

Poverty as Manufactured Vulnerability

Povertism, Classism, and Functional Right-Wing Radicalism in the German Welfare State

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17939504

Abstract

The present work develops a conceptual framework for the analysis of poverty-related forms of discrimination and violence in contemporary welfare regimes, with a particular focus on the German Hartz IV system, the subsequent Bürgergeld system, and the new basic income support scheme (2026). The point of departure is the observation that established concepts such as classism insufficiently capture central mechanisms of administrative dehumanization, epistemic dispossession, and the targeted production of vulnerability.

On the basis of the longitudinal empirical corpus of work:

Speed, T. (2025). *SPEED'S WORK – An Autistic Intervention in the Concept of Work in the Age of AI and Robotics*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17826640>

ISBN: 3819249281 (de) and ISBN: 3819277358 (en),

the term *povertism* (poverty-based racism) is introduced as an independent analytical category. Povertism does not denote a mere stigmatization of already poor population groups, but rather a structural practice of the active production of poverty as a prerequisite for control, sanctioning, and social devaluation.

In addition, a functional concept of right-wing radicalism is developed that is not tied to party-political self-ascriptions or extremist symbolism, but to human-rights-relevant criteria such as the systematic hierarchization of human dignity, the withdrawal of epistemic and existential rights, and the institutional legitimation of suffering. From a historical perspective, continuities with social-racist and eugenic patterns of thought are traced, without positing an identity-establishing equation with National Socialist crimes.

The work explicitly understands itself as a conceptual clarification against the accusation of exaggeration and contributes to the theoretical grounding of critical research on welfare statehood, administrative violence, and the political economy of manufactured vulnerability.

This paper is an interface text. The author's primary research corpus employs an autistic, non-linear, rhythmically recursive writing mode that cannot be fully preserved in academic English without structural loss of epistemic function.

1. Introduction: Concepts, Power, and the Trivialization of Structural Violence

The debate surrounding the German Hartz IV and Bürgergeld system has, since its introduction, been characterized by a striking imbalance. While empirical findings on mental illness, social destabilization, existential insecurity, and institutional harshness are comprehensively documented, the conceptual sharpness of corresponding critique is regularly called into question. In particular, wherever critics use terms such as racism, right-wing radicalism, or structural violence, a discursive defense pattern sets in that aims less at substantive refutation than at semantic disqualification.

This observation is not based on a blanket assumption, but on the repeated experience that conceptual critique of welfare-state practice is often deflected not substantively, but linguistically—for example by invoking the alleged inappropriateness, exaggeration, or political loading of the terms used. The debate thus shifts from the question of the appropriateness of the practices described to the question of which terms are allowed to count as legitimate at all.

This work takes up precisely this point. It proceeds from the thesis that the accusation of “exaggeration” does not primarily constitute a scientific argument, but rather a normalization strategy aimed at maintaining the institutional self-description of the welfare state as neutral, caring, and democratic. Terms are rejected not because they are analytically imprecise, but because they make visible power relations that remain concealed in the normal operation of state administration.

At the same time, it must be noted that many critical analyses do indeed encounter conceptual limits. Concepts such as classism or social exclusion do capture aspects of social inequality, but often remain at the surface of stigmatization, status difference, or cultural devaluation. They insufficiently explain why modern welfare regimes systematically produce conditions under which poverty is not merely administered, but actively produced, reproduced, and functionalized.

The present work therefore pursues a dual objective. First, it seeks to show that certain terms deemed “inappropriate” in political discourse can indeed fulfill a precise analytical function when they are cleanly defined and functionally derived. Second, it argues that the Hartz IV and Bürgergeld system can only be adequately analyzed if it is understood not exclusively as a social policy instrument, but as a regime of power and discipline that deliberately deploys existential vulnerability.

The focus is thus explicitly not on individual attribution of blame or moral accusation, but on the analysis of structural modes of operation that are precisely subject to critical scrutiny because they operate independently of individual intentions. Neither individual administrative employees nor specific political actors stand at the center, but rather institutional logics, legal frameworks, and epistemic practices that stabilize and reproduce themselves over time.

