

INTRODUCTION



In the summer of 2006, just one out of fifty-one students leaving the Galilei-Schule in Berlin's Neukölln district found an apprenticeship. At the time of my research some years later, the figure was three. The problem has long been known to the public, statistics regularly document social inequalities in the education system, and politicians dutifully lament the resulting injustices. How these conditions impact on those concerned, however, remains largely hidden behind the numbers and statements. When addressing this issue, emotions are crucial. Emotional literacy has been a key focus of school education in Germany since the late eighteenth century,¹ but which feelings are generated by school practices today? This book inquires both into the specific emotions and affects created by an exclusionary education system, and into the resulting emotional dispositions and processes of subjectivization under the conditions prevailing in today's society. This ethnography of a school in Berlin thus puts the emotional experiences of students centre stage and proposes a political reading of feelings.

During the 2012/13 school year, I carried out fieldwork at a school in the Berlin district of Neukölln that is considered especially problematic, referred to in this study as the 'Galilei-Schule' (not its real name). At the time, as part of a programme of structural reform, the school was in transition from a *Hauptschule* to a *Sekundarschule*. The *Hauptschule*, typically attended by lower-class and immigrant students, was located at the bottom of the tripartite German school system often blamed by international education surveys such as PISA for obstructing social mobility.² In spite of the reforms, the already difficult conditions at the school had hardly improved, in some cases even becoming worse. I accompanied two tenth-grade classes, who were among the last to graduate from the *Hauptschule* in Berlin, using various ethnographic methods, mainly participant observation and narrative interviews, both during and outside lessons. For each

of the emotional states I studied, the question of the appropriate approach arose afresh, which is why I use different sources over the course of the book. In some chapters, I expand my materials beyond observations and interviews, for example concerning subject models circulating in teenage popular culture and their media expressions. Most of those I spoke to were young men – the classes under study were two thirds male, added to which I found it generally easier to connect with them. At certain points, however, I do explicitly discuss divergent emotional practices of female students. By highlighting received patterns of gendered emotion and gendered models of emotional behaviour, I reconstruct forms of *doing gender*. Since the great majority of the students were second-generation migrants, the themes of ethnicity and migration also play an important role here, including the ways these themes intersect with issues of gender and class.

This book operates at the interface between two fields of research that have, to date, been largely separate: the study of processes of social exclusion on the one hand and, on the other, the analysis of affects and emotions. In Germany, processes of exclusion and growing precariousness in post-industrial societies have been examined in detail, largely since the labour market reforms of the early 2000s (the ‘Hartz’ reforms). As well as being accompanied by the spread of precarious employment in the low-wage sector, the new regulations also linked structurally produced unemployment with a moralizing suspicion of laziness. In this context, I stress that this is not just a matter of material deprivation or lack of access to secure jobs, but that it also involves a heightened sense of devaluation and worthlessness. And this affective-moral imbalance of the current social order is best examined via the kind of ‘affective turn’ that has been fostered in the social sciences and cultural studies for some years now. Emotional states in the lower strata of society are very different today than they were in Fordist times, when proletarian culture and the labour movement offered a meaningful and dignified frame of reference for the formation of a sub-bourgeois identity. For teenagers growing up in Berlin-Neukölln, these traditional resources for self-empowerment, together with the associated political programmes, have become largely irrelevant. This raises the question of how the emotions and affects of students with few opportunities in the labour market are now being structured.

Focussing attention on the emotional aspects of growing up at the bottom end of Germany’s hierarchically organized education system also opens up a critical perspective on school in the context of social inequality. A ‘dense’ description of emotional experiences of inferiority allows a differentiated and situated social critique that is also stark and drastic. Explicitly situating the research in ‘neoliberal times’ opens up a historical perspective, addressing negative developments while seeking to avoid reductionism. The

usual view is inverted here: instead of blaming teenagers and their parents for the obvious crisis of education at the Galilei-Schule, I consider the main problem to be the current state of school as an institution. In the accounts presented, the students' creative and cognitive potential is underlined, while this potential is shown to be developed in ways that often bypass school, or can even work against it. This does not mean that individual teachers are to blame; instead, we are collectively responsible, as a society, for the wrongs described here.

