10 Global Asymmetries: Impacts on Human Differentiation

This section builds on the preceding discussion of the two central regimes of human differentiation by examining the historical and political dimensions of their emergence. This analysis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and deeply rooted mechanisms within these differentiation systems, and thus to explore the geopolitical-hegemonic dimension of human differentiation. A particular focal point concerns the meta-level of hierarchy, control, and exploitation relations, which are characterized by the strategic deployment of neoliberal semantics of indifference inherent in their respective coding logics. The genesis of both differentiation systems can be traced back to globally intertwined patterns of exploitation and expansion that impact both people and resources. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the political context in which human differentiation practices are carried out in the 21st century, especially within the German context, it is essential to conduct a thorough examination of the role of the United States as a hegemonic power. This hegemony is facing mounting challenges from other global powers, most notably China, Russia, and the BRICS coalition of states, which are resisting the dominance of the US dollar. Understanding the depth and effectiveness of US dominance requires reflection on key historical and economic policy turning points that have not only shaped the global political landscape but also significantly influenced the regimes of human differentiation under discussion. In this context, recognizing and analyzing the complex and often concealed connections between geopolitical strategies, economic interests, and human differentiation practices is crucial. Such a thorough investigation facilitates a better understanding of the underlying structures and dynamics that drive and sustain human differentiation practices. The analysis of global political and economic conditions after the Second World War reveals three interconnected developments (Hardt and Negri 2001, 256) that have significantly shaped the living conditions of an increasing number of people:

A. The extensive decolonization processes that occurred up to the 1970s resulted in significant shifts in global power relations (see Chapter 10.1). These wars of independence marked the transition from direct colonial rule to new forms of global influence, which were manifested in various spheres, including the economic, political, and cultural realms. These processes illustrate the non-linear and relational nature of power. Although formerly colonized states achieved formal sovereignty, they frequently remained embedded in a global dependency system, shaped by the structures of the postcolonial world order. The continuation of inequalities and dependencies through economic and political influences demonstrates the intricate nature of power relations in the postcolonial era. Furthermore, the impact of discursive power is made apparent by the fact that the process of decolonization and its ramifications were significantly shaped by global narratives and identities that were formed by former colonial powers and dominant economic interests. The incorporation of the concept of double contingency into the examination of these processes demonstrates how actors and systems exist in a state of constant mutual unpredictability and adaptation, which contributes to the dynamics and complexity of the global order. This interplay of adaptation and unpredictability reinforces the argument that global power structures evolve in a non-linear manner, which in turn gives rise to human differentiation. An analysis of decolonization in the context of the development of a neoliberal agenda and a global system that conditions and structures populations reveals the intertwining of power and domination in the formation of the global order. An understanding of these interconnected developments, which affect the living conditions of many worldwide, reveals the profound influence of power structures on human differentiation and necessitates a critical examination of the mechanisms driving global inequality (see Chapter 10.3). The consideration of non-linearity provides crucial insights into the underlying structures and dynamics that drive and sustain these processes.

B. The implementation of neoliberal economic policies as a strategic exercise of power within the intricate web of power and domination in social systems offers insight into how the dynamics of functional differentiation and autopoietic systems exert a significant influence on global economic relations. This policy is characterized by the restructuring of global production chains and labor markets through the exploitation of low-cost labor in "underdeveloped" countries and the externalization of ecological costs to the affected regions. It demonstrates how economic systems function as self-reproducing units, structuring their environments according to their own logics. The security of resources, particularly those derived from oil and the dollar (see Chapter 10.2), becomes a constant in macro-social and anthropological terms. It addresses essential systemic needs and significantly shapes the global economic order. Control over strategic resources like oil not only amplifies the economic power of certain actors but also solidifies the dominance of the US dollar as a global control medium (see Chapter 10.3). This illustrates the convergence of economic control mechanisms with geopolitical strategies aimed at maintaining and reinforcing global power structures. Furthermore, the deliberate design and manipulation of global production and labor market structures as part of the neoliberal agenda reflect a strategic indifference on the part of geopolitically privileged actors. The systemic entrenchment of socio-economic inequalities, by disadvantaging certain regions and population groups, demonstrates how economic practices shape and continuously reshape power relations.

C. A global system that shapes and influences populations in accordance with a neoliberal agenda is clearly discernible. The "schema of indifference," which will be introduced in this section, emerges as a central feature, pervading the economic, political, media, and educational spheres (see Chapter 10.4). It demonstrates the transfer of authority to non-state, transnational networks. This framework gives precedence to competition and individualism, internalizing a neoliberal logic that erodes social bonds and collective approaches to problem-solving. This pattern is particularly evident in the legitimization of resource wars, which profoundly influence how conflicts are perceived and evaluated within the discursive power matrix that justifies such conflicts. By focusing on the mechanisms and channels through which values are transmitted, it is possible to engage in critical reflection on the legitimizing bases of these conflicts. There is a pressing need to deconstruct dominant narratives and develop alternative solutions to conflicts, challenging the prevailing neoliberal structures. This approach not only critiques the current paradigms but also proposes avenues for substantial systemic change.

The following analysis explores the relationship between global power structures and the formation of identities within human differentiation, contextualizing the practices of differentiation within their historical, political, and economic frameworks. It provides a comprehensive examination of specific elements that are vital for understanding the mechanisms of power and domination. Furthermore, it incorporates the reciprocal influence of global events and individual experiences into the analysis of human differentiation practices, enabling a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, legitimation, and resistance.

10.1 The Interplay between Decolonization wars and US Hegemony

The relationship between the "decolonization wars" that commenced after 1945, and the rise of US hegemony is inextricably linked to a substantial transformation in global power structures. This era represents a transition from a system of exploitation, predominantly dominated by Europe, to a neoliberal regime of differentiation and world order spearheaded by the United States. This regime is characterized notably by the dominance of the US dollar as the global reserve currency. This period represents a transition from a primordial to a neoliberal regime of difference. The last 500 years of European history have been marked by exploitation, destruction, and the consequent impoverishment of conquered territories. These events have fostered profound inequalities between countries considered "developed" in the West and those often broadly labeled as "underdeveloped" or the "Third World." These inequalities are not always immediately apparent as direct consequences of centuries of invasions and violent appropriations of people, resources, and ideas. It is imperative to recognize that the terms "developed," "underdeveloped," and "Third World" possess strategic significance within the context of global exploitation regimes. The categorization into these ostensibly clear-cut divisions represents a highly simplified view of a complex reality, which impairs our ability to fully comprehend the intricately intertwined global relationships. Nevertheless, the terms "Global North" and "Global South" should not be interpreted as rigid and monolithic blocs. Rather, they are indicative of considerable and multidimensional disparities within these groups. It is crucial to recognize that states do not function in the same manner as individuals. The actions of governments and multinational corporations on the international stage are shaped by intricate interactions and uncertainties. States and other systemically significant actors operate within a global system defined by interrelationships and feedback loops, which exert influence on their decisions and actions, as well as on the actions of other states and non-state entities. In discussions of global exploitation mechanisms, it becomes evident that globally active elites cannot be categorized or stigmatized as a homogeneous group, whether based on territorial, ethnic, religious, or national identity. However, the conceptualization of a neoliberal regime of difference, which entails a consequent hierarchization and exploitation of people, unmistakably reveals that the hegemonic strategies of the post-war world promote systematic oppression, exploitation, wars, and genocides. These phenomena are now manifesting in ways that are more complex and sometimes more concealed than they were in the past. The patterns and practices of the last centuries, which were primarily oriented towards exploitation and capital accumulation for the benefit of elites, have undergone significant evolution in terms of their forms and enforcement methods. The discussion of global exploitation mechanisms, in conjunction with the hierarchization and exploitation that is engendered by a neoliberal regime of difference, indicates a profound transformation in the methods and strategies that are employed by global elites. These shifts in the modalities of power and control have continued to exert an influence on economic decisions and policies at the international level in the decades following decolonization.

