus theoretical knowledge with what Jarness succinctly describes as "an interactional style whereby sameness between the participants of an encounter is emphasised, while differences are tactfully concealed". As also Leonie acknowledges, "this does not imply *actual* sameness, but rather a way of under-communicating differences" (Jarness 2013, 270). In this perspective, the cultural middle class' moral egalitarianism does not necessarily appear as a *strategic* form of disingenuousness, while still stabilizing and

legitimizing inequality in subtle ways. On the one hand, egalitarian orientations paradoxically inhibit the acknowledgment of inequality, because the ideal of equal recognition in a sense takes pride of place over the thematization of real-existing inequalities. On the other hand shifting the focus to horizontal, *cultural* distinctions between “lifeworlds”, “milieus”, or “cultures”, and “recognizing” those hierarchically inferior “for what they are” runs the risk of naturalizing social relations of inequality.

Methodologically, these observations are important because they highlight limitations of the boundary approach. As we saw here, the positionings of professionals tacitly presuppose a knowledge of social boundaries inscribed into geographies, habitus, the occupational structure, or workplace hierarchies, even where the drawing of symbolic boundaries is avoided and hierarchies dethematized. In these cases, the crucial site of stratification and distinction are not discursive acts of boundary demarcation, as they are focalized in boundary studies, but the implicit *system of stratified social categories* which discourses presuppose in order to be intelligible.

### **“They Sit There In Their Big-Ass Doctor’s Practice” – Boundaries Against the Economic Middle Class**

As fleetingly present in Ralf’s demarcation of the *Gymnasium* and elite private schools, and Anne’s question of whether “the *banker* really is so important”, a crucial group of social others that the feeling rule against social distinction does *not* apply to is the economic middle class. If the ideal of social therapists is an active, “natural” contact with the world and a deepening of one’s own subjectivity (“appreciate the value of things”), the core of their social critique is *alienation*, as stymied development and a lack of resonance. Alienation is imagined twofold: by constraint (as in the case of the poor, who do not manage to eat healthily, sing, and explore the world), but also by willful superficiality and coldness. This second form of alienation forms the core of moral boundaries drawn against the economic middle class, who are depicted as preoccupied only with money.

Kristin thus described her social position as “in the middle of things [*mittendrin*] [...] not on any of the fringes [*Ränder*], in terms of money or education” (Kristin, 223). Drawing on a metaphor of playful activity and expressive individualism she explained: “I’m dashing around

there [i.e. in the middle], as if it was a playing field [*Spielfeld*]. [...] I'm part of the arrangement [*Gefüge*] but I am moving fast and sometimes I also tease the others. [...] I slap them on the butt [laughs] or pull their noses. [...] I'm having a pretty good time [laughs]" <sup>262</sup> (Kristin, 209). She contrasted that with

people who have a completely different lifestyle and just want to consume a lot, which they can, because they have loads of cash. With this I feel an insecurity and foreignness [*Fremdheit*], except that there [...] I also feel a little proud, even *arrogant*.. [...] As if I somehow see the world in a more real way. Or have more contact to the natural [*dem Ursprünglichen*] [laughs]. To somehow be closer to the ground [*bodennah*]. It seems aloof to me [*abgehoben*]. Like I can appreciate the value of things more"<sup>263</sup> (Kristin, 229).

Anne described meeting friends of her parents "who have houses and money" as a "cultural shock. [...] It's where I think 'Hello? Guys, do you even see what is going on the world? [...] You sit there in your big-ass doctor's office, drive a big-ass car-' I mean this is simply a form of alienation that is happening there"<sup>264</sup> (Anne, 01:17). And Sophie admitted that she would get bored when talking to people who only care about

security and these... I wouldn't want to say *boring* things. Where it's really all about your mortgage, your job, your car, the pay raise of your husband, you own wage negotiations, all these benchmarks. Then there's just a huge sense of boredom that befalls me. And there are other moments, when people have a completely different

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<sup>262</sup> "Also ich seh mich da drin so ein bisschen rumflitzen, jetzt, als wär das so ein Spielfeld. Und ich versuche, also in meinem inneren Bild da jetzt, bin ich zwar Teil des Gefüges, aber ich beweg mich irgendwie ziemlich schnell und manchmal ärgere ich auch die anderen, die da mit mir drin sitzen. [I: Inwiefern?] Ich seh da einen Haufen Menschen und ich flitz da rum und hau denen auf den Po oder sowas. [beide lachen] Oder zieh denen an der Nase. [...]Aber irgendwie eigentliche ne ganz gute Zeit [lacht]."

<sup>263</sup> "Menschen, die so einen ganz anderen Lebensstil haben, die zum Beispiel sehr viel konsumieren wollen oder auch können, weil sie richtig viel Kohle haben und sowas. Also, das macht mir eine ähnliche Unsicherheit und Fremdheit, aber mit nem anderen Gefühl verbunden. Da fühle ich mich eher ein bisschen stolz! Oder so ein bisschen, weiß ich nicht, vielleicht kann man auch "arrogant" sagen? Oder sowas? [I: Woher kommt der Stolz da?] K: Der Stolz ist so ein, als würde ich die Welt irgendwie realer sehen oder so. Oder mehr noch den Kontakt zum Ursprünglichen (lacht) haben oder so. Oder, was heißt "Ursprünglichen", aber irgendwie "bodennah" zu sein. Es kommt mir irgendwie so abgehoben vor. Als würde ich noch andere, den Wert von Dingen irgendwie nachvollziehen können."

<sup>264</sup> "Dann komme ich zu meinen Eltern nachhause, die eher Freunde haben, die [...] auch Häuser haben und Geld. Das ist für mich schon manchmal echt einen Kulturschock, [...] da denkt man sich auch "Hallo, Leute kriegt ihr überhaupt noch mit was in der Welt so los ist? [...] Du sitzt da in deiner dicken Arztpraxis, fährst dein dickes Auto!" also da findet auch einfach eine Entfremdung statt von der Seite."

idea of life, or a hobby, or they've gone traveling or something, or [...] really care about their work. *That I find amazing.*<sup>265</sup> (Sophie, 01:23)

Such cultural and moral boundaries against the boring and alienated pursuit of money can be understood in the context of the romantic and bourgeois double heritage of the cultural middle class introduced above. Members of this middle class fraction are not only expected to succeed in investive status work (Schimank et al. 2014); they also seek to gain the prestige of the singular life and personality (Reckwitz 2017, 303ff.): "Though capital accumulation strategies accompany many activities, they do not form the ultimate goal of life in the new middle class. Beyond the mere standard of living, this class is interested in the quality of life. On this account, the new middle class distances itself from the old middle class which is seen as having, in a sense, overzealously strived for income, wealth and status symbols, and 'did not know how to live'" (Reckwitz 2017, 305).

#### **"It's Not That We Want More Money, But..." – Negotiating Precarity**

There is one last other aspect to the anti-materialism of the social therapists that is not only class- but also cohort-specific and concerns the negotiation of *precarity*. In the age group interviewed here, repudiating the importance of money in the name of altruism and self-realization can also be a way to hold at bay the considerable status expectations confronting children of the middle class (Schimank, Mau, and Groh-Samberg 2014) in the face of unstable or downwardly mobile career trajectories. As is known from social mobility research, individuals generally seek to reach or even surpass the status of their parents; an expectation that poses a particular problem to respondents like Anne, who, despite considerable investments into education, are confronted with precarious employment and living conditions. In this context, moral boundaries against economic success can also be understood as shoring up a middle class sense of social location unsettled by precarity.

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<sup>265</sup> "...das Sicherheitsbewusste und dieses, ich würde nicht *Langweilige* sagen. Wenn es halt wirklich um Hauskredit, Arbeitsstelle, Auto, Gehaltsverhandlung des Mannes, Gehaltsverhandlung von einem selber, also einfach wirklich nur um diese Eckdaten geht. Dann ist einfach große Ödness, die mich befällt. Und ich glaube, dass dann alles andere, wo Leute irgendwie einen anderen Lebensentwurf haben, oder irgendein abgefahrenes Hobby oder Reisen gegangen sind, oder irgendwas, oder in einem ganz anderen Beruf arbeiten, oder irgendwie ihren Beruf komplett ausfüllen, das finde ich toll."

This came up in a sub-sample of five respondents describing their lives as precarious. A scene illustrating the complex entanglement of money, precarity, and social sense of this sub-group appeared in a group discussion with three academically trained social workers and left-wing activists. I met Anna and Dennis, a couple with a young child, at their flat in a large West German city, later being joined by an acquaintance of theirs, Stephanie. Stephanie and Anna were currently unemployed and received social assistance or parental allowance; both were thinking of going back to university. The flat lay on the top floor of the building, and bright sunlight flooded onto the wooden floors of what seemed like an oddly unfurnished room. Toys, balls, and trinkets of the toddler were strewn across the floor, but otherwise the interior was sparse and there was no decoration in the living room, apart from a single framed poster over an IKEA sofa.

“None of this is ours”, Anna remarked, as she saw me looking around. The two had only rented the AirBnB for a few weeks while looking for a permanent flat. But since none was to be found on the city’s tight housing market, they were about to head off to Croatia for a month, using Anna’s parental allowance and Dennis’ remaining vacations. “If we don’t have a place to stay anyway, why not go somewhere nice?” Anna told me with a smile (Group III, Memo I). In the group discussion, Anna, Dennis, and Stephanie extensively debated “precarity” as a problem of their sector, their clients, and the migrants their political groups organized solidarity campaigns for. They themselves repeatedly labeled themselves as “privileged”, especially in the “downward comparison” [*Vergleich nach unten*] (Dennis) to these others. Yet in an interesting segment, both Anna and Dennis began to interrogate this self-understanding.

Dennis: I have always thought of myself as privileged. In the sense that I don’t have any wishes that more money or higher income would solve. But through my work with the [leftist group], it’s become more and more important for me to also see my own affectedness [*Betroffenheit*], and to draw on that politically.

Anna: Yes, it's kind of funny, isn't it? I have many friends who officially probably would be called precarious. And still, I would say that all of us, by having this downward comparison that you mentioned... somehow, we don't have a problem with that so much. [...] We think ‘yea, it's really shit, but it's the normality somehow’. [...] Everyone is living with this project work stuff [*Projektdinger*], always temporary. I mean, nobody

in my circle of friends has a permanent contract. It's like- sometimes for a few months, sometimes for a year, then it's suddenly over. [...] It's normal and nothing people get upset about.

I: And is that because it's actually [*wirklich*] not that bad?

Anna: Well, it depends on what you mean by 'actually'. I mean we are fine somehow, it's not that I- I have the feeling that- I'm not lacking anything... Except now-

Dennis: We need an apartment. We can't find a place now. But the point is not that we want to have more money so we can afford a flat. There simply are no flats, so this is a general problem.

Anna: Although if we had a good income-

Dennis: Yeah, if we had loads of money we would *buy* a flat or something. But-

Anna: Yes, or we would also find one. Maybe at a high price.

Dennis: Yes, but actually one would want to live in a society where people can just have a place to live, somehow.<sup>266</sup> (Group III, 40)

Anna problematizes the idea of being "privileged" when she observes how bad employment conditions are normalized, because employees compare themselves to those worse off. Describing this state, she introduces the label "precarious", though keeping it at a distance by applying it to "friends" and qualifying it as "officially". She remains hesitant in her positionings,

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<sup>266</sup> [Dennis: Ich hab mich selber immer als privilegiert begriffen. So, dass ich keine Wünsche hab, die jetzt irgendwie mit mehr Geld oder mehr Einkommen so zu lösen wären.] [...] Anna: Ja, aber ist irgendwie witzig oder? Also ich hab in meinem Freundeskreis einige die... wahrscheinlich offiziell oder so allgemein als prekär bezeichnet würden. Und trotzdem würde ich sagen, dass wir trotzdem alle- dadurch dass wir halt diesen Vergleich nach unten haben, wie du sagst, irgendwie so... jetzt nicht so n Problem damit haben oder das gar nicht so schlimm finden und denken 'ja, das ist kacke, aber es ist auch irgendwo ne Normalität'. Weil der ganze Freundeskreis, alle leben so in diesen Projektdingern und immer nur befristet und... also im engen Freundeskreis hat keiner einen unbefristeten Vertrag. Also und- mal n paar Monate, mal n Jahr, dann wieder gar nicht mehr [...] es ist normal und nicht sowas worüber alle sich dann aufregen. [...] die nehmen das halt auch als Normalität hin. [I: Weil es wirklich auch nicht schlimm ist?] Anna: Ja was heißt 'wirklich', ne? Ich mein irgendwie kommen wir ja gut klar, also es ist nicht so, dass ich- also ich hab auch das Gefühl mir fehlt nichts. Außer jetzt- [Dennis: Wir brauchen ne Wohnung. Finden keine Wohnung jetzt. Aber es geht ja nicht darum, dass wir mehr Geld haben wollen, damit wir uns ne Wohnung leisten können, sondern es gibt halt keine, also es ist n allgemeines Problem.] Anna: Obwohl wenn wir n gutes Einkommen hätten- [Dennis: Ja, wenn wir Geld hätten, würden wir uns jetzt ne Wohnung *kaufen* oder so. Aber-] Anna: Ja oder wir würden halt auch eine kriegen. Halt eine überteuerte. [Dennis: Aber man will ja eigentlich in ner Gesellschaft leben, wo Leute halt einfach... wohnen können, irgendwie.]

reporting that she “is fine” and “doesn’t lack anything”, yet pointing out how a higher income would help her and Dennis find a flat. Remarkably, Dennis rejects this idea twice. For him, acknowledging his affectedness by social problems is of *political* importance in the context of his solidarity activism. But he too keeps the idea of being precarious at arm’s length, maintaining that he is “privileged” because he has no wishes that money could fulfill. He insists that the problem is a collective, political one (lack of housing) and that effectively the solution is not to earn more money, but to change society in a way that money was less important for one’s livelihood.

Obviously, this type of discourse could not be further away from the one seen in other clusters, particularly among the working class interviewees, who, for better or for worse, see money and income as *the* central medium of success and recognition. Against this idea, respondents in this cluster cite ethical, cultural, as well as political considerations to relativize the importance of money. They base a “privileged” sense of social location (see also Leonie above) on non-monetary goods like education and social competences. This seemingly also serves to mask instabilities and incongruencies of social location, such as a sense of defensiveness in the face of precarity. Put bluntly: If the problem is defined as a lack of money, one is poor, passive, and failing. But if it is defined politically, morally, or generationally, one has the chance of seeing oneself as virtuous, solidaristic, active, and “all of us”.

Strikingly, although *money* appears as a false or “ugly” incentive for one’s life in this cluster, and injustices of pay and precarity are criticized, most upward boundaries that were prominent among the working class respondents, especially of the rich as a particularly powerful group, or other privileged categories “*above*”, do not appear at all. If the distinction against those below is casual and carefully couched in benevolence, distinction against those above is mainly articulated as a horizontal demarcation from economic success and/or the economic fraction of a middle class that respondents understand themselves to belong to.

### 11.3. Relation to Politics: “We Need to Shape Society”

#### “The Important Thing Is to Have Appreciation For Everyone” – Politics as Social Engagement

For the Social Therapists, politics is a direct continuation of the ethical demands on the self that structured their morality and self-understandings. Politics is understood as social engagement, grassroots direct social action, and/or subjective reflection, often driven by a sense of privilege. Its object consists in processes of social recognition, encounter, and reflexivity. In their relation to politics, the Social Therapists resemble what Vester et al.’s representative survey study identified as the social integrationist camp (Vester et al. 2001, 446ff; see also Vester 2019), emphasizing *social* rather than political activism with a moral and egalitarian focus, as well as smaller-scale participatory forms in a critical distance to party politics. Anne, for instance, articulated an idea of change through grassroots initiatives regarding culture and the environment:

“I think that a lot of things can change from below [*von unten*]. [...] In [my city], there are initiatives that organize lunch meetings for encounters [with refugees] [*Begegnungscafés*] or for inclusion. For people with little money, there’s a cultural institution that gives away free tickets. There are attempts and beginnings. [...] Also in terms of the environmental movements of the 1980s and how this has arrived in politics, like in Ms. Merkel’s case, I am pretty hopeful that it is worth the effort to begin small”<sup>267</sup> (Anne, 01:23).

As in the alternative worker cluster, agency is ascribed to movements or smaller scale initiatives rather than parties. Kristin described political activity as, “organizing a happening [*Aktion*], or, I don’t know, building alternative structures, [...] like cafés and libraries. To connect people and do things together, raise awareness [*aufmerksam machen*]”<sup>268</sup> (Kristin,

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<sup>267</sup> “Ich glaube, dass sich einiges von unten verändern kann. [...] In [Stadt] zum Beispiel gibt es viele Initiativen, die Begegnungscafés veranstalten oder für Teilhabe. Für Menschen mit wenig Geld verschenkt die Kultur-[Institution] auch Freikarten. Es gibt schon Versuche und Ansätze. [...] Auch bezogen auf die Umweltbewegungen in den 80ern und was da jetzt in der Politik angekommen ist, auch bei Frau Merkel. Dann bin ich da eigentlich schon hoffnungsvoll, dass das was bringt im Kleinen anzufangen.”

<sup>268</sup> „Eine Aktion zum Beispiel. Oder ein, ich weiß nicht, Orte, die man als alternative Strukturen aufbauen kann. Also, weiß nicht. Ich denk da irgendwie grad an so, Orte wie Cafes oder Büchereien oder sowas [...] Menschen zusammenzuholen, um etwas gemeinsam zu machen. Und aufmerksam darauf zu machen, ja, irgendwie so Aktionen zu planen.“

155). For some, this also included their professional work, as in the case of Dennis who emphasized that he told the migrants he worked with, “that they are not just supplicants [Bittsteller]. That they have rights and that they should show resistance in their everyday life. [...] That’s the political part of my work” (Dennis/Group III, 31).

There is a stark contrast to the relations to politics observed among the workers. For them, politics was something *politicians* did in far-away political institutions “above”, and that people like them had to suffer. For Social Therapists, politics is something that *they do*, and mostly happens in everyday life, outside of the political system. As we saw in Dennis’ statement, his ethos as a social worker and his political engagement met in the commitment to the *rights* of disadvantage groups, such as migrants. Politics effectively forms an extension of the high ethical expectations of one’s life and work. As Wiebke, a scientific assistant working at a research center in a West German university town, put it, there is a

responsibility for everyone to help shape the world as a whole, but also one’s direct environment [...]. And to not be absent-minded and just let things happen. That you get angry together, in a community, even if it is difficult to see how it really changes anything. [...] Because we have so many possibilities, and also privileges, that we can spare the time to do something for our environment, and the world, and things we believe in. [...] Like climate change, but also that our society grows together more strongly, and we just try to accept every person for what he is. A change in the image of society, somehow.<sup>269</sup> (Wiebke, 00:22)

In comparison to the workers’ discourses about politics, we here see the real-life contours of classed differences in relations to politics already revealed in the MCA, where middle class individuals considered themselves much more interested in politics and able to participate in

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<sup>269</sup> “Man hat eine Verantwortung, schon ein bisschen, dass jeder die Welt im großen Ganzen mitgestaltet, aber auch das direkte Umfeld [...]. Und das nicht einfach auf sich einrieseln lässt oder einfach geschehen lässt. Wenn man sich da auch mal ärgert gemeinschaftlich, auch wenn es schwierig ist, dann direkte Veränderungen zu sehen, aber dass man schon, wenn man auf der Welt-... Weil wir ja schon irgendwie voll viele Möglichkeiten haben und Sachen und Vorteile hier, dass wir die Zeit entbehren können, etwas zu tun, für das Umfeld oder für die Welt und für bestimmte Dinge, an die wir glauben. [...] Also von Klimaschutz bis auch, dass die Gesellschaft mehr zusammenwächst und einfach versucht jeden Menschen erstmal im Grunde so anzunehmen wie er ist. Ein bisschen auch ein Wandel des Gesellschaftsbildes.”

political groups. In this cluster as well, there is a skepticism about institutional politics<sup>270</sup>, but instead of the populist register we saw prominent among workers, the critique is here directed at democratic deficits. As Anne said,

“I’m hesitant about always blaming politicians. I once went to the city council and I saw what a cut and thrust [*Hauen und Stechen*] it is here already. So I don’t even want to imagine what it is on the higher levels. [...] But on the other hand, I recently read a book about which milieus the politicians come from and how this has changed since the 1980s from the workers and the middle class to the high bourgeoisie [*Großbürgertum*]. So many don’t even know what it means to get Hartz IV because they never experienced it and because this field is not represented” (Anne, 01:11).

For her, many important things “could not be changed from above” [*von oben*] (ibid., 01:23). Linking to the theme of recognition prominent in this cluster, she said that politics started with the question, “what kind of attitude we pass on to our kids. [...] The basic thing is to have appreciation [*Wertschätzung*] for everyone, to see needs [*Bedürfnisse*] and not to judge people’s behaviors. [...] We need to shape society [*gestalten*] so that no one ends up running into a wall. [...] We should just see the single human being more, and learn to accept it as it is” (ibid., 01:37).