Ethnography of Exclusion

Since the 1980s, discussions around exclusion, in the social sciences and in public discourse, driven forward in particular by contributions from France, have taken place in response to growing divisions within society, the return of mass unemployment, and fears of social decline in ever broader sections of the population.³ I make no strict distinction here between concepts like exclusion, marginalization or precarity, using these and other terms to explore the question of how social exclusion is produced, experienced and processed in everyday life. I would, however, like to point out some basic conceptual assumptions: exclusion does not mean being absolutely shut out of society; it is understood here instead as a specific form of intrasocietal inequality, an inequality of 'inside' and 'outside', as seen for example in Germany's multi-tiered school system.⁴ These conditions of exclusion are created within a global framework of power shaped by postcolonial structures, and the emotional experience of inequality is always relational, resulting from specific and different contexts of comparison.⁵ And rather than just locating precarity in a specific zone of the labour market, where it is particularly widespread, I also understand it as a characteristic of contemporary society, not strictly limited to specific milieus or spheres.⁶

In my previous book, published in Germany under the title *Hauptschüler. Zur gesellschaftlichen Produktion von Verachtung* (Hauptschule Students: On the Societal Production of Contempt), I refer to the theory of recognition formulated by Axel Honneth, stressing the fact that *Hauptschule* students are excluded not only in socioeconomic terms, but also symbolically. Using the example of a *Hauptschule* in Berlin's Wedding district, I describe how students are not only systematically denied access to goods, resources and opportunities, but that they are also despised and humiliated. In his book *Kampf um Anerkennung* (Struggle for Recognition), Honneth distinguishes between emotional, legal and social recognition, linking them on a personal level with forms of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Berlin's *Hauptschule* students are often denied all

three kinds of recognition, an extremely problematic mix of social disdain and cultural devalorization with precarious family conditions and a lack of German citizenship. Honneth refers to this form of denied recognition as ‘disregard’ (*Missachtung*), stressing that key resources for successful identity development are withheld from those concerned.⁷ I choose to speak instead of ‘contempt’ (*Verachtung*) to place more emphasis on the emotional dimension of processes of exclusion, while also highlighting the fact that *Hauptschule* students are not only denied something, but that their dignity is actively infringed upon.⁸ By contempt, then, I mean a form of social discrediting of specific individuals or groups on the basis of negative value judgements and emotional defence mechanisms.

In this ethnographic study of *Hauptschule* students in Berlin’s Neukölln district, I revisit some aspects of these arguments, elaborating on them and turning them in a slightly different direction. From a focus on the production of exclusion and contempt, the focus shifts to the question of how this is experienced and processed by the students. Exclusion is produced in school mainly via the everyday actions of teachers and routine bureaucratic decisions that often inadvertently obey mechanisms of social exclusion.⁹ Contempt is revealed in day-to-day humiliation, above all in the often-heard claims that *Hauptschule* students are stupid, lazy or otherwise inferior. At the *Hauptschule* schools I studied in Berlin, this mode of socio-moral devalorization had already become largely normalized, so that even well-meaning members of staff unconsciously followed the pattern. Social exclusion is rarely experienced in abstract terms with relation to structures of social inequality. Instead, it is mainly perceived indirectly and in strongly emotional ways: shame over bad grades, anger towards specific teachers, or fear of unemployment. These modes of experience are joined by playfully ironic, coolly distanced and defiantly aggressive responses to social devalorization that can also be understood as pop-cultural variants of dealing with exclusion. The following chapters examine a range of different modes of coping with this plight. The students try to adapt to hostile conditions, attributing their ‘failure’ largely to themselves, but also reacting with striking aggression towards society, their forms of youthful protest often being both creative and marginalizing at the same time.