A noteworthy instance of political action that shaped the evolution of global economic relations and reinforced the tenets of neoliberal economic exploitation can be observed in the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in 1985, as outlined in the "Baker Plan." The plan, named after James Baker, who was the US

Treasury Secretary during the Reagan administration, was formulated as a direct response to the debt crisis of the early 1980s (Cahill and Konings 2017, 37). The global economic crisis had a markedly detrimental impact on the financial stability of numerous nations, now designated as "developing countries." In the 1970s, these countries had previously benefited from convenient access to international loans, facilitated by elevated oil prices and the resulting cash surpluses of oil-exporting nations. However, the confluence of a global recession and a surge in global interest rates, precipitated by the "Volcker Shock," rendered the repayment of these loans a considerably more arduous undertaking. This policy, named after Paul Volcker, the then-chairman of the US Federal Reserve, was implemented with the objective of combating high inflation in the US, which had reached double-digit levels at the time. The notable surge in key interest rates gave rise to elevated global interest rates, reinforced the value of the US dollar, and intensified the debt crisis in developing countries by imposing a considerable debt burden. This situation resulted in the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which are widely regarded as mechanisms for exploiting the resources of the Global South. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), implemented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), conditioned the granting of loans to countries in the Global South on the implementation of specific reform requirements. The objective of these programs was to facilitate economic restructuring in heavily indebted countries. This was achieved through the imposition of conditions that prioritized debt repayment and economic liberalization, which often had a profound social and economic impact on the affected nations (Kellermann 2015, 139). In official discourse, the conditions were presented as a means of enhancing the efficiency and competitiveness of the countries in question. In return for access to further loans and the possibility of repaying existing debts, the countries concerned were required to implement a series of extensive neoliberal reforms (Chomsky 1999, 25). These measures comprised a range of fiscal, monetary, and structural reforms. Regarding fiscal policy, the objective was to reduce government expenditure and increase revenue in order to reduce budget deficits. These objectives were primarily achieved through reductions in public services, decreases in subsidies, and modifications to tax rates. Concerning monetary policy, the objective was to stabilize the currency and control inflation, primarily through the implementation of restrictive monetary policies and interest rate increases. Structurally, the reforms sought to transform the economic and institutional framework conditions through the implementation of deregulation, trade liberalization, and privatization of state-owned companies, with the objective of establishing an environment conducive to investment. Furthermore, social policy measures, such as programs designed to combat poverty and reinforce social security systems, were implemented with the objective of mitigating the social consequences of these economic transformations. James Baker, representing the United States, which held the largest voting share on the IMF board, and together with other developed capitalist states forming a dominant voting bloc, facilitated loans from private financiers administered by the IMF (Chorev and Babb 2009, 471). The Baker Plan thus provided the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with a new rationale for its continued existence, namely, the advancement of a neoliberal agenda in the Global South. The Baker Plan established a template for the conditions attached to IMF loans for the ensuing decade. Between 1986 and 2000, the IMF approved the use of its structural adjustment or "enhanced structural adjustment" facilities for 131 programs across 50 countries (IMF 2014). The pervasive implementation of structural adjustment programs constituted a pivotal element in the dissemination of neoliberal ideologies throughout the Global South. By linking the provision of financial assistance to the implementation of particular economic policies, the IMF played a pivotal role in the promotion and dissemination of neoliberal principles throughout these regions. This approach not only transformed local economies but also significantly impacted their political and social landscapes, aligning them more closely with global market-oriented ideologies (Cahill and Konings 2017, 37).

From this perspective, structural adjustment programs (SAPs) can be conceptualized as mechanisms that shape the interactions between global financial institutions and countries in the Global South through specific communication and decision-making processes. They exemplify the principle of *structural coupling* (see Chapter 2.2.7), wherein connections between two or more systems (in this case, the global financial institutions and the national economic systems of the Global South) are established through coordinated interactions that influence and alter the respective systems. The coupling of financial aid to specific lending conditions has increased the dependence of the Global South on these institutions and the Global North in general, significantly restricting their autonomous economic decision-making capacity. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have played an active role in influencing economic policy in these countries, thereby consolidating their positions as key actors in the global economic system. Concurrently, the criticism of the consequences of SAPs has given rise to a comprehensive debate concerning their legitimacy and the policies they implement. The SAPs marked the inception of a comprehensive implementation of neoliberal economic policies in developing and emerging countries, with the objective of addressing their economic crises. These programs were distinguished by privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of government spending, and they set the stage for the *Washington Consensus* of 1989. This set of ten economic policy principles was promoted as a universal remedy for the problems plaguing the global economy. This consensus served to consolidate US hegemony by reshaping the global economic order in accordance with the tenets of a free market economy and neoliberal ideology. The widespread adoption of these policies established the dominance of the United States in setting global economic policy guidelines and solidified its leadership role in promoting a worldwide neoliberal agenda, which had a profound impact on the global economic structure. The Washington Consensus is founded upon a set of economic policy recommendations that have been promoted by a number of central institutions in Washington, D.C., including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the US Treasury Department. These recommendations have informed the economic strategies adopted by numerous countries around the globe (Birdsall et al. 2010, 94; Kellermann 2015). The Washington Consensus was initially developed in response to debt crises in Latin American countries during the 1980s and 1990s. It subsequently gained global application in the policies of major institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the US Treasury Department, towards developing countries. The ten core principles are designed to promote economic stabilization and growth. These ten principles encompass a range of economic reforms, including fiscal discipline, restructuring of public expenditures, tax reforms, liberalization of interest rates, trade liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation, and enhancing the legal protection of property rights. The objective of each principle is to guide economies along a trajectory of greater market orientation, fostering openness and competitive markets (Vogl 2021, 13). Despite its original intention to stimulate economic growth, the Washington Consensus has been the subject of increasing criticism for its strong emphasis on market economy principles, which have been perceived as being at the expense of social considerations. In numerous instances, the implementation of the Washington Consensus resulted in heightened poverty, social unrest, and a surge in inequality. These adverse effects, in turn, contributed to an increase in economically motivated migration. Consequently, the Washington Consensus and the structural adjustment programs associated with it have exacerbated the pervasive apprehensions surrounding neoliberal reforms. These concerns pertain to the manner in which such policies, by prioritizing economic efficiency, frequently fail to adequately address social justice and sustainability concerns, with significant implications for developing countries and a notable impact on migration patterns. Although explicit forms of domination and human differentiation have been superseded in numerous regions of the world by a financialized system that is equally influential and exploitative, capital accumulation remains the primary objective for a relatively small group of privileged individuals. A significant element in the advent of practices imbued with neoliberal ideologies is the strategic and sustained invocation of what are termed "Western values." These are presented as inherently superior and epitomizing "good" on a universal scale. The incorporation of elements from previous ideologies, norms, and bodies of knowledge into the paradigm of these "Western values" has enabled the emergence of subtle discriminatory patterns of action, experience, and thought. These patterns form the foundation for the neoliberal order of difference, which establishes structural connections between the economic and political elites and the global system. This regime, through the deliberate coding and programming of social structures and processes, systematically disadvantages certain population groups while safeguarding and advancing the interests of the economic and political elite. The rhetoric of freedom and democracy functions as a façade for sustaining a global order rooted in inequality and exploitation.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, territories and populations that had long been subjected to European imperial domination—now predominantly the countries of origin for individuals designated as "refugees" or "migrants" in German media and politics—were compelled to fight for their liberation. The wars and conflicts of independence that ensued were of pivotal importance in 20th-century history, marking a period when formerly enslaved and subjugated peoples engaged in battles for independence and the right to self-governance. These movements sought to restore political self-determination and national sovereignty to the affected countries. In numerous regions of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, these endeavors intensified into intense armed conflicts and wars, with local forces confronting deeply entrenched power structures whose dominance over their territories had spanned centuries, coupled with exploitation of natural resources. In the decades following the war, Western democracies engaged in numerous conflicts globally in order to maintain their hegemonic position. Driven by economic interests and power politics, these nations were reluctant to relinquish their spheres of influence. The United States pursued a policy of providing strategic support to newly independent populations and nascent nations with the objective of enhancing its military presence and dominance, as well as aligning these states with itself in the context of the Cold War against the Soviet Union (Hardt und Negri 2001, 149). This support frequently accompanied a rhetoric of democracy, a topic that will be further examined later in this discussion. The processes of decolonization and the rapid emergence of neocolonialism constituted significant obstacles to the establishment of a peaceful, multilateral post-war order (Palen 2024, 192). The aspiration of developing countries to attain a comparable level of economic advancement to that of Western nations has frequently resulted in demands for differential treatment and protectionist policies designed to safeguard nascent industries. The increasing endorsement of American-style protectionist policies in "developing states," presented as a safeguard against the potential encroachment of Western neo-colonialism, proved challenging to align with the Western vision of more liberal, multilateral trade. Moreover, European colonial powers were hesitant to formally acknowledge the independence of their colonies, which further complicated the process of decolonization and economic self-sufficiency in these regions. This reluctance can be attributed to a desire to maintain economic control and influence, which frequently conflicted with the emerging aspirations of the colonized territories (Palen 2024, 192). In the 1950s and 1960s, economic domination and military repression emerged as two facets of a unified apparatus of control, particularly in the context of decolonization. During this period, military measures and violent acts of repression by Western nations were employed with the objective of suppressing democratic and nationalist movements within the decolonizing world (ibid.). While the wars of independence that followed the Second World War resulted in the formal establishment of political independence, they also gave rise to new forms of economic and political dependency. The countries in question were subjected to a new form of subjugation, as the previous methods of influence were replaced by new ones. The new economic structures, shaped significantly by European states such as Great Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, ensured the prolongation of economic dependency. These powers impeded the diversification of economic development in newly independent nations, maintaining their role as suppliers of raw materials and sources of inexpensive labor. As a consequence, a system of exploitation was established that continues to exert a profound influence on the economic, socio-cultural, and political landscape in the present era (Hardt and Negri 2001, 150).