2. Methodological and Empirical Foundation: *Speeds Arbeit* as Autistic Long-Term Structural Analysis and Artistic Research

The empirical foundation of this investigation is formed by the corpus of work and experience *Speeds Arbeit* (*Speed's Work*), which emerged between 2001 and 2025. This corpus comprises multiple book publications, filmic works, artistic-documentary materials, theoretical texts, as well as an extensive body of administrative correspondence, administrative files, and institutional interactions. It represents the result of decades-long, continuous research that was not planned retrospectively, but produced under real social, economic, and administrative conditions of constraint.

In contrast to classical social-scientific studies that examine temporally limited surveys or samples, this material allows for a temporally deep-layered analysis of institutional patterns. Precisely through the long observation period, it becomes visible that central mechanisms of the German social and administrative system reproduce themselves with remarkable stability across different legal versions, political constellations, and organizational restructurings. The empirical value of the corpus thus lies not in its number of cases, but in the identification of structural invariances over time.

Accordingly, the claim of this investigation is not statistical representativeness, but structural insight. What is generalized are not frequencies or distributions, but mechanisms of effect, decision logics, and escalation patterns that appear repeatedly and independently of individual actors. In this sense, the work follows a qualitatively analytical understanding of generalization as established in ethnography, critical institutional analysis, and case theory.

The mechanisms of effect reconstructed here do not stand in contradiction to existing quantitative and qualitative studies, but converge with them at a structural level. Studies on the psychological consequences of sanctions, on permanent existential insecurity, or on the escalation dynamics of administrative procedures confirm individual effects that *Speed's Work* reconstructs through temporal depth of focus.

2.1 Research under Conditions of Constraint: Provoked Empiricism

A central characteristic of *Speed's Work* is that the empirical data did not emerge under controlled research conditions, but were produced by institutional interventions themselves. The provocation did not consist in violations of rules or strategic misconduct, but in the consistent articulation of rights, the non-adaptation to implicit norms of conformity, and the insistence on formal equal treatment.

Sanctions, benefit reductions, administrative requirements, medical and administrative assessments, as well as judicial proceedings repeatedly generated situations of existential intensification. These situations are not to be understood as methodological disturbances, but as empirically highly revealing constellations in which institutional logics emerge with particular clarity.

The term *provoked empiricism* as used here does not mean the intentional creation of crisis situations, but rather the fact that the system under investigation itself produces those conditions under which its mode of operation becomes visible. The empirical data are thus not a reaction to an experimental intervention, but to real, consequential administrative decisions. Precisely for this reason, they differ fundamentally from hypothetical models or simulation-based analyses.

This form of empiricism makes it possible to analyze institutional action not only in terms of its normative claim, but in its concrete effects. It renders visible how administration reacts to deviation, how it generates, stabilizes, or escalates pressure, and how it deals with subjects who do not fit smoothly into prescribed roles.

2.2 Autistic Epistemology as a Condition of Knowledge

A central methodological aspect of this work is the autistic position of the researching subject. As an autistic author and artist, the author is neither fully integrated into academic assumptions of normality nor positioned outside institutional power relations. This double marginality is not a biographical addendum, but an epistemic condition of knowledge production.

Autistic modes of perception and processing are characterized, among other things, by an increased sensitivity to rule incoherences, implicit norms, semantic shifts, and double-bind structures. In bureaucratic contexts that rely heavily on unspoken expectations of adaptation, performative compliance, and implicit loyalty, these characteristics become a specific analytical advantage. Contradictions between formal legal frameworks and factual practice, between official rhetoric and actual effect, become particularly salient.

This perspective does not replace other forms of analysis, but supplements them with a dimension of knowledge that often remains invisible in neurotypical research settings. *Speeds Arbeit* analyzes not only what institutions document or claim, but what they actually do, particularly where their implicit assumptions fail or turn into violence.

2.3 Artistic Research as a Necessary Methodology

The methodological positioning of this work lies in the field of artistic research. Here, it is not understood as an aesthetic supplement to classical science, but as an autonomous form of research that becomes particularly productive where linear, standardized methods reach their limits. Artistic research allows for the integration of theory, practice, perception, and documentary material in a manner that renders complex, processual, and affective dimensions of institutional violence analyzable.