As in Wiebke’s statement (“accept every person as it is...”), the core of political demands lies in an ethical universalism centered on recognition. In line with the conspicuous non-distinction and inclusiveness observed above, a sense of generalized deservingness is the key moral impulse on which claims are based. In a typical exchange, I asked Anne about her experiences with the employment agency, “did you think you deserved to be treated better?”, to which she replied, “all human beings deserve to be appreciated.” (Anne, 01:00).<sup>271</sup> Deservingness here does not appear as just redistribution according to moral criteria, but as universal non-distinction.

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<sup>270</sup> Anna said, “I don’t identify with any party. A fundamental change is something I don’t associate with any party. Voting is important, of course, in times of the AfD. But I just vote for the *Die Linke*, because- what else?” (Anna/Group III, 95)

<sup>271</sup> [I: Meinst du, du hättest es eigentlich verdient besser behandelt zu werden?] Ja. Alle Menschen haben es verdient, wertgeschätzt zu werden.

In line with the moral focus on subjective states of the self and others and the culturalized understanding of social differences reconstructed above, politics is mainly discussed in terms of mindsets (see below). Like the flourishing or alienated individuals it is thought to consist of, society is seen as an object of potential development and growth. Social transformation is described idealistically, through metaphors of thinking or seeing, such as a “change of the *image* of society” [*Gesellschaftsbild*], a “change of *mind*” [*Umdenken*] (Wiebke, 00:31), “another *image* of humanity” [*Menschenbild*], or “*thinking* further in the direction human equality” (Martin, 01:08). It is also imagined as a voluntaristic process (“we should”) of collective education and self-transformation. As we saw in Kristin’s earlier quote about helping LGBT people so as to “become active beyond my own individual process”, solidarity with disadvantaged others is understood as part of a development of one’s personality into an active, involved, and altruistic person engaging with the world, which forms the basic self ideal of Social Therapists. In a contrast to the nostalgic retrospection of many workers, recent history, as in Anne’s reference to the environmental movement, is seen as by and large positive (though threatened by the radical right) as well as harbouring a *future* potential.

All respondents in this cluster identified as “left”, “green”, or both, with reconstructions of the meanings of these terms closely linking to the overall self-understandings of respondents and the culturalist recognition-centered bent of their image of social order. Anne, for instance, defined being left as “centering the human being [*den Menschen*] and minorities that are disadvantaged” (Anne, 01:27), while Anna said “in terms of the feeling [*Gefühl*], it is about a humane [*menschenfreundlich*], solidary, communal social togetherness, not being against each other.” (Anna/Group III, 98). Leonie described the left as,

liberal, somehow, also in the way you educate children, but also, I don’t know, ecological [*Öko*], alternative, to stand for things or demonstrate, or just to be against the mainstream and do things differently. Well, and also that you like to invest in society, sort of. Not in the sense of communism, but that you like being in society, living in society, sharing social things, like a common vegetable garden, for example, and that you think about others (Leonie, 01:11).<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> “Schon irgendwie dann liberal auch vielleicht so ein bisschen in Erziehung, aber auch, weiß ich nicht, ein bisschen Öko, alternativ und auch irgendwie für Sachen einzustehen oder zu demonstrieren oder einfach gegen den Mainstream, Sachen anders zu machen. Naja und auch eben, dass man eben in eine Gesellschaft gerne

These responses strongly resonate with the study by Zollinger (2021) introduced above. Apart from “left”, common self-descriptions of New Left voters were “social”, “interested”, “open”, “conscious”, “active”, “student”, “alternative”, “young”, and “tolerant”.<sup>273</sup> We immediately recognize the large overlap of these terms with the self-presentations recorded above, which stressed activity (“young, active”), reflexivity (“conscious”), and altruism (“social” “tolerant”). Being left is mostly understood along the lines of left-*liberal* New Politics with a very strong focus on recognition. In terms of issues, migrants and refugees or the anti-migrant politics of the radical right are mentioned by all respondents; other themes include environmental and climate, gender and LGBT politics. In a striking correspondence to the demarcation from economic concerns, “economy”, “inequality”, but also “injustice” and “power” (as well as variants of these words) do not appear in the interviews at all. However, respondents expressed critiques of “resource maldistribution”, the “burning up” [*verheizen*] of nature and human beings “for the sake of growth” (Martin, 125), as well as of the privatization of public services: “I associate with being on the left [...] that schools and the health system should not be privatized. There are certain things that don’t work well in a market economy. And the state should get involved and organize them for the common good [*Allgemeinwohl*]”<sup>274</sup> (Anne, 01:27).

### **“They Must Have a Need That Is Not Fulfilled” – Social Psychologizing the Radical Right**

The radical right, and especially the recent successes of the AfD, are a central political topic for respondents in this cluster and are discussed by all respondents, many of whom express a sense of shock and disbelief. Kristin described it as being “alarmed, angry, and sad” (Kristin, 177). And Sophie said, “I’m not very political, in the sense that I read loads of things and follow current events”, adding with a view to the election of Donald Trump, “but if the most powerful

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investiert oder so in der Art von, ja jetzt nicht Kommunismus, aber irgendwie gerne in Gesellschaft ist, gerne in Gesellschaft lebt und auch gerne so gerne gesellschaftliche Sachen teilt. Naja, sowas wie Gemüsegarten oder einen gemeinsamen Gemüsegarten einfach irgendwie Produkte dann auch austauscht, also einfach an andere denkt und sich auch als Gemeinschaft so auch sieht. “

<sup>273</sup> The attributes that voters of the populist radical right mentioned, apart from right-wing, were: Swiss, down-to-earth, country(side) [*land*], conservative, bourgeois, direct, normal, honest, worker, simple, hard-working. (Zollinger forthcoming)

<sup>274</sup> “Also mit ‚links‘ verbinde ich, [...] dass Schulen und das Gesundheitswesen nicht privatisiert gehören. Es gibt bestimmte Dinge, die laufen nicht gut über die Marktwirtschaft, in denen sollte der der Staat mehr seine Hand drin haben und die mehr für das Allgemeinwohl organisieren.“

man can be someone like that, who... emotionally works on such a low level [*Niveau*], that's... I don't know... just shocking" (Sophie, 01:06).

The theories Social Therapists articulate about the radical right have in common that they see *social psychological* sentiments like frustration, anger, and fear as the drivers of the right's support. For Martin, AfD supporters "fear the unknown [and] follow the false promise of orientation and security by encapsulating [*abkapseln*] their identity" (Martin, 127). Kristin, who – while raised in the West – now lived in the East, reckoned that "people here are still filled with a lot of sorrow [*Kummer*] and resentment [*Groll*] that comes from reunification times. [...] I think there is a load of hurt [*Verletzung*] inside" (Kristin, 179). And Anne said, "if people become aggressive and hurt others [...] then they must feel some kind of distress [*Not*]. They must have a need [*Bedürfnis*] that is not being fulfilled"<sup>275</sup> (Anne, 32).

This therapeutic vision quite obviously links to the subjectivized perspective on the self and others that predominated in this cluster. Right-wing radicalism is seen as the result of a misguided channeling of emotions. "Something is off and I'm feeling discontent [...] and then people quickly find a scapegoat and that's the foreigners or whoever" (Anne, 156). It is also seen as a deficit of character that comes from a lack of experiences, encounter, and reflection. "Here [in the village] you don't have people of color. [...] From here to work, to the supermarket, and back to the village, the chances are not very high to have a different kind of encounter [*Begegnung*]" (Theresa, 01:17). The limited ethical horizon attributed to the right is linked to lifestyles that are socially, emotionally, and cognitively constrained. In a telling segment, Leonie indirectly characterizes typical AfD voters by recounting her surprise at finding a "sweet" and "friendly" older neighbor among them. Asked about who supports the AfD, she replied,

To answer this I would need to generalize, which I'm a bit wary of. But I'd say it's people with a basic education [*einfach gebildet*] who have few contacts to foreigners or Germans with a migration background. [...] But it's also people where you would never expect it. To give an example: The grandmother of a friend, she's really such a sweet granny [*liebe Omi*] and her husband is ill and she cares for him so sweetly [*lieb*], so

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<sup>275</sup> „Also wenn Menschen aggressiv werden und andere verletzen [...] hat er irgendeine Not, hat er irgendein Bedürfnis was nicht erfüllt ist.“

patient and friendly. And, I don't know, they are really well-regarded in the city for their [shop], and their grandchildren [...] are social workers [and] one of them is married to a guy from Sudan. [...] But then the grandma always says things against the foreigners [...] where you really wonder where that comes from. That is something that is really shocking, that it's also such sweet [*liebe*] people, who have a lot of social contacts and who really shouldn't have prejudices anymore.<sup>276</sup> (Leonie, 01:02)

Implicit in this account is the assumption that apart from personal contact with migrants, a good and gentle character, intact social integration and status ("well-regarded in the town"), as well as contact to specific occupational groups ("social workers") inhibit right-wing sentiment.

As such, the respondents position radical right supporters as counter images to themselves and their own feeling rules. The radical right stands for a lack of exactly that reflexivity, emotional depth, humanity, and interest in the world that the social therapists themselves are proud to possess and cultivate. Distinguishing herself from AfD sympathizers, Theresa says, "I have learnt at the university to question things, so that makes you less manipulable" (Theresa, 01:14). And asked what causes people to become left- or right-wing, Kristin answered,

"It has a lot to do with the circumstances in which you grow up, I imagine. What's the feeling I have in my life [*Lebensgefühl*]? Do I feel safe and sheltered [*geborgen*]? [...] I'm thinking of myself now. I think I'm always feeling safe and protected in the world, so I don't have the feeling that I need to seal myself off [*abschotten*]. I can open myself to a change of the system into a more egalitarian direction. I'm not afraid that I will lose something"<sup>277</sup> (Kristin, 193).

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<sup>276</sup> Dafür müsste jetzt so pauschalisieren, scheu ich mich jetzt ein bisschen davor, aber ich sage jetzt mal, einfach gebildete Leute, die nicht viel Kontakte haben zu Ausländern oder auch zu Deutschen mit Migrationshintergrund. [...] Aber es sind auch Leute, wo man es nicht so erwartet. Also um ein Beispiel zu nennen aus der Familie, die Oma von meinem Mann, die ist wirklich eine total liebe Omi und ihr Mann ist krank und die pflegt ihn so lieb, ist so geduldig und freundlich und ich weiß nicht, die sind so in der Stadt bekannt und sind so angesehen mit dem [Laden] und ihre Enkeltochter [...] die arbeiten als Sozialarbeiter und Streetworker [...] die eine Enkeltochter ist jetzt mit einem Sudanesen verheiratet. So ganz viele Aspekte, wo man denkt "Okay da würde ich jetzt niemals denken, dass jemand von denen AfD wählt!", aber dann die Omi immer irgendwelche Sachen gegen Ausländer, was die da machen, und dass das ja gar nicht geht. Und wo man das gar nicht denkt und man sich einfach fragt, woher das kommt. Das ist etwas, was einen dann so ein bisschen schockt manchmal. Das selbst so Menschen liebe Personen, die eigentlich viel Kontakt haben so und eigentlich wirklich keine Vorurteile mehr haben sollten.

<sup>277</sup> "Ich glaube, dass das schon viel damit zu tun hat auch, unter welchen Umständen man aufwächst, kann ich mir vorstellen. Also, auch so, "Wie ist so mein Lebensgefühl eigentlich? Fühl ich mich gut geborgen? [...] Also ich

Just like the radical right closure, the process of *opening*, which is articulated as an answer to the strength of the radical right, is understood in social psychological terms, as a collective work on fears and other problematic emotions, and a broadening of horizons, e.g. through the fostering of contacts with foreigners. “We need to take better care of people who feel disadvantaged and don’t feel seen”, suggested Anne, and added, “It would also be a possibility to go [with people] into a refugee facility sometime and see how they live there. It always has to do with a feeling of foreignness. And that changes as soon as you get to know each other” (Anne, 01:22).

Theresa said that fighting back against the right, “has to do with an opening [*Öffnung*]. If I think of the village here, there is little that makes it attractive for young people from the outside to move here. [...] I see this as strongly connected to cultural offers. Which the government and the local authorities have a responsibility to support. Also in relation to the shift to the right [*Rechtsruck*]” (Theresa, 01:21). As already observed above, hope for the countryside comes from “young people from the outside”, like Theresa herself, which would help open the horizons of countryside dwellers through cultural offers. Similarly, Wiebke too thought that bringing culture to rural areas would help society grow back together again. “I find it beautiful if you try to mix different structures and people. If performance art goes to the village and meets the hunting association. Because both have their legitimacy, both have interesting structures. Okay maybe the hunting association a bit less, but, I don’t know, the church choir maybe. That different people come together [...] who normally form groups”<sup>278</sup> (Wiebke, 01:37).

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hab jetzt grad an mich gedacht, dass ich eigentlich mich immer ganz gut geborgen in der Welt fühle und so das Gefühl hab, ich brauch mich nicht so abschotten, weil ich kann mich eigentlich auch gut, einer Veränderung des Systems in eine gleichwertigere Richtung öffnen. Ich hab da keine Sorge, was zu verlieren.“

<sup>278</sup> “Ich finde es halt schön, wenn man mal versucht verschiedene Strukturen und Bereiche zu durchmischen, wenn dann irgendwie so weiß ich nicht Performance Art auf das Land kommt und den Schützenverein trifft. Beides hat seine Berechtigung, beides hat spannende Strukturen, würde sagen Schützenverein vielleicht weniger, aber keine Ahnung, vielleicht dörflichen, ländlichen Strukturen, die sich so gebildet haben, Kirchengesangsverein, dass verschiedene Menschen zusammenkommen und sich austauschen, die normalerweise nicht zusammenkommen, weil sie ja doch schon einfach Gruppen bilden”.

#### 11.4. Summary

In this section, we encountered a cluster of sociocultural professionals who mainly understand themselves as active, interested, and altruistically motivated people. A central category is that of being “*engagiert*” – active, involved, and committed, e.g. in relationships and social causes – which captures a range of important aspects of self-understandings. The ideal of rich and variegated subjectivities and experiences, found in particular in the encounter with others, were central moral anchors of social identities. The label Social Therapist meant to highlight that in describing themselves and others, respondents drew on a subjectivized, emotion-centered, reflexive, and non-judgmental – hence: therapeutic – discourses of recognition, realization, and growth. These were coupled with high ethical expectations of the self. Respondents saw themselves as “privileged” recipients of education and emotional cultivation, which they sought to pass on to others with a caring and pedagogical impulse. Social Therapists located themselves in the middle of society; the rich or other categories “above” were absent from their accounts. But two sets of categories were distinguished by cultural boundaries as lacking the respondents’ own sense of connection and capacity for reflexivity and self-development. These were the economic middle class (whose pursuit of money made them cold and alienated) and the poor and less educated, including village dwellers that had never seen the wide world (who were deprived by their limited horizons).

Although especially the latter relation implied an often subtly patronizing sense of hierarchy, the Social Therapists’ “honourable self” took great care to describe social differences in a horizontal, culturally relativist way. Society here appeared as a tableau of different but equivalent “lifeworlds”, “milieus”, “socializations”, or “cultural imprints”. This egalitarian impulse had the paradoxical effect of dethematizing inequality. Vertical differences formed an embarrassing subject that was largely avoided, and only appeared in articulations of a socially discerning “visceral self” aware of status differentials and their markers (“blocks”, “Hartz IV”).

In line with this, politics appeared first and foremost as an extension of the impulse to foster understanding and recognition between lifeworlds. Social Therapists had a participatory understanding of politics as social engagement, e.g. in smaller-scale movements, social initiatives, and subcultures, and were otherwise skeptical about institutional politics and party politics “from above”. Taking a idealist and voluntaristic approach, Social Therapists described

the political and societal transformations they aimed for with metaphors of a “change of mind”, “image” or “vision”. These visions concerned a universalist opening towards outgroups, especially migrants, an extension and equilization of recognition and deservingness, as well as the protection of nature. The great opponent on all these issues was the radical right (particularly the AfD), whose rise was discussed in a social psychological register as a symptom of unmastered emotions like anger, fear, and grief. Such emotional blockades, and prejudices more generally, were explained by a lack of reflexivity and empathy caused by limited social and cultural horizons. As in their general outlook, respondents here too thought that the problem could be overcome through culture, education, and human encounters, including the acquaintance with foreigners, and the extension of cultural offers to wider swathes of society (notably: the countryside).

## **12. Expertise: High Liberals**

In direct contrast to the emotional and ethical subjectivization of self, society, and politics found among the Social Therapists, another cluster of respondents stressed their capability of *abstracting* judgments from emotions, and of seeing the world in a disembodied, non-moralized ‘bigger picture’. Projecting an image of themselves as rational, competent, and knowledgeable experts (rather than, say, “creative beings” or “ordinary guys”) has important consequences for the wider social horizon against which these respondents position themselves. Differing both from the previous and the working class clusters, interviewees develop a detached and depersonalized perspective on social and political relations, which emulates the dispassionate gaze of the expert. The performance of this expertise is predicated on objectified and embodied cultural capital, which here appears less as a way of character formation and deepening of the self, than as skill and authority. This means that respondents rely on a professional habitus to make authoritative and “official” statements about their area of expertise, but also for drawing on scientific knowledge outside their fields.

Drawing on Pierre Ostiguy’s helpful conceptual analogy of the distinction between the sociocultural and sociopolitical “high” and “low”, I choose to call this cluster *High Liberals*. This links the qualitatively reconstructed type with the fraction of sociocultural professionals that we found on the upper end of the political space reconstructed in the MCA. Here we had encountered a disproportionately male and upper middle class identifying fraction of

sociocultural professionals in professions with comparatively higher income, autonomy, and status. Ideologically, this fraction was marked by antipopulist and liberal orientations. Eight out of nine of the interviewees in this cluster, who predominantly worked in cultural-intellectual fields like research, politics, journalism, and arts, had an M.A. title.<sup>279</sup> All but one were male.

### **12.1. Sense of Social Location: “Arriving Somewhere Up There”**

#### **“Leering Up” – Aspirational Professionalism and Cultural Capital**

The habitus of the High Liberals is closely related to aspirations to professionalism in the public or para-public sectors (e.g. non-profits), that respondents are employed in. Self-descriptions in this cluster often link personal character and professional role. An example was Daria, a successful young journalist who, after a string of internships, stays abroad, and three degrees, had recently landed a job at a major media outlet. I met her in a crowded bar in East-Berlin while she was in town for just a couple of days. She had a meeting after our interview and kept apologizing as she checked her phone. Asked about how she would describe herself, Daria replied:

Let me benefit from the fact that we analyzed this relatively often during my traineeship. What this analysis confirmed is that I am definitely quite idealistic in many respects, especially with regard to structures, and accordingly I often analyze and reflect very strongly on what is going wrong and what could be optimized. And I am also relatively critical and also very self-critical. What we also analyzed is that I was one of the few in this group who was team-oriented. Which shocked me, because I would have hoped that more people would be team-oriented. But apparently that is not the case... And what I am thinking about a lot in this moment is this expectation of myself [*Anspruch*] to do something that is meaningful.<sup>280</sup> (Daria, 00:01)

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<sup>279</sup> The remaining one had two B.A. degrees.

<sup>280</sup> “Ich profitiere jetzt mal davon, dass wir das relativ oft analysiert haben in meinem Volontariat. Und was sich da durch diese Analyse bestätigt hat, ist dass ich auf jeden Fall relativ idealistisch bin in vielerlei Hinsicht, besonders was Strukturen anbelangt und dementsprechend auch oft sehr stark analysiere und reflektiere was, ja, was vielleicht falsch läuft und was man irgendwie optimieren könnte. Und... ja auch relativ kritisch und auch sehr selbstkritisch, würde ich sagen. Genau, was wir auch analysiert haben ist, dass ich eine der wenigen in dieser

We recognize Daria's ethical orientations ("idealism", "meaning", "Anspruch") from the previous cluster. But here it is notable that Daria chooses to embed her self-description in the context of her workplace, using the conceptual language of management ("team orientation", "self-critical", "optimize") or social science ("structures", "system"), and linking her desire for meaningful activity with her work. Lamont observed for upper middle class professionals that "in contrast to blue-collar workers, [they] rarely live for 'after work'. Work is the means by which they develop, express, and evaluate themselves" (Lamont 1992, 33).

Like Daria, many respondents of this cluster tied their theories of the self to the role sets of their profession, and the development and success (or lack thereof) in the sphere of work. Michael, an academic working as a consultant for a political party, began his self-introduction by saying, "I see myself as a politically interested but ultimately humanities-oriented person" (Michael, 00:01); and Florian, a freelance translator said "I understand myself as an abstract-thinking craftsman" (Florian, 00:00). Johannes, a teacher in the prestigious humanist *Gymnasium* of a large Western German city told me, "I think I'm very good at communicating in a way that I'm in control over whether someone likes me or not. [...] Which is why I'm good at my job, because you need that kind of quality as a teacher to get along well with many different people." (Johannes, 00:00). If my opening question ("How would you describe yourself...?") tended to elicit aspects of the respondents' self-understanding which they considered likely to confer status on them, among this cluster, *expertise* and embodied skills were most strongly emphasized.