It is of the absolute essence that the neoliberal regime not only demonstrates resilience against the old, primordial codings but also proactively challenges them with a rhetorical stance of "Western values." This enables the regime to gradually thrive on the ongoing dynamics of exploitation. The concept of "Western values" is utilized to establish a moral superiority and, simultaneously, to reinforce a globalized structure of exploitation that encompasses economic, socio-cultural, and political aspects. The current economic dominance of a few Western democracies cannot be fully understood without considering the centuries-long legacy of colonial exploitation and its enduring consequences, a connection that is frequently overlooked. It is imperative to acknowledge the fundamental inequalities between highly industrialized and exploited contexts as a logical and inevitable consequence of centuries of invasion and violent appropriation of people, resources, and ideas. It was not creativity or intelligence that facilitated the economic superiority of some Western actors; rather, it was the unscrupulous and methodical exploitation of others. The exploitation of these regions resulted in the creation of a power vacuum, characterized by the absence of stable constitutional and governmental structures. This created an environment conducive to the systematic exploitation of former colonies by local elites and, in particular, by criminal and violent groups that often employed religious symbolism to justify their actions. This dynamic promoted the accumulation of wealth in the Global North and facilitated the manipulation of markets in regions lacking robust state structures. This configuration facilitated the United States' assumption of a pioneering role in global reforms through modernization and globalization. While the former imperial power, Britain, exerted control over other territories in its colonial history through both formal and informal methods of imperialism, the United States primarily exerts its influence through the global dependence on the US dollar (Go 2011, 56).

These insights elucidate the sociocybernetic comprehension of human differentiation, particularly the perspective of hegemonies as an *emergent, autopoietic phenomena of network-like hierarchies* (see Chapter 2.2.8): Hegemony *emerges* from the interaction of various human and non-human components (Joseph 2002, 39). It is emergent in that, although it can be traced back to the actions of its individual components, it develops properties that exceed the sum of those parts, thereby maintaining a relative autonomy. This is evidenced by the fact that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The forms of American hegemony that shape the present are thus not exclusively the result of direct control or conscious actions by individual actors. Rather, they are the result of complex interactions within a sociopolitical system. These interactions give rise to an overarching order that, while partially attributable to the actions of its constituent parts, develops properties that cannot be fully explained by those parts. Hegemonic structures may manifest in a multitude of systems, as they are fundamentally a relational form of power (Williams 2020, 141). In other words, it is not constrained by specific institutions or material structures but rather exists and operates largely independently of time and place in different human contexts. The concept of hegemony can be conceived of as a form of power that manifests in diverse ways across different systems, thus broadening the scope of Gramsci's original theoretical framework. In the view of Gramsci, the state occupies a key position in the context of hegemony, encompassing clearly delineated functional domains such as civil society, the economy, and the state apparatus (Gramsci 1971, 67). The approach developed here builds upon this concept, extending the understanding of hegemony beyond its traditional association with state-directed power. Instead, it is conceptualized as a flexible form of domination that manifests in diverse social structures, through a multitude of actors, and at various levels within complex social systems. At the same time, this perspective aligns with Gramsci's conceptualization of power as outlined in the Prison Notebooks (Gramsci 1971, 107). In this context, power is conceptualized as a complex order that emerges from the interactions of heterogeneous social forces and practices. This elucidates that, while leading social groups may utilize assorted methods to secure their dominance—such as through the state apparatus or by establishing hegemony in certain areas of civil society—the emerging order in complex societies is not merely the direct consequence of an elite's desires. Those in positions of authority, or "agents" (see Chapter 2.2.5), must navigate the complexities of their respective spheres of influence. To achieve comprehensive hegemony that aligns with their objectives, they must work with existing social tendencies, transforming them into new configurations (Williams 2020, 140). Hegemony, therefore, is the result of a process of reorganization and integration of existing social forces into a new order. The power of leading actors—ranging from individuals to elite groups, institutions, and state and non-state actors—is therefore based not only on direct control but also on their capacity to align disparate social currents in a manner that facilitates the emergence of a stable and advantageous hegemonic order (ibid., 141). This consequently gives rise to disorder and instability in other areas and regions, particularly those that possess valuable and hegemony-relevant resources. Hegemony, therefore, not only provides stability to the prevailing order, but also engenders conflict and inequality in less privileged contexts. In this sense, hegemony is an emergent phenomenon, existing as much more than the sum of the individual actors and forces that constitute it. It is relatively autonomous in that it initiates self-organizing processes that stabilize specific power relations without being fully controlled by a central authority. The consolidation of hegemony is facilitated by self-reinforcing feedback processes, which gives rise to a phenomenon known as path dependency. Once established, power structures are capable of sustaining and continually reproducing themselves.