Filmic works, narrative structures, formal repetitions, and aesthetic decisions do not function as subjective expression, but as analytical instruments through which temporal dynamics, relational patterns, and logics of escalation become visible. Artistic research makes it possible to investigate those aspects of administrative practice that elude purely propositional description, yet nonetheless produce real effects.

Precisely in its interplay with autistic epistemic practice, an unusual and thus far scarcely researched constellation emerges: a long-term, embodied investigation of structural violence conducted by a person who is themselves permanently an object of those very structures. This constellation is not replicable, but it is theoretically connectable and critically verifiable.

2.4 Delimitation from Autobiographical Narrative

A clear conceptual delimitation is necessary at this point. *Speed's Work* is not an autobiographical account of suffering in the narrower sense. Personal experiences do not

function as an end in themselves, but as empirical material through which institutional regularities, decision logics, and power structures can be reconstructed. The analytical focus does not lie on individual states of mind, but on recurring structural features of administrative practice.

The epistemic value of this corpus arises precisely from its uniqueness: its long duration, its internal coherence, and the situational inevitability of the documented interactions. In this form, it constitutes a first-of-its-kind investigation that analyzes welfare-state violence not from external observation, but from within its internal dynamics.

3. Classism Reframed: From Social Devaluation to Administrative Logic

In contemporary debates, the term *classism* is often used as an analogy to racism or sexism and denotes the devaluation of people on the basis of their social origin, level of education, or economic position. In this form, the term is analytically useful, but only to a limited extent for the investigation of welfare-state practice. It often remains at the level of social attitudes, cultural distinction, or individual prejudice.

In the context of the Hartz IV and Bürgergeld system, classism operates less as a moral disparagement than as an institutionalized administrative logic. It is expressed not primarily in explicit judgments of devaluation, but in legal categories, standardized procedures, and implicit expectations that define whose statements are considered credible, whose actions are regarded as rational, and whose needs are recognized as legitimate.

This shift is decisive: classism appears here not as a social marginal phenomenon, but as a structuring principle of state practice.

3.1 Classism as an Epistemic Practice

A central characteristic of this form of classism is the systematic epistemic dispossession of benefit recipients. Poverty functions not only as an economic status, but as an implicit signal of a lack of reliability, rationality, or personal responsibility. Statements concerning health limitations, psychological burdens, or biographical ruptures are subject to a permanent reservation and require continuous justification.

Drawing on Fricker's concept of testimonial injustice, it can be argued that poverty here operates as a structural credibility deficit. Epistemic devaluation does not occur on the basis of individual untruthfulness, but on the basis of the social position itself. Classism is thus not merely a matter of social inequality, but a form of institutionalized knowledge hierarchy.

This epistemic dimension is central to the analysis of welfare-state violence, as it explains why those affected are not only materially constrained, but are also systematically prevented from articulating their situation as epistemically capable subjects.

3.2 The Categorization Lie

This epistemic practice is stabilized by an institutional fiction referred to here as the *categorization lie*. Formally, welfare institutions emphasize the individual assessment of each single case. In practice, however, processing occurs predominantly through standardized

categories such as “fit for work,” “subject to cooperation obligations,” “relevant for sanctions,” or “eligible for support.”

The categorization lie consists in the rhetorical invocation of individuality while systematically negating it in practice. Biographical complexity, neurodivergent ways of life, non-market forms of work, or chronic burdens are documented, but exert only limited influence on decision-making processes. What remains decisive is the fit with the designated category, not the actual lived reality.

Precisely because categories carry legal consequences, this is not a neutral simplification, but a technique of power that determines which forms of life are recognized as legitimate.

3.3 The Limit of the Concept of Classism

As precise as this analysis is, it simultaneously marks the limit of the concept of classism. Classism explains how people are devalued, categorized, and epistemically devalued. It does not, however, sufficiently explain why the system has a structural interest in placing people in this position on a permanent basis.

In particular, it remains unclear why welfare-state institutions do not merely react to existing poverty, but produce conditions under which poverty is reproduced or intensified. The concept of classism describes the form of devaluation, not its logic of production.

