

7 Macrosocial Anthropological Constants

The transdisciplinary areas and aspects of human differentiation that have been discussed hitherto offer significant insights for the comprehension of human differentiation. These concepts are especially crucial for incorporating macrosocial anthropological constants into the analysis of human differentiation. In the conclusion of this book, it is postulated that the comprehension of human differentiation in complex contemporary societies will perpetually be inadequate and consequently erroneous in the absence of consideration of these foundational scientific discoveries. The discussion of anthropological constants is a topic of considerable debate, particularly given the methodological challenges associated with making universally valid statements about humanity as a whole. This analysis circumvents the aforementioned debate by focusing on *macrosocial* constants or universals that reveal consistent patterns of governance from the Neolithic Revolution to the modern era, without affirming the often assumed determinism of universals. It is imperative to clarify that the recognition of macrosocial constants does not in any way imply a determinism that portrays exploitation and oppression as inevitable. Instead, the knowledge thus gained functions as a critical tool that stimulates reflection on the conditions of our existence and encourages active participation in the process of creating a more just society. This perspective elucidates that transformation is feasible, yet it necessitates an authentic investigation of the pervasive structures that inform our collective existence. In this analysis, the term “anthropological constant” is defined as a phenomenon that is vital for life or based on fundamental human brain functions, anatomy, or physiology, as well as a universal in the complex social structures of human communities. While “anthropological constants” encompass both biological and social foundations, “macrosocial anthropological constants” specifically denote enduring patterns of social organization, norms, and values that persist across historical epochs within social systems. The distinction between directly observable physical attributes and theoretically derived universals based on the unique characteristics of *Homo sapiens* can often be challenging to make. *Macrosocial anthropological constants* manifest as deeply rooted patterns and structures of human coexistence that persist across historical epochs and shape fundamental elements of social order, including norms, values, and institutions in social systems. These con-

stants represent stable, cross-system modes of thought, emotion, and action that serve vital functions in the maintenance and regulation of social system structure. These characteristics define the collective aspects of human coexistence and encompass universal social practices that reflect the fundamental tenets of human existence and coexistence, despite cultural diversity and historical change. An essential component of these constants is the presence of practices associated with the exercise of power and domination, as well as the securing of resources. These two processes are inextricably linked and inevitably result in social stratification and human differentiation. Practices of power and domination manifest in the control and distribution of resources, the definition of social hierarchies, and the establishment of social orders, which in turn give rise to specific forms of inclusion and exclusion as well as social inequality. These dynamics are central to understanding how societies are structured and how they function, enabling the ongoing reproduction of social differentiations and the maintenance of power structures across generations.

Macrosocial anthropological constants emerge in response to the dynamic challenges posed by population growth, changes in population density, and the increased complexity of society. These constants serve two distinct yet interrelated functions. Primarily, they facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances. Secondly, they maintain cultural and social continuity, which is essential for societal stability and identity (Antweiler 2016, 195). The emergence of complex social systems, which are distinguished by increasing social stratification, division of labor, and political organization, commenced at disparate times across the globe. However, it is typically associated with the advent of agriculture and the sedentarization of populations (Putterman 2008, 729). This pivotal shift gave rise to new demands and structural challenges, primarily related to the procurement and coordination of resources. In response, the formation of new and specialized subsystems became imperative. The evolution of these complex social systems commenced with the transition from smaller communities, typically comprising up to 150 individuals—frequently referenced as “Dunbar’s number” (see Chapter 3.3)—to larger and more complexly structured forms of organization. The Neolithic Revolution, which marked this significant transition, occurred in various regions at different times, beginning approximately 12,000 years ago (Chu and Xu 2023, 1). The establishment of the first complex societies, frequently referred to as civilizations, featured cities, centralized administrations, and written languages. This development began around the 4th millennium BC in Mesopotamia in the Near East (Weisdorf 2005, 561). Subsequently, a number of early civilizations emerged in a variety of locations, including Egypt, the Indus Valley, China, the Andean region of South America, and Mesoamerica. The challenges associated with these structural developments primarily originate from the necessity to efficiently procure and coordinate resources. This results in the formation of novel and specialized subsystems. These systems must function independently while maintaining coherence with the overarching