It is now necessary to consider how hegemony, as an emergent phenomenon, produces *autopoietic* effects. As an autopoietic phenomenon, complex hegemony is dependent on self-referential mechanisms of self-organization and self-production. The self-reinforcing feedback processes of social norms stabilize hegemony, thus creating path dependencies (Elder-Vass 2010, 122). An illustrative example of this is mainstream media coverage. A group of individuals, such as the staff of a newspaper, operates within a specific organizational framework. The dominance of certain "common sense" ideas—that is, ideas that determine what can and cannot be published in a newspaper—is seldom explicitly acknowledged. Rather, it emerges from norms that are established over time and develop from the interactions of employees in a commercial, social, and political environment (Williams 2020, 143). These norms exert a considerable influence on the behavior of employees and the composition of the organization. In practical terms, this implies that a journalist who persistently and vocally criticizes advertisers must either alter her behavior or leave the newspaper. This dynamic exemplifies a combination of consensus and coercion that is characteristic of hegemonic power (Edwards and Cromwell 2006, 9). This phenomenon also manifests in the context of geopolitical positions that are repeatedly and repetitively espoused. The one-sided representations of conflicts, wars, and the question of who is resisting and who has a right to self-defense are less an expression of objective reporting than the result of hegemonic perspectives. These hegemonic constellations exert influence over which perspectives are deemed legitimate. From an anthropological perspective, it can be argued that the notion of completely objective reporting is untenable, given the inherent power relations that pervade every discourse. The media is inherently constrained by the hegemonic structures that dictate which narratives are deemed legitimate or truthful. This hegemony not only influences the content of reporting but also affects the decision-making process regarding what information is kept secret or distorted. One illustrative example of this phenomenon is the manner in which Western mainstream media outlets present certain geopolitical events. The United States' military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other regions are frequently not referred to as such. In lieu of this, the discourse is frequently constructed around terms such as "intervention" or "liberation," which obscure the violence and geopolitical interests of the actors involved. Hegemonic narratives ensure that these interventions are presented as necessary measures to secure peace and democracy, while the negative consequences, such as civilian casualties or the destabilization of entire regions, are either marginalized or relativized as unavoidable "collateral damage." Concurrently, the stance of the hegemon's allies—notably the United States and its allies in the Middle East—is invariably portrayed as legitimate and morally justifiable. Similarly, allied states that are also involved in human rights violations or pursue aggressive foreign policies are often subjected to less rigorous scrutiny. This is particularly evident in the one-sided reporting on conflicts in the region, whereby the perspectives of the hegemon's allies are presented as "the right ones," while resistance movements or opposition actors are discredited or criminalized. This topic will be revisited in the context of the schemata of indifference as the chapter progresses. It will become evident how these schemata influence not only the perception of conflicts, but also the way specific actors and events are deliberately excluded or marginalized within hegemonic discourses.

The principle of *network-hierarchies* (see Chapter 2.2.8) brings two central characteristics of complex hegemony to the fore: its ability to simultaneously enable and limit processes, and its quasi-intentional nature, which, despite its stabilization, can react flexibly to social contingencies (Williams 2020, 153). In the context of network hierarchies, hegemony manifests itself as a dynamic meshwork that allows for the coexistence of decentralized networks and hierarchical structures. Hegemony is conceptualized as a "network hierarchy," encompassing both decentralized, network-like power relations (such as neoliberal governance through money as a medium of value coding) and centralized, hierarchical structures (such as governments, parliaments, and state authorities). The stabilization of hegemony is achieved through self-reinforcing feedback processes, whereby specific pathways of social organization are privileged and alternative developments are impeded. The networks that comprise this hegemony are not static entities; rather, they are reinforced by their interactions with hierarchical structures, which consolidate power relations within the networks on a continuous basis. These feedback processes promote selective self-organization, whereby certain behaviors and structures within the networks emerge and become entrenched, while other potential developments are blocked or unsupported by the system (Williams 2020, 81). Hegemony as a network-hierarchy thus functions as an adaptive structure, maintaining openness to certain changes while limiting alternative developments that could threaten the existing power order. The interplay of networks and hierarchies produces a stable yet flexible order in which hegemony not only exerts power but also establishes the parameters for social developments. This order shapes the hierarchical structures that, on one hand, centralize power control, while, on the other hand, global financial markets operate as flexible, decentralized networks, collectively generating a *guided self-organization* that functions as the central form of governance for complex hegemonies (see Chapter 2.2.8). This demonstrates that hegemonic power is exercised not only through direct control, but also through the targeted reinforcement of specific systemic processes within networks and hierarchies. This approach maintains a balance between stability and flexibility. The concept of network hierarchies, as exemplified by the context of US hegemony and the decolonization wars, demonstrates that hegemony is best conceptualized as a complex network of decentralized networks and hierarchical structures that operate on a global scale and are stabilized by a variety of power mechanisms. In this regard, the interdependence with leading financial institutions and banks is of particular significance. The measures taken to undermine anti-imperialist efforts in the decolonization wars and to consolidate US hegemony provide an illustrative example of the interplay of these elements. The United States continues to exert its hegemonic influence through a multifaceted approach, encompassing not only direct military and diplomatic measures but also a complex network of transnational financial institutions. These include prominent entities such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and multinational banks. These institutions continue to operate as pivotal actors within a global power network, exerting influence over political and economic decisions through the provision of loans, the imposition of conditions, and the implementation of economic programs. The interaction between these hierarchical and network-like structures continues today to produce a self-reinforcing feedback loop. In this process, international financial institutions act as formal instances of power, while global markets and banks continue to enforce neoliberal principles at the local level. The coupling of loans to economic conditions continues to present a significant challenge to the establishment of alternative economic and political orders that exist outside of the neoliberal framework. In this network hierarchy, the United States maintains its global leadership not only through direct control but also, and perhaps more significantly, through the control of financial conditions and economic structures. These mechanisms result in a quasi-autopoietic reproduction of the neoliberal system, whereby global financial structures consolidate existing power relations on an ongoing basis. The emergence of alternative developments is precluded by economic isolation or financial dependencies when states attempt to disengage from the neoliberal order. The contemporary global order thus reflects the same dynamics that originated during the decolonization wars: a dense interplay of networks and hierarchies that secures US hegemony and hinders alternative approaches to the distribution of power. Hegemonic power is thus not only the result of the interplay of various forces, but also develops a power of its own, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. This leads to an understanding of complex hegemony that goes beyond processes and illuminates its specific causal effects within complex social systems.

10.2 Dollar Hegemony and Europe's Strategic "Concessions"

The gradual implementation of neoliberal policies on a global scale following the Second World War marked a substantial shift in traditional strategies of accumulation. This transition is characterized by the exploitation of natural resources, the employment of precarious labor under conditions reminiscent of slavery, the creation of debt traps, and the privatization of previously public goods and services. These strategies were not only exploitative in nature but were also designed with the explicit intention of embedding and extending the reach of neoliberal economics. This has resulted in a significant reshaping of global economic structures and a notable deepening of economic disparities (Saidel 2023, 6). The rise of neoliberalism has resulted in a gradual deterioration of the social gains and rights that had been hard-won over the course of generations through the efforts of various social movements and class struggles. This development is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations as early as 1948. Despite the heterogeneous nature of its implementation, which is characterized by a variety of different practices, the gradual introduction of neoliberal conditions nonetheless manifested the core features of neoliberalism outlined above (see Chapter 9.3.1). These processes did not occur in isolation but rather within the context of global institutions established by the Bretton Woods agreements.