This analytical gap is decisive. Without addressing it, it remains incomprehensible why sanctions, benefit reductions, or bureaucratic escalations persist despite demonstrable harm. It is at this point that the following conceptual extension begins.

4. Povertism: Poverty as a Produced and Functionalized Structure

The term *povertism* is introduced in this work in order to close an analytical gap that is not adequately captured by either classism or general poverty research. While classism describes forms of social, cultural, and epistemic devaluation, the concept of povertism targets the active institutional production, stabilization, and utilization of poverty as an instrument of governance.

Povertism thus denotes neither a prejudice nor an individual attitude, but a structural logic in which poverty is not primarily understood as a social problem to be overcome, but as a functional element of state regulation. Within this framework, poverty appears not as a failure of the system, but as a condition of its effectiveness.

4.1 From Reaction to the Production of Poverty

Classical social policy narratives present the welfare state as a reactive instance: poverty is regarded as an external condition to which responses such as support, assistance, or activation are applied. This perspective, however, overlooks the fact that central mechanisms of the Hartz IV and Bürgergeld system themselves generate conditions under which poverty is stabilized or deepened.

Sanctions, benefit reductions, delayed procedures, permanent review obligations, and the coupling of existential security to behavioral norms lead not only to temporary restrictions, but

to lasting existential insecurity. Poverty is thus not merely administered, but produced processually.

What is decisive here is not whether poverty would be theoretically reversible, but that in the institutional execution of the welfare state it is in fact treated as a permanent status, the overcoming of which is tied to conditions that are structurally scarcely attainable, particularly for vulnerable groups—such as neurodivergent, chronically ill, or socially isolated persons.

4.1.1 The Double Access to Poverty (“Double Hit”)

A central element of this logic of production consists in the fact that poverty is understood in welfare-state discourse almost exclusively as individual failure or private deviation, although it is predominantly structurally produced. Poverty arises not only through market mechanisms, but to a decisive extent through state action—whether through omission (inadequate wages, lack of security, deregulation) or through direct interventions (sanctions, cuts, exclusion mechanisms). The state is thus not merely a reactive instance, but a co-producer of the conditions under which poverty emerges and persists.

At the same time, the social benefits system intervenes precisely at this structurally produced poverty once again—yet not with recognition of its causes, but with a re-individualization of responsibility. Those affected are forced into a regime of activation, control, and behavioral norming that treats their situation not as the result of institutional deficits, but as an expression of personal inadequacy. This double access—first the structural production of poverty, followed by its moral and administrative individualization—leads to a secondary devaluation of those affected.

This mechanism, which *Speed’s Work* describes as the “double hit,” transforms structurally harmed persons into purportedly guilty ones. Poverty is thus not only materially produced, but simultaneously epistemically recoded: from an outcome of systemic conditions into a personal flaw, from a victim of state and economic structures into an object of disciplinary availability. The structural causes remain invisible, while those affected are once again burdened, controlled, and normed.

The welfare-state logic that addresses poverty exclusively as an individual problem is therefore not neutral, but functional. It stabilizes precisely those structures that produce poverty by shifting responsibility and depoliticizing critique. An analysis of povertism must grasp this double movement—production of poverty and subsequent attribution of blame—as a coherent mechanism in order to adequately capture the violent character of the system.

Within this logic lies the actual democratic endangerment of povertism: when poverty is structurally produced and simultaneously coded as individual failure, a mechanism emerges by means of which potentially any social group that is politically, culturally, or economically undesirable can first be pushed into poverty and subsequently automatically delegitimized, devalued, and rendered disciplinable.

4.2 Povertism as a Technique of Power

Povertism operates as a technique of power by deliberately deploying existential vulnerability in order to enforce conformity, adaptation, and self-discipline. The securing of the material basis of

life is tied to conditions that go far beyond the guarantee of legal minimum standards and intervene deeply in the conduct of life.

In this process, an asymmetrical relationship emerges in which benefit recipients appear not as bearers of social rights, but as contingently assessable cases. Poverty functions as a permanent state of pressure that restricts courses of action, delegitimizes resistance, and undermines long-term perspectives. In this sense, povertism is not merely economic, but disciplinarian and epistemically effective.