system. The restricted range of potential solutions to issues of self-organization or self-regulation suggests the presence of an intrinsic logic, indicating the existence of social-functional universals that regulate the formation and operation of complex social systems. These universals reflect the underlying patterns that enable these systems to fulfill essential functional requirements while adapting to environmental and internal complexities (Antweiler 2016, 195). This implies that social systems are constrained in their capacity to organize and regulate themselves due to their intrinsic complexity and the necessity for effective functioning. As a result of these limitations, certain functional structures and mechanisms are observed to be repeated in different societies and cultural contexts. In this context, the term “social-functional universals” is applicable. These universals represent fundamental organizational principles that enable social systems to address internal and external challenges. The further subdivision of the systems that emerge in this way into subsystems must be ensured by *second-order social systems* (Hejl 2001, 54). The subdivision of social systems into subsystems is a necessary step in order to facilitate the effective performance of specialized functions within these complex systems. However, these subsystems must possess the capacity to function autonomously, assuming particular tasks or roles within the overarching system, while also being capable of integrating into the superordinate system and interacting with other subsystems. Second-order social systems facilitate the aforementioned further subdivision and specialization, while simultaneously ensuring the coherence and integration of the overall system. They are of critical importance for the maintenance of system functionality and adaptability in the context of changing circumstances and challenges. The identification of universal patterns in socially stratified systems lends support to the notion of macrosocial constants or universals as “emergent” phenomena (Antweiler 2016, 196). Since the Neolithic Revolution, the forms of human differentiation have developed profoundly and in a vast array of ways within the context of these macrosocial anthropological constants. The advent of agriculture and animal domestication marked the emergence of the first complex social structures, which facilitated the efficient production and storage of food. This, in turn, gave rise to surpluses that constituted the basis for social differentiation and the evolution of power structures. The formation of sedentary settlements, coupled with the advent of agriculture and artisanal techniques, gave rise to considerable challenges pertaining to the long-term stewardship and safeguarding of these newly acquired resources (Simmons 2007, 54). This necessity gradually gave rise to the first formal structures for the exercise of power and social stratification, although these varied from region to region. The genesis of these systems is exemplified by the caste system of India and other analogous systems of differentiation, which governed the apportionment of labor and resources according to defined principles between those in authority and those subject to their rule, the wealthy and the impoverished, and those who were free and those who were enslaved (Morris and Scheidel 2016;

Flannery and Marcus 2012; Morris and Scheidel 2009). The transformations in social organization gave rise to the formation of intricate hierarchies, power and domination structures that laid the foundation for subsequent manifestations of slavery, resource control, warfare, and interpersonal conflict (Flannery and Marcus 2012, 121; Trigger 2003; Chu and Xu 2023).

Slavery, as one of the most extreme manifestations of social inequality, became the norm in many ancient civilizations as a result of the necessity for labor in agriculture and the construction of large structures. The practice was firmly entrenched in the social and economic structures of these civilizations and was legitimized by cultural, legal, and religious norms (Trigger 2003; Hayden 2018). The advent of new social dynamics also precipitated an increase in intergroup conflict and warfare. The competition for resources, the expansion of territory, and the protection of settlements gave rise to a number of systematic instances of organized violence (Cartledge 1979, Chapter 11). The resulting conflicts served a number of purposes, including the advancement of one's own political and economic interests, the defense against foreign influences, and the definition of identities, the construction of images of the adversary, and the reinforcement of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. These initial forms of contemporary human differentiation reflect the foundational mechanisms that have shaped human civilization since the Neolithic era. For example, the securing of resources and energy, which is directly related to population size, and the inevitable need for protein supply are inextricably intertwined with the emergence and development of human systems of domination. These factors represent macro-social constants that persist with undiminished urgency and necessity to the present day. While the specific manifestations, practices, and narratives of domination and oppression may vary over time, the underlying logic remains constant. These deeply rooted patterns in the organization and design of human societies are therefore considered macro-social anthropological constants. Such tendencies include the establishment of hierarchies, the implementation of mechanisms of classification and differentiation, and the generation and maintenance of social orders, which are reinforced by culturally transmitted narratives.

The specific regimes addressed in this book (Chapters 8 and 9) are characterized by primordial and neoliberal codes, which reflect deeply rooted macrosocial and anthropological constants. These constants are the basis for the formation of social structures, the establishment of power relations, and their legitimization through culturally transmitted narratives, practices, and patterns of behavior. Notwithstanding the considerable discrepancies in their underlying rationale, historical evolution, codification, and pragmatic implementation, they are ultimately anchored in the universal imperative for social order and structure. They are an expression of historical power constellations and negotiations. Cultural codes (see Chapter 8), whether primordial or neoliberal, act as operational logics that facilitate the effective processing of information, the shaping of possibilities for