In the age-bracket of the interviewees (mostly around the age of 30), professionalism mainly took an aspirational, prospective form. Due to the extended educational trajectories leading to higher professional positions, the respondents often had not yet reached the destination of their career projects, and some felt themselves to be stalling. But all communicated a sense of ambition, of being "on track" (Elias) towards higher positions in institutions like media companies, universities, or foundations. A project of upward mobility for some, for most it merely meant catching up with the status of their professional class parents.<sup>281</sup> Talking about

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Gruppe war, die teamorientiert war. Was mich sehr schockiert hat, weil ich gehofft hätte, dass mehr Menschen teamorientiert sind, aber das ist scheinbar nicht der Fall. Genau. Und was mich in letzter Zeit sehr beschäftigt, [...] ist auf jeden Fall auch dieser eigenen Anspruch, dass man was macht, was irgendwie mit Sinn verbunden ist."

<sup>281</sup> The fathers of four respondents were owners of small or mid-sized companies, or managers in large firms. Three others had parents that had studied and worked in cultural public sector professions (e.g. teachers). One

job applications he was currently writing, university researcher Elias illustrated the gap between present realities and future ambitions involved in this cluster's social positionings:

I'm currently applying to two positions both of which are limited to one year. [...] Both are in different countries, neither of them the one I am from. So, you know, it's really quite an impossible situation. If I was working in another sector, that'd be analogous to me driving from Bulgaria to Germany to work in construction there. [...] It's super precarious and super shit, really. [...] But, on the other hand, within the academic field, both are very good positions. And that I can even apply there and have a realistic chance, that's something that gives me a really good feeling. Like I'm on the right track. Everything's moving. [...]

I: You even sound a little enthusiastic when you speak about that.

[laughs] Yes, yes, indeed, that's a very good observation. I think that's because this has just come up right now. And inside I'm still really happy that this might be possible. So I'm very excited to even talk about it, I think [laughs]. (Elias, 152).<sup>282</sup>

While Elias' draws on the image of super-exploited manual migrant laborers to dramatize precarity in the transnational academic field, his emotional focus lies on the potential upward trajectory that defines his career project "What I earn is really nothing", he continued characterizing his position in society, "but at the same time, you're always leering upwards [*nach oben schielen*]. It's all set up for you to arrive somewhere above [*irgendwo oben*]. And

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came from a social sector lower middle class household. Gabriel, a university-trained artist currently employed in routine service work, remarked, "economically, I think I will remain below my parents. But that's due to my own personal choice... of becoming an artist" (Gabriel, 01:38).

<sup>282</sup> "Ich bewerbe mich jetzt gerade auf zwei Stellen, die jeweils beide für ein Jahr befristet sind. [...] Und sie sind beide in zwei unterschiedlichen Ländern, von denen keines von beiden das ist, wo ich herkomme. Also weißt du, das ist eigentlich so eine voll unmögliche Situation. Wenn ich in einem anderen Sektor irgendwie arbeiten würde, weißt du, das wäre dann analog dazu, dass ich irgendwie aus Bulgarien nach Deutschland reisen muss, um da auf dem Bau zu arbeiten. [...] Es ist eigentlich mega prekär und eigentlich mega scheiße [...]. Andererseits sind trotzdem im akademischen Feld beides sehr gute Positionen und dass ich mich darauf überhaupt bewerben kann und das es irgendwie eine realistische Aussicht gibt, ist eigentlich so sowas, was mir voll das gute Gefühl gibt. So im Sinne von 'ich bin auf der richtigen Bahn. Das läuft alles'. [I: Du klingst ziemlich enthusiastisch, wenn du darüber sprichst.] [lacht] Ja, ja, tatsächlich, das ist sehr gut beobachtet. Das ist aber auch, weil sich das jetzt gerade erst so ergibt. [...] Da freue ich mich eigentlich innerlich immer noch richtig, dass das [möglich ist]. Also ich glaube, deshalb bin ich gerade sehr aufgeregt, darüber überhaupt zu sprechen. [lacht]"

that's kind of a contradiction sometimes, that you want to be like that, even though that's not really what you are"<sup>283</sup> (Elias, 152).

For those aspiring, or "leering up", to higher professional positions, early adulthood often is a phase of status inconsistency, a time in which high investments, especially into education, have not yet led to their intended returns and the conduct of life is centered on what Schimank et al. call investive status work (see Groh-Samberg, Mau, and Schimank 2014). For many, it becomes clear only later, whether this is a temporary "trial" (Martuccelli 2015) or, in the case of the growing educated wing of the precariat, a permanent condition (Standing 2011). In this sense, the accounts of individuals self-describing as precarious or at any rate not yet 'arrived' aptly illustrate the subjective class sense of professionals in this cluster. The upper middle class here serves as a point of reference, even where by objective measures respondents might be counted as poor. An example was Florian, a freelance author and translator with an M.A. degree in the humanities, who welcomed me in his small room full of books, in a flatshare in the center of a university town. I took a seat on his desk chair, while he sat down on the only other space that was free, the bed. The desk, just a step away from his bed, was Florian's workplace. "Financially, things are not going great", he said (Florian, 00:06). Jobs had been infrequent and unpredictable, and he got by on giving private lessons to high school students.

Still, Florian saw himself as "definitely part of the intellectual bourgeoisie [*Bildungsbürgertum*], certainly". "My family has studied", he explained, "I have studied. That's what I can say. I could start a PhD and move up into the educational aristocracy [*Bildungsadel*], if I wanted to" (ibid., 00:43).<sup>284</sup> Having studied and working in a world defined by higher learning was a point to which he returned again and again. Explaining his job, he told me, "according to Pierre Bourdieu there are fields of restricted cultural production. Where the more exclusive your audience is, so to say, the more symbolic capital you earn. And with my books [...] I aim at an educated audience that is interested in literature." He summarized his

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<sup>283</sup> "Was ich verdiene, ist echt gar nichts, eigentlich. Aber gleichzeitig irgendwie, schielt man die ganze Zeit so nach oben quasi. Also es ist so angelegt darauf, dass man irgendwo oben ankommt. Und das ist teilweise auch genau der Widerspruch. Also, dass man das irgendwie auf ne Art sein will, aber es eigentlich auch gar nicht ist."

<sup>284</sup> "Ich bin definitiv Teil des Bildungsbürgertums, das schon. Also meine Familie hat schon studiert. [...] Ich hab studiert. Das ist so ziemlich das, was ich sagen kann. Ich könnte promovieren, ich könnte in diesen Bildungsadel aufsteigen, wenn ich das wollte."

social position: “As an artist, you have lots of symbolic capital and you have none of the economic capital. That’s pretty much where I am. And I’m trying to change that” (ibid., 00:43).

We encounter the same sense of defensiveness in the face of precarity already discussed in the previous section. But more generally, Florian’s assessment echoes what Savage et al. observe for professionals at large: “Professionalism can best be understood as an attempt to translate cultural assets into material rewards” (Savage et al. 1992, 34; see also Gouldner 1979, 20ff.). These cultural assets – education, skills and networks – are crucial for securing careers and income streams in this segment of the middle class. As such they are particularly central to the self-understandings of aspirational individuals on the long and increasingly insecure roads of these careers. “For those who, like the professionals, live on the sale of cultural services to a clientele, the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic capital, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence” (Bourdieu 1984, 291).

An important stabilizing force was mentioned by three respondents: the Bank of Mum and Dad (Toft and Friedman 2021). When discussing his social position, Gabriel, a university-trained artist currently employed in routine service work, mentioned, “I don’t know how large my inheritance will be. But I suspect it will keep me safe for a long while” (Gabriel, 01:35). And Elias, referring to his parents who “are maybe not extremely rich, but, like, upper middle class [*obere Mittelschicht*]”, said, “that there is a kind of support [*Stütze*], that you will not fall very deep, I think that makes a bigger difference than one is ready to admit” (Elias, 152; see also below).

### **“There Are Elites in Every Field” – Distinction by Education**

Perhaps out of the reality of “trying to be what you are not” (yet), and the need to reassure oneself of a professionalism that was equally provisional as it was central to self-understandings, respondents in this cluster much more straightforwardly drew cultural boundaries against those lacking their education and experience. This is notable in particular compared to the careful non-distinction reconstructed in the previous cluster. One illustration was a story Florian shared, which revolved around the young intern at a literary institution which had invited him for a workshop. This intern had repeatedly joined the conversation all

too self-assured, “throwing names and half-digested theories into the room. [...] But he could simply not keep up with the discussion [*konnte nicht mitreden*]” (Florian, 00:03). Florian, who put the intern in his place, introduced the story to illustrate the sense in which he thinks of himself as “an elitist asshole, that’s true, but an egalitarian elitist asshole” (ibid.).

“I let everyone in who is ready to participate. [...] I don’t care at all, whether someone has studied Literature, whether someone has an aristocratic title or... money, or whatever, right? I only want to be able to do the things I do without having to show courtesy to whoever thinks he can be a part just like that [*denkt dass er dazugehört*]. It’s like, you’re a sociologists, right? [I: Yes.] Well, in a conference of sociological experts too, not everyone is able to join and demand that things be broken down to his level. And it would be the same way in construction. I mean, I would be completely out of place on a construction site [laughs]. So I mean elitism in the sense of *plural elites*, so to say. There are elites in every field.” (ibid.)<sup>285</sup>

The loud intern here appears as a polluting category, illegitimately claiming the symbolic power of being allowed to speak in an expert forum, an important mark of professionalism. Citing this figure, Florian fraternizes with an interviewer addressed as a fellow “expert”. With the help of the story, he also presents an ideal of meritocratic hierarchies within differentiated professional spheres. We can understand his defense of elitism as a policing of the boundaries of professionalism, which, especially in the case of the artistic field, are only weakly institutionalized and therefore particularly contested (Müller-Jentsch 2005; Abbott 2014). The ideal of “egalitarian elitism” is distinguished from vertical inequality by the inclusion of those without titles (educational or aristocratic) or money, and of a working class occupation (construction) among the “plural” elites.

As we saw, positive references to an individualist sense of superiority, metaphors of vertical stratification (“break things *down* to his level”) and the conditionalities of gatekeeping (“not

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<sup>285</sup> “Ich lass jeden rein, wenn, also jeder kann mitmachen, wenn er denn, wenn er denn sozusagen bereit ist mitzumachen. [...] Is mir völlig egal, ob jemand Literaturwissenschaft studiert hat oder n Adelstitel hat oder ... Geld hat oder was auch immer, ne. Das ist mir völlig egal. Ich will nur halt die Sachen machen können, die ich möchte und will nicht einfach auf jeden Rücksicht nehmen müssen, der irgendwie meint, dass er dazugehört. Genauso wie, naja, du bist Soziologe, ne? [I: Ja] Und bei ner soziologischen Fachkonferenz kann nicht einfach jeder dazu kommen und verlangen, dass jetzt alles auf sein Niveau runtergebrochen wird. Und auch auf, aufm Bau. Ich wär aufm Bau sowas von Fehl am Platz (lacht), da bin-. Also Elitarismus im Sinne von ... Pluralitäteneliten sozusagen. Also es gibt in allem Eliten.” (Florian, 00:03)

everyone can join”) would have been taboo in the demonstratively horizontalist discourse of the Social Therapist cluster.<sup>286</sup> As intellectual and cultural “petty producers” (Bourdieu 1984), aspiring professionals in journalism, academia, or art navigate competitive and volatile markets (see also Reckwitz 2017, 304). This creates a distinct negotiation of ambition and uncertainty which was absent from the accounts of other clusters with more predictable career paths. The aspirational self-understanding as a professional more or less overtly relies on the legitimization or even defense of hierarchies of qualification. Michael, describing the increasing proportion of students admitted to the highest-tier school form of the *Gymnasium* as a “flood” [*Schwemme*], feared that it would lower educational standards. “That the *Gymnasium* has become so broad has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the educational upper classes [*Bildungsbürgerklassen*] are to some degree abolished [*nivelliert*]. But I think this is bought at the cost of lowering the overall level of education [*Bildungsniveau*]” (Michael, 01:34; see also below).

### **“Nothing But Numbers” – Cultural Versus Economic Capital**

Cultural boundaries are also important in distinctions from the *economic middle class*, which resemble those described for the previous cluster in that cultural and moral boundaries intertwine. As we had glimpsed in Florian’s lamentation of a tradeoff between “symbolic” and “economic capital”, education is expected to yield material returns. But one’s own cultural capital is also the basis of demarcations against the pursuit of money, located in the economic middle class. Gregor, a social sector professional, discussed how he could have gone into the tech industry and “made lots of money”, like friends of his, but decided against it, so as to have “a job that I feel good about and wake up in the morning and think, ‘yes, I like getting up for this’” (Gregor, 00:48). And Michael said right in the second sentence of his self-introduction that “economic success never stood in the foreground for me. [...] I once went to do a job interview at McKinsey’s, [and] I couldn’t even comprehend how these people can think the way they do. That nothing but numbers count there” (Michael, 00:00).

He himself “could never work in business. Because I don’t agree with many of the things that are being produced. [...] Instead of asking whether something is needed, markets get created,

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<sup>286</sup> As we will see below, they also do not appear in the discourse of the sociocultural *lower* middle class.

needs are orchestrated and induced [*inszeniert und induziert*], all to sell stuff. That's something I always found repulsive"<sup>287</sup> (Michael, 00:05). Michael linked the superficiality and wastefulness of business with the production of loud, polluting, and expensive cars, which at times made him "despair, really despair" (00:07). He opposed the mentality of "only numbers" to an intellectual conduct of life: "What has always stimulated me most was history, in the sense of an intellectual heritage [*Gedankengut*], including the values [*Werte*] transported in them. [...] And also good manners, just on a basic level. You want to behave in a way that doesn't harm others, to respect new people and listen to them." (Michael, 00:00). Education, value rationality, and manners are opposed to the pursuit of wealth, instrumental rationality, and boasting, in a duality that is defining for this cluster (see also Lamont 1992).

In a remark by Elias, the rejection of money as a center of the conduct of life was linked to the reward structure of intellectual professions.

If society wasn't organized as it is, I would be the first to work without money. Though it must be said that the university doesn't function only on the basis of money. The currency you struggle over is recognition [*Anerkennung*], most of the time. Without money, [...] you could organize things in a less dysfunctional and ugly way, but that type of struggle would remain (Elias, 80).<sup>288</sup>

Money stands for a particularly "ugly" form of a competition, which in any case is understood as universal and inevitable. Institutional recognition forms the non-economic "currency" of Elias' own "struggle". This demarcation of cultural and economic capital goes both ways, in the sense that it is not only a set of categories the respondents apply to others, but also one they know will be applied to them (in the concepts introduced above, it is involved both in

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<sup>287</sup> „Ich, hab ich mal ein Bewerbungsgespräch bei [firm] gemacht und ich hab einfach gemerkt, diese Menschen, die denken völlig anders als ich und ich kann überhaupt nicht nachvollziehen, also, wie man so denken kann. Dass da nur Zahlen im Vordergrund stehen. [...] und ich könnt auch nie, ich könnt auch nicht in der Wirtschaft arbeiten, weil ich vielen, viele Produkte, die die Wirtschaft produziert, überhaupt nicht verstehen kann und nachvollziehen kann, warum man des braucht [...] Da wird n Markt kreiiert, um, um ... es werden Bedürfnisse inszeniert und... induziert, um ... um dann Sachen zu verkaufen. [...] das ist was, was mich immer abgestoßen hat.“

<sup>288</sup> Florian remarks that success in his field depends on „wie oft dein Name fällt. Du kannst ja der der größte Schauspieler der Welt sein, aber wenn du, wenn du nie in irgendwelchen Filmen spielst, wenn niemand über dich redet, dann bist du es effektiv nicht, weil einfach dich keiner kennt. Also letzten Endes ist es Bekanntheitsgrad" (00:28).

identification and categorization). Gabriel sketched this with dry humour, citing the example of a fictional business consultant envying the artists' self-realization.<sup>289</sup>

As an artist, you're always eyed a bit suspiciously. It's really noticeable how quickly people ask you, 'but can you live off of that?' And when, like in my case, you're not really successful commercially, they are often relieved. Because the artist's occupation fits into all the imperatives of our time, of the free development of the individual. But everybody who is 30 or older had to learn that there are a lot of obstacles in the way of the free development of the individual. So they're relieved when they see that this is also true for artists, which is the occupation that most loudly flaunts this imperative. Like, 'if they already get to self-realize, at least they have to lower their sight when it comes to the money'. That way you can also feel at ease about your choice not to pursue a career as a trombone player, but to become a business consultant instead"<sup>290</sup> (Gabriel, 00:46).

Gabriel describes the artist's occupation as flaunting an "imperative of individual development", threatening the self-image of those who prioritized economic security ("becoming a business consultant") over self-realization ("playing the trombone"). This discourse presents us with an ironized and critical version of the expressive individualism encountered above.

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<sup>289</sup> He also articulated an ambivalent sense of both envy and rejection vis-à-vis the wealthy. Having mentioned a book about inequality he was reading, Gabriel said, "And I see this inequality, of course, when someone passes by in a Ferrari, or in those rooftop pools and gilded toilets on Instagram. [...] But I don't feel oppressed by that. It's a bit embarrassing [*peinlich*] that this is so important to many people. Or the envy that I sometimes feel as well, when I see this, it's just embarrassing. That these status symbols are so effective. Maybe with the other sex as well. Though not with the women that I am interested in. [...] Everybody knows it's just bragging, but somehow [laughs] it still works, and that's the embarrassing thing" (Gabriel, 01:10).

<sup>290</sup> "Du wirst ja als Künstler ... natürlich immer ein bisschen beäugt. Das ist schon auch sehr auffällig, wie häufig oder wie schnell diese Frage auch immer gestellt wird, so mit dem "Kannst du davon leben?" Und jetzt in meinem Fall, wo ich jetzt nicht wirklich nennenswerten, kommerziellen Erfolg hab, ... sind die Leute glaub ich häufig auch, hab ich das Gefühl, so im Gespräch dann, erleichtert. [I: Warum ist das so?] Weil der Künstlerberuf erstmal per se all die Imperative unserer Zeit, des der freien Entwicklung des Individuums entspricht. Jeder Mensch aber, der jetzt schon, sagen wa mal, dreißig ist, festgestellt hat, dass diese freie Entfaltung des Individuums mit ganz vielen Hürden verbunden ist. Und wahrscheinlich erleichtert ist, wenn es in dem Beruf, der das am allermeisten proklamiert, genau so ist. Oder wenn der auch Abstriche machen muss, dann wenigstens beim Geld oder so, wenn er sich schon verwirklicht. Also dass da so auch vielleicht in der persönlichen Entscheidung ... jetzt das mit der Posaune dann doch nicht versucht zu haben, sondern ... Unternehmensberater geworden zu sein, hat er da ja ne Erleichterung."

Gabriel's critique of individuality as an imperative alludes to themes from critical sociology, as becomes clear when Gabriel later cites Boltanski and Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, and the aporias of the "artistic critique" (Chiapello and Boltanski 2005). In general, it is noticeable that respondents in this cluster extensively draw on the vocabulary of academic sociology when discussing their own position in society. The specific terms chosen – e.g. of "fields of cultural production", "symbolic capital", "educational classes", "the creative milieu", or "recognition struggles" – seem to have in common that they offer an objective relational vocabulary that is non-economic. Culturalist sociologies supply these highly educated sociocultural professionals with a terminology for understanding themselves *in their own terms*, that is, terms reevaluating their position in the social space and placing cultural capital at the center of the social picture.

## **12.2. Moral Economy: "The Bigger Picture"**

We already saw here how the cultural boundaries that are central for identification and categorization in this cluster are at times tied to moral evaluations, e.g. when opposing cultural value rationality and economic instrumental rationality ("nothing but numbers"), or when formulating a meritocratic ideal of worth in the context of professionalism ("being able to keep up"). I now reconstruct two further patterns of engaging with morality which differ from those seen in the previous clusters. The first concerns discourses about cosmopolitanism and the transcendence of the local; the second an "officialized" discourse that entails a depersonalization and relativization of morality. In both patterns, values are expressed in a way that de-emphasizes moral judgment. The moral economy of High Liberals is one defined by a skepticism against moralism, which, ideally, should be replaced by expertise and factual knowledge.

### **"They Haven't Seen What I Have Seen" – Cosmopolitanism**

Cosmopolitan talk, i.e. self-positionings as outside and beyond the confines of the national and local, was an important genre of positionings along the "new cleavage" in this cluster. This genre is linked to the cultural boundaries and the aspirational professionalism reconstructed

above. As we saw the Social Therapists had mainly expressed universalist values via encounters with disadvantaged groups and “other cultures” in their work or social engagement. In the accounts of this cluster, universalism is linked much more individualistically to a sense of having a broader horizon, a sense embodied chiefly by experiences of transnational mobility and education.