The Bretton Woods system, named after the location of a pivotal meeting in New Hampshire, USA, in 1944, established an international monetary and financial order in the aftermath of the Second World War. The objective was to achieve global economic stability through the implementation of fixed exchange rates, with the US dollar serving as the anchor currency and its value pegged to gold. The Bretton Woods system facilitated international trade and economic recovery while simultaneously cementing the position of the United States at the center of the global financial system (Eckes 2021, 141). The Bretton Woods system was devised with the objective of stabilizing exchange rates, facilitating international trade, and providing support for the reconstruction and development of countries that had been devastated by war and those that were less developed. Central institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, were established with the purpose of monitoring and advancing these goals. Although these institutions initially emerged during a phase marked by Keynesian economics, the welfare state, and a development-oriented approach, they subsequently underwent a gradual shift in their guiding principles, aligning themselves with a globally operative neoliberalism that became increasingly dominant. Subsequent to the Bretton Woods Conference, the currencies of all nations were fixed to the U.S. dollar, which was convertible at a fixed rate of 35 dollars per ounce of gold. This arrangement effectively established the dollar as the central reserve currency in the global financial system, thereby creating what experts refer to as the "gold foreign exchange standard." This system represented a modified version of the gold standard, designed to provide a more stable and predictable international monetary environment, which facilitated post-war recovery and economic growth (Middelkoop 2016, 76). In the subsequent period, US companies utilized the enhanced dollar value to facilitate the acquisition of European companies, while the United States accumulated considerable budget deficits. The central position of the dollar enabled the generation of money through the simple act of printing. During the 1960s, the United States began to exploit this privilege to a greater extent, particularly to finance the escalating costs of the Vietnam War. This practice of monetary expansion had far-reaching consequences for global economic stability and constituted a key aspect of the asymmetric advantages held by the United States within the international financial system (Cahill and Konings 2017, 43). Despite international concerns regarding the potential devaluation of the dollar and US commitments to reduce deficits, these assurances became increasingly implausible in light of the mounting costs associated with the Vietnam War, which reached up to 100 billion dollars. The mounting expenses associated with the war effort placed significant strain on the US economy, prompting concerns about the long-term viability of its fiscal policies and the stability of the dollar in the global financial system (Middelkoop 2016, 77). Consequently, the United States exported a considerable quantity of dollars to foreign countries, laying the foundation for the so-called "Eurodollar" markets. As the competitive advantage of American manufacturing began to diminish, foreign countries increasingly questioned the prudence of holding US dollars. This growing skepticism prompted a shift in reserve currency holdings, with countries exchanging their dollar reserves for gold, further exacerbating the challenges to the US dollar's stability and its role as the world's reserve currency. This shift indicated a growing international skepticism regarding the valuation of the dollar and the overall strength of the American economy. This, in turn, led to adjustments in global financial practices and policies (Cahill and Konings 2017, 44). France demanded the exchange of gold for $150 million of its financial reserves and subsequently planned an additional exchange of an additional $150 million. President De Gaulle even ordered the French Navy to transport the gold bars back to France. This action by France established a precedent that was emulated by numerous European countries, resulting in a notable expansion of their gold reserves. Germany's gold reserves increased from zero to 3,500 tons, Italy's from just over 220 to 2,500 tons, France's from almost 600 to 3,100 tons, and the Netherlands' from 300 to almost 1,700 tons. By the beginning of 1971, the Dutch

Central Bank (DNB) had successfully exchanged almost one billion dollars for gold, reflecting a growing perception of instability in the US dollar and a preference for more tangible assets like gold (Middelkoop 2016, 77). From 1959 to 1971, the United States experienced a considerable depletion of its gold reserves, amounting to a loss of over 50 % of the total holdings, which had reached a figure in excess of 20,000 tons. If this trend had continued at the same rate, the United States would have faced the imminent risk of depleting its entire gold holdings within a few years. In accordance with the counsel of his advisors, President Nixon resolved to proclaim his revised economic strategy on August 15, 1971, during a televised address that notably disrupted the popular television program "Bonanza." In his discourse, Nixon articulated sweeping measures, including the immediate implementation of wage and price controls, a ten percent import tariff surcharge, and most pressingly, the unpegging of the dollar from gold. This last measure, known as the closing of the gold window, was a direct response to the rapid depletion of the US gold reserves. By suspending the direct convertibility of the dollar into gold, this action effectively decoupled the dollar from gold and was aimed at preventing the complete depletion of the gold reserves and stabilizing the international position of the dollar (ibid.). Since the 1970s, global currencies and the principles of debt and credit have been fundamentally shaped by the unchallenged dominance of the dollar, which has become one of the most strategically important instruments of neoliberal governance. With the dissolution of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, the fixed exchange rates to the US dollar, which had previously been anchored to gold, ceased to be internationally binding. This marked the final recognition of the immaterial nature of money and the inherent variability of its value, as currencies were detached from the gold standard. This shift has permitted currencies to fluctuate freely against one another, influenced by market forces and central bank policies rather than a predetermined value linked to gold. This has had a profound impact on international financial systems and economic strategies (Szews 2022, 204).

In the aftermath of the 1971 currency crisis, the United States, under the leadership of Nixon and Kissinger, formulated a strategy to bolster the dollar's global standing. The decision to abandon the gold standard not only reinforced existing global power structures but also secured control over global energy sources, which proved to be a crucial factor in maintaining financial dominance. This dominance enabled the United States to extend its influence over oil-rich countries and to impose economic and political conditions worldwide. By linking the trade of fossil fuels to the dollar, the United States was able to maintain the stability of its economy and further consolidate its dominant position in the global market. The United States was ultimately successful in persuading the member countries of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), including Saudi Arabia, to conduct all oil trade exclusively in dollars. The influx of these "petrodollars" had the effect of bolstering the US economy through investments in government bonds, consolidating the global supremacy of the US, and establishing *dollar hegemony*. This strategic realignment did not merely secure resource access; it also had a significant impact on the geopolitical balance of power, particularly in regions with abundant energy resources. The global dependence on the US dollar and the decisions of US economic policy introduced a novel form of economic and political dependence, redefining international relations and financial systems (Middelkoop 2016, 80). In the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, the United States was largely successful in advancing the "liberalization of markets" on a global scale. During the Cold War, the United States justified its military and economic dominance as a necessary response to Soviet influence. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these factors formed the foundation for a "pact" between the United States and the European capitalist states. In this arrangement, the United States offered assurances of peace and security in exchange for European "concessions," effectively extending its influence through the guise of economic liberalization and the formation of strategic alliances. This realignment solidified the United States' role in influencing global economic policies and maintaining a dominant position in international affairs (Go 2011, 193).

In the present context, the readiness of European capitalist states to adopt and implement the US-promoted neoliberal agenda—including market liberalization and economic deregulation—is almost unconditional. Europe has aligned its political and economic policies with the United States in a manner that reflects a high degree of integration into the broader neoliberal framework. This dynamic had profound effects on human differentiation practices, as the global propagation of neoliberalism by the United States reshaped socio-economic structures worldwide. The active promotion and implementation of market liberalization and privatization resulted in a notable increase in social inequalities and a discernible impact on the formation of social categories and identities. The promotion of economic success and individual achievement as the primary metrics for social and professional advancement has prompted a comprehensive reevaluation of the values and merits considered valuable in societies that adhere to neoliberal principles. This shift has not only consolidated existing social differences and hierarchies but has also given rise to new forms of exclusion and marginalization. In contemporary societies, individuals and groups are increasingly evaluated based on their economic productivity and contribution to the market. This has led to a shift in how individual and collective identities are framed, with a particular emphasis on marketability and competitive advantage. This transformation exemplifies the profound and far-reaching impact of neoliberal policies on societal structures and individual lives. The result is a social structure in which access to resources, education, and power is largely determined by market-defined criteria of efficiency and profitability. As a result, social justice and equality are subordinated to the primacy of the market, contributing to an increasing disparity between different social groups and eroding social cohesion.