This book describes and analyses depressing conditions at a Berlin school. To use a category proposed by Sherry Ortner, it could be called a ‘dark’ ethnography.¹⁰ Ortner was referring to the tendency in ethnographic writing since the 1980s to focus increasingly on everyday hardships and their structural causes in the context of neoliberal transformations. But this sociopolitical thrust of social and cultural anthropology was accompanied by alternative currents that balanced it out and took it further. Ortner mentions an increased focus on questions of a good, meaningful

and forward-looking life, as well as a revival of ethnographic criticism in the double sense of ethnographers tending to study oppositional behaviours and also viewing their writing itself as a form of social critique. *That Sinking Feeling* brings these various tendencies together: the book describes the full extent of the miserable conditions at the Galilei-Schule, among others as a way of counteracting neoliberal strategies of ideological obfuscation, as when promising school reforms are used by the state to camouflage cuts to education budgets. Viewing emotions as morally coded practices always raises the question of the ‘right’ life or the ‘wrong’ one, of the conditions for a successful life, and of the ways ‘failure’ is experienced. Finally, the book focusses particular attention on forms of critique beyond grand political gestures, seeking to arrive at a form of critical writing that avoids some of the typical pitfalls of critical analyses of society (adopting a dogmatic tone, taking the moral high ground, ignoring everyday problems). Instead, it attempts a form of critical writing that relates reflexively to its subject, that highlights situated moments of resistance without romanticizing them, and that explores complexities while remaining understandable.¹¹

With this ethnography of *Hauptschule* students in Neukölln, I am also writing against the unfortunate separation of social reportage and social analysis that crept in as poverty studies gradually mutated into academic research on exclusion and inequality. Classic studies of poverty in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were often trenchant forms of social critique based on participant observation and personal contact with those concerned. Rather than seeing poverty as something tied to specific individuals, exclusion research now understands it as the result of social conditions. But this valid insight came at the price of withdrawing to a desk at the university, where one can reflect on social conditions undisturbed. What was lost was an empathetic grasp of strongly emotional modes of experiencing social devalorization – something now addressed mainly by journalists and literary writers, photographers and filmmakers. Social scientists, on the other hand (at least at German universities), focus mainly on developing their analytical vocabulary. In such a constellation, ethnographic close-ups and personal involvement are quickly labelled ‘subjective’ and ‘romantic’ – and thus not scientific.

My ethnographic writing aims to blend analysis of the reproduction of social exclusion with a focus on the emotional experience of social devalorization. This ethnography of emotional responses to attributions of inferiority combines historical reconstructions and theoretical reflections with an empirical approach in which I address emotions in various ways, via: atmospheres and sociospatial situatedness; narrative and discourse; engagement with objects and documents; film and popular culture; body and media practices; social interactions and school hierarchies; modes of assessment

and forms of repression; and via personal positionings and prospects for the future. My arguments are mostly based on descriptions of complex situations, discussed on the basis of extended field observation. Below the level of more abstract concepts like norm, identity or role, observing situations in this way gives access to the students' emotional and affective practices, revealing both peculiarities and patterns. As well as being eminently illustrative, such descriptions of complex situations also take on a significance that goes beyond the specific individual case in question. As well as addressing fundamental questions of social order, this opens up a more everyday, pragmatic viewpoint that may help to avoid certain situations, or at least to make momentarily unavoidable situations easier to handle.

Emotions and Affects: A Political Reading

Studying the emotional states typically generated by schools gives a striking picture of the severe impact of being viewed and treated as inferior by society. This book renders visible the emotional dimension of exclusion and situates it within current processes of societal transformation. Like pieces of a puzzle, the following chapters offer different elements of the culture of devalorization and self-assertion among a young, urban underclass, exploring different aspects of the way they experience and deal with socially produced inferiority. Juxtaposing and linking various, sometimes conflicting, emotional states in this way paints a many-layered picture of the emotional space of the Galilei-Schule. One might refer to the result as an 'affect map' or 'assemblage'.¹² Such an approach, which is open to experimental methods, reconstructs and arranges emerging and incomplete emotional patterns that already possess a certain structural direction. This heterogeneity also counteracts the tendency to treat individuals from lower social classes as psychologically uniform, often characterized as lacking both control over their emotions and cultivated interiority – thus paradoxically labelling them as both excessively emotional and not emotional in the 'proper' manner.¹³