identification, and the regulation of affiliations. They contribute to the reduction of complexity by doing so. These codes utilize specialized semantics to guarantee precise and expeditious classification and processing of information within social systems. The use of specialized systems of meaning, with the deployment of codes closely aligned with the respective social, economic, and cultural contexts, facilitates the continuous creation and negotiation of differentiated social orders, with the objective of achieving stabilization. Nevertheless, the orders that are established and legitimized in this manner through cultural endeavors and communication are distinguished by their *de facto* instability (see Chapter 8.3.2). This *instability* is an expression of the dynamic nature of social systems. This is a consequence of the continual alteration of power configurations and the necessity to adjust to emerging information and social priorities. As power relations are perpetually renegotiated and the necessity for social order and structure is subject to constant change, the resulting social orders can never be entirely stable. This intrinsic dynamism guarantees that social systems remain flexible and can adapt to changing circumstances, thereby ensuring their ability to survive. In this way, instability is not only an indication of the changeability of social orders, but also of their ability to evolve and adapt to new challenges. In the context of the ongoing challenges faced by individuals within complex structures, the instability inherent in social systems manifests not only as a characteristic of external social orders but also as a phenomenon within people's inner worlds of experience. In the dynamic and often contradictory contexts of present-day social groups, individuals strive to find orientation. The excessive demands resulting from the size dimensions of social groups and the resulting complexity represent a significant challenge for human societies in modern times (Bauman 2008, 2003; Luhmann 1997a). It arises from the effort to meet the diverse demands and expectations of constantly evolving *multiple modernities*, while the resources available for coping with these challenges are limited or insufficient. This dynamic results in a reality in which neither individuals nor collective entities can ever develop fully stable or lasting solutions to the issues of human differentiation and social integration. Instead, individuals and social systems are compelled to engage in a continuous process of adaptation and reorientation. This is characterized by the pervasive need to navigate uncertainties, contradictions, and the potential dissolution of existing structures. This reality, which is characterized by instability and excessive demands, calls for an approach that focuses on flexibility and resilience, as well as a profound understanding of the fundamental, dynamic processes of social systems and the human condition.

The incorporation of macro-social anthropological constants into the examination of particular social structures provides a robust basis for subsequent inquiry into the adaptive characteristics of domination mechanisms. It becomes evident that, despite radical alterations and technological advancements, certain fundamental patterns of social organization persist. The central mechanisms for resource

extraction, particularly the securing of protein supply, exert a profound influence on food security and social and economic power structures within communities. These practices are deeply rooted in human history. These examples demonstrate the continued relevance of traditional resource utilization and governance practices in the contemporary era, serving as key components of social stratification and power relations. An appreciation of the durability of macrosocial constants encourages the recognition that customary practices are not only integrated into contemporary social and economic structures, but also contribute to the resilience and adaptability of human societies. This approach views human differentiation not as a vestige of the past or as an ideological construct, but rather as an expression of fundamental human tendencies that adapt to and evolve in new contexts. Furthermore, the integration of macrosocial insights is becoming increasingly significant in the context of the aforementioned human surplus in highly complex societies. The persistence of macro-social anthropological constants, such as resource and protein security, hierarchization, and group organization, provides stability and a sense of continuity that helps to mitigate the overload caused by rapid social and technological development. The adaptation of traditional practices and their integration into prevailing ways of life helps establish anchor points that contribute to food security and the stabilization of social structures and power relations. These adaptive processes demonstrate the capacity of human societies to maintain resilience and stability in the face of the challenges of the contemporary world by drawing on deeply rooted, time-tested mechanisms of social organization and resource management.

The systematic implementation of macro-social constants into the theoretical framework for exploring human differentiation aims to overcome the constraints of simplistic moralizing and finger-pointing. Such reactions, which are often prevalent in public debate, may offer simple answers, but they fail to take into account the complex reality of human sociality and its historical conditions. A comprehensive and introspective examination of the anthropological foundations has the potential to facilitate partial emancipations by prompting a critical engagement with the underlying causes of social inequalities. It is important to reiterate that this approach does not entail determinism. This approach acknowledges the influence of historically and bioculturally co-evolved structures on human societies while also recognizing the capacity for individual and collective action to initiate change and address social inequalities. It is of the utmost importance that these efforts are not oversimplified by focusing on a single or two dimensions, or, as is frequently the case, by conflating the conceptual and material dimensions. A comprehensive and differentiated approach is essential for addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges inherent in social structures and developing sustainable solutions that take into account the deeply rooted nature of these structures.