Europe's "concessions" to the USA, in exchange for security guarantees, have facilitated the global implementation of an economic order that not only consolidated existing differentiations but also created new forms of social and economic differentiation patterns. This has gradually permitted the establishment of what this book refers to as neoliberal regimes of orders of difference. This regime is distinguished by its capacity to categorize, regulate, and rank individuals in accordance with market principles within a system shaped by debt economics. This aspect is pivotal for the subsequent discussion of exploitation relations, as from this vantage point, the "military interventions" of the USA and its allies were driven by the objective of combating communism and curtailing Russia's influence in various global regions. Concurrently, these interventions ensured the uninterrupted flow of oil from the Gulf States to the Western world, thereby intertwining economic objectives with geopolitical strategies (Alzubairi 2019, 25).

10.3 The Role of Oil in Sustaining Hegemonic Power

To elucidate the significance of fossil fuels, particularly oil, and its role in shaping Western societies, as well as the systematic oversight of this dependency in the current discourses and practices of human differentiation, a detailed examination of the complex history of oil production in the Middle East is presented below. For over a century and a half, and with particular intensity since the Second World War, oil has exerted a decisive influence on the everyday lives of Westerners and on the economies of these countries. It serves as the foundation for a multitude of vehicles, including automobiles, trucks, trains, ships, and airplanes, as well as the military fleet and defense infrastructure. Moreover, the production of plastics and a plethora of associated products is contingent upon oil supplies. As a result, contemporary Western societies are dependent on this essential resource. Even those industries that utilize alternative energies, such as biofuels, compressed natural gas, or nuclear power, are dependent on oil for lubricants and other essential components. The pervasiveness of petroleum-based products is evident in nearly every aspect of daily life, reflecting the ubiquitous and influential role of oil in shaping contemporary Western societies and their consumption patterns. Given its status as a critical factor for the economy, the military, and everyday life, it is evident that this resource plays a pivotal role in the context of US hegemony and regimes coded by neoliberal ideologies. Control over oil resources has become a pervasive and enduring feature of global politics, defining the distribution of power and influence in international relations. This dynamic is reflected in energy security policy, which for states is not merely an economic issue but also constitutes a central element of national security and geopolitical strategy.

Case study Iran: Operation Ajax The advent of the modern oil age in the Middle East can be traced back to 1908, when significant oil reserves were unearthed in Persia — the country's name at the time — which is now Iran (Colgan 2021, 61). The Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which was responsible for this discovery, subsequently became known as British Petroleum. By the 1930s, the oil industry was dominated by seven major oil companies. Notwithstanding the inclusion of the French Compagnie française des pétroles (CFP), now known as Total, the world market was predominantly dominated by Anglo-American interests. Collectively, these corporations exercised control over the majority of exploration and production rights in the regions now designated as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller Gulf states (ibid.). The success of this oil oligopoly was predicated on the members' mutual reliance on each other's adherence to agreements, reinforced by legal obligations among them. Over time, a network of reciprocal shareholdings in central oil concessions was established on a global scale, particularly in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and subsequently in Iran. A number of prominent oil companies, including Exxon, Mobil, Shell, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (the predecessor to BP), and CFP, collectively owned the Iraq Petroleum Company, which held the majority of oil production rights in Iraq (Colgan 2021, 62). Prior to the formation of OPEC in 1960, these prominent oil companies, with the backing of Western powers, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, held considerable sway over the direction of the oil industry. In addition to providing capital and technical expertise for the exploration, production, refining, and distribution of oil, these companies also maintained close ties with their home governments (ibid.). In return for the exploitation of their oil reserves, these companies paid the governments of oil-producing countries a combination of fixed concession fees, taxes on production profits, and royalties on each barrel produced. This hegemonic practice, which was rooted in a network of economic power and political influence, manifested in a system that systematically undermined uncooperative oil states and fragmented their power. This control was maintained through the implementation of sanctions and, on occasion, by providing support for the overthrow of governments and the establishment of new regimes. These actions were undertaken with the objective of maintaining and expanding control over global oil resources. This approach was most dramatically demonstrated in Iran from 1951 to 1953, where the strategic importance of oil in global geopolitics and economic dominance was made evident in a striking manner.

In 1951, Iranian Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh nationalized the country's oil sector and confiscated British assets in response to the British government's refusal to negotiate a more equitable arrangement for Iran (Wight 2021, 16). The major oil companies retaliated by implementing an economic boycott against Iran, which had a considerable detrimental impact on the country's oil industry. The British government, led by Winston Churchill, sought to overthrow Mossadegh in response to the latter's nationalization of Iran's oil assets, which were predominantly under British control. This action was driven by two key factors: the loss of control over the highly lucrative oil resources and the perceived threat posed by Mossadegh's actions to Western interests in the region. This event marked a turning point in the history of international relations and energy politics (Israeli 2020, 154). The initiative to overthrow the Iranian democratic government originated with the British intelligence service, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), also known as MI6 (Sachs 2018, 83). London adeptly leveraged the political shifts in Washington, persuading the United States of the mounting communist threat in Iran and the strategic significance of securing access to Iran's vast oil reserves for the West. This argument was consistent with the United States' Cold War priorities, portraying the nationalization of Iran's oil as not only a loss for British interests but also a potential gain for Soviet influence in the Middle East. Consequently, the British narrative effectively exploited American concerns about communism to garner backing for clandestine operations aimed at destabilizing Mossadegh's government (Colgan 2021, 62). The British government's decision to overthrow the Iranian government was primarily driven by the significant profit opportunities presented by Iranian oil. Winston Churchill, for instance, described the oil reserves as an extraordinary treasure that surpassed even the wildest expectations.

The British government held a 50 percent stake in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), which had generated substantial revenues for the British Treasury. In the two-year period between 1949 and 1950, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) contributed a total of 24 million pounds in taxes and an additional 92 million pounds in foreign currency earnings (Israeli 2020, 155). The AIOC was instrumental in generating substantial revenue for Britain, while also fulfilling 85 percent of the British navy's fuel requirements. It is crucial to note that the British government was able to secure the support of the White House by adeptly leveraging American concerns about the potential for a communist takeover in Iran and the urgency of protecting oil reserves. This ultimately persuaded Washington to intervene. For the United States, the primary objective was to safeguard the financial resources indispensable to its ascendant status as a global superpower and to buttress its doctrine of American exceptionalism. The American military, economy, and its allies were heavily dependent on access to large quantities of inexpensive oil. From 1949 to 1970, there was an 180 percent increase in oil consumption in the United States, a 1,350 percent increase in Western Europe, and a significant rise in Japan, where oil consumption increased from a few thousand barrels per day to 4.4 million barrels per day. This exponential growth in oil consumption was a principal factor in the swift economic recovery of Western countries in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was driven by the strategic significance of oil in global economic and political strategies (Wight 2021, 15), which we identify as *macrosocial anthropological constants* (for further details, please refer to Chapter 7). This insatiable hunger for energy resulted in geopolitical maneuvers aimed at securing access to oil, primarily in the Middle

