



Marked Silence, Neo-Feudalistic Reactions and the Stabilized Moral Regime – The Current De- and Reformation of „the Social“¹

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1 Introduction

The German chancellor and leader of the German conservative party, Angela Merkel, said in an interview a few weeks ago: “Nobody could have imagined a few months ago to what extent we would be pushed into state intervention programs. Of course, Merkel spoke on, this intervention is not easy for anybody. Therefore, she recommended turning back to the former course as soon as possible”² (tagesschau.de, 11. März 2008, zit. nach Bildzeitungsinterview mit Angela Merkel, own translation). The worldwide celebrated new president of the United States, Barack Obama, said in an interview on CBS-News a few weeks before Merkel: “(...) there's no doubt that we have not been able yet to reset the confidence in the financial markets and in the consumer markets and among businesses that allow the economy to move forward in a strong way. And my job as president is gonna be to make sure that we restore that confidence“ (CBS News, 16. November 2008, Obama On Economic Crisis, Transition; <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/11/16/60minutes/main4607893.shtml>; Stand: 16. April 2009).

These are only two examples, but other statements are almost the same in the last months – particularly from political leaders in the OECD governments: The current crisis is seen as a period of an economic destabilization, distrust and lost confidence. Therefore, all solutions aim at re-building trust, confidence and, thereby, at a re-stabilized financial and economic institution and program structure. Consequently, the current crisis is primarily discussed as a crisis of the financial and economical system, as a period of economical weakness. Only one other aspect is also publicly present: the dimension of climatological and ecological questions. But this dimension seems to be a fig leaf of almost all current changes in rhetoric and is tied back to economical calculations, too: “Large-scale investment to fix global finances is an opportunity to move quickly to a low-carbon economy“, like the Guardian wrote in the mid of March (17th March 2009).

Questions of welfare, social security or social support are almost completely faded out in the current debates. The so-called *Group of Twenty* passed a its „Global plan for recovery and reform: the Communiqué from the London Summit“ in London on April the 2nd this year. Here, for instance, the term “welfare“ or “welfare state“ does not appear, and the same applies for “social security“, “social services“ or “social work“. “Social support“ and “social

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² In Original: „Niemand habe sich noch vor einigen Monaten träumen lassen, zu solchen staatlichen Eingriffen gezwungen sein zu können, sagte die CDU-Chefin. Dass dies in ihrer Partei niemandem leicht falle, sei „mehr als verständlich“. Daher sei sie dafür, nach der Krise so schnell wie möglich wieder zum alten Kurs zurückzukehren.“ (tagesschau.de, 11. März 2008, zit. nach Bildzeitungsinterview mit Angela Merkel) .

protection“ are only used twice regarding to the amount of \$ 50 billion which should be available for the “poorest countries“ – and even with regards to the term “public“ the paper only uses it in connection with “finance“ at one point: “public finance” and the promised “public report“ at another one.

The crisis seems to be discussed as a crisis of a (capitalist) *economy* and solutions should, therefore, be solutions by way of (capitalist) *economical* instruments and programs. Other political or even cultural and social aspects are not present in the current discussions – or almost represented only in very marginal notes.

This *economical mould* of the current crisis debate is not only a hegemonic pattern, but also backed by other political actors or better by their silence: the *marked silence* of social movements, but also of social support agencies, like social services or social work agencies.

2 “The Marked Silence“

In the fields of social work and social policy we can currently not find more than very single voices trying to make sense out of the developments we call “financial and economical crisis“. The same story, the other way around: Almost no public debate can be traced – in the public media or the institutionalized political settings – what will follow culturally and politically in reference to questions of social security and social support (see the London communiqué). It is astonishing, but it almost seems like the crisis is nothing to social work and social services yet, and also the managers of the current crisis assume that their crisis management has not be connected in any way to questions of social security, social support and welfare in general.

But what is this “marked silence” about?

I guess we have to distinguish different speaker positions with different reasons for their silence. My recommendation for the fields of social work and social services is to distinguish three groups.

At first, there is a group which has benefited from the marketization processes in the last years – like some managers of social services or social work organizations engaged in the area of workfare. This *profiteers of the marketization* are silent in the current crisis. Even if the real privatization of social service and social work organizations is not as successful in all countries as the neo-liberal programs wanted to suggest – for instance in Germany privatized social services still form only a small group and nothing more – even then, we have a radical managerialization and commodification *in* the organizations of social work – internally. Mostly, not the whole organizational unit is privatized, but the inherent logics has radically been changed, taylorized, managerialized and commodified.

And these *profiteers of the marketization* are silent in the moments of a crisis because their standing is slippery at that moment with less space arguing against state interventions in the eye of the economic re-regulation. So, the *profiteers of the marketizations* are silent – probably only for a while – hoping that the privatization and economization programs will get back their hegemony.