The book combines approaches from the sociology and anthropology of emotions, cultural studies and affect theory.¹⁴ The sociology of emotions looks at the emotional labour inscribed into hierarchical social settings, though I look at processes not only of adaptation and coping but also of subverting and resisting institutional demands.¹⁵ I look both at explicit/targeted forms of pedagogical address in the classroom and at implicit/embodied modes of feeling in the context of socialization in a teenage peer group – categories that may at times be in conflict.¹⁶ The anthropology of emotions locates the formation of feelings in specific social locations and historical settings, in this case a run-down school located in a poor

neighbourhood of Berlin with a mainly post-migrant student population that has been severely afflicted by the ongoing neoliberal remodelling of Germany's education system. With a cultural studies perspective, I add an emphasis on cultural scripts and cultural frames that significantly shape processes of emotional and affective modelling, for example by looking at notions of the 'ghetto' and the figure of the boxer. A theory of affects inspired by Spinoza stresses their relationality; in this view, the individual manifests in relations of affecting and being affected.¹⁷ While these relations are shaped by specific affective arrangements (in our case the school's infrastructure and the social hierarchies inscribed within it), affective disposition also plays a key role; this, too, is in part socially determined, for example by growing up in conditions marked by poverty.¹⁸ In this study, then, the formation of feeling is examined from different disciplinary angles and theoretical perspectives.

That Sinking Feeling seeks, above all, to establish links between emotions/affects and structural power relations within society. My critical reading of 'school as a state apparatus'¹⁹ emphasizes the political in the everyday, applying an ethnographic sensibility to register current affective calibrations and the shifting emotional terrain of teenage subjectivization at the bottom end of the social hierarchy.²⁰ This is challenging in particular because a still-influential philosophical tradition tends to view emotions as expressions of individual psychology or as naturally given, rather than as relational, societal phenomena or as cultural categories.²¹ Using a practice theory approach, the study focuses on *doing emotion* in verbal, physical, gestural and other forms. Rather than understanding these practices as intentional or individualistic, I relate them to past and present cultural patterns of expression.²² A broad definition of feeling allows me to examine not only emotions like anger, shame and fear, but also affectively charged everyday phenomena like boredom, coolness and aggressivity. Switching between these various terms (feeling, emotion, affect) helps me not to lose sight of the complexity and open-endedness of emotional behaviours. Also, rather than distinguishing categorically between emotions and affects – as advocated, for example, by Canadian social theorist Brian Massumi – I locate them conceptually and empirically on a common level, with gradations in terms of their formation and structure.²³

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the philosopher John Dewey stressed that successful education, in the sense of a process of development towards maturity, is only achieved through profound experiences, while the kind of experiences gathered by young people in school are often of the wrong kind, primarily negative and inhibiting.²⁴ While this remains true today, the concept of experience has its pitfalls, leading cultural and social anthropologists both to embrace it excessively and to vehemently reject it.

In the 1970s and 1980s, inspired by Dewey, ethnologists like Victor Turner built their ethnographic project around an emphatic concept of experience, by which they meant special, extraordinary moments that stood out from everyday routine.²⁵ In the early 1990s, Joan Scott and others rightly turned against the romanticizing claim to authenticity of this concept of experience, causing it to vanish from ethnological book titles for a while.²⁶ The discursive and deconstructive turns then brought forth their own limitations, while the material and sensual turns saw a revival of the concept of experience, although it is now mostly used in a cautious, historically reflected manner.²⁷ In this sense, rather than marking especially ‘original’ or ‘inward’ sensations, experience refers here both to moments that stand out from school routine and to slowly accumulating everyday experiences that are socially constructed and sometimes reflected on. Such emotional experiences are explored from various viewpoints, both with regard to their fragmentary and disruptive character, and taking into account their role in making meaning and reproducing social structures.²⁸

Examining the emotional space of the *Hauptschule*, I focus on phenomena shown by my field research to be of key importance with regard to processes of social exclusion. (I) Boredom and distraction: I understand boredom not only as a temporal phenomenon resulting from the perceived meaninglessness of lessons, but also as a consequence of neglected spaces. A depressive school atmosphere is not simply ‘there’, it is ‘made’ – and it results in typical reactions, as I show using the examples of ‘trash talk’ and ‘clowning’. (II) Forms of self-empowerment are reconstructed using examples from youth and popular culture: coolness is not a character trait but a (not always successful) pose and an (often contested) attribute, studied here using the example of selfies posted on Facebook by students; by ‘ghetto pride’ I mean a highly ambivalent form of self-validation, especially common in hip-hop culture, in which sociospatial marginalization is reinterpreted as a source of pride. (III) Feelings of inadequacy like shame and embarrassment not only arise from low levels of status and recognition, but are also considered inferior or worthless in their own right, treated largely as ‘ugly feelings’.²⁹ This value judgement impacts on the way such feelings are experienced; since they are often hidden or glossed over, their presence in school is felt in indirect, latent ways. (IV) Anger and aggressivity are related to the social conditions under which they emerge, and to the value judgements and views associated with them. Using the example of a school strike provoked by classism and racism, and the various components of the ‘boxer style’, I examine the sociality, morality and physicality of these antagonistic emotions. Finally, in section (V), I look beyond school to describe hopes and fears for the future that are especially pronounced among Berlin’s *Hauptschule* students on account of their precarious social position and