East. Such actions were frequently justified on the grounds of combating perceived communist threats, yet they also served to preserve a system that ensured a consistent and affordable oil supply to Western countries. While this policy contributed to economic growth in the West, it simultaneously reinforced inequalities and fostered long-term conflicts in oil-rich states, whose resources were exploited by external actors at the expense of their own populations. Oil was the most extensively traded commodity on an international scale, both in terms of value and volume. In the decades following World War II, the majority of internationally traded oil (and exports in general) was sold in dollars. This practice established a direct correlation between the value of oil and the dollar, a factor that explains why most of the oil revenue was denominated in petrodollars rather than any other Petro-currency. The economic structure in question is not only anchored in the strategic significance of oil in global commerce but also upholds the dominance of the dollar in the international financial system, consequently enhancing the economic and political sway of the United States on a global scale (Wight 2021, 15). In 1953, governments that housed the leading oil companies resorted to covert operations to enforce additional sanctions against Iran. Ultimately, Operation Ajax culminated in the overthrow of Mossadegh and the reinstatement of the Shah to political power. The Shah was more amenable to the interests of British and Western oil companies and favored foreign direct investment, particularly in the energy sector. He also sought to deepen relations with Western countries, especially the USA. This alignment reflected neoliberal principles, which advocate for free markets and international capital flows. The Shah's authoritarian style of governance, marked by the repression of political opposition and the curtailment of workers' rights, reflected a neoliberal tendency to erode trade union power and enhance labor market flexibility. Furthermore, the Shah's economic policies resulted in the concentration of power and wealth among a small elite, a hallmark of neoliberal economic policy that often exacerbates inequality. The assumption of power by the Shah thus established the foundation for an economy conducive to neoliberal reforms, particularly in terms of economic and trade liberalization, setting the stage for radical socio-economic transformations within Iran.

The fall of Mossadegh represented a watershed moment that not only transformed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East but also demonstrated the capacity of external powers to influence the political order of oil-rich nations. Western governments and multinational oil cartels demonstrated a clear determination to protect and promote their economic interests at all costs, influencing the political leadership of sovereign states in the process. This collusion resulted in a proliferation of animosity, despondency, and resentment, which played a pivotal role in the ascendance and fortification of fundamentalist movements and mafia-like structures. These groups frequently emerged in response to the actions of Western actors, which were often perceived as both mafia-like and brutal. In the wake of the coup in Iran, governments of oil-producing countries became keenly aware of the potential consequences of defying Western interests. Nevertheless, this awareness did not deter the occurrence of aggressive infiltrations and takeovers of fossil energy sources and infrastructures in the subsequent decades. These actions were primarily driven by the interests of the United States of America and its allies, including the provision of support to the Mujahedin in the 1980s, from whose ranks the Taliban later emerged. In the 1990s, the USA provided support to these groups, motivated by the strategic objective of controlling pipeline routes for Central Asian oil. The dynamics of these geopolitical maneuvers and the pattern of US influence provide insight into the broader picture of international power constellations, conceptualized here as *complex hegemonies* (see Chapter 10.2). The "interventions" must be viewed within the context of great power competition, a scenario that, in the 21st century, is no longer limited to the major Western powers and Russia; it also includes emerging actors such as China and India. This complex network of influences and interventions has a pervasive impact on global politics and economics, continuously shaping the landscape of international relations. This illustrates the complex nature of global power structures and the management of resources, which are fundamental to our understanding of dominance. It also elucidates the pivotal role that control over essential resources like oil plays in strategies to fortify power. The analysis of the intensive exploitation of oil reserves by dominant global actors demonstrates that neoliberalism is not merely an economic concept. It encompasses a range of strategies that have deliberately fragmented political structures since the Second World War, with the subsequent goal of integrating them into a network of "free markets" that are effectively under the control of oil cartels. The strategies of market liberalization and state privatization, when combined with the substantial profits they yield, have been implemented in collaboration between state authorities and oil companies. The overthrow of a government, whether accomplished through overt and aggressive means or more subtle methods, is a central element of the hegemonic policies of superpowers such as the United States. These strategies not only influence the economic structures of nations but also reconfigure their political and social structures, making it evident that neoliberal policies have a significant impact on global governance and regional stability (Wight 2021; Feldman 2011; Raheb 2021).

The aforementioned coup can be interpreted as a form of systemic disruption, whereby external actors intervened with the deliberate intention of restructuring the Iranian political system in a manner that would produce outcomes aligned with their own system requirements. Furthermore, the concept of double contingency (see Chapter 2.2.6) is discernible in the hegemonic securing of resources, particularly oil. Operation Ajax provides an illustrative example of how the United States and Great Britain coordinated their actions based on anticipated reactions from the Iranian regime and other international actors, particularly the Soviet Union.

The Iranian regime under Mossadegh had nationalized the oil industry, a move that posed a direct threat to the interests of Western powers and created considerable uncertainty. The response of the United States and the United Kingdom, in the form of a covert coup, was a direct consequence of the perceived threat to their economic and strategic interests in the region. In contrast, the Mossadegh regime had also acted on the assumption that a nationalized oil industry would advance the economic and political interests of Iran, potentially without fully anticipating the significant opposition from Western powers. The decision to nationalize can also be viewed through the lens of double contingency, as the Iranian government based its actions on the anticipated behavior of other states, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. However, it is possible that the Iranian government may have underestimated the extent of the potential responses from these states. This mutual strategic adaptation, in conjunction with the calculations of the states involved, revealed the intricate nuances of double contingency in geopolitical contexts. Operation Ajax demonstrates how international relations and decision-making are frequently influenced by mutual expectations and efforts to anticipate and respond to the actions of other actors in order to achieve strategic objectives. In such contexts, the actions of a state are never isolated; rather, they must always be understood within the context of a global network of interactions. These findings illustrate that simplistic interventions that fail to account for the intricate complexities of global systems and issues not only fail to achieve their intended outcomes in the long term but can also give rise to consequences that were not foreseen. In the case of the overthrow of the Iranian democratic government, the initially installed Shah assumed power in the short term but was eventually replaced by a far more powerful network of ayatollahs. Subsequently, this group has evolved into a hegemonic power, possessing an impressive arsenal that includes sophisticated missiles, drones, and other advanced military equipment. The Iranian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic illustrate how external interventions can result in unpredictable political transformations, leading to outcomes that may be diametrically opposed to the original objectives of such interventions.

The discourse on the acquisition of resources and imperial dynamics, which is often conducted without consideration of moral implications, is inextricably linked with the importance of the observer within second-order observations. Indeed, the observer is a crucial element in this discourse, as they are the ones who interpret and analyze the actions of the subjects under study. In this case, my role as an author interpreting global events from a systemic-anthropological perspective serves as a prime illustration of this phenomenon. This perspective reflects a second-order principle in which the subjective viewpoint and associated values are of primary importance. The deliberate exclusion of moral considerations may create the impression of neutrality, which is often an illusion in practice. The intertwining of power, control, and oppression inherent in the securing of resources and the construction of empires gives rise to profound moral questions that must be addressed. To gain a more profound comprehension of these geopolitical strategies and their ramifications, it is essential to cultivate a high tolerance for ambiguity. This requires the development of the ability to navigate the contradictions and inconsistencies that are often present between the official self-images of states or organizations and their actual actions. As an author, this presents a challenge: to analyze not only the visible events and their official narratives, but also the underlying assumptions and hidden motivations. It is crucial to examine the moral implications of political and economic decisions and to assess how these decisions contribute to the formation and justification of the global order. Since the "takeover of empire" following the Second World War, the United States has been engaged in a series of ongoing and increasingly intense conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa with the objective of securing fossil fuel resources. A review of the political history of many oil-rich countries post-1950 reveals that the United States has been involved in a series of intrigues, wars, and CIA-led coups and military overthrows, a continuation of the approach previously employed by Britain and France. In light of this historical context, it is evident that a comprehensive and critical examination of the strategies employed and the ethical considerations surrounding such foreign interventions is imperative. The historical dimension is of particular significance when analyzing human differentiation through a systemic-anthropological lens, as it provides a valuable context for understanding the nuances of human differentiation.