This leads me to a second group.

This is a group of *pre-state critics*. In the debate about the „economization of the social“ in social services and social work, as some governmentality thinkers called it, a parallel group of critics has been arguing quite generally against neo-liberalism – and on behalf of the welfare state. Their main diagnosis is as follows: The neo-liberal state is a weakened and reduced state, therefore reducing social welfare allocation radically. The analytical problem of that position was – or even is – first of all that, as Bob, Nik/Jamie or Volker have already convincingly shown, that the neo-liberal state is a different state, not a general, weak one. And secondly, the pre-state critics ignored and are still ignoring almost all welfare state critique, like feminist, gay or black movements have been mentioning since the 1960s. Rassism and genderism, but also classism as constitutive moments of the existing welfare states, have not been discussed by the pre-state critics. They rather argued just “pre-state” – suggesting there is something like “the state”. And now they are silent because for them the current regulation and state intervention programs seem to end the anti-state period. The crisis management seems to bring “the state” back in: Here, this group of pre-state critics builds a coalition with leading political figures who recapitulated in the last weeks that the state was the primate and the market not any more. Pre-state critics keep quiet as long as they feel their ideas are prevailing: No reason to criticize the current crisis management in general.

Thirdly, there is a group which could be predestinated to raise such critical voices against the economical mould of the current debates about the crisis. What are the reasons for this? Because social work and social services originate from humanitarian and political ideals represented by social movements in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, social work is deeply connected to social movements, critical to the state and the market. But as mentioned before, voices from the civil society are really weak in these days for two reasons, I think. First of all, because a “market state-dispositive“ has been established to battle against the crisis; thus, a strategically very problematic situation for social movements, like Ulrich Brand, a German state theorist, marked on the occasion of our symposium near Berlin three weeks ago – we did to honour Margit. Secondly – and I guess this is the more important reason regarding social work and social services: Critical positions are weakened, not only because explicit pre-state critics are mostly welfare state-focused. The relation between social services and social work and the welfare state is characterized by a paradox from the very beginning. On the one hand, social work and social services are constitutive welfare state agents, they are part of the welfare arrangements. On the other hand, they presented themselves as anti-state, as only social justice-oriented, pre-user-oriented, etc., mostly ignoring their position as welfare state agencies – both in practice and in theory. At that point social work theory has still immense shortcomings concerning questions of power and domination, the state and political-economy. And therefore, social work has still only a very weak reflexive background for critical distance. It is a little bit like the Party of the left in Germany at the moment. While the parties in the government were raising pensions between 2.5 and 3.3 %, the party of the left called for a minimum increase of 4% – not reflecting in any way that the German pension system is one of the most stratified pension systems throughout Europe.

To summarize at this point:

- profiteers of marketization keep quiet because they lost - even temporarily - public and political legitimation,
- pre-state critics are silent because they generally agree to the suggested direction of the current crisis management: more state regulation
- and a critical social work appears weak because of the loss of analytical distance from being part of the welfare arrangement.

3 Resume: Pre-Welfarist, Neo-Feudalistic Form of and an Ongoing Moral Regime

Even if somebody can agree so far, they could probably argue: "Admittedly, there are at least two major exceptions to that marked silence in the fields of social work and social services." And, of course, there are: first of all, the increasing debate and implementation of a *charity economy* and, secondly, the *stabilization of a moral regime*.

3.1 Pre-Welfarist, Neo-Feudalistic Form

The first exception appears in the debate about *increasing poverty* and about *decreasing lack of financial coverage* a growing number of social work organizations experience. Both aspects are discussed to a small extent in the last months and are publicly present.

But both aspects are discussed in a remarkable way – and this is one reason why I will keep up my argument of a marked silence. A second reason follows arguments of regulation theorists like Bonb Jessop or Jamie Peck, who do show a deep continuity of post-welfare strategies which have already started at the end of the 20th century.

There is a debate about increasing poverty, as it is coming to a head in the current crisis – a debate which is not at least symbolized by the unemployed citizens of New York forming longer and longer queues in front of soup kitchens, or the increasing number of children using soup kitchens, for instance, in Berlin or London. But what we can see here – on the one hand – is *not* the reaction of welfare state agents – even social work and social services are engaged in these forms of aid. What we can see here, I guess, is an *increasing charity economy*, while there is almost no sign of political engagement for widening, stabilizing and developing the publicly organized welfare. Thus, we have a debate on an increasing poverty, but the recommendations to react and the tangible reaction models are leading us behind the ideas of welfare for which social movements fought. Therefore, these reactions are no critical moment for breaking the silence *from* a perspective of welfare agents, like social work and social services – and therefore, they do not break the marked silence. On the other hand, the booming charity economy is not a new phenomenon of the past 12 months. Especially in the state-based welfare arrangements, like in Germany or Austria, where the pre-welfare charity economy was integrated in the corporatist structure of the welfare state, we can notice a remarkably high dynamic during the past 5-10 years which was coming to a head in the past twelve months. For instance, in Germany, the number of soup kitchens increased in the last six years from 320 (2003) to more than 850 at the beginning of this year. More than 100 of these start-ups took place in the last 10 months.