A central effect of this logic consists in the fact that suffering does not appear as a system error, but as a legitimate consequence of insufficient adaptation. Responsibility for structurally produced situations of distress is thus shifted onto those affected themselves—a mechanism that is central to the stability of the system.

4.3 Povertism and Racism: Structural Homology Rather Than Equivalence

The use of the term *povertism* deliberately draws on theories of racism without positing an equivalence between poverty and biological racism. What is meant is not an identity of phenomena, but a structural homology: in both cases, a socially ascribed status functions as a total marker that overrides individual characteristics, morally charges deviation, and legitimizes exclusion.

Within the povertist regime, poverty is treated not as a situational condition, but as an indicator of character. Benefit recipients appear as inherently deficient, in need of explanation, and in need of control. This logic corresponds to classical features of racist orders: anti-individualization, collective attribution, and the legitimation of unequal treatment.

The fact that poverty is not formally coded as biological does not relativize this structure. What is decisive is that it becomes institutionally effective as a permanent social marking that systematically restricts access to rights, credibility, and social participation.

4.4 Povertism as a Precondition for Right-Wing Radical Effects

Povertism forms the structural foundation for those right-wing radical effects that are analyzed in the following section. By effectively conditionalizing human dignity and binding existential security to requirements of conformity, a condition emerges in which fundamental rights no longer apply universally, but become dependent on usable behavior.

This dynamic is not the result of extremist ideologies, but an effect of administrative normality. Precisely herein lies its danger: povertism prepares the ground for forms of state practice that undermine human rights standards without understanding themselves as anti-democratic.

5. Right-Wing Radicalism as a Mode of Effect: Human Dignity Under Condition

In public discourse, the term *right-wing radicalism* is predominantly associated with party-political actors, ideological programs, or explicitly anti-democratic movements. In this work, by contrast, it is used in a functional sense in order to analyze modes of effect of state practice that can occur independently of political orientation or self-classification.

This conceptual shift is necessary because certain human-rights-relevant effects of modern welfare states are not captured by classical concepts of extremism. What is meant are not ideological positions, but structures in which equality, legal subjectivity, and claims to protection are factually suspended or conditionalized.

5.1 Functional Right-Wing Radicalism: Conceptual Definition

In this work, *functional right-wing radicalism* refers to those institutional modes of effect in which fundamental rights are no longer treated as inalienable, but as behavior-dependent. Human dignity is not formally denied, but practically relativized: it no longer applies universally, but only under certain conditions.

Characteristic of this mode of effect are three interconnected elements:

1. the systematic hierarchization of rights,
2. the legitimation of suffering as a necessary or educational means,
3. the epistemic devaluation of those affected by these practices.

Only the interplay of these elements constitutes functional right-wing radicalism. Not every form of state coercion or hierarchization falls under this concept. What is decisive is that existential vulnerability is not treated as a condition to be avoided, but is deployed as a functional instrument.

5.2 Conditionalized Dignity in the Welfare State

In the context of the Hartz IV and Bürgergeld system, this logic becomes evident in the coupling of existential security to standardized behavioral requirements. The claim to material basic security is not understood as a social right, but as a contingent benefit that can be restricted, withdrawn, or suspended in cases of deviation.

This practice produces an implicit hierarchy of persons: those whose way of life is considered conforming, and those whose existence is placed under reservation. The formal recognition of human dignity remains in place, but is functionally relativized in practice. Rights are not openly abolished, but are in fact gradually withdrawn.

It is precisely this form of creeping erosion that distinguishes functional right-wing radicalism from openly authoritarian regimes. It does not operate through states of exception, but in the normal operation of democratic administration.

This conditionalized dignity materializes particularly clearly in instruments such as integration agreements, which formally appear as cooperative contracts but functionally establish a sanction-backed structure of obedience. The original context of poverty—such as structural unemployment, health-related limitations, or institutionally produced precarity—is systematically obscured. In its place emerges a new narrative order in which poverty itself is no longer the problem, but insufficient cooperation. Guilt is not examined, but presupposed; relief occurs only through demonstrated conformity.