The term "fragmentation of state systems" can be understood as a euphemism for the comprehensive disintegration and destruction of existing structures. This concept uncovers the fundamental nature of the neoliberal-coded regime of orders of difference. It is ultimately of no consequence whether democratic or authoritarian structures are dismantled; the respective governments are compelled to adhere to a predetermined agenda in order to avoid sanctions and attacks. Despite the waning of US hegemony since the 2000s and the emergence of other hegemonic powers, the dynamics described here persist, even if the current geopolitical constellations are far more complex than in previous decades. The control of oil resources in geopolitically sensitive regions has had a profound impact on the global economic and political landscape. The importance of energy security has been a constant feature of every advanced civilization and empire since the Neolithic era. It has become a macro-social anthropological constant that illustrates how access to critical resources is essential to hegemonic strategies, regardless of the prevailing political systems or ideologies. The history of oil extraction demonstrates the inextricable link between resources, authority, and dominance, as external forces have consistently shaped the global political and economic landscape. The understanding that the acquisition of resources is inextricably linked to their exploitation leads to the conclusion that it plays a key role in fostering diverse forms of human differentiation and in profoundly influencing global political and social structures. This dynamic will continue to exert a decisive influence on future geopolitical developments.

10.4 Schemata of Indifference

From the current perspective, an attitude of selective indifference emerges as a collective phenomenon that is deeply ingrained in the way social systems process information using affective-cognitive-bodily schemata (for further details, please refer to Chapter 6) and determine the communicative relevance of specific topics. This form of indifference also functions as a mechanism of collective cognitive repression, effectively excluding certain dynamics of power and exploitation from public discourse and collective consciousness. This provides a protective mechanism, enabling social systems to maintain their operational routines and identities without the disruption caused by confronting information that is unpleasant or system-threatening. In social systems that are constituted through communication and selectively process information based on its relevance to their own meaning structures, indifference manifests as a form of communicative selectivity. This selectivity results in the dismissal of information pertaining to instances of abuse of power and exploitation as irrelevant to the system. Consequently, such information is ignored. The specific Western interpretation of freedom, which has evolved through a historical exploitation of human and natural resources, can be viewed as a product of communicative selectivity. In Western countries, the concept of freedom has been elevated to the status of a fundamental ontological constant within the context of liberal democracy. The profound dependence of Western nations and emerging democracies on fossil fuels, particularly oil, has not only shaped their development since 1945 but has also significantly influenced their cultural conceptions of freedom and excess. This specific interpretation of freedom has evolved in the West into a right to unrestricted mobility and the excessive utilization of energy derived from fossil fuels (Sloterdijk and Heinrichs 2001, 321). This model is predicated on the exclusion of "others," which in turn is based on the exclusion of the "others." The neoliberal glorification of greed and perfidy as cultural values frequently obscures the fundamental "major event" (Sloterdijk 2016, 125) of fossil energy use, which is significantly absent from dominant ideologies: There is a persistent and pervasive lack of awareness that fossil fuels are not merely simple raw materials; rather, they function as universal "laborers of nature" (ibid., 126) that inherently generate abundance as soon as they are utilized. This phenomenon fails to acknowledge the far-reaching influence and reliance on fossil fuels that are integral to many aspects of contemporary economic and social existence. It upholds a cultural and ideological structure that justifies the continued exploitation and consumption of these resources. The privileged status of geopolitically advantaged Western countries is based on a double dynamic of externalization that closely intertwines their political economies with their political ecology (Lessenich 2018, 150). The concentration of energy production and control over oil flows bestows hegemonic actors with unparalleled power, as elucidated in section 10.3. The advent of the oil age has had a profound impact on societies in the Global North, enabling an unprecedented increase in productivity, economic organization, and consumption levels that far surpass those achievable with coal. This shift has created new opportunities for political mobilization and has led to an increase in demands for democratic participation. The dynamics of fossil fuel exploitation have not only altered the economic base but have also reshaped cultural, political, and economic structures in ways that systematically promote a certain ignorance of the long-term consequences and dependencies. *The "cultures of freedom"* that are emerging in these societies *are rooted in a dynamic of exploitation that is deeply entrenched in the use of fossil fuels. These cultures are predicated on the use of motorized machinery in lieu of human labor*, which has resulted in an unrelenting surge in the consumption of environmentally deleterious fossil energy resources. This phenomenon has been designated "sinister liberalism" (Sloterdijk 2016, 126), which, while promising freedom and progress, bears significant environmental and intergenerational costs. The resulting culture reflects not only the material basis of their prosperity but also a profound indifference to the ecological and social costs that this prosperity entails. This indifference is pervasive within the societal fabric, influencing policies and practices that prioritize immediate gains over sustainable and equitable development. Information that clearly evidences the detrimental effects of Western fossil fuel dependency is frequently dismissed as irrelevant within the Western framework of freedom, which results in its systematic exclusion from public discourse, only to be completely disregarded in political implementation. This selective processing of information is consistent with the framework of BCAS (Binary-Coded Affective Meaning Attribution within Schemata), particularly with respect to the determination of information relevance or irrelevance (see section 6.4). This processing includes a temporal immediacy aspect, whereby the urgency or immediacy of information affects its perceived relevance within the schema. The underlying assignment of meaning through binary coding oversimplifies the complexity of reality and fails to adequately address the pressing and multifaceted nature of ecological and social challenges. This inflexible and enduring stance of indifference, as evidenced by the pervasive delineation between system and environment, represents a strategy through which systems reinforce their boundaries. By negating or minimizing specific external realities—especially the consequences of their own exploitative practices—within their internal logic, these systems maintain a form of homeostasis. The systematic disregard for the ecological and social costs of fossil energy consumption thus mirrors the tendency to overlook potentially destabilizing factors, such as the need for more sustainable resource management. This approach not only preserves the status quo but also reinforces the structural barriers that impede meaningful engagement with critical issues, ultimately entrenching unsustainable practices and contributing to ongoing environmental degradation and social inequity.

In societies that are functionally differentiated, particularly those of the Western type, the clear demarcation of roles and functions gives rise to selective perception and behavior, as discussed in section 2.2.1. Individuals and collectives act rationally and purposefully within certain contexts, such as their professional environments. However, they often disregard the broader effects of their actions on global inequalities and ecological destruction in other aspects of their lives, such as consumption. This compartmentalization fosters a collective indifference to the extensive consequences of a lifestyle marked by "freedom," excess, and unlimited mobility. It also promotes a cognitive bias rooted in the illusion of an affluent capitalist win-win scenario, where the detrimental impacts of such lifestyles are overshadowed by the immediate benefits perceived. This selective awareness contributes to the continued viability of unsustainable practices without addressing the necessary changes required to mitigate their long-term impacts on society and the environment (Lessenich 2