their predominantly migrant background. By meeting students again several years later, I also gained a longer-term view of biographical developments. The clusters of emotions discussed here cannot be understood in isolation; they are many-layered, mixed feelings that reflect specific ways of experiencing and processing social exclusion.³⁰

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been increased scientific interest in emotions and affects across disciplines.³¹ In my description of the affective space of the *Hauptschule*, I take common assumptions concerning the social conditioning of feelings one step further by foregrounding the conditions under which these feelings emerge and their political potential in the context of social exclusion.³² Emotions and affects articulate social discord, but also utopian desires, allowing repression and resistance to be lived and experienced in practical terms. By emphasizing the politics of affects and emotions, rather than turning away from post-Marxist questions of class structures and exploitation, I refine and readjust these questions, knocking them off their pedestal of philosophical and political rhetoric and approaching them instead via everyday processes of subjectivization. This also implies a clear rejection of all those who think that focussing on feelings makes it possible to ignore the hierarchical order of our society. But neither does a political reading of affects and emotions mean one-sidedly reducing feelings to sociostructural conditions and meanings. Moreover, I reject simple positive-negative readings of emotional phenomena – positively connoted emotions like pride and coolness are also discussed in terms of their self-excluding effects and negatively connoted feelings like anger and envy with a view to their emancipatory and critical potential. The political dimension of affects and emotions is strongly related to their role as a central element of social order and subject formation.³³

Structures of Feeling

The detailed reconstruction of differing emotional experiences in the context of social marginalization is guided by the question of whether looking at these various affective states allows broader structures of feeling to be identified. As used by Raymond Williams, the term ‘structures of feeling’ concerns the cultural practice of an era, a sense of the lived historical moment that can only ever be reconstructed in approximate form.³⁴ Structures of feeling, then, are scientifically constructed hypotheses that seek to link elements of a cultural constellation, past or present, with specific affective states typical of the period. In my study, the capitalist class system and processes of neo-liberalization offer a matrix through which to view the stratification of the school system and the devalorization of this

system's 'losers'. When such analytical categories are used thoughtlessly, however, the ambiguity of affects and emotions may be lost. Williams warns against viewing cultural activities as discrete products and translating them into fixed semantic forms. Instead of this, I proceed empirically, reconstructing individual clusters of affects and emotions step by step with regard to processes of social exclusion. This approach stresses the ambivalences and contradictions of emotional phenomena, their many layers and facets, their context – and situation-specificity, but without losing sight of the 'big' issues of power and inequality – in fact, it is the details that reveal the alarming affective impact of today's processes of exclusion.

Between the 1950s and the 1980s, Williams revised his formulation of this concept several times; rather than establishing a fixed theoretical structure, he used it to outline a specific analytical perspective. Having originally assumed a generational evolution of emotional structures over time, he later placed more emphasis on the divergences and tensions within the emotional culture of a specific period due to stratification.³⁵ His approach belonged to what is sometimes called a 'culturalist' strain of Marxist thought, in which social practices were no longer extrapolated mechanistically from economic conditions. But Williams went beyond a mere rehabilitation of the cultural by focussing attention not only on literary and artistic practices, but also on everyday life and popular culture. Structures of feeling stand for the lived culture of an era, for the ways in which feelings shape the way social structures are experienced and perpetually reproduced in everyday life.³⁶ In this way, formations within society can be identified before fixed concepts for them have been established. Whereas Williams saw such emergent forms primarily as related to progressive movements in the Marxist sense, authors who came after him, like Stuart Hall, used related concepts to identify the gradual rise since the 1970s of a more neoliberal form of capitalist society.³⁷ The task of social and cultural analysis is to trace these forms, to portray them in detail, and to interpret their links to past or present sociopolitical formations.