This recoding is legally and politically highly problematic. It transforms social rights into probation-dependent obligations and shifts the focus away from material existential security toward standardized behavioral governance. The integration agreement thus functions less as an instrument of assistance than as a preemptive contractual penalty: those who do not sign or

fail to meet the implicit expectations risk existential disadvantages, regardless of the actual cause of their poverty.

This logic is reinforced by a linguistic reframing of the system itself. Terms such as “basic security for jobseekers” semantically erase poverty and replace it with a purely functional status. Existential distress no longer appears as a social problem, but as a temporary lack of labor-market conformity. This reduction of complex life situations to a one-dimensional functional criterion is characteristic of authoritarian mechanisms of alignment in modern administrative states: deviation is not criminalized, but administratively normalized and rendered sanctionable.

It is precisely this combination of contractual fiction, recoding of guilt, and linguistic depoliticization that makes conditionalized dignity in the welfare state a central carrier of functional right-wing radicalism. The violence does not lie in the open abolition of rights, but in their systematic transformation into rewards for obedience.

5.3 Delimitation from Right-Wing Extremism and Authoritarian Ideologies

The conceptual usage developed here explicitly implies no equivalence with right-wing extremist ideologies, historical crimes, or authoritarian regimes. Right-wing extremism refers to political movements or programs that openly reject the democratic order. Functional right-wing radicalism, by contrast, describes effects that can arise within formally democratic structures.

This distinction is analytically central. It makes it possible to name human-rights-violating effects of state practice without attributing extremist intentions to actors. It is precisely this separation of intention and effect that renders the concept scientifically precise and prevents its reduction to a mere polemical term.

The danger of functional right-wing radicalism does not lie in the conscious abolition of rights, but in their administrative hollowing-out under the guise of efficiency, controllability, and attribution of responsibility.

5.4 Right-Wing Radicalism as a Phenomenon of Normal Operation

The conceptual definition proposed here leads to an uncomfortable, but analytically necessary conclusion: right-wing radical modes of effect are not confined to political extremist margins. They can emerge in the normal operation of state institutions when these systematically conditionalize human dignity, legitimize suffering, and delegitimize critique.

This observation implies no historical equivalence or moral dramatization. Rather, it points to a structural danger of modern administrative states in which market logics, efficiency criteria, and populist moral economies take precedence over universal rights. Functional right-wing radicalism is thus not an exceptional case, but a risk inherent in system logic.

Precisely because these dynamics occur within legal and democratic forms, they often escape perception. Their analysis therefore requires a conceptual precision that goes beyond classical models of extremism.

6. Historical Contexts: Social Racism, Eugenics, and the Continuity of Administrative Selection

The analysis of contemporary welfare-state practice requires a historical contextualization that avoids equivalences while taking structural continuities seriously. The embedding undertaken here in social-racist and eugenic traditions does not pursue the aim of morally delegitimizing present-day institutions or equating them with historical crimes. Rather, it serves to reconstruct modes of thought and administrative logics that can continue to operate across different political systems.

Modern bureaucracies in particular are characterized by the rhetorical marking of historical ruptures, while operative categories, classification schemes, and mechanisms of selection partially persist. The question is therefore not whether contemporary social policy is “still” racist or eugenic, but which structural features of earlier regimes continue to operate in transformed form.

6.1 Social Racism and Anti-Individualization

Even before the emergence of biological theories of race, forms of social racism existed in which poverty, “asociality,” or “work-shyness” were treated as collective characteristics. What was decisive was not the attribution of biological traits, but the construction of a social Other that was regarded as deficient, dangerous, or inferior.

Central to these logics is anti-individualization: individual life situations are not regarded as contingent or in need of explanation, but as expressions of a stable social type. Precisely this logic reappears in modern administrative practice when benefit recipients are treated primarily as cases, risks, or problem situations, whose individual speech is systematically relativized.

The recourse to social-racist concepts does not serve historical dramatization here, but analytical precision: it makes visible that the devaluation of certain groups is not bound to biological categories, but operates through social classification.