Six out of eight respondents in this cluster mentioned extended periods of a year or longer spent working and/or studying abroad.<sup>291</sup> One of them was Gregor, who – with the near-certain prospect of becoming a branch manager at his social sector non-profit a few years down the line – wanted to pause his job for a few months and take an extended trip around the world with his partner. He connected the openness to such plans to his upbringing in a multitude of countries, as the child of higher-ranking officials in a transnational institution. Living in a village and commuting to a nearby city for his job, Gregor described himself as “not very bound to any place. Whether I live here in the village or in Berlin, that’s not a criterion for me. It’s about whether I can fulfill my wishes and dreams”. Speaking about the planned journey, he said, “I think most people are afraid of that kind of thing. Of leaving the normal path. So in this sense I am not an average person, because I still have other goals [*Ziele*]” (Gregor, 01:06).

A sense of courageous self-realization (“my wishes and dreams”), or singularization (“not average”, see Reckwitz 2017), is here tied to transcending local embeddedness. But compared to the pattern observed in the previous cluster, this remains at the individual level and is not tied to an idea of mediating between cultures or educating others to accept diversity. Instead, cosmopolitan talk mainly serves as a means of social distinction, as becomes visible in the account of Michael, who, after studying and working at prestigious institutions in European and non-European countries, had moved to a larger German city to start a PhD and simultaneously work for a center-right party.

Michael depicted himself as profoundly alienated from others by the education and perspective he had gained abroad. Returning to Germany after what he described as “the most transformative and beautiful time of my life”, Michael “could not relate anymore to most

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<sup>291</sup> As opposed to 4 out 12 Social Therapists, none of the Ordinary Altruists (see below), and 2 out of 30 workers (both in the ‘alternative’ cluster).

people I used to spend time with. Because they never got out [*nie rausgekommen*], they never saw what I saw and experienced what I experienced. Instead I stayed close to the friends I made in London”<sup>292</sup> (Michael, 01:14). Directly linking this alienation to his education, he said about his rural place of origin, “I can barely speak with people from the village anymore, without feeling that we live in completely different worlds. Just by what we have experienced. [...] So yes, probably [I am] rather more academic [*bildungsbürgerlich*] or [...] cultured [*kulturbeflissen*]” (Michael, 01:35). He used the same image of failed encounters when talking about “people [who] don’t share a certain background” in his big city sports club. “There is little reflection about certain topics. And that makes it difficult to have conversations. [...] The other person quickly notices, ‘alright, this is not... not my wave length’. You don’t want to give them that impression, but they just notice and then they shut down”<sup>293</sup> (Michael, 01:40).

Michael’s account parallelizes village dwellers and more simply educated sports club members with those who had never left Germany. All three categories of people are hard for him to talk to, because interests, experiences, and habitus diverge too strongly. This became particularly apparent in political issues, where those “who have never seen anything only know about issues from the media, but never from their own experience. [...] They rant against foreigners but none of them has ever seriously seen a foreign country”<sup>294</sup> (Michael, 00:55). Prejudice is here linked to limited experience and education, an idea that was echoed by Florian. Discussing what he perceived as a worrying rise of nationalism across Europe, he said:

I don’t see myself as German in the national sense. I rather situate myself in a European intellectual history. I wouldn’t say, ‘I am German and proud of it’. You shouldn’t be proud of [that], because you haven’t done anything for it.

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<sup>292</sup>“Gerad diese Auslandserfahrungen haben mich natürlich sehr geprägt. [...] als ich nach Deutschland zurückkam, viele Leute, mit denen ich vorher viel zu tun hatte, nichts mehr anfangen konnte, weil die nie rausgekommen sind und nie auch nicht des gesehen hatten, was ich gesehen hatte und nicht erlebt hatten, was ich erlebt hatte.”

<sup>293</sup> “[Ich hab] die Erfahrung gemacht, dass oft weniger Reflexion stattfindet über bestimmte Themen, wenn nicht n bestimmter Hintergrund vorhanden ist. Und dann das Gespräch einfach schwierig ist. Weil das Gespräch nach nem Satz beendet ist. Also das hab ich im Sportverein ab und zu halt erlebt. Also, du interessierst dich grundsätzlich für die Leute und willst dich mit denen unterhalten, aber dann dann merkt der andere schon, okay, du, das das ist nicht deine, es ist nicht seine Wellenlänge oder vom Gefühl her, obwohl du ihm das Gefühl gar nicht vermitteln wolltest, aber das merkt er selbst und dann macht er zu.”

<sup>294</sup> “Die ham nie was anderes gesehen, ham auch über die Themen, über die sie gesprochen, also bestenfalls aus aus den Medien, aber nie aus eigener Anschauung irgendwie was erfahren und des fand ich extrem unangenehm in den Diskussionen, wenn dann ... über Ausländer geschimpft wurde oder sonst was, ohne dass da ein einziger von denen jemals ernsthaft im Ausland gewesen wäre.”

I: But you also haven't done anything for being European, have you?

Well, I have done something for that, in the sense that I have engaged with European intellectual history. In the sense that I have studied, and have studied actively, not just cheated my way through. [...] When you immerse yourself in the history of European thought, and read literature and philosophy, then you have done something to become a part of it. [...]

I: And why do you think nationalism is on the rise again?

It's probably a counter-movement to the kind of intellectual bullshit that I just said [both laugh]. People want to have an identity, and form groups, and that means demarcating yourself from other groups. [...] I have the nasty suspicion that many people just wish they could be undeservedly proud of something.<sup>295</sup> (Florian, 01:17)

Florian's discussion reveals the close connection between cosmopolitan positionings and distinctions by cultural capital. But they also reveal the moral undertones of cosmopolitan distinction as linked to educational meritocracy. Florian twice describes patriotism as an undeserved form of pride and opposes it to the effort he put into his education. The intellectual belonging in European thought that functions as a counter-image to national pride is a result of purposive and laborious intellectual appropriation. Florian has earned his Europeanness. This sets him apart from those who artificially need to construct a group identity they can be proud of. Interestingly, national identities are portrayed as being constructed *in reaction* to cosmopolitan ideas like his own.

Cosmopolitan rhetoric chimes with the meritocratic intellectualism and distinctions by cultural capital observed above. Compared to the relational logic of a deepened acceptance of

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<sup>295</sup> "Ich seh mich nicht so sehr als deutsch-national oder was in dem Sinne, ich seh mich viel mehr in ner europäischen Geistesgeschichte verortet. Als dass ich sagen würde, "Ich bin Deutscher und stolz drauf." Man [sollte] auf die Nationalität eigentlich nicht stolz sein, denn dafür hat man nichts getan. [I: Aber für die europäische ja eigentlich auch nicht, oder?] Naja, ich hab was dafür getan, um mich zumindest ein bisschen mit der europäischen Geistesgeschichte auseinanderzusetzen. Also in der Hinsicht, dass ich studiert habe. Und dass ich aktiv studiert habe und nicht einfach nur geguckt habe, dass ich mich irgendwie durchmogle. [...] Wenn du dich halt mit der europäischen Geistesgeschichte auseinandersetzt, wenn du Literatur liest, wenn du Philosophie liest, dann hast du was dafür getan, dass du davon irgendwie Teil wirst. [...] [I: Und warum meinst du kommt dieser nationale Gedanke, den du erwähnt hast, jetzt grade so stark wieder?] Vermutlich so ne Gegenbewegung gegen eben genau solche intellektuelle Scheiße, wie ich sie grad vom Stapel gelassen habe (beide lachen). Weil Leute glaub ich gerne ne Identität haben und Gruppen, Gruppenbildung funktioniert so. [...] Ich hab die böse Vermutung, dass viele Leute auch, sich auch einfach wünschen, dass sie unverdient auf irgendwas stolz sein können.

diversity seen in the previous cluster, transcending the local and national is here understood as the individual achievement of rising above limited horizons, often as part of a professional career. Cosmopolitan achievement has a normative component in that the transnational is marked as the superior pole vis-à-vis the national and local, and is thought to allow for a wider, more complex, and accurate perspective on the world. This is portrayed as the result of effort, willpower and a transfer of the whole person onto “another wavelength” compared to those settling for the local. Cosmopolitan talk is used for a meritocratic doubling down on cultural boundaries.

Yet, in the wider context of respondents’ self-presentations, cosmopolitan talk formed part of a dialectic of local disembedding and re-embedding. We already saw this in Elias’ ambivalent discussion of transnational mobility as both exciting and precarious, both promising of career advancement and a sign of the disruptive, “impossible” dynamic of the academic job market. In Gregor’s narrative, his travel plans served to contrast a sense of his own extraordinariness to the stable, local life in the village which he had otherwise chosen. Gregor repeatedly compared this “very normal, average life [...] exactly in the middle of society”<sup>296</sup> (00:46) to the exceptional restlessness of his parents’ global careers. While they had always been “gone” [*weg*], in Singapore, Canada or Belgium, he said, “I would rather be here” [*„Ich möchte lieber da sein“*], (00:13).<sup>297</sup> Similarly, researcher Ralf had worked for an international organization outside of Europe for years, but moved back to his Western German village of origin when he was becoming a father.<sup>298</sup>

The interview in which Michael drew strong boundaries against those who had “never gotten out”, was conducted in a traditional regional restaurant which he had chosen as meeting place. Over a local meat dish and large jugs of beer, Michael said that he could not imagine settling for good anywhere outside the federal state he had grown up in, and described himself as “a European who is very attached to his home [*sehr heimatverbunden*]” (01:17).

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<sup>296</sup> “Ich lebe ein sehr normales, durchschnittliches Leben [...], genau in der Mitte der Gesellschaft, vom Finanziellen her, aber auch sonst so, sozial und politisch”

<sup>297</sup> Recalling a theme discussed above, Gregor also immediately relativized his proposition that most people were not courageous enough for a journey like the one he was planning: “Well, the reason I can have that kind of courage is that I know that if our money runs out in the middle of the Mongolian desert, I have my family, and they will give me money to come home. [...] If I get run over by a truck in Russia, my family and my money won’t help me [laughs], but with many other things they will” (Gregor, 01:06).

<sup>298</sup> Europeanist Florian spent considerable time discussing how his town was a “small pond” compared to the literary scene of Berlin.

These observations help us avoid stereotypical images of the ‘cosmopolitans’ encountered in public discourse or the compounded items of survey research. Instead of rootless frequent flyers who tomorrow could “live in Berlin, London or Singapore” (as the ex-AfD leader Gauland was quoted in the introduction), we should imagine them as professionals drawing symbolic profits from transnational engagements in local settings.

### **“The Business Community Demands a Skilled Labor Force” – Officialization of Discourse**

We get even closer to the meaning of morality in this cluster by looking at the form of discourses respondents choose for their political and social commentary. A mark of this cluster is the relative absence of the moral and emotional modes of argumentation we observed in the previous cluster of Social Therapists. Respondents avoid presenting their judgments as moral standpoints, and instead project the image of people looking soberly and realistically at the bigger picture. For instance, discussing refugee immigration, Florian opined: “Of course I see the economic component and the social problems, everything else would be naïve. But there needs to be an informed deliberation [*informiertes Abwägen*]. To say we cannot let refugees in because some 17-year old boy stabbed a 14-year old girl... Well, without the refugees, 14-year olds would still be stabbed by 17-year olds here and there (Florian, 01:05).<sup>299</sup>

In this form of discourse, morality is de-emphasized, and moral reactions, e.g. to a violent crime, are repudiated in favor of a depersonalized, cold-headed look at an objective situation.<sup>300</sup> Feelings are attributed to the devalued other side of categorization, as when Florian remarked that “most people who argue on the basis of Christian values have never even read the Bible. All they have is a feeling of right and wrong.” (Florian, 01:12). Florian said of himself, “I make decisions based on correct assessments of a given context, not based on what is correct in a moral sense” (ibid.).

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<sup>299</sup> „Ich seh natürlich auch die wirtschaftliche Komponente, die natürlich auch schwierig ist und ich sehe auch, dass es natürlich soziale Probleme macht. Das wäre naiv, dass es nicht der Fall wäre. Aber ... da muss halt ein informiertes Abwägen stattfinden. Also, zu sagen, wir dürfen keine Flüchtlinge reinlassen, weil irgendein 17-Jähriger irgendeine 14-Jährige abgestochen hat. Naja gut, das passiert auch, wenn man keine Flüchtlinge reinlassen würde. Würden trotzdem 14-Jährige von 17-Jährigen abgestochen werden, in irgendeiner Form.“

<sup>300</sup> The terminology of subjectivized and objectivized morality is loosely based on the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism in moral philosophy, which concerns the conditions of validity of ethical statements (see Graham 2021).

He demarcated this not only from conservative critics of homosexuality, but also from moralizing left-wing activists: “I know leftists who think that being left means being a good person, doing the morally right thing. But no [laughs] that’s not what it means.” (Florian, 01:09). This distancing from moralism on the left and the right is a recurring theme in this cluster. Gabriel said that “being an artist [...] is a very individual activity. Someone who wants to contribute to public morality for me is not an artist. For example, it’s a very fashionable moral cause right now, in the theater and so on, to want to free the world from racism. I think it’s very dubious how much you can actually contribute to solving that problem” (Gabriel, 00:57). And Elias remarked “symbolic radicalism leads nowhere. [...] It really doesn’t help if you try to prove by your lifestyle that you are somehow super on the left. To run to all kinds of demos and put stickers on your rucksack or something”<sup>301</sup> (Elias, 136).

We can reasonably infer that the groups that respondents demarcate themselves from are the very same ones we had encountered in the previous cluster. Already inherent in these quotes is the attitude that is supposed to take the place of moral judgments. It is a reasoned and flexible individual assessment of the objective situation, abstracted from emotional impulses and moralistic gestures. This attitude corresponds to the gaze of the expert, as becomes palpable already on the linguistic level. Respondents embed their positionings in discussions of large abstract entities like “Rhenish Capitalism” and the “free democratic basic order” (Gregor), “the European intellectual heritage” (Florian), or “social liberalism” (Gabriel), and use phrases from the jargon of official politics in demands for “a deepening of international cooperation” (Michael) and “informed dialogue” (Florian). Michael, for instance, continuing his complaint about the broadening of *Gymnasium* and university attendance, explained the background of these trends saying,

The OECD is largely at fault here. They saw that Germany has a relatively low quota of graduates. [...] In France or Greece it is up to 70 percent [...], while in Germany it is around 33 percent. [...] So the OECD and the business community [*die Wirtschaft*] demanded skilled employees, but what politics [*die Politik*] heard was ‘we need more academics’. [...] So now Germany is about to give up its dual system of occupational

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<sup>301</sup> “Rein symbolischer Radikalismus führt halt zu nichts. [...] Es hilft überhaupt nichts, wenn man sich selber, selber besonders radikal wird oder dass man irgendwie beweisen muss mit seinem Lebensstil, dass man jetzt so ultra links ist oder so. [...] Und auf irgendwelchen Demos geht oder irgendwie Sticker auf seine Tasche klebt.”

training, although this system is one of our greatest export hits [*Exportschlager*]. That is very paradoxical, in my opinion” (Michael, 00:17).

What Michael means is probably not the quota of graduates but that of high school leavers pursuing tertiary education. But irrespective of the content of his critique, the quote illustrates how positionings in this cluster are articulated with a terminology of structures, institutional agents, and statistical distributions, like “the business community”, “politics”, or the OECD. The German occupational training scheme is addressed as “our” biggest export hit, in a seamless identification with the state administration (see also below).<sup>302</sup>

This pattern resembles what Bourdieu calls an “officialization” of discourse, defined as “the power to act on the group by appropriating the power the group exerts over itself through its official language” (Bourdieu 1990, 110; see also Czarniawska 2004, 50ff.). The power of officialized discourse, Bourdieu clarifies, “does not lie in the language itself, but in the group that authorizes and recognizes it and, with it, authorizes and recognizes itself” (Bourdieu 1990, 110). Aspirational middle class professionals learn how to use cultural capital for symbolic power, i.e. the ability to authoritatively interpret the social and political world.

The deflections of the workers (‘I’m not the one you should ask about this’) as well as the personalization of the social therapeutic habitus (‘it affects me when people make bad experiences’) can be understood as forms of concretizing and personalizing, or altogether avoiding abstract “official” discourses about politics and society. By contrast, the habitus of High Liberals seeks to project the confidence of those who are authorized to speak in these matters. This expresses itself not only in a rather polished and learned style (as in statements above talking about “needs being orchestrated and induced”, “the field of restricted cultural production”, “the imperatives of our time”, etc.), and a certain ease of relaying one’s opinions, but also in the attempt to present these opinions as having some kind of systematic unity and anchorage in factual knowledge. We recognize the “depersonalizing of one’s own norms of action” that Honneth (1995) described as a prerogative of higher strata.

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<sup>302</sup> As we saw, these types of phrases had occurred very rarely in other interviews, or were often accompanied by forms of hedging that signaled their unfamiliarity to the speakers’ everyday language. E.g. “I think that capitalism... well this is really general and stupid now, and I don’t really have the super info background on this, but...” (Matthias, 14).

There is an obvious gendered subtext here. In a classical study, Carol Gilligan (1993) reconstructed two modes of moral decision-making or “moral voices” that illuminate the differentiation of moral outlooks between Social Therapists and High Liberals. In the *justice* voice, moral problems “are approached with reference to balancing, making the inequitable equitable. This tends to carry with it a notion of detached reasoning, a consideration of what the just outcome should be. On the other hand, moral problems can be approached via the perspective of *care*. This perspective emphasises responsiveness to the needs and the situation of the other” (Abbott 2020, 70). Though related to a host of social and situational factors, Gilligan and subsequent studies found the distinction of moral voices to be first and foremost gendered, with men strongly tending towards the justice mode of moral reasoning, centered on just outcomes understood as independent of feelings and relational responsiveness. More generally, critical studies on masculinities have reconstructed a principle by which hegemonic masculinities of the professional middle class draw advantages “from their adherence to forms of rationality based on a persistent ‘control’ or repression of emotions, linking [...] to a Cartesian separation between mind, responsible for ‘rational’ action, and body, responsible for ‘irrational’ action” (de Boise and Hearn 2017, 782; Connell 2005, 164ff.; see also Seidler 2006, 95; 2007).<sup>303</sup>

These observations identify morality as an important site of gendered dynamics both of classed consciousness and the formation of new cleavage identities, not only between classes, but also within them. As Bourdieu writes, gender properties “are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity (Bourdieu 1984, 106). In the MCA, we saw that the minority of male sociocultural professionals tended towards the ‘high’ liberal pole of the political space. While Social Therapists embed the cultivation of society and the extension of recognition in a morality of care, High Liberals operate by a moral code of detachment which is embedded in the ‘bird’s eye view’ of the expert. As we will see next, this has tangible consequences also for political positionings.

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<sup>303</sup> Indeed, if there hadn’t been similar findings about intra-middle class milieu differences e.g. in Vester et al. (2001), the distinction between the two cultural middle class clusters presented so far might have been understood as only down to gender differences. As Bourdieu writes, gender properties “are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity (Bourdieu 1984, 106). In the MCA, we saw that the minority of male sociocultural professionals tended towards the ‘high’ liberal pole of the political space.

### 12.3. Relations to Politics: “A Culture of Discussion”

Moral patterns of detachment and officialization immediately segue into forms of the political habitus. On this dimension, we find an understanding of politics as a rational discourse, an insistence on the value of a “culture of discussion” (Florian) and repudiation of “pub table slogans” (Michael), a non-partisan rhetoric of balancing, dialogue, and problem solving, and a liberal-democratic orientation towards state institutions and procedures. In an emulation of the dispassionate gaze of the expert, emotional and moralized thinking is rejected as out of place in matters of politics.

A striking exhibition of this habitus form was recently produced by a sociocultural professional outside of my sample, Justus Bender, the politics editor of the influential center-right newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*. Bender writes,

The established parties have lost their ability to include people who are less intelligent, wise, and disciplined, and only rely on intuitions. The people still involved are those who decide rationally, that is, those who argue on the basis of scientifically verifiable facts about possible solutions for real problems. [...] But there are people outside the distinguished circles whom no one can conjure away. They are less reflective, make decisions according to their feelings and get frustrated when political parties cast their lowest common denominator into laws.<sup>304</sup> (Bender 2021)

With Ostiguy (2017; Ostiguy and Roberts 2016), we can describe this pattern as a “high” political style. As introduced above, the high-low polarity captures differences in sociopolitical style that embody different ideals of political representation and social relations to politics. Ostiguy’s conceptual analogy distinguishes proper, tidy, formal, learned, and polished “high” from informal, uninhibited, popular, or flamboyant “low” political styles. “[What] the components of the high-low axis have in common [is] the level of sublimation judged ideal in the exercise of leadership and authority.” (Ostiguy 2017, 83). “The high is abstract and

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<sup>304</sup> “Die Volksparteien haben ihre Fähigkeit eingebüßt, solche Menschen einzubinden, die weniger klug und weise und diszipliniert auftreten, sondern nur eine Intuition haben. Erreicht werden vor allem jene, die rational entscheiden, also anhand wissenschaftlich überprüfbarer Erkenntnisse darüber streiten, welche Lösungen für reale Probleme möglich sind. [...] Außerhalb der vornehmen Gesellschaft gibt es Menschen, die niemand wegzaubern kann. Sie sind weniger reflektiert, treffen Entscheidungen eher nach dem Gefühl und kommen nicht auf ihre Kosten, wenn Volksparteien ihren kleinsten gemeinsamen Nenner in Gesetze gießen.”

restrained, claiming to be more proper, whether in manners or in procedures. [...] [It is] impersonal, 'fair' in the sense of universal and 'the same for everyone', procedural, and overall cold and distant" (ibid).