Williams's work on structures of feeling has been much discussed and applied in various contexts. Criticism focussed, among other things, on his underlying definitions of culture and experience, while empirical links were made to working-class culture and to the British school system.³⁸ Taking Williams and other writers from cultural studies as their points of departure, Jennifer Harding and Deirdre Pribram underlined the central role of emotions in social positioning in terms of subject categories such as class, ethnicity and gender.³⁹ In their reflections on structures of feeling, Ben Highmore and Rainer Schützeichel chose alternative terms like 'formations of feelings' and 'emotional milieus', avoiding the problematic aspects of the notion of structure without losing sight of a certain regularity of

emotional states.⁴⁰ With reference to Williams, Ann Stoler and Lauren Berlant set out to shed light on the affective underpinnings of colonial and neoliberal regimes, arriving at such innovative notions as ‘affective states’ and ‘cruel optimism’.⁴¹

As a concept, structures of feeling is at odds with some current developments in cultural and social theory, and this is especially obvious in the examples of affect and practice theory. Williams can be seen as a precursor of these branches of theory, while also serving as a warning against some of their shortcomings. His fondness for emerging cultural forms located at or beyond the limits of our semantic grasp, and his profound scepticism concerning over-hasty conceptual closure, stand for a critique of representation that is also fundamental to more recent theories of affect. In affect studies, Williams is seen as an important source of inspiration, but other authors, above all Gilles Deleuze, play a far more prominent role.⁴² While awareness of latent and ephemeral affective phenomena has continually grown in this and neighbouring fields of research in the social sciences since the turn of the millennium (for example, in the studies on atmospheres I quote in chapter 1), less attention has been paid to their structural conditioning. In this regard, standards of reflection have tended to regress: on the one hand, a neuroscience camp has returned to a view of feelings as biological automatisms while, on the other, some post-Deleuzian readings celebrate affects as ‘autonomous’, as spontaneous, pre-social, revolutionary cells.⁴³

In the field of practice theory, too, Williams’s ‘cultural’ Marxism could be taken as an important point of reference, but the focus tends to be more on authors like Pierre Bourdieu. Compared with Williams’s vague formulations of the relation between practice and structure, the vocabulary of social theory has been considerably expanded since his times, systematically integrating new fields such as objects, bodies and senses.⁴⁴ Emotions, too, have received more attention within practice theory, now viewed not as a character trait, but as a practice, discussed in terms of doing rather than having. A distinction can be made here between narrow and broad concepts of emotion, with corresponding heuristics: Monique Scheer favours the term ‘emotional practices’, among others, in order to distinguish specific emotional practices (mobilizing, naming, communicating and regulating emotions) from other forms of practice.⁴⁵ Andreas Reckwitz advocates a broad definition of the affective in the sense of being motivated and directed, emphasizing the fundamentally affective tone of practices and of social order.⁴⁶ Margaret Wetherell also speaks of affective practice but, more in the sense of ‘embodied meaning making’, she stresses the patterned, structured and habitual qualities of affects and emotions.⁴⁷ In the course of this turn to practice theory, however, certain postulates were also lost, above all the vehemence of Williams’s Marxist social critique. Rather

than aiming for academic specifications, his studies were primarily forms of social critique and they were discussed beyond the academy as public interventions. Within the field of practice theory, as well, two programmatic positions can be identified, each with its strengths and weaknesses: a situationally oriented current, taking its lead from ethnomethodology and Goffman, in which tools of micro-sociological analysis are refined while neglecting links to social structures and hierarchies, and a structuralist current, oriented mainly towards Bourdieu, that leaves little space for the peculiarities and surprises of lived practice.

My study centres on deeply ambivalent, even disconcerting emotional experiences of inferiority resulting from prevailing conditions within society. As well as tendencies towards the individualization and depoliticization of social inequality, I also observed forms of emotional revolt and situated critique that did not fit into established political categories. On the one hand, *Hauptschule* students integrated themselves into the social order with particular zeal by validating basic meritocratic assumptions. On the other, forms of disregard on the part of the school were often subverted, satirized and attacked. School as an institution appeared both influential and dysfunctional, producing devalorization and negative social selection, at odds with its own stated aims of integration and education.