6.2 Eugenic Thought Patterns and Administrative Rationality

Eugenic programs of the early twentieth century combined social policy governance with biologist assumptions about worth, capacity for performance, and reproductive capability. For the present analysis, it is not the ideology of these programs that is decisive, but their administrative logic: the notion that social problems can be efficiently solved through selection, control, and exclusion.

Historically, this logic operated not only in explicitly authoritarian regimes, but also in reform-oriented welfare concepts. Decisive here is the shift from social support toward examination, evaluation, and sorting-out. Modern welfare states have abandoned the biologist premises, but not necessarily the selective rationality.

When contemporary systems distinguish between “eligible for support” and “not eligible for support” persons, elevate usability to an implicit norm, and tie existential security to adaptation performances, this does not constitute a return of eugenics, but rather a functional transformation of selective administrative logics.

6.3 Ruptures, Transformations, and Conceptual Caution

The emphasis on structural continuities must not be confused with a denial of historical ruptures. The legal anchoring of human dignity, international human rights regimes, and democratic control mechanisms constitute real differences. Precisely for this reason, it is analytically necessary to distinguish between ideological continuity and structural affinity.

The historical reference undertaken here explicitly operates with the concept of structural affinity. It does not claim an identity of systems, but points to recurring patterns of administrative rationality: classification, selection, normalization, and the legitimation of unequal treatment.

This differentiation is decisive in order to combine historical sensitivity with analytical sharpness.

6.4 Historical Depth of Focus as a Critical Instrument

The inclusion of historical contexts fulfills a critical function in this work. It prevents contemporary practices from appearing as natural, inevitable, or purely technocratic. By making the historical conditions of their emergence visible, it becomes clear that present-day administrative logics are likewise contingent and subject to change.

Historical depth of focus does not serve moral accusation here, but the denaturalization of institutional self-descriptions. It opens an analytical space in which contemporary forms of social selection can be understood as the result of specific decisions and power relations—and thus remain, in principle, open to critique and transformation.

7. Concepts, Defense, and Responsibility: On the Political Economy of De-Naming

The preceding sections have shown that classism, povertism, and functional right-wing radicalism are to be understood not as moral attributions, but as analytical concepts for describing structural modes of effect. Nevertheless, a substantial part of public, administrative, and legal contestation is directed not at the practices described themselves, but at the terminology with which they are named. This section analyzes this shift as an autonomous phenomenon of power.

7.1 “Exaggeration” as a Discursive Defense Strategy and a Human-Rights Distortion of Reality

The accusation of exaggeration is not a neutral measure of scientific appropriateness. It functions as a normative boundary-setting that determines which descriptions of social reality are considered permissible and which are not. This accusation most frequently targets those concepts that do not merely describe power relations, but expose them in their mode of operation.

In the context of the welfare state, this defense strategy has a specific human-rights dimension. The system is highly dependent on the reinterpretation or concealment of factual conditions through legal terminology, administrative categories, and institutional rhetoric. Terms such as “cooperation,” “support and demand,” “personal responsibility,” or “reasonable burden” do not function as neutral descriptions, but as performative assertions that produce legal facts.

This linguistic production of facts is particularly effective in judicial proceedings. Courts are structurally embedded in the task of securing institutional coherence and the preservation of the state's self-image. Severe systemic deficiencies are often neutralized not through explicit denial, but through rhetorical recoding: structural violence appears as an isolated case, systematic devaluation as administrative routine, and existential endangerment as social-policy reasonableness.

In this context, the accusation of exaggeration fulfills a dual function. On the one hand, it delegitimizes the critical description of real conditions. On the other hand, it stabilizes a legally produced normality in which practices that are problematic from a human-rights perspective appear proportionate, necessary, or without alternative. The boundary between factual determination and normative assertion is thereby systematically blurred.

A populist dimension is added to this dynamic. The welfare state operates within a public discourse that morally charges poverty and legitimizes social harshness. References to “benefit abuse,” “fairness toward taxpayers,” or “work incentives” generate a resonance space in which structural violence is not only accepted, but expected. Administration and the judiciary operate within this framework and reproduce it linguistically.

7.2 Hermeneutical Injustice and Epistemic Control

From an epistemological perspective, this mechanism can be described as a form of hermeneutical injustice. When those affected or critical researchers lack, or are denied, the concepts needed to adequately articulate their experiences, structural violence remains invisible or is individualized.