### **"I Will Not Stoop to That Level" – Rational Discourse and the Sociopolitical High**

Resembling this type, respondents understand politics first and foremost as a rational discourse. Speaking about how to react to the advances of the AfD, Florian argued:

It is necessary to engage with them instead of just calling them out. It is legitimate to call them out when they misbehave [*sich daneben benehmen*]. Where they move towards the populist corner. [...] If the AfD starts a smear campaign, I don't need to listen to them. There, I can just say, 'this is a smear campaign, I will not stoop to that level. This is not the type of discourse we want to be having'. Because that's just lacking a certain culture of discussion [*Diskussionkultur*]. Having a culture of discussion is very important for me. [...] I don't care about rhetorical mud slinging, I care about what comes out at the end. [...] So the conversation is over when they stop arguing about the matter at hand and resort to *ad hominem* arguments. This has no place in a rational debate. [...] But where someone from the AfD says, 'this and that is the position, here is the situation, this is the problem, we propose the following solution', then I can talk with them.<sup>305</sup> (Florian, 00:58)

A number of things are notable here. Florian begins the segment by a repudiation of the moral outrage with which some (on the left) react to the radical right. He thinks that the vilification of the radical right on the part of the "extreme left" only perpetuates the problem. "If you say

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<sup>305</sup> "Es [ist] notwendig, sich mit ihnen auseinanderzusetzen und ihnen nicht immer nur Vorhaltungen zu machen. Also, es ist legitim, ihnen Vorhaltungen zu machen, wo sie sich eben auch einfach daneben benehmen. Also, wo sie unheimlich stark in diese populistische Ecke gehen. [...] Also, wenn jemand von der AfD ne Schmierenkampagne fährt, muss ich ihm nicht zuhören. Dann kann an der Stelle auch einfach gesagt werden, "das ist jetzt eine Schmierenkampagne, auf dieses Niveau lasse ich mich nicht ein. Das ist nicht die Form von Diskurs, die wir führen würden, führen möchten, das hat keine Diskussionskultur." Diskussionskultur ist ne Sache die mir sehr wichtig ist. [...] Also ich interessier mich nicht für rhetorische Schlammschlachten, ich interessier mich für das, was letzten Endes rauskommt. [...] An dem Punkt, wo sie aus der Diskussionskultur aussteigen und anfangen eben, nicht mehr zur Sache zu argumentieren, ad hominem Argumente zu bringen oder was weiß ich, an dem Punkt kann ich das Gespräch beenden und zwar auch begründet beenden [...]. Das hat in einer vernünftigen Debatte keinen Platz. [...] Aber an dem Punkt, wo jemand von der AfD sagt, "dies und jenes ist die Position ... ist die Situation, dieses und jenes ist das Problem, wir schlagen folgende Lösung vor", da kann ich doch mit den Leuten reden."

we must not tolerate people who are intolerant, then you are being intolerant” (Florian, 01:01). Instead of lecturing the AfD, he thinks one must engage in a dialogue with their proposals. This dialogue should take the form of a “rational discourse”, which is circumscribed by speech norms and other norms of propriety. Both moral denunciations and “populism”, which is equated with “misbehaving”, violate these norms of rational discourse. Equally, extreme partisanship, which he criticizes as an “‘us against them’ kind of thinking” (ibid.) are opposed to the ideal of rational discourse, or “informed dialogue” (ibid.). Florian rejects the performative aspect of political contention (“rhetoric”) in favor of results and solution (“what comes out at the end”).<sup>306</sup>

This proper, pragmatic, non-partisan “high” politics is demarcated against polarization, low “smears”, “mudslinging”, “ad hominem” and “populist” forms of argumentation; or – as Michael puts it – slogans “traded at the pub counter” (the *Stammtisch*, a term we already encountered in Christoph’s account above). Michael had long been active at the local level for the center-right party he was currently working for. But he had dropped out at some point, and, in the interview, confessed that he was considering defecting to the Greens, specifically “the part of the Greens that has transformed into a bourgeois [*bürgerliche*] party” (Michael, 01:11). In explanation, he told me,

I just cannot stomach those pub counter slogans [*Stammtischparolen*] anymore, that are used to do politics in the countryside. It really is just awful. [...] There just weren’t many people who had studied. [...] It was a bit different in the [party], but you still had to engage with these kinds of voters. I just couldn’t see how one could convince them that [what they were saying] was nonsense, that their position was untenable. There was a total gridlock. That’s why I say, these generations first need to die out [*wegsterben*], as harsh as it sounds.<sup>307</sup> (Michael, 00:55)

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<sup>306</sup> Somewhat contradictorily, however, his own attention is quite keenly focused on the proper manners of speaking and behaving of political contestants, which comes to stand for the formal and procedural integrity of politics as rational debate.

<sup>307</sup> “Des is auch was, warum ich nicht mehr aktiv bin, gerade aufm Land kam ich einfach nicht damit klar, was da für Parolen, Stammtischparolen-, so wird Politik gemacht und des fand ich einfach furchtbar. [...] In der [Partei-Organization] war es vielleicht ein bisschen anders, aber ... man hat sich ja trotzdem mit quasi den Wählern auseinandersetzen müssen aus diesen Bereichen und ... ich hab einfach nicht gesehen, wie man diese Wähler davon überzeugen kann, dass das Blödsinn ist, ja oder dass das einfach keine Position ist, die haltbar ist... Deswegen sag ich, diese Generationen müssen erstmal, so hart es klingt, wegsterben.”

Michael's political alienation clearly links to the overall distance he had earlier expressed towards lower educated people in his milieu of origin. His frustration about the simplistic and bigotted logic of rural politics stands in contradistinction to the "bourgeois" Greens he is increasingly feeling closer to. He associates regressive elements with a generation that "just has to die out at some point", that is, as a rudiment from an earlier age, that will be discarded by the course of history. Michael's disagreement with political positions of his party's voters, mainly on migration, is certainly important here. But as we will see below, he actually shows himself ambivalent on this issue. His deep, almost visceral rejection of rural politics on the center-right is first and foremost focused on the low "pub counter" style of political articulation, a mentality that Michael directly links to lower levels of education ("there were few people who had studied"). Michael's alienation takes new cleavage politics as an occasion, but is ultimately driven by an estrangement of habitus that is closely tied to his trajectory of professional aspiration and the accumulation of cultural capital.

The High Liberal political habitus is centrally defined by an *antipopulist* intuition in which social distinction and liberal positions are inextricably joined (Stavrakakis et al. 2018). Partisan polarization, and the erosion of norms of propriety and institutional procedures both by "populists" and leftist moralizers form a central preoccupation in this cluster. Interestingly, not a single worker had mentioned the term "populism". But in the High Liberal cluster it took quite an important role as an object of demarcation; such as when Gabriel criticized that German debates increasingly resembled US politics, "where they all suddenly became populists, and now only read their own news" (Gabriel, 01:21).

### **"When the Boat Tilts Left, I Lean Right" – Balancing Between Extremes**

As we saw, High Liberals reject excessive partisanship, moralism, and populism in favor of "high" performances of expertise, deliberation, and results ("what comes out"). As Johannes remarked, "mental flexibility is key for retaining power, and it stands contrary to the left parties' thinking in principles and fundamentals"<sup>308</sup> (Johannes, Memo I). Regarding political positionings on contentious issues and the left and right these orientations are expressed by

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<sup>308</sup> "Geistige Beweglichkeit ist der Schlüssel zum Machterhalt und steht konträr zum Prinzipien- und Grundsatzdenken in linken Parteien" (Stated after the end of the interview recording and noted in a memo).

a recurrent figure of *balancing*, where ideological extremes are opposed to a well-reasoned, “realistic” grasp of political issues.

In terms of party preferences, most respondents name more than one party they have voted for or sympathize with, including two mentions each of all major parties apart from the AfD (Left Party, Greens, SPD, FDP, and CDU). Respondents are keen to highlight issue positions over parties and partisanship, again with a rhetoric that abstracts from the personal. Daria, asked for a grievance that she personally found important, laughed and listed a whole number of current debates of the time, “well, the NSA was certainly incisive, but, I mean there’s glyphosate, the pension system, the Volkswagen scandal [laughs] – we live in an El Dorado of grievances!” (Daria, 6). Those asked for left- and right positionings qualify the distinction, e.g. by saying they are “liberal” (Gregor, Gabriel), “center left” (Ralf, Florian), or “economically left, but culturally right” (Michael).

The resulting logic of balancing and reasoned moderation is captured in a vivid image that Florian quoted:

As Thomas Mann said, if the boat tilts right, he would lean left and if it tilts left, he will lean right. For me this is not a question of principles, but of necessity [*Notwendigkeit*]. [...] If the AfD has a good argument, I will not vote for them, but I will listen. If the CDU has the right approach, I will probably not join their side- Unless it was necessary to strengthen that position.” (Florian, 00:59).<sup>309</sup>

The demonstratively pragmatic and non-partisan approach can be illustrated by discussions of migration in this cluster, which sharply differ from those we saw in the Social Therapist cluster. As quoted above, Florian insisted that while moral panics over migrant criminality were misplaced, it would be “naïve” not to see the economic and social costs of migration. Michael told me he understood migration skepticism though he did not share it fully. His partner, he said, was much more critical on these issues. “She says she would vote for the AfD, if they weren’t rejecting [refugee policies] out of racist motives but for factual reasons [*Sachgründe*].

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<sup>309</sup> “Ich glaube Thomas Mann sagte, [...] wenn sich das Boot nach rechts neigt, lehnt er sich nach links und wenn es sich nach links neigt, lehnt er sich nach rechts. Also ...für mich ist es keine Frage von Prinzipien, sondern ne Frage von Notwendigkeit. Und naja, wie gesagt, wenn die AfD ein ein gutes Argument hat, werd ich sie nicht wählen, aber ich werd ihnen zuhören. Wenn die CDU die richtige Herangehensweise hat, werd ich mich vermutlich, also vielleicht auch nicht auf die Seite der CDU schlagen, außer wenn es notwendig wäre, dass diese Position mehr gestärkt wird.” (Florian 01:01)

And I understand those doubts, and I find them legitimate, [...] except I would also always maintain a humanitarian approach, that I find very important.”<sup>310</sup>

The distinction of racist motives and factual reasons echoes the distinction between rational arguments and “smears” seen earlier. Michael shows himself open to reasoned criticism of migration policies, as long as they can be reconciled with a “humanitarian approach”. Similarly, Gregor developed a two-sided argument to plea for a “realistic” image of migration.

Every person has the right to asylum, and I think that’s very important. [...] So if the German migration agencies think this is warranted, then to me it is legitimate. Because I have no reason to fundamentally be critical about the German agencies. [...] On the other hand, when you look at these Lebanese clans in Berlin who are trying to infiltrate state structures [...], then I see a massive danger for the rule of law [*Rechtsstaatlichkeit*] there. And I think that’s a point where our free democratic basic order is endangered and we need to take action with all the necessary force, to ensure we can continue to live in democracy and freedom. [...] I think we are slowly arriving at a realistic image. What it boils down to is this: In every country there is a quota of criminals. [...] And I think we need to be very clear about this, because it has nothing to do with discrimination, it’s simply about having a realistic picture of the world. So we need to take care of this, using our justice system [*Rechtsstaat*].<sup>311</sup> (Gregor, 00:27)

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<sup>310</sup> “Meine Freundin ist da auch wesentlich kritischer als ich, also die ist die sagt wenn, sie würde auch AfD wählen, wenn die nicht wenn die nicht eben dieses falsche Weltbild vertreten würden, wenn sie nicht aus rassistischen Motiven des alles ablehnen würden. Sondern aus, wenn sie sagen aus aus Sachgründen, ja, sie sie findet einfach nicht, dass man ... dass dass dass ... dass Deutschland es verträgt, wenn so viele Menschen nach Deutschland kommen ... weder von der vom Arbeitsmarkt, noch von ... von der Kultur her. Also ich versteh, diese ganzen Bedenken, die kann ich nachvollziehen ... und find ich auch berechtigt und es gibt bestimmt n Limit irgendwo, gleichzeitig hab ich halt trotzdem noch nen humanitären Ansatz, den ich sehr sehr stark machen würde, den ich wichtig find.”

<sup>311</sup> “Also jeder Mensch hat erstmal das Recht, und das find ich auch ganz wichtig, ein Recht auf Asyl. [...] Und wenn die staatlichen Behörden das so sehen, dann find ich ist das auch einfach mal legitim. Ich hab jetzt keinen Grund, den deutschen Behörden jetzt grundsätzlich kritisch gegenüber zu stehen. [...] Andererseits, wenn man sich in Berlin diese Klans aus dem Libanon anguckt, die gezielt jetzt auch staatliche Strukturen unterwandern wollen [...], da seh ich dann unsere Rechtsstaatlichkeit massivst gefährdet. Da ist für mich einfach dann ein Punkt, wo ich unsern ja unsere freiheitliche Grundordnung in Gefahr sehe und da muss man dann find ich auch mit der gebotenen Härte durchgreifen, damit wir alle weiterhin in Zukunft auch in einer Demokratie und in Freiheit leben können. [...] Ich glaube wir kommen langsam auf, dazu, dass wir ein realistischeres Bild sehen, also im Endeffekt ist es ja so: In jedem Land gibt es eine gewisse Quote an Kriminellen, an Menschen die ... sich nicht anpassen wollen und versuchen ... auf Kosten anderer ihren Vorteil zu haben. [...] Und das muss man finde ich auch so deutlich sagen, hat nichts find ich mit Diskriminierung oder mit irgendwelche anderen Dingen zu tun, sondern das einfach nen realistisches Bild der Welt. Und ja ... das muss man halt auch finde ich ... jetzt langsam mal so deutlich sehen und dann auch dementsprechend handeln, durch unseren Rechtsstaat.”

What is notable here is that on both sides of Gregor's argument *state institutions* – of migration control and of justice – are the central points of reference. Refugee immigration is justified by the principles of government agencies.

This introduces a last important feature of this cluster's political habitus, i.e. the ascription of trust and agency to the state and institutions more generally. High Liberals habitually take the position of the state in their arguments, such as when Michael said with a view to EU-China relations, "the states alone have no chance of competing with rising powers, neither demographically nor economically. This is why for me there can only be more Europe, not less"<sup>312</sup> (Michael, 01:38). As already seen in the discussions around the AfD above, the institutions of democracy are at the center of arguments. Gabriel also articulated this when he illustrated how inequality was only a problem to the degree that it undercut democracy.

For me the decisive question is when does it [inequality] cancel democracy. [...] It's clear that poverty is a problem, but in many countries the poor also profit. The cake becomes more unequal, so to say, but it grows. [...] And people talk about 'the top 1 percent', but that's a bit of a misunderstanding. Because those are not always the same people, they change over time. If I saw that [...], say, the Trumps were owning the Axel Springer press and this would churn out gigantic party donations, [...] and then they could just pass this on as an inheritance; if we were living in that kind of system, then I would find that problematic. Because it undermines democracy, in favor of an oligarchy. And that's not good. But [not] as long as these people keep changing and new ideas have a chance to get heard.<sup>313</sup> (Gabriel, 01:15)

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<sup>312</sup> „Die Staaten haben allein keine Chance weltweit zu bestehen gegen aufstrebende Mächte, demographisch oder ökonomisch. Deshalb gibt es für mich nur ein Mehr Europa, kein Weniger.“

<sup>313</sup> „Für die Frage der Ungleichheit [ist] für mich die Frage, ab wann hebt das die Demokratie auf. [...] Also, dass Armut nen Problem ist, ist klar. Aber in vielen Ländern is es ja so, dass die Armen sozusagen auch profitieren. Also dass zwar der Kuchen sozusagen immer ungleicher wird, aber der Kuchen wird immer größer. [...] Und man sagt ja immer so, 'die Top ein Prozent'. Das sind ja nicht immer dieselben Leute, das, die wechseln ja, das ist so ein bisschen das Missverständnis. Also, wenn ich jetzt zum Beispiel sehen würde,... erstens es sind wirklich immer dieselben Leute und deren Kinder. Zweitens, die entscheiden über alle möglichen Bereiche, ja? Also wenn die, jetzt mal angenommen, die Trumps hätten noch den Axel Springer Verlag und ... da würden unermessliche Parteispenden herauskommen ... [...] und dann vererben die das einfach. ... Wenn wir in so nem System leben würden, dann hätt ich damit n Problem, weil das wär für mich die Abschaffung der Demokratie, zugunsten im Grunde einer Oligarchie. Das wär nicht gut. Aber [nicht] solange diese Menschen wechselnd sind und solange ich das Gefühl habe, dass neue Ideen sich durchsetzen können.“

Instead of the movementism and social engagement “from below” of the Social Therapists, which kept a distance from official politics, respondents here tend to “see like a state” (Scott 1998). Trusting in the problem-solving capacity of institutions, they formulate demands in terms of adjustments to state legislation and regulation. Solutions are situated in terms of systemic narratives with a social liberal slant. Statist rather than technocratic, agency is located within existing systems of power, especially representative democracy.

Gregor described his economic ideal as “Rhenish capitalism”, “in the sense that business [*die Wirtschaft*] and the employers are aware of their social responsibility [...] that from the highest executive to the lowest employee everyone is aware of their responsibility, and sees to it that they contribute their part for the well-being of the community”<sup>314</sup> (Gregor, 01:10). For Daria, an important issue was the overbearing power of finance capital. Asked what could be done, she said “better laws. Any laws in the first place. And hiring people in regulation who understand what is happening.” She saw her own role as a journalist as “giving a forum to alternative ideas [...]. So that a market is created within the existing system” (Daria, 11).<sup>315</sup>

Generally speaking, positionings are formulated in the terms of the political system, which is viewed with a great deal of trust. Gregor, for instance, thought that the increasing prominence of climate issues in the CDU showed the responsiveness of the political system (Gregor, 01:15). Sharing this optimistic vision of real-existing democracy – which obviously stands in the starkest possible contrast to that articulated by the workers above – Gymnasium teacher Johannes described his “agenda” as being “that students can participate in the opinion formation process of society. That they see, ‘if you have your own opinion, you can participate in democracy, because in democracy all opinions are represented’” (Johannes, 00:28).<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> “Rheinischer Kapitalismus”, „also, dass die Wirtschaft und auch die Arbeitgeber... sich ihrer sozialen Verantwortung bewusst sind [...] dass von der, vom obersten Chef bis zum untersten Mitarbeiter alle sich ihrer Verantwortung bewusst sind und ihren möglichen Teil dazu beitragen, dass es der Gemeinschaft gut geht.“

<sup>315</sup> “Wenn du alternativen Ideen ein Forum gibst. Damit in dem System gerade ein Markt dafür entsteht.”

<sup>316</sup> „Mein Ziel oder meine Agenda [ist], dass sie [die Schüler] teilnehmen können am Meinungsbildungsprozess in der Gesellschaft. Dass man sieht, okay, wenn du ne eigene Meinung hast, heißt das auch, dass du an der Demokratie teilnehmen kannst, weil in der Demokratie ist jede Meinung vertreten“.

#### 12.4. Summary

This section reconstructed a cluster of sociocultural professionals that differs considerably from the first one in terms of self-understanding, morality, and relations to politics. In their self-understandings, respondents here placed themselves noticeably 'higher' than in the previous cluster, making status claims on the basis of professionalism and cultural capital ("educational elite") and drawing boundaries particularly against those with lower cultural capital. This includes the less highly educated as well as the economic wing of the middle class.

The High Liberals' own cultural capital and claim for symbolic power finds a key expression in the performance of expertise and the mastery of the 'official' language of institutions, which are central to the High Liberals' cosmology. Democracy, the rule of law, the welfare state, and political discourse are central points of reference. High Liberals seek to 'objectivize' their judgments, by presenting them as not based on emotions or impulses, but on facts. This forms a crucial boundary both against moralizers located mainly on the left and populists mainly located on the right. Both moralizers and populists are criticized as acting on the basis of prejudices ("pub counter talk"), ideology, or dogmatic ideas about "right and wrong".

Against both, High Liberals use a rhetoric of "realism" and the weighing of alternatives, following an ideal of an objective perspective at the bigger picture and pragmatic problem-solving. Institutional politics and its jargon are central to the accounts of the High Liberal cluster, the only one for which this is the case. Politics is understood as a "rational discourse" and thematized in an anti-populist "high" register. Politics is described with metaphors of conversation, one that should be based on knowledge, propriety, and reason. All of these ideals are violated by populism, which explicitly or implicitly forms a central category of demarcation, and again is heavily associated with lower education.