This booming charity economy leads me to the second aspect of the first exception: the lack of financial coverage. Especially these organizations which are engaged in this massively grown charity economy are mostly dependent on loyalty. Soup kitchens and similar programs

are mostly or even only based on private donations. Again, this privatization of a former public support – or even legally guaranteed support does not break the silence because it works well with the not-existing-debate about a public and social infrastructure, needed in the moment of a crisis. And at the same time, this tendency of substituting former welfare support by charity is not a general shift from post-welfare to "post-post-welfare" or something like this, but a moment of lengthening the post-welfarist strategies of the last years – started years before the current crisis.

So, it seems as if the marked silence of social work and social services concerning the current crisis mirrors the situation of those actors who are already part of a fundamental transformation, a process of a re- and deformation of the social, which has been starting years before the current crisis.

I want to illustrate that moment in regard to the second exception: the re-stabilization of a moral regime.

3.2 The Stabilized Moral Regime

Currently, we cannot only recognize the attempt "to make sure that we restore (the) confidence (into the financial markets)", as Barack Obama, as US president, said, or "to turn back to the former course as soon as possible" as Angela Merkel, as German chancellor, has argued – we cannot only recognize this understanding of the economic crisis as a period, a period in the actually existing capitalism. With just looking onto the marked silence in the fields of social work and social service, we also have to recognize the re-stabilization of main strategies of governing, characterizing the advanced or neo-liberal programs in the last years. And especially one main strategy: the stabilization of new moral regimes.

Post-welfarist governance in the fields of social work and social services since the 1980s and 1990s is characterized by the utilization of experts' knowledge to control the behavior of populations and subjects on the one hand and to focus on small units on the other hand. This is what Garland and other criminologists call "responsibilization" and governmentality thinkers have categorized as "an activation policy" connected with a new "punitivity" – strategies which are not at least very present in social services if you look at the so-called "Early Support"/"Early Warning Systems" in the Netherlands or the German speaking countries, or at the parallel debates about "anti-social behaviour" in the UK in the last years.

These strategies - focussing on small responsible units, like parents or the neighbourhood, and no longer on the communal or national state as a political units – are not criticized at the moment, although it would be politically convincing to think about the connection of responsibilization, activation and privatization programs *and* the break-down of regulation patterns which are based on the individualized calculation. But instead the current crisis management lengthens the moral regime, re-stabilizes the moments of individualized risk calculation. There are no significant signs of demoralizing the families as responsible units for the anti- or pre-social behavior of their children, no significance of demoralizing specific proletarian and post-proletarian life styles, stigmatized as being uncivilized, as being an outprint of being a member of a "new underclass".

The current debate about the crisis and the connected crisis management is characterized by an economical mould. This is one reason why discussions about what happens and what should happen concerning the formation of "the Social", to follow Robert Castel, has not yet started in the fields of social work and social services – apart from some, and only "some" –

academic circles and some circles by political activists. But another reason is probably very basic: social work and social services are part of the post-welfarist regime, often (re)producing the dominating regulation and governing strategies and not acting actively the dilemma of being part of the advanced state, to use a Gramscian concept, and at the same time acting as a *Bildungsinstanz*, an agency which widens the action space for the users.

The current debate about the crisis and the connected crisis management could probably be a reminder of the process of the de- and reformation of “the Social” as it was established in the 19th and early 20th century as a welfare arrangement, and as it is re-established since the 1970s as a post-welfare arrangement. What we can learn by analyzing the transformation of social work and social services could be that currently the revised patterns of domination characterizing post-welfarism become very seeable, especially in the so-called middle-class of OECD countries. But internally, like in the area of social services, the main strategies of individual risk calculation, activation, responsabilization and a new punitivity have already been institutionalized since 10-15 years.

So, the needed empiricism of “the social in crisis“ can temporarily not be started in the summer of 2007, but has to focus on the diverse “materialist-discursive practices” which are in transformation, meaning to analyse which parts are in a continuity to former practices – like the comeback of the pre-welfare charity economy – and which are in a discontinuity to them – like the responsabilization of families compared to former welfare strategies. But that would be another story about “analyzing political rationalities” which has to be told somewhere else.

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