The demand to refrain from using terms such as racism or right-wing radicalism in the context of welfare-state practice does not constitute neutrality. It represents a refusal of concepts that systematically narrows the space of interpretation. Certain experiences may be lived, but may not be named in a language that would render their structural dimension visible.

Concepts themselves function here as instruments of power. It is not their analytical quality that determines their admissibility, but their political disruptive potential. Control over language thus becomes control over reality.

7.3 Scientific Conceptual Work, Responsibility, and the Rule of Law

A central misunderstanding consists in equating analytical conceptual usage with moral accusation. The concepts developed in this work—povertism, functional right-wing radicalism, administrative dehumanization—do not initially aim at attributing individual attitudes, but at describing structural modes of effect that operate independently of personal intentions.

This conceptual restraint must not, however, be confused with irresponsibility. In a constitutional state governed by the rule of law, it is not only permissible, but necessary, to render violence recognizable, nameable, and thus also justiciable. Concepts are the prerequisite for being able to identify culpable action and institutional breaches of duty at all.

Precisely because state violence is often exercised in a divided, formalized, and seemingly anonymous manner, there exists the danger of systematic diffusion of responsibility. Without precise concepts, concrete decisions disappear behind procedures, jurisdictions, or asserted

inevitability. Scientific conceptual work is therefore a prerequisite of legal responsibility, not its opposite.

The confrontation of responsible persons with analytically grounded concepts does not constitute a prejudgment, but the necessary preliminary stage of rule-of-law review. Only when it is clearly named which forms of violence, degradation, or discrimination are present can questions of individual responsibility, breach of duty, or culpable conduct be meaningfully addressed.

The demand to refrain from such concepts effectively amounts to transferring structural violence permanently into a legally non-graspable state. Critique is not refuted, but linguistically neutralized; responsibility is not clarified, but dissolved. Scientific conceptual work, in this sense, is not an escalation, but a democratic necessity.

8. Conclusion: Concepts as Democratic Infrastructure

The present work has shown that the analysis of the Hartz IV and Bürgergeld system requires a conceptual expansion that goes beyond established concepts of social inequality. Classism alone captures neither the active production of existential vulnerability nor the specific mechanisms of administrative dehumanization that are effective in modern welfare regimes. With the concept of *povertism*, an analytical category has therefore been introduced that understands poverty not as a given condition, but as a politically and institutionally produced instrument.

In addition, a functional concept of right-wing radicalism has been developed that makes it possible to analyze human-rights-relevant effects of state practice without resorting to intentional or party-political attributions. This perspective makes visible that right-wing radical modes of effect are not bound to political extremist margins, but can occur in the normal operation of administrative systems when human dignity is conditionalized, suffering is legitimized, and critique is epistemically delegitimized.

The historical embedding in social-racist and eugenic traditions did not serve to establish equivalence, but to provide contextualization. It shows that certain logics of selection, devaluation, and discipline are deeply anchored in the history of modern administration and vary across different political systems without fully losing their structural core.

A central concern of this work was the rejection of the accusation of conceptual exaggeration. It was argued that this accusation itself is part of a power strategy aimed at limiting the space of legitimate critique. Concepts are not merely linguistic labels, but epistemic tools that determine which forms of social reality become visible and discussable. Their refusal does not signify neutrality, but the stabilization of existing power relations.

In this sense, the conceptual work developed here understands itself as a contribution to the democratic infrastructure of critical research. It does not aim at scandalization, but at analytical responsibility: where state practice has existential consequences, the language of analysis must do justice to this reality. Only in this way can welfare statehood, social rights, and human dignity be not merely formally asserted, but made examinable in terms of their actual effects.

The present analysis is deliberately diagnostic in orientation; it nevertheless implies that models which decouple existential security from requirements of conformity are structurally suited to avoiding the mechanisms of violence described here.

The analysis presented here is possible in this form only because it is based on a unique constellation of long-term institutional exposure, autistic epistemic practice, and artistic research—a constellation that cannot be replicated, but whose results are theoretically connectable and verifiable.

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