As discussed, this quite neatly links to the dimensions found in the MCA, as well as their social underpinnings. We here saw a "high" and "liberal" part of the cultural middle class that was disproportionately male, highly educated, and employed in higher professional occupations. We can suspect that the High Liberal pattern captures the habitus syndrome of this subgroup. Socially marked by education-based aspirations to higher professional positions, High Liberalism as a *sociopolitical* outlook maintains close affinities with a moral habitus of affectively controlled value rationality, an officialization of discourse, and the ideal of a wider,

disinterested, expert gaze. Compared to the previous cluster, it is thus also predicated on a feeling rule, but one opposite to that of the Social Therapists. Politics and other fields of judgment are approached through an institutional logic of reasoning that exceeds individual morality. This pattern of disembodiment, detachment, and rationality corresponds to the emotional control and institutional identification required of professionals in higher positions.

An issue that exemplifies the difference to the previous clusters is that of migration, which respondents approach with a certain ambivalence. Migration is neither rejected nor univocally welcomed but differentiated into a *rights* component (mainly asylum, but also of distinct lifestyles) which finds strong support, and a component of social and economic *integration*, where respondents are much more skeptical about migration's burden and the limits of Germany's uptake capacity. Cosmopolitanism figures as a marker of individual achievement in careers that include transnational engagements, but – like the High Liberals overall – are geared towards national institutions.

### **13. Ordinary Altruists – An Additional, Lower Middle Class Cluster?**

There were six interviews that could not be assigned to either of the two previous types, but were also too heterogeneous to constitute a cluster of their own. I want to only briefly present some of this material here, so as to demonstrate differences to the two types established above. This is meant to sharpen the social and discursive contours of the types identified, and perhaps indicate avenues for further research.

As we saw in the MCA, within the sociocultural professional category, there were lower middle class, less highly educated, and rural subgroups, who exhibited average universalist and left-wing orientations, and were thereby distinguished from the rest of this class fraction. Linking this to occupational categories, we saw that this more central and centrist region of the space corresponded to the average position of *nurses*, the category with the lowest wages and one of the only ones in the sociocultural professional class fraction without tertiary education entry requirements. The interviews presented here, comprising three nurses without higher education, two teachers at an elementary and a lower tier high school (*Realschule*) in rural villages, and an unemployed social worker, seem to tap into subgroups with this profile.

## “Separate the Trash” – Situational Morality

One difference of some of these accounts was that instead of the focus on professional aspiration or the cultivation of the self and society observed in the previous clusters, respondents expressed a sense of ordinariness and moderation as we had seen among some of the working class respondents. Sina, a small town special needs educator in her early 30s introduced herself saying, “I would say that I’m leading a relatively normal life. Both in my job and my free time, nothing extraordinary. I’ve pretty much arrived. [...] During my studies it was always about reaching the next step, but now everything is pretty much settled and I don’t feel like there’s anything I want to change or any goal I still need to reach in my life.”<sup>317</sup> Directly recalling the self-presentations of some of the Conservative Workers, Lena, a nurse in a West German village said about herself:

I’m rather down-to-earth [*bodenständig*], I would say. [...] As in, I don’t need some kind of luxury. We go camping when we’re on vacation. Or I don’t use make up. I’m content with normal things. And I think protecting the environment is important. That everyone- For example, there were thousands of bottle caps strewn on the grass here. So I picked them up, because I don’t think it’s okay for this stuff to lie around. [...] Just that these little things that everyone can do, that you observe them.<sup>318</sup> (Lena)

Environmentalism is here identified with foregoing unnecessary luxury and keeping the immediate environment clean. These altruistic “little things that everyone can do” are not presented as the core of one’s entire conduct of life, nor articulated as systemic narratives. Instead of the Social Therapists’ subjectivized morality or the High Liberals’ bird’s eye view, here a situational ad hoc morality predominated, which again resembled that of some of the working class interviewees presented above. Jana, who had recently become a *Realschule* teacher in her small rural town after studying in a local technical college, identified environmental concerns with separating the trash. “I don’t know, stuff like electric cars,

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<sup>317</sup> “Also ich würde mich schon eher so beschreiben, dass ich ein relativ, relativ normales Leben führe quasi [lacht] im Beruf und Freizeit so, also nicht so mega außergewöhnlich.”

<sup>318</sup> „Ich bin eher so n bisschen bodenständiger, würd ich sagen, auf jeden Fall. [...] Also ja, ich brauch jetzt nicht irgendwie viel Luxus, zum Beispiel. Also wir campen zum Beispiel auch im Urlaub. Also oder ich schmink mich zum Beispiel auch nicht. Also ich bin einfach mit normalen Sachen zufrieden und find zum Beispiel Umweltschutz find ich wichtig. Dass man jetzt zum Beispiel, also hier lagen gestern auf der Wiese zum Beispiel dreitausend Kronkorken rum, die hab ich dann erstmal eingesammelt, weil ich das nicht in Ordnung finde, wenn das zum Beispiel rumliegt. [...] Ja, einfach so diese kleinen Sachen, die man machen kann, dass man die halt einhält.“

environment stuff, I always wonder why we have to hype this so much here in Germany. In other countries they're not even separating the trash. I think we're doing some high-level complaining [*Motzen auf hohem Niveau*], while the others don't even manage to separate their trash"<sup>319</sup> (Jana, 29).

The differences were perhaps the starkest in the ambivalent thematization of migration. Here, an emphasis on crime and the dangers of immigration surfaced that departed clearly from the discourses in the previous clusters. The consequences of migration were discussed less as a political issue than as a matter of good or bad experiences. Jana thought people had the right to escape from wars, but she also counterposed this positioning with the story of a threatening encounter she had once had, when she was followed by a black man outside the train station in the nearest town (Jana, 12). Already the equation of the refugee question with a black man (whose origin Jana did not find out about) would have been unusual in the Social Therapist cluster. The weighing rhetoric of "on the one hand – on the other hand" resembles that seen among some of the High Liberals, but the points cited are on a much more concrete register not articulated in ideological terms. Lena said,

I don't think it's good that the AfD is getting into power more and more. But somehow you can understand it, because... for example if you hear that refugees are moving into housing blocks where people have been living for years, and they just need to leave. Then you understand why they don't think that's great. But on the other hand you can understand the refugees too. Of course, if there's war in your country, what are you supposed to do?<sup>320</sup> (Lena, 00:16)

Using Damhuis' conceptualization of political sophistication (Damhuis 2020, 127f.), we again see low levels of ideological differentiation and integration here. Political judgments are ambivalent, ad hoc, and based on hear-say. Katharina, a nurse living on the outskirts of an

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<sup>319</sup> „Keine Ahnung so Sachen wie Elektroautos, so Umwelt, da denk ich immer warum müssen wir in Deutschland so'n Hype drum machen und in anderen Ländern trennen se noch nicht mal Müll. Also da denke ich das isch jetzt einfach Motzen auf hohem Niveau und andere kriegen's noch nicht mal hin dass se'n Müll trennen.“

<sup>320</sup> „Sowas find ich halt nicht gut, dass die [AfD] halt immer mehr an die Macht kommen, aber irgendwie kann mans auch n bisschen verstehen, weil ... zum Beispiel, wenn man dann halt die andere Seite hört, dass Flüchtlinge halt in Wohnblocks ziehen, wo jahrelang Leute drin gewohnt haben, die dann einfach ... da raus müssen, kann ich die Leute auch verstehen, dass die zum Beispiel das dann nicht so toll finden, ne. Auf der anderen Seite kann man halt auch die Flüchtlinge verstehen, weil klar, wenn in deinem Land Krieg ist, was machst du?“

Eastern German city, used a similar two-sided figure of speech as Lena to express her ambivalence regarding recent refugee arrivals:

I'd say I rather profit from it. I tend to see it as a good thing. That everything's a bit more colourful. [I've been] regularly going to a Turk to get certain spices, because they were just impossible to get in [my city]. So if now there's a little Syrian opening his shop where I get a nice fresh bunch of coriander, then I'm all for it. Of course it's also that sometimes you think... when you... hear that there's been more burglaries... in the neighborhood, then you also think 'now, who was that again?' [...] And there I get quite rigorous. We need clear rules for this kind of behavior. That's just not acceptable.<sup>321</sup>  
(Katharina, 01:36)

The second part of Katharina's statement ("clear rules") echoes the emphasis on "playing by the rules" seen in earlier quotes from the Conservative and Social Populist cluster. Again, it becomes clear here that restrictive and "authoritarian" positions on migrant criminality are compatible with a tolerance for diversity in other contexts. This seems to be the case especially in a context where political ideology is not strongly integrated.

An unexpected combination of positionings with a strongly ideological bent was developed by Nico, a young social worker currently in search of a job in his smaller town. Asked about the type of person he was, Nico went through a five-point plan of his life priorities, which included helping others, caring for animals and the environment, and "seeing the world through my faith" (Nico, 7). Nico had developed this list in a seminar for personality development, hosted by a men's rights activist. Like this activist, Nico supported the AfD. Ironically citing a term of defenders of migration, he said, "I have the feeling... there are more rapes in Germany than before, because of the 'new citizens' [*Neubürger*]. A few more stabbings. [...] I think these people who have come here have also brought their problems and their culture" (Nico, 35). With this combination of a caring and environmentalist self-understanding and his support for

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<sup>321</sup> „Also ich profitiere eher davon. Ick find dit eher gut. Dass et ebend halt och mal bunter werden wird. [Ich bin] regelmäßig zu irgendnem Türken gegangen um mir irgendwelche Gewürze oder irgendwelche Sachen geholt, was in [Stadt] ja ne Katastrophe war. [...] Wenn dann dabei n kleener Syrer da... da sein Lebensmittelgeschäft uffmacht und ick endlich richtig groß buschigerweise Koriander bekomm, frisch, denn jeh ick da druff. Also ick profitiere eher davon. Klar isset och so, dass man vielleicht manchmal och denkt ... wenn man ... hört, dass vermehrt irgendwelche Einbrüche... in der Gegend stattgefunden haben, denn überlegt ma natürlich kurzzeitig och, wer war dit jetzt. [...] da werd ick dann och rigoros und da muss et in meinen Augen och ne klare Regelung für geben für so n Verhalten, dit jeht nicht.“

the far right, motivated by migration-skepticism and, above all, anti-feminism, Nico was a unique case in the sample that is very hard to generalize. But his account serves as a reminder of the idiosyncratic ways in which class- and occupation-specific orientations can be elaborated politically.

Overall, the loose grouping contained expressions of a distance from politics, a sense of passivity, and distrust in politics that were not present in the two previous clusters. Jana said she voted for the CDU, like her parents, but otherwise “I keep out of all this, because I don’t have a clue [*keine Ahnung*]. [...] Of course you pick up opinions here and there, but I never thought I could join that kind of conversation [*ich hab da mitzureden*]” (Jana, 17). And Lena said, “we could work on renewable energies more. [I: Who could do that?] Ooof... that’s the question. Politicians always talk a lot, but then hardly ever do anything” (Lena, 00:12).<sup>322</sup>

#### **“Fat, Jogging Pants, Weird Pink Hair” – Saying the Quiet Part Loud**

Paradoxically, three respondents in this grouping, which were closer to a lower middle class position by occupational positions, educational degrees, and self-understandings, were also the ones most explicitly drawing downward boundaries, especially in terms of education. Katharina, who had not studied herself, described her nearest city as unusual because

normally in the inner city there are people who have... academic jobs, who have a certain... intellect, because only in this way they can afford the rents [...], not your typical Hartz IV recipients, right? But in [city] it’s really different. [There are] types where you notice that they... probably don’t have work, that many things don’t matter to them. Their nutrition, their health, where you simply... see from the appearance already, that they think very little about what they eat and how they life, somehow. I mean, jogging pants... weird pink hair, fat. That’s how I would describe it” (Katharina, 00:27).<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> „An den erneuerbaren Energien könnte man auf jeden Fall noch dran arbeiten. [Wer könnte das machen?] Puh... Politiker, das ist ja immer so die Frage, die reden immer viel und machen irgendwie fast gar nichts.“

<sup>323</sup> Normalerweise is es ja so, dass in den Innenstädten Leute leben, die ebend halt och ... vielleicht ... akademische .... Berufe oder wie och immer wahrnehmen, die ebend halt n gewissen ... also Intellekt haben, weil se ebend halt och ... die Mieten sich sozusagen in der Innenstadt nur och so leisten können. [...] jetzt einfach nicht der Hartz IV-Empfänger so, ne? Und ... und ... in [Stadt] ist es aber ganz anders. [Da sind] Typen, wo de merkst... dass die ebend halt irgendwie ... wahrscheinlich nicht unbedingt ne Arbeit haben, denen ebend halt

Jana, the *Realschule* teacher, thought it was a problem for her students from less educated [*bildungsferne*] families, that such a child “doesn’t get anything from its parents, if they only sit at home on the sofa and pour the beer down their throats” (Jana, 12). As a model for teaching children the importance of education, she cited a German comedy film in which a teacher, “does a tour with a problem class. To a drug addict, a Hartz IV family, where the dogs are peeing on the carpet, a homeless guy and whatever. Negative examples. And he asks them, ‘is this where you want to end up?’ And it worked. It showed them that without a school degree that’s where you land. Maybe deterrence is the way” (ibid.).<sup>324</sup>

As we saw, the respondents in the two clusters above strictly avoid derogating the poor so openly. But it is noticeable that the “negative examples” Jana and Katharina cite closely resemble the listless *Plattenbau* inhabitants – sitting in dirty armchairs or neglecting the education of their children – that we encountered in earlier accounts. Perhaps the authoritarianism and symbolic violence of these statements can be understood as a radicalized, uncensored version of the cultural boundaries found to be typical for this class fraction, that is, as instances of “saying the quiet part loud”. If so, it would be an interesting question whether survey items designed to measure authoritarianism, for instance, would be capable of tapping into this class-specific articulation relating not so much to the punishment of deviant lifestyles, but the imperatives of education and professional success.

Overall, I introduced these accounts diverging from the patterns reconstructed before to further illustrate the heterogeneity also within the sociocultural professional sample. The MCA showed a region of transition in which positionings of lower middle class segments of the sociocultural professional category overlapped with those of the working class. It seems plausible that this also corresponds to certain aspects of shared lower middle class mentalities of ordinariness, a more situational morality, and concerns with crime. This impression also

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viele Sachen einfach och egal sind, die Ernährung, irgendwie so n bisschen Gesundheit, die einfach,... wo man schon von Außen sieht, dass da einfach ... wenig ... darüber nachgedacht wird, was gegessen wird, wie man irgendwie, wie man lebt, wie man irgendwie, also, sieht man denen einfach doch an, irgendwo-. Also Jogginghose... Komische pinke Haare, dick. So. So würd ichs jetzt mal beschreiben”.

<sup>324</sup> “Ich finds eigentlich ganz cool, diesen Film *Fack Ju Göhte*. Da ist eben einer- der wird Lehrer, der ist eigentlich kein Lehrer. Und der ist bei der Problemklasse, Klasse 10 schlechthin. Und der macht mit denen dann so’n Rundgang zu nem Drogenabhängigen, zu ner Hartz-IV-Familie, wo die Hunde in die Wohnung machen und was weiß ich, also, der zeigt denen quasi so Negativbeispiele. Oder Obdachlose. Und dann fragt der sie ‘wollt ihr da enden?’ Und ab dann hat’s funktioniert. Also denen einfach tatsächlich aufgezeigt, weil ohne Schulabschluss ist das logischerweise irgendwo vielleicht euer Weg. Vielleicht funktioniert’s durch Abschreckung.”

came from the observation that a number of workers mentioned their partners working as nurses, kindergarten teachers, or in other sociocultural occupations. However, corroborating this intuition would require more purposive sampling of individuals in these class positions

## **14. Summary: Idealism, Warm and Cold**

### **14.1. Flourishing, Expertise, and Aspiration**

Summarizing the analysis of the sociocultural professional clusters (see also table 10 below), we can again make out distinct points around which social identification, morality, and relations to politics crystallize. I think these can be captured by the terms *flourishing* and *expertise*. Flourishing, an organicist metaphor used both in ethics and psychology, captures the Social Therapists' concern with emotional development, self-expression, and interpersonal recognition.<sup>325</sup> The respondents seek flourishing in their own life, through rich experiences, meaningful connections, and expressivity; they hope to foster it in others, e.g. through their social and medical work or volunteering; and they envision societal progress in the image of growing recognition. In a first person plural logic, social change is imagined as a collective change of mind towards greater inclusiveness, and an expansion of rights to those presently excluded. The central site for this change are smaller scale instances of encounter, empowerment, and community, which can be fostered by forms of everyday politics or forms of activism hardly differentiated from social engagement.

The Social Therapeutic moral project of flourishing directly flows from the respondents' position in the social division of labor, which has them positioned on the caring, reproductive, and feminized 'left hand of the state'. This lets us grasp how classed social identities and ethical dispositions are generalized into a specific form of universalism. For many respondents, politics as social engagement, moral self-understandings shaped by high expectations of the self, and occupational ethos are one. As we saw, Social Therapists have an idealist understanding of society, which centers on "images" and "visions" that bestow recognition and unify people across social divides, or, on the contrary, divide and exclude. A consequence of this understanding is a specifically liberal form of egalitarianism. Respondents

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<sup>325</sup> The term entered the lexicon as a translation of Aristotle's *eudaimonia* (e.g. Annas 2011; Keyes 2002).

have a sense of vertical social inequality, and see themselves as “privileged” for their education and family background, even where current circumstances are highly precarious. Yet, in a kind of attempted egalitarian *re-description*, material inequality is largely dethematized, and differences articulated in a culturalist register of non-distinction, equal recognition, and equal rights of horizontally distinguished “life forms” and “cultures”. Also politically, rights-based demands are much more prominent than demands concerning material distribution.

This also clarifies the classed differentiation between redistribution and deservingness which appeared in the MCA. Respondents in this class fraction articulate expansive deservingness notions not primarily in a logic of distribution (‘the worthy poor/the workers deserve a bigger piece of the cake’) but in a universalist logic of non-distinction and recognition (‘every human being deserves appreciation’). If in the workers’ deservingness discourses a recognition-based critique was vested in redistribution claims, among Social Therapists even redistribution claims are vested in terms of universal recognition.

The moral project of flourishing and its attendant habitus forms, inherited from the alternative movements and subcultures of the 1970s and, more distantly, Romanticism, are not shared by the second, High Liberal type identified here, which rejects moral “thinking in fundamentals” and “symbolic politics”. Instead, this cluster places *expertise* and an institutionally embedded form of reason at the center of self-understandings. This is underpinned by a distinct second form of idealism, which sees knowledge, rational discourses, and “realism” as means for solving sociopolitical problems. The basic pattern of identification is that of enlightened functional elites, providing professional skills for a largely functioning institutional order in charge of the common good.

Again this is closely linked to the respondents’ social position, which is defined by the aspiration to higher professional positions predicated on cultural capital. As we saw the High Liberals’ ‘officialized’ articulation of value rationality is informed by the affective control and institutional identification demanded by such positions. The core divide identified in the sociopolitical realm is that between politics as rational discourse and simplified or impulsive forms like populism and moralism, a divide that is more or less openly portrayed as a rift between those with and without higher education. Everyday politics or being on the left,

which form important points of reference for the Social Therapists, are not central here. Instead the unique relation to politics of this cluster is their trust in and concern with institutional politics and its jargon. The High Liberals embody the reverse of political exclusion, i.e. a taken-for-granted authority to speak on matters of “official” politics which is linked to credentials and symbolic power. This recalls the MCA findings of an alignment of higher education and upper middle class identification with the “high” pole of the ideological space. The duality of Social Therapists and High Liberals resembles the distinction between socio-ecological and liberal-intellectual milieus identified by the SINUS studies (Barth et al. 2017), and High Liberals’ orientations towards expertise and social rationality also recall early observations about the politics of the professional-managerial class (Ehrenreich 1990; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979).

Where the workers’ moral projects were defined by self-assertion in the face of constraints, the projects of sociocultural professionals are defined by aspiration. Respondents articulate their goals not in terms of the autonomy or deservingness they can achieve against the odds, but in terms of a life that they *want*, drawing on a sense of ethical calling, of self-realization, and of entitlement. Even in the face of considerable obstacles, like precarity and insecure or stalling careers, respondents insist on a sense of choice (“if I wanted, I could rise into the educational aristocracy”). Self-understandings connected to one’s work, ethical demands on the conduct of life, and political views form a continuum in a way that starkly differs from the pattern observed among the workers. And also on the level of moral articulation, we see a pronounced difference between the pessimistic, powerless, ad hoc critique of workers, whose moral ideals were revealed negatively by the flagging of violations, and the sociocultural professionals’ formulations about “Rhenish capitalism” or the society that “we all have a responsibility to shape”. This difference becomes perfectly understandable when considering that in the professionals’ self-perception they were not only entitled to interpret social matters and correct the aberrations of social change, but also saw their entire life connected to a desired impact on society, a perspective that was absent from the workers’ accounts. Put a little cynically, we here encounter the “difference between people who worked essentially telling other people what to do [...] and people who do the work that other people tell them to do” (Ehrenreich 2020, n.p.).