Neoliberal Times

The fact that *Hauptschule* students are considered inferior, their low rank within the educational hierarchy seen as an expression of moral and intellectual deficits, is in itself symptomatic of a social order in which the losers of exacerbated competition are blamed for their failures. My study examines the affective and emotional implications of this contemporary form of morally charged social hierarchization in detail, reconstructing processes of neo-liberalization ‘from below’.⁴⁸

Neoliberalism is a controversial concept, used to both describe and pass judgement on very different phenomena. But precisely this possibility of dealing with a range of different political-economic developments – liberalization of labour markets, deregulation of financial markets, dismantling of social safety nets – within the framework of a single critical analysis also shows its analytic potential, given that the concept is being used with the appropriate care.⁴⁹ The core elements of neoliberal programmes include the primacy of the economy, a fixation on private property, distrust of the state, and the model of *homo economicus*, but this core has constantly given rise to new variants of neoliberalism.⁵⁰ For all this divergence, it is possible to discern the gradual rise of a neoliberal hegemony since the 1970s in

Western Europe. Authors like Stuart Hall and Wendy Brown have even described these transformations as a ‘revolution’, albeit qualified as ‘secret’ or ‘stealth’, underlining the way basic conceptions of society have shifted imperceptibly towards economic standards.⁵¹ In Germany, with some delay, the ‘Hartz’ reforms of the early 2000s implemented neoliberal social policy that had a direct impact on *Hauptschule* students and their families.

Ethnographic studies of feelings are especially well suited to analysing processes of subjectivization in neoliberal times, helping to explain the ways social standards are interiorized and processed. This also allows a fundamental critique of the German school system, identifying blatant forms of exclusion and highlighting their negative impacts. The focus on emotions makes clear how closely social conditions are linked with personal conditions. But society should not be understood as a totalizing machine, and the individual should not be viewed as a simple reflection of sociostructural conditions. Instead, I foreground the contradictory, ambivalent and idiosyncratic dynamics of affectively charged subjectivization processes in the context of exclusion in school. Relating emotional phenomena to conditions of social inequality alters the way both society and feelings are viewed: the former no longer appears outer and organized, the latter no longer inner and natural.

This book offers clear evidence of the profound impact of neoliberal developments. Various aspects of this transformation are highlighted, including market-oriented education policy and competitive visions of society. The students included negative stereotypes in their own self-descriptions and reproduced the contempt they themselves faced when dealing with weaker individuals at the school. In this way, they inadvertently underpinned the conditions of their inferiorization, propagating an individualist model of achievement and a conformist model of the ‘good life’, in some cases even downplaying the impact of social inequality. With reference to Paul Willis’s classic study *Learning to Labour. How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, in which working-class youth affirm cultural patterns that cause them to remain within their working-class status, the Galilei-Schule must now be referred to as a school of precariousness. Even the students’ preferred forms of self-affirmation and emotional rebellion often follow the guidelines of neoliberal subjectivity. They insert themselves into hegemonic structures by basing their strategies in the struggle for attention on machismo and feminine attractiveness, or by seeking to boost their self-esteem with consumer coolness and body optimization.

At the same time, there are also signs of an erosion of the neoliberal regime. The students barely allow themselves to be controlled by the staff, behaving wilfully: they bully each other, but display solidarity when resisting a racist teacher; they subvert the school’s system of punishments,

but resist attempts to politicize them from the left. Rather than referring to any kind of programme, political matters were more likely to be articulated in everyday routines, via situated practices of critique, rebellion and refusal. As a result, the emotional experiences in question do not fit smoothly into the prescribed social order, often arising in conflict with it. Social devalorization by means of grades, for example, was taken to such extremes as to become emotionally intolerable. Leading mostly straight to unemployment, school appeared largely meaningless, provoking distanced responses from students and staff alike, and the ensuring precarity proved such a burden that it was experienced by Galilei alumni as an ongoing existential crisis. With the emotional messages conveyed in the following chapters, these young people let us know that in the long term, no society can be founded on social devalorization, and that a new social contract is needed.