In this way, the in-depth exploration revealed internal diversity as well as common features of social identity and ideology in this overall more homogeneous class fraction. For the sake of simplification, we could describe the two patterns as warm and cold variants of idealism, with warm idealism centering on human, interpersonal recognition through a changed 'vision of humanity' and cold idealism centering on a better ordering of the world through knowledge and institutional rationality. Both can be seen as generalizations of ethical dispositions linked to classed (and gendered) social positions and occupational ethos. They converge in placing cultural capital at the center of accounts,<sup>326</sup> though the distinct ways in which this is done, i.e. as (self-)cultivation and expertise, lead to less or more hierarchical senses of social location.

Furthermore, both clusters converge in an emphasis on *rights* which connected political positionings of the clusters across their differences. For instance, we saw that Social Therapists used a rights frame to underline the equality of migrants and overall promoted diversity in social life, while High Liberals were more skeptical about the social consequences of migration but also stressed the rights especially of asylum seekers, placing them in the context of a legitimate institutional architecture of migration control. Differing relations to institutional politics (central for High Liberals, distant for Social Therapists) coincide with a shared attitude about the direction of social change that is critical but overall comparatively optimistic. For both, the Radical Right appears as a central embodiment of sociopolitical regression, for the one side mainly because of its exclusionary politics, for the other mainly for its populism.

The social specificity of these shared emphases on cultural capital and rights also becomes visible in comparison to the divergent pattern of what was described as a potential third cluster. These lower middle class Ordinary Altruists, with lower levels of cultural capital, shared neither the cultural boundaries of the High Liberals nor the centrality of cultivation articulated by the Social Therapists. Their relations to politics were relatively disaffected and judgments of issues like migration were much more ad hoc, concrete, and ambivalent, therein resembling the habitus of many of the workers.

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<sup>326</sup> As Bourdieu remarked, "the dominated fraction of the dominant class (clerics or 'intellectuals' and 'artists', depending on the period) always tends to set the specific capital, to which it owes its position, at the top of the hierarchy of the principles of hierarchization" (Bourdieu 1991, 168).

	<b>Social Therapists</b> <i>Flourishing</i>	<b>High Liberals</b> <i>Expertise</i>	<b>Ordinary Altruists?</b>
<b>Self-understanding</b> <b>Sense of social location</b>	Active, interested, ethical people, “invested in others” Flourishing – alienation: Rich experience, expressivity, human contact, versus money (cold, ugly); poor, villagers (deprived, limited) <i>Non-distinction</i> : Horizontal understanding of social differences (“lifeworlds”), dethematizing inequality (But: sense of status markers)	Far-sighted professionals, “bigger picture” Expertise – impulses: Education, symbolic power; Cultural boundary against economic middle class (“only numbers”) and less educated (“not my wavelength”) <i>Aspiration</i> and upward projection of social location; Identification with professional role	Ordinary people, moderation, down-to-earth Demarcations against the poor (resemble workers’ discourses)
<b>Moral Economy</b>	<i>Subjectivized morality</i> : experiences central; Recognition, reflexivity, high expectations of self (“ <i>Anspruch</i> ”); Deepen own subjectivity, cultivate others <i>Ethical universalism</i> : Encounter, rights, recognition, “different cultures” (traveling); Deservingness non-distinction	<i>Objectivized morality</i> : Reasoned assessment of facts, versus prejudices, emotional reactions, “right or wrong”, partisanship, dogmatism <i>Professional Cosmopolitanism</i> : Transnational engagement as achievement, status marker	Situational morality: Ad hoc judgments, “Doing one’s part” (separate trash)
<b>Relation to politics</b>	<i>Politics as social engagement</i> : Involvement, small scale activism, social initiatives, subcultures <i>Idealism and voluntarism</i> : Changing “image”, “vision” of society; “We all” <i>Recognition focus</i> : Cultivation, expanding horizons (Radical right as social psychological counter-image) Skeptical about parties and politics “from above”	<i>Politics as rational discourse</i> , “realism”; <i>High political style</i> : Propriety and rationality, parties, political jargon (“the business community”) <i>Anti-populism</i> : Against “pub counter slogans” (associated with lower education); <i>Anti-moralism</i> : Against left “symbolic politics” <i>State-centrism</i> : Identification with institutions, rights	Politics distant: Little ideological differentiation and integration

	<b>Social Therapists</b> <i>Flourishing</i>	<b>High Liberals</b> <i>Rationality</i>	<b>Ordinary Altruists?</b>
<i>New cleavage identity potentials</i>	Universalism at the core of self-understandings; linked to education; understood as conflict dynamic in the context of radical right	Liberal identification strongly linked to social distinction by education (including urban-rural divide); Cosmopolitanism as status marker	
<i>Counteracting tendencies</i>	Groupness partly inhibited by non-distinction Relatively averse to conflict perception, benevolence extended to opponents	Pragmatic “realistic” ambivalence about key issues, e.g. immigration and law-and-order  Distance also from ‘moralizing’ and ‘ideological’ left; implicit: demarcation from Social Therapist types  Key conflict: Populism-Antipopulism	Transition between cultural middle and working class, in position and habitus

Table 10: Summary table of sociocultural professional clusters

## 14.2. Cleavage Identities?

What has been said so far already makes it clear that new cleavage identities are more strongly defined in the sociocultural professional clusters than they were in the worker sample. For both of the two main clusters a liberal ethos of “Weltoffenheit” (openness to the world) and rights is not only central for political positionings but also embedded in social and moral identities forming in the context of specific senses of social location. Especially in the case of the Social Therapists, commitments to universalist inclusion clearly form a core part of self-understandings, and links it with values of self-expression and –development, work ethos, and political outlook. Non-judgmentally encountering and appreciating other “lifeworlds” and “cultures” is key for the respondents’ own self-ideal, and we saw them actively work on their emotional responses and language to deepen their own ability to overcome prejudices. But in many cases, this is also generalized into a wider social mission whereby respondents seek to help others “look beyond their own noses” [*über den Tellerrand schauen*], a crucial metaphor used by many interviewees.

Especially in accounts of these others, e.g. villagers or disaffected lower class youths, understood to be impoverished by limited means and social horizons, a structurally situated sense of groupness emerges from the interviews. Social Therapists understand people ‘like themselves’ as those who have overcome the fear of otherness because they were “privileged” enough to enjoy a life of rich experiences and “interesting” social encounters, both of which are associated with mobility and traveling, urban life, and (higher) education. Similarly, High Liberals identify by the wider gaze afforded by their education, which they share with people “on their wavelength”, that have “a certain background” of cultivation and professionalism, including through experiences of transnational mobility.

In both cases, cultural capital, as formal education and a habitus of cultivation is central for social identities and links to cleavage-related self-understandings in distinct ways. In the Social Therapists’ case, left-wing universalism is part and parcel of an “open”, “active”, and “interested” habitus, which channels cultural capital despite the conspicuous avoidance of status-based social distinction. In the High Liberals’ case, cultural capital primarily functions as a status-based form of social distinction. Cosmopolitanism and a worldly liberal outlook (e.g.

in the rejection of nationalism and the respect for minority rights) here act as markers of an implicit ingroup of educated professionals. In other words, Social Therapists show a pattern of group identification that is primarily universalist, while the High Liberals’ sense of groupness primarily builds on education-based identities.

This is relevant because it also implicitly informs the interpretation of social conflict in the two clusters. In the High Liberals’ case, the central axis of perceived societal conflict is that of populism-antipopulism, as well as that between modern and backwards mentalities, associated with low education, rural regions, or older generations. In the Social Therapists’ case, the central conflict is precisely the ideological polarity identified in the new cleavage literature, encompassing issues of migration and diversity, social liberalization and the recognition of sexual and other minorities, as well as more diffusely commitments to expansive deservingness. Antipopulist and universalist conflict perceptions converge in demarcations against the AfD.

	<b>Soc Th</b>	<b>Hi Lib</b>
<i>Cleavage ID potential: new cleavage-related categories salient</i>	x	x
- linked to social structure	x	x
- linked to societal conflict	(x)	(x)
- linked to sense of groupness	x	(x)
<i>Other conflict logic dominant for self-understandings</i>		x

Table 11: New cleavage identities as potential and reality among the sociocultural professional clusters

In this sense, we can speak of relatively strong new cleavage identities in the two clusters, but particularly the one labeled Social Therapists. Yet ironically, the very universalism and non-judgmental openness of this latter cluster also made it the most wary to actually express social conflict, for which, in a sense, it lacks the vocabulary. As we saw, Social Therapists extended their benevolent understanding even to the extreme other side of the universalist-particularist divide in the social psychologizing of radical right support as expressing “a need that is not fulfilled”, a lack of recognition, or of “social competences”. Somewhat simplifying we could

say that to the Social Therapists, the new cleavage presents itself not as a political but as a pedagogical problem. Among High Liberals, on the other hand, the universalism-particularism conflict here essentially appeared as derivative of a more fundamental conflict between the high and the low. These respondents not only demarcated themselves from the illiberal right, whose substantive critique of immigration they treated in a relatively open, pragmatic, and balancing mode; but they also drew a boundary against left-wing moralizers mistaking politics for a question of “right and wrong”. As another study could explore, the source of much agitation over ‘identity politics’, ‘cancel culture’, or the ‘woko haram’ might not actually be the offended sensitivity of down-to-earth folks, but a divergence of sociomoral styles within the cultural middle class, with a liberal fraction struggling to uphold the definitional power of ‘high’ expertise.

## 15. Conclusion: Prepolitical Realities, Cleavage Potentials

“The fact that electoral logic ignores the differences between the Communist vote of an artist or a university teacher and that of a primary teacher, or a fortiori a clerk, a factory worker or a miner is not an excuse for sociology to do the same thing.”

Bourdieu 1984, 453

Is German society ripped into antagonistic halves or thirds by the cultural conflict of a high education, frequent-flying universalist new middle class looking down on a rooted and traditional particularist working class which resents them? The answer this study gives is: no, not really. But political actors who want to make such a conflict reality could draw on a range of distinct potentials and openings.

In this conclusion, discourses about a ‘new cultural class conflict’ are treated distinctly from the diagnosis of a new cleavage. The latter diagnosis is confirmed as a description of the structural underpinnings of *partisan* alignment and *partisan* identification, the very field in which it was originally developed. But it is shown to be much less accurate in the realm of pre-political identities. Among the large majority of non-partisan citizens, the new cleavage only exists as a set of potentials. Pre-political social identities were shown to center on moral projects embedded in social structure. For the most part, partisan ideology is peripheral to these projects, and for the most part they relate to universalism and particularism only selectively and in non-uniform ways within both classes studied. The translation of self-understandings (me) into group demarcations (us), and of both into conflict perceptions (us versus them) is uneven and in many instances lies diagonal to the logic of new cleavage formation.

As we saw, all existing studies on the new cleavage, including those on social identities, take as a reference group *electorates*, e.g. of the New Left and Radical Right. Starting from the other side and looking at social identification in classes, we see that the pre-political is structured by dynamics that sharply differ from the ideological conflicts of political partisanship. This is so *a fortiori* in situations of low polarization and social mobilization, as in the German case, and particularly among political excluded populations like workers. Yet in specific instances, the pre-political identity constellations reconstructed do provide openings

for the formation of a new cleavage. These instances provide important insights into potentials for future realignment.

In this sense, the findings of this study are two-fold. On the one hand, it identifies some crucial sites and dynamics by which classed social identities provide a “mobilization potential” for a deeper politicization of the universalism-particularism divide. But at the same time, it shows that as a diagnosis of an *existing* state of social divisions, the geological imaginary of a new cleavage running through all of the social sphere is misleading. Discourses that apply the explanatory model of cleavage theory outside the sphere for which it was designed – the social bases of party politics – must end up oversimplifying a much more messy social reality. Attempts to portray classes and their identities as univocally linked to a single line of large-scale social conflict miss the multiplicity of divides that structure the classed political space, and ascribe an overly ideological grammar to pre-political social identities.

### **15.1. This Is Not America**

As we saw, sociostructural positions are highly structuring for ideological differences in Germany, with considerable correspondences between positionings in the political space and positions in the social space, most strongly approximated by occupational class and education. Also survey measures of class *identities*, both self-selected and ascribed, correspond with significant ideological differences aligning with those between objective class positions. Issues of migration, traditionalism, law-and-order, and deservingness by and large form a common, though unevenly polarized dimension of universalism-particularism. On average, workers and sociocultural professionals are strongly divided along this polarity, which politically is most clearly represented by AfD and Green Party. All this confirms and extends previous findings of the new cleavage literature and shows it to be an accurate and concise framework for understanding the postindustrial nexus of social structure, issues, and party competition.

Putting this framework in conversation with Bourdieusian political sociology, the MCA part of the analysis revealed that this class-political nexus does not take the form of Manichaean political camps, but that of a gradational space. It also contextualized the new cleavage divide in the larger picture of political stratification. Some central findings include the following:

- a) Universalism-particularism is one of four dimensions of ideological differentiation, each corresponding to distinct social divides: besides the old cleavage of redistribution and the new cleavage of universalism, these are the left-right polarity and the high-low polarity of 'populism' and political exclusion. Together, the structures of ideological and social differentiation take the form of a classed political space. It was shown that the Bourdieusian conceptualization of a social stratification and differentiation of the political space converges with the model of cleavage theory, opening up synergies for studies of classed politics. The analysis also somewhat relativized the position of the universalism-particularism cleavage. The same class-political constellation reconstructed by the new and old cleavages could also be described by the combination of the left-right and high-low dimensions. This made it clear that the divides described by the cleavage model are only one manifestation of the more fundamental phenomenon of a classed structure of the political space.
- b) The issue divides bundled by the four dimensions did not constitute coherent camps. Instead they describe looser clusters connected by family resemblances in a gradational space.
- c) Coherent universalists and particularists are minorities, the majority stands in between. Overall, the polarization of the space was limited and there was an ideological center encompassing positions on which very large majorities concurred. The issues over which there *was* strong polarization each followed different logics of social division. The most polarized issue was refugee admissions, which divided higher and lower social strata. The meritocratic justification of inequality divided left- and right-leaners, with bases among the cultural middle class and the petty bourgeoisie. Beliefs in the (il)legitimacy of the current system of political representation divided workers from the economic middle class and higher professionals in general. Salient sociopolitical divides are multidimensional and do not align on a single line of conflict.
- d) The political space is not only structured by differences in political opinions but also by degrees of exclusion from politics altogether, with lower strata, and particularly workers, on the excluded side. Political exclusion aligns with ideological articulations of populism.

- e) Also within the two occupational classes most divided along the universalism-particularism axis, internal divides appeared that essentially repeated the inequalities and ideological differences shown in the population at large.

The overall picture painted by the MCA then is one of multidimensional divisions in a gradational political space shaped by social stratification and differentiation. In this picture, the new cleavage divide figures as one important manifestation of contemporary classed politics. It highlights the link between liberalism and higher social strata, further differentiated into social liberal and economic liberal regions. These regions are associated with the cultural and economic wings of the middle class, following a general left and right differentiation along the principle of capital composition. Workers and lower strata are politically excluded to a strong degree.

The idea of a dualistic frontline with clearly demarcated and polarized camps on either side, as evoked in recent debates, was here disproven. Generally speaking, the German pattern of polarization, partisanship, and alignment does not resemble the dualistic, and much more polarized model of the US, where many of the metaphors and discursive themes of recent debates originate. Instead, the emerging picture is much more in sync with the results of the German Federal elections coming in just as these conclusions were written, showing a sociopolitical landscape fragmented by multiple ideological divides.

Indeed, polarized camps only appeared when looking at voters of the two parties most clearly articulating the universalism-particularism divide, the Greens and the AfD. Also in the qualitative part of the study, taking a deep look at the social identities of younger production workers and sociocultural professionals, the AfD was the most unambiguous object of demarcations among the latter; and the clearest cleavage identities were articulated by respondents with the strongest political identities. All this suggests that the new cleavage divide is above all a phenomenon of the realm of party competition and not, as suggested by many commentators, a dividing line that permeates all of social life.

## **15.2. Prepolitical Realities**

Parties bundle the leanings of diverse electorates into a relatively coherent set of ideological categories informing oppositions between friends and foes. What the qualitative part of the

study showed was that this ideological, conflictual, coherent, and dualistic picture does not describe the medium and vernacular in which most people develop their views. Instead, the politics of ordinary people was shown to be an appendix of pre-political moral projects situated in social structure. This became visible when reconstructing identification and categorization in a holistic and open manner, rather than reducing them from the outset to the researchers' categorical schemes. In the everyday life of most people, political partisanship plays none or only a fleeting role. Ideological positionings are a byproduct of pre-political constellations. The categories and practical schemes deployed to elaborate political considerations (among other more pressing things) flow from self-understandings and moral intuitions anchored in a sense of social location.

This makes plausible why the picture of ideological differentiation can be both classed and heterogeneous, structured and fuzzy. It is fuzzy because ideological positionings are derived from an ethos that is itself non-ideological. The view from below sees and judges according to categorical schemes that are different from those of the view from above. Still the outcome retains a classed shape because the realities to which the ethos is fitted are defined by the affordances and constraints of the class structure. As we saw, the distance between pre-political and ideological categories (like 'left' and 'right', 'pro-' and 'anti-redistribution', '-migration' etc.) increases the lower people are positioned in the hierarchy of social stratification, and the more they are politically demobilized.

We captured the idiosyncratic logic of the pre-political by teasing out a range of moral projects which formed the focal point around which self-understandings crystallized. At heart, these moral projects are habitualized strategies in what T. S. Eliot calls "the endless struggle to think well of ourselves" (Eliot 1969, cit. in Laidlaw 2017) under conditions not of our choosing. The pursuit of embeddedness, flourishing, deservingness, autonomy, solidarity, and expertise each center on the specific assets and sources of status available to groups of respondents; and they express and reevaluate their position in society, each mobilizing a specific set of categories, drawing on forms of occupational and gendered ethos, as well as the implicit contracts inscribed in the wider moral economy. These pre-political constellations furnish the categories also for political positionings and thus mediate between social structure and political ideology.

The point of this deliberately holistic reconstruction was to get to the deeper generative principles of people's self-understandings and to ask whether these rely on forms of identification relevant to new cleavage formation. The most basic finding was one of diversity. Social identity types differed strongly within both classes, again making the assumption of a unitary line of conflict between the two classes seem implausible (but see below).

The range of types identified in this part of the study is certainly not exhaustive, but they indicate some common patterns of social identity within the two classes, each tied to specific sources of status and worth, each demarcated from a specific set of others, and each leading to specific relations to politics. Respectability and lifestyle conservatism, the protest against status loss and injured producers' pride, privatist individualism, and alternative forms of life each describe distinct realities in the German working class. The same is true for professionalism, social pedagogy, and ordinary altruism among sociocultural professionals. Within each, boundaries are drawn against groups that are particularly near, or in particular ways impinge on moral projects and the everyday cosmologies and status claims they comprise.

Without wanting to repeat what has already been summarized multiple times above, we can here revisit some general themes. As we saw, the most basic formula for describing patterns of identification among sociocultural professionals was aspirational idealism plus cultural capital, while the working class counterpart was moral materialism plus moderation. Inside both classes we saw large differences in the specific social sources of idealism and materialism, the forms of cultural capital and status, and the projective focal points of an aspirational or moderated life. What differentiated the two classes from one another across clusters was a sharply differing perception of societal hierarchies and the respondents' place in them.

Workers stressed material hierarchies of distribution, like those of income and wealth (illustrated e.g. by cars and houses but also pension entitlements), as well as of workplace control. Situating themselves between the bottom and the middle of these hierarchies, workers articulated a lower middle class ethos of moderation in response to situations of relative constraint (Sachweh and Lenz 2018), and drew sharp boundaries against those above. Sociocultural professionals thematized hierarchies of education, opportunity, and expertise in which they placed themselves on the privileged side, or sought to avoid talking about vertical

differences altogether, including those separating them from the rich and powerful. The most clearly differentiated moral calculi resulting from this were a meritocratic one based on achievement, which was shared by some workers and the cluster of higher professionals, but in the workers' case was more heavily centered on scarcity ('who deserves to get which part of the finite cake'), and a universalist moral calculus of abundance ('everyone deserves to be appreciated') prevalent especially among the cluster of Social Therapists. Both articulated ideals of justice and equality, one in the sense of equal rules applying to all, the other by equal rights for all (see also below).

Both views of equality and societal hierarchies closely linked to the objective situation of respondents. Drawing on an aspirational frame mirroring middle class careers and status work, as well as occupational ethos, sociocultural professionals articulated developmental narratives based on the idea of a perfectibility of the self, of others, and of the world at large. Predicated on cultural capital as the central asset for status claims, this improvement took the forms of therapeutic cultivation or of expertise, partly shaped by differing positions in a (gendered) social division of labor. Throughout, the moral calculus of abundance and rights can be said to draw on a social experience of status based on immaterial assets. This experience was not shared by the workers, whose moral projects sought to achieve autonomy, respectability, and status in protected spheres and by a responsible handling of limited means. A decidedly materialist register dominated, by which also claims to recognition and representation were expressed in the medium of money (e.g. in complaints about rich politicians or the relative remuneration of manual versus office work).

For all respondents, work stood at the core of social identity. But while for sociocultural professionals work formed the center of their moral projects, for the workers it was largely a means that enabled moral projects centered outside of work, in a private life of community, relationships, leisure, and individual self-determination. This relationship between moral projects and different forms of work goes further than the rather mechanistic notion of a formation of character by work logics (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). Workplaces in manufacturing too have an 'interpersonal' side, in the sense of dense networks of communication and cooperation with others, carpools for the drive to the factory, etc. It is the relationship between this labor and the moral projects of the laborers' lives that differentiates

it from the ethically infused labor of social services, medicine, or culture. The latter thrive on an ethos of universality and partial decommodification, as well as, in the higher ranks, a claim to professional independence. This gives the immediate product of work a moral character, instead of work being a symbol of discipline, competence, and respectability, as which it appeared in the workers' accounts.

As we saw the cultural middle class' moral charging of work was expressed through the incommensurability of the product (care, culture,...) with money, which was articulated particularly strongly in demarcations from middle class professions, like corporate consultants, centered on monetary rewards. This divide was central to the cultural middle class respondents, because the economic middle class formed a socially close referent whose lifestyle stood in contradiction to their own moral projects. The fine-grained sensitivity for this divide was illustrated when in one case the distinction hinged on the line separating self-employed private doctors ("in their big-ass doctor's practice") from those working in the public hospital.

The troubles especially of precarious interviewees, and passing remarks of family wealth illustrated how sociocultural professionals too were not oblivious to the dictates of money. But by and large material inequality was dethematized or culturalized as deficits of recognition in a horizontal tableau of lifeworlds. Central lines of distinction – of alienation and flourishing, and rationality and impulse – hinged on the uses and development of cultural capital. We also saw how precarity in this class fraction was met by doubling down both on the emphasis on non-monetary, ethical or political motivations ("it's not that we want more money. But we want to live in a world, where everybody..."), and on aspiration, by projecting oneself into a higher, "privileged" position in disregard of material circumstances.

This sharply differed from the mentality of the workers who prided themselves in the production of tangible use value, and for whom money formed the centerpiece of the implicit social contract, the medium of social comparison, and the explicit condition of possibility for central symbols of moral achievement like that of house ownership. The most important lines of distinction anchoring the sense of social location, of above and below, the small world and the big world, the private sphere and society, as well as that of competition and solidarity between workers all were centrally articulated in terms of material relations of wage

differentials, sectoral power, or the agency and constraint of hierarchical positions. The socially situated forms of idealism and materialism formed a stark meta-theme of differences between the two classes, also structuring diverging ideological outlooks.

A second meta-theme that characterized differences between the classes was the contrast between a sense of powerlessness on the workers' side, and self-ascribed symbolic power on the side of the professionals. This latter sense of symbolic power did not draw on superior positions in lines of command, but on specialized knowledge, inherent in a sense of having something to say (expertise), or having something to give (by creating conditions for flourishing). We saw how this directly segued into 'officialized' and voluntaristic forms of sociopolitical thought. Among the workers, workplace disempowerment mirrored forms of sociopolitical critique 'from the sidelines'. As industrial worker Sebastian said, "when the master [craftsman] says something, there's not much to be discussed. Of course we can voice our opinion and say, 'ah, but this is shit'. But in the end you will still have to do it. [...] You can voice your opinion, but it won't change anything [laughs]" (Sebastian, 60).<sup>327</sup> In the sociopolitical realm, powerlessness was negotiated by forms of a paternalistic delegation of responsibility, protest, fatalism, and/or withdrawal.

In general, the analysis revealed strong qualitative differences in the articulation of moral ideals and critique between the classes. While professionals drew on an explicit set of normative ideals and projects, like 'inclusion', 'recognition', or 'liberalism', the workers largely mobilized a sense of injustice which negatively highlighted violations of reciprocity, deservingness, order, etc., often linked to a vague nostalgic sense of a formerly intact moral economy.<sup>328</sup> Here we encounter what Honneth describes as "the crass discrepancy [...] between the normatively based ideas of justice formulated in the culture of bourgeois experts and the political avant-garde, on the one hand, and the situationally dependent, highly fragmentary social morality of the suppressed classes, on the other" (Honneth 1995, 208).

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<sup>327</sup> "Der Meister, wenn der was sagt, dann... ja... also dann gibts eigentlich nicht viel zum diskutiere. Wenn er das sagt, dann kann man zwar auch unsere Meinung äußere und sagen 'Hey, das isch jetzt aber scheiße' oder was, aber mache musste es ja trotzdem. Weil letzschendlich bisch da zum schaffe und s Geschäft muss gemacht werde. Und da kann man zwar sei Meinung äußere, aber dass' was ändert isch dann meist auch nicht [lacht]."

<sup>328</sup> E.g. of 'participation for performance', or of small craftsmen being highly esteemed and remunerated.

One of the aims of this study was to draw out some of the contours of this fragmentary social critique and the underlying sense of injustice that persists despite perceptions of powerlessness. This also helps paint a more vivid, less caricatured image of the diversity of sociopolitical impulses in the contemporary working class. The strong focus of the workers' critique of material inequality, on needs neglected by the state, and the gap between those above and below, for instance, runs counter to recent debates which almost entirely thematize workers' orientations in terms of their exclusionary tendencies. One of the reasons for this one-sided focus, I suspect, is precisely that the workers' critique remains below the threshold of an explicit ideological and normative system, and is bereft of the channels that would allow for its public elaboration and realization (see also below). This opens the door for interpretations based on projections, or the generalization of observations about only one ideological fraction of the working class, that mobilized by radical right parties. On the other side, the analysis sought to reconstruct a more life-like portrayal of the moral and political orientations of the cultural middle class, moving beyond both the deeply misleading caricature of arrogant frequent flyers who could live in Beijing, London, or Paris, and idealized self-descriptions as a socially amorphous group of open-minded people that might just as well include the provincial bricklayer from the Rhineland.

With the reconstruction of a diversity of social identity patterns among the two classes, the study showed the limitations of generalizing a structural analysis of party competition into a wider diagnosis of social divisions. When generalized into a rift running through the classed everyday cultures of ordinary people, the geological metaphor of a new cleavage is misleading, because it overestimates the degree of ideological coherence and the salience of sociopolitical conflict, and underestimates the idiosyncratic logic of the pre-political which introduces qualitative forms of ideological differentiation not captured by homogenous opinion scales. The view from below at times differs starkly from the view from above, but it is in the terms of the former that social identities are developed. Workers and sociocultural professionals, as well as sociocultural groupings within these classes, do not really give universalist or particularist answers to the same set of questions. Instead they address entirely different questions, drawing on vocabularies and moral cosmologies that qualitatively differ from one another. These heterogeneous sets of questions arise from problems encountered by distinct moral projects in their respective social settings. Across the board, their deeper

roots lie in the habits, strategies, and expectations by which people pursue status under the conditions of a differentiated and unequal class society.

This rootedness in specific circumstances also means that with few exceptions, respondents of the two classes do not demarcate themselves *from each other*, as the narrative of a new cultural class conflict suggests. Instead they cite more socially proximate groups. The trope of “urban cultural elites” which right-wing think tanks successfully disseminated in the US did not appear in my sample. Nor can we meaningfully speak of a *hegemony* of the cultural middle class among the workers (as claimed by Reckwitz 2019, 2017); neither in the original Gramscian meaning that the interests of a dominant class become the common sense for the dominated (as was partly the case for the workers’ identification with the interests of firm owners), nor in the looser sense of an orientation of workers towards the values and lifestyles espoused by the cultural middle class. Among the Alternative Workers, we saw strong indications that the cultural middle class hegemonizes the subcultural radical left, but this is a relatively marginal scene.

### **15.3. Cleavage Potentials**

Yet, as the analysis above also highlighted, there are distinct openings and potentials within the pre-political identities that political actors can use to create and mobilize in the form of a new cleavage of universalism-particularism. These openings become particularly visible when connecting the patterns found here with the studies on cleavage identities among New Left and Radical Right electorates by Stubager (2009), Bornschieer et al. (2021) and Damhuis (2020) cited above. Resonating with Stubager’s findings we saw pronounced education-based group identities among the cultural middle class cluster. Self-understandings based on education, both as cultivation and expertise, linked the demarcation of social identities to universalist and/or liberal political positionings. Self-descriptions of sociocultural professionals as “active”, “interested”, and “tolerant” very closely resembled the terms of identification captured by Zollinger (2021) and Bornschieer et al. (2021) for New Left electorates.

Among the sociocultural professionals, it is first and foremost the AfD and the social imaginary around its supporters that at times turns the latent paternalism of pedagogical benevolence and the education-based conceit of the higher professionals into a form of outgroup animus.

This happens in those instances where radical right support in particular, and narrow-minded, exclusionary outlooks in general, are identified with an emotionally or cognitively underdeveloped population located among strata with lower education and/or rural dwellers. It can be conjectured that the AfD is so central in the sociocultural professionals' accounts, because its rise contradicts the idea of future-oriented Social Therapists that there is a more or less linear trajectory of societal progress (hence the deep "shock" and surprise expressed by many respondents);<sup>329</sup> but also because it embodies the irrational and unrefined populist 'low' which is the central point of demarcation for the High Liberals.

On the workers' side, we saw patterns of an exclusionary moral critique of deservingness and violated reciprocity which resonated with Damhuis' observations among Radical Right electorates in France and the Netherlands. As detailed above, the main pathways for identifications that feed into the new cleavage are a) the localist defense of an intact, socially integrated, and prosperous island against intrusions from the outside, including migration but also transnational capital; b) the competitive and exclusionary logic of deservingness claims of workers perceiving a decline of status, articulated against the unmerited entitlements especially of migrants, as well as the unemployed and the underclass; and c) the closely related vindication of a sense of producers' pride which leads to calls for the disciplining of supposed freeriders.

While a) touches on the deep core of the moral project of embeddedness, b) and c) relate to the moral economy of reciprocity and work-based meritocracy on which workers stake their claims to respectability and deservingness. The former mobilizes a sense of groupness along the localist lines of 'from here/not from here', which informs political projects of national closure, but can also engender a more general impulse to authoritarian control in the defense of a threatened order. In the latter, an imagined community of 'makers', the producers of national wealth distributed by politicians, is marked off from unduly privileged migrants and benefits recipients. These too have been shown to form important motivations for radical right support (Dörre 2020; Rathgeb 2020), and the deep anchoring of social identities in the work-based social contract of deservingness can be seen as an important mobilization

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<sup>329</sup> In an enlightening remark, Mannheim locates the historical sources of liberal ideas of progress and evolution: the process of capitalist rationalization, as well as a Protestant theological impulse secularized in idealism, i.e. "the idea of the infinite perfectibility of the human species" (Mannheim 1929, 201).

potential in this context. Although not articulated as such by the respondents, there is also a strong conflict potential across the social groups of the new cleavage inherent in these questions. This became tangible in the fact that expansive deservingness, as non-distinction, and the idea of an enrichment by the encounter with the foreign and unknown, was shown to be equally central to the self-understandings of a central sociocultural professional cluster, the Social Therapists. Here again, we saw that this went much deeper than political preferences, touching the very core of the Social Therapists' moral project.

On a deeper level, differing positions on new cleavage issues like migration, law-and-order, and deservingness can be situated in the context of differing ideals of sociomoral integration held by workers and sociocultural professionals. We can capture these as ideals of sociomoral integration by *rights and rules*. Rights orientations were what connected the accounts of Social Therapists and High Liberals, taking the form of universalist non-distinction ("everybody has a right...") or of institutional rationality (as in the distinction between the social impact of migration and the right to asylum) respectively. The insistence on rules, on the other hand, was what connected the Working Class Conservatives' claim to respectability via work discipline (e.g. against cheeky youngsters) and the deservingness critique of the Social Populists. In both we saw an identification of the threshold of respectability with "playing by the rules", primarily of the work imperative.

Hostility against outgroups like migrants, criminals, benefits recipients, or the poor is here legitimized by claims that through criminality, fraud, or a lack of work discipline, these groups break the moral code that 'normal' people like the workers live by. This code includes honoring expectations of reciprocity, submitting to the work imperative as a precondition for legitimate claims, and ensuring the largest possible degree of self-reliance by a considerate use of limited means. All these are deeply embedded in the moral cosmology of the workers because they describe the rules by which they themselves live. As one respondent put it in his fictional address to a migrant, "listen, we also have to play by the rules, we also have to work and slave". This also makes plausible how respondents can strongly reject immigration while also identifying with migrants as fellow workers ("Honestly, I would do the same").

Against a psychological reading, e.g. of the thinking in hierarchies, as commonly encountered in the literature on authoritarianism, normative modes like the ones reconstructed here must

be understood as expressions of a class-specific ethical habitus (see also De Keere 2018), and seen in the social context of their development. Modes of sociomoral integration flowing from a class-specific ethical habitus also illuminate the different role of migrants in the accounts of the two classes. For one side, the figure of the migrant appears as an institutional problem or an embodiment of violated rights. For the other, migrants appear as good or bad people, who are judged by moral rules of conduct and rejected where they are associated with (unpunished) rule-breaking. This also makes plausible the intimate link between the workers' discussions of the deservingness of migrants and benefit recipients, equally suspected of rule-breaking, which also showed up as a correlation of migration and deservingness attitudes in the MCA analysis.

These openings clearly relate to the general patterns of classed identities sketched above, in the sense that the rights frame resonates with the focus on extending recognition, of opening options for development, and with an institutional logic of moral integration, all inherent in the aspirational idealism of the sociocultural professionals. The rules frame, on the other hand, resonates with the workers' moral materialism and sense of moderation, because it provides a moral calculus determining legitimate entitlements in a zero-sum distribution of limited goods. Further, it is the identification with rules as part of work-centered meritocracy that legitimizes the authoritarian disciplining of others. Education-based middle class identities, the defensiveness of affluent workers, work-centered meritocracy, and the nationally framed zero-sum competition of deservingness form the strongest identity potentials for the formation of a new cleavage among workers and sociocultural professionals.

If we were only focusing on these potentials, we could easily paint a picture of the surveyed landscape as one of deep identitarian polarization along a cultural class conflict. On the one hand we would then see traditionalist rooted workers struggling to protect their island of prosperity against intruding strangers, and lashing out against the weak to prove their own endangered sense of deservingness. On the other, we would see middle class left-liberals citing openness to migrants and cosmopolitanism to demarcate themselves from narrow-minded villagers and uneducated populist. And we could not help but see the parallelism of this constellation to the political conflict between parties of the New Left and the Radical Right. Such a picture highlights tendencies that are certainly, and worryingly, real. But seen in

isolation and generalized into a single large-scale pattern of conflict, which most respondents themselves do not perceive and which a good deal of the observations do not fit into, would mean interpreting a messy and contradictory social reality through the lense of a grand narrative that we bring to the data, and which ultimately derives from conflicts in a political sphere that most people do not inhabit.

In this picture, we would, for instance, miss how a considerable segment of the working class lives by a privatist moral code that eschews group demarcations. We would miss how undogmatically lifestyle conservatives negotiate tradition and the integration of individual migrants, and how their moderate orientation to respectability and the status quo distances them from the radical right. We would miss how pragmatically liberal intellectuals thematize the problems of immigration and how fiercely they oppose leftist moral politics. We would miss how wary the most universalist fraction of the cultural middle class is to express group conflict and derogate those below. And we would miss how strongly workers' deservingness discourses are centered on social demands and material inequalities attributed to the doings of bosses and politicians; how absent the distinction from cultural elites is in these accounts; and how their migration skepticism allows for an extensive identification with many or even most migrants as people like themselves.

Above all, we would close our perspective to the fact that the social identity patterns reconstructed here are to a large extent not linked to coherent political ideologies and could thus be mobilized in terms not confined to the conflict over liberalism and/or migration. The strong presence of economic grievances and critiques of inequality among the workers here is a central, albeit not innovative finding (see e.g. Dörre 2017). In the 2021 Federal election, the SPD seems to have regained some strength among workers with a campaign focused on economic issues and a slogan of 'respect' for 'those who keep the cart rolling' which directly echoes some of the statements of workers captured above. Mere rhetoric appeals to the working class have been shown to boost working class support for campaigns (Robison et al. 2021; Evans and Tilley 2017). And producers' pride and the critique of the parasitic undeserving rich in bed with the political establishment has historically been an important trope also of left-wing working class consciousness (see Michel 2017; Prasad et al. 2009).

An example for a different path from the hardening of cultural conflicts among the sociocultural professionals is the issue *precarity*. Recent academic and political debates have suggested that precarity might form a common denominator for the political mobilization of workers and the educated middle class, both of whom are disproportionately affected by increasing employment insecurity and an individualization of risks (Häusermann et al. 2015; Standing 2011). More insights here exist on the workers' side, whose individualization and normalization of precarity we saw in the figure of temp worker Lisa and her dogged hope for a permanent position (e.g. Goes 2015, Trappmann et al. 2021). The limited observations among the precarious middle class seem to suggest a similar tendency (e.g. in Anna's account of the normality of "this project work thing"). This disidentification of respondents with the structural instability of their lives on both sides would make a common formation of the "precariat" across class locations seem rather unrealistic (see also Wright 2016).

But it could be useful to take a deeper look at the unsettled social sense of the precarious and/or downwardly mobile cultural middle class, which has been identified as the central constituency of recent movements for economic redistribution (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2013; Winant 2019). The account of one of the respondents about the way an awareness of his own precarity resulted from his political activism showed an alternative to the aspirational avoidance of precarity and of situating oneself in vertical inequalities.

#### **15.4. The Political Exclusion of the Working Class**

Generally speaking, we saw pathologies of capitalism all over the accounts presented here, be it through the intensification of work and the competition between categories of workers (in the form of temp work or the instrumentalization of migrants for wage dumping), the lack of recognition for manual labor and demeaningly low wages in some sectors, the precarity suffered by the 'B team' of the postindustrial workforce in dualized labor markets, the struggle of the middle class' offspring to retain its parents' status amidst low growth and rising inequalities, the pull of capital concentration which endangers small businesses, or the sheer difficulty of those forced to sell their labor power for the larger share of their waking life to build an autonomous, self-determined life. What was lacking was a political vocabulary that

would name these pathologies and their common cause, as well as the organizational means that could leverage the sense of injustice of workers and precarious professionals.

When months after the end of the interview phase, I happened to meet the logistics worker Maximilian again, we had a conversation I noted in a memo.

Maximilian: So what is that whole book about?

I: For example about how people understand politics. Like where they see their own place in it and whether they have the feeling they can influence things.

M: But everybody knows that we don't have any power.

I: Well, I also talked with people who said that we all are society, and if we change all change things in our own small worlds, then everything changes.

M: Well well. They're really fucking kidding themselves, aren't they? [laughs]  
(Maximilian, Memo II)

The most important trend in the political behavior of workers is not their shift to the right, but their far-reaching exclusion from politics. Indeed, it was shown that left-right leanings of this class – as reported in surveys – remained essentially stagnant.<sup>330</sup> What did change was a stark decrease of workers feeling represented by political parties, a decrease that far outpaced that of the general population. Disproportionately large segments of workers distrust the existing system of political representation, and overall levels of political interest and knowledge are low, symptoms of political exclusion which we saw directly correlated with populist anti-politician sentiments. The workers' skepticism against the system of representation seems justified, as they enjoy significantly lower degrees of descriptive and substantive representation, and have largely disappeared from public discourses outside of discussions of the 'left behind' supporters of the radical right.

All these themes also prominently emerged in the conversations with workers. Together with the rich, politicians here figure as core personifications of a ruling class "above", engaged in "nepotistic games" denying the "little guys" a seat at the table. Even among the majority of workers who still vote, most understand themselves as outside spectators of a political game

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<sup>330</sup> Albeit against the backdrop of a subtle but steady leftward shift of the middle class.

whose language and constellations have become meaningless. “I don’t even care anymore. No matter what we do, we only get kicked in the ass anyway.” “Decisions are made by the so-called upper class, let’s just say, the rich people”. “That’s how it always is. It doesn’t matter what you want, it’s always a choice between a douche and a turd”. We found such statements not only among the disgruntled and downwardly mobile, but also among workers who overall saw the implicit social contract as intact, and were by and large content with their situation.

On a more subtle level, it was noticeable how workers across the board distanced themselves from political talk and its categories, including the left-right distinction. Expressions like “I’m not the one who would know about such things” admitted a lack of competence in the double sense introduced by Bourdieu, as both field-specific knowledge and the symbolic capital of authoritatively speaking about “such things”. The direct flipside of this exclusion and subsequent self-exclusion – which was also prevalent among women in the sociocultural professional sample – were the discourses of the liberal experts, who at times almost comically stressed their competence in the realm of high politics (“the business community demands a skilled labor force”).

For cleavage theory, this points to the important question whether we can speak of a cleavage in a situation where only one side is politically mobilized. For democracy, and for hopes of rebuilding channels that would enable workers to tackle the extensive injustices they criticize, these findings are simply troubling. And it would seem that discussions about the radical right following among the working class have partly distracted from this even more worrisome hollowing out of German democracy (Schäfer and Zürn 2021). Breaking the vicious cycle by which the exclusion of the workers is not even registered as a political problem precisely because it prevents them from setting the public agenda might also be a worthy mission for the engagement of sociocultural professionals.

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