Notes

1. See Frevert/Wulf (eds), *Die Bildung der Gefühle*.
2. OECD (ed.), *PISA 2006*.
3. See Bude/Willisch (eds), *Exklusion*; Castel/Dörre (eds), *Prekarität, Abstieg, Ausgrenzung*.
4. See Kronauer, *Exklusion*; Opitz, 'Exklusion'.
5. See Weiß, *Soziologie globaler Ungleichheiten*; Boatca, *Global Inequalities Beyond Occidentalism*.
6. See Marchart, *Die Prekarisierungsgesellschaft*.
7. See Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Honneth, 'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect'.
8. On the distinction between disrespect and contempt, see Liebsch, 'Spielarten der Verachtung'. On the distinction between contempt and disgust, see Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*.
9. See Gomolla/Radtke, *Institutionelle Diskriminierung*.
10. See Ortner, 'Dark Anthropology and its Others'.
11. On the concept of critique, see Jaeggi/Wesche (eds), *Was ist Kritik?*; Allerkamp/Orozco/Witt (eds), *Gegen/Stand der Kritik*.
12. See Deleuze/Guattari, *One Thousand Plateaus*; Anderson/McFarlane, 'Assemblage and Geography'.
13. See Lutz, 'The Anthropology of Emotions', 421.
14. See Greco/Stenner (eds), *Emotions. A Social Science Reader*; Harding/Pribram (eds), *Emotions*; Gregg/Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*.
15. See Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*.
16. See Röttger-Rössler, 'Gefühlsbildung'.
17. See Slaby/Mühlhoff, 'Affect'; Saar, *Die Immanenz der Macht*.
18. See Slaby/von Scheve, (eds), *Affective Societies*; Burkitt, *Emotions and Social Relations*.
19. See Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'.
20. See Bens et al., *The Politics of Affective Societies*.
21. See Lutz, 'Emotion, Thought, and Estrangement'; Frevert et al., *Gefühlswissen*.
22. See Reckwitz, 'Praktiken und ihre Affekte'; Scheer, 'Emotionspraktiken'.
23. See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*.

24. See Dewey, *Experience and Education*.
25. See Turner/Bruner (eds), *The Anthropology of Experience*.
26. See Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience'.
27. For current usages, see Chakkalaka, *Die Welt in Bildern*; Bareither, *Gewalt im Computerspiel*.
28. See Throop, 'Articulating Experience'; Stephenson/Papadopoulos, *Analysing Everyday Experience*.
29. See Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*.
30. See Milton/Svašek (eds), *Mixed Emotions*; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.
31. See Seigworth/Gregg (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*; Harding/Pribram (eds), *Emotions*; Wulff (ed.), *The Emotions*.
32. See Abu-Lughod/Lutz (eds), *Language and the Politics of Emotions*; Flam, *Soziologie der Emotionen*.
33. See Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*; Schutz/Pekrun (eds), *Emotion in Education*.
34. See Williams, 'Structures of Feeling'.
35. See Williams, 'On Structure of Feeling'.
36. See Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69–75; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128–135.
37. See Hall/Critcher/Jefferson/Clarke, *Policing the Crisis*; Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, 25–53.
38. See Milner, 'Cultural Materialism, Culturalism and Post-Culturalism'; Filmer, 'Structures of Feeling and Socio-Cultural Formations'; Kirk, 'Class, Community, and "Structures of Feeling" in Working-Class Writing from the 1980s'; Zembylos, "'Structures of Feeling" in Curriculum and Education'.
39. See Harding/Pribram (eds), *Emotions*.
40. See Highmore, 'Formations of Feeling, Constellation of Things'; Schützeichel, "'Structures of Feelings" und Emotionsmilieus'.
41. See Stoler, 'Affective States'; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.
42. See Seigworth/Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers'.
43. See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*.
44. See Schäfer (ed.), *Praxistheorie*.
45. See Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?'; Scheer, 'Emotionspraktiken'.
46. See Reckwitz, 'Praktiken und ihre Affekte'.
47. See Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion*.
48. See Gago, *Neoliberalism from Below*.
49. See Biebricher, *Neoliberalismus zur Einführung*.
50. See Harvey, *Neoliberalism*; Ther, *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent*.
51. See Hall, 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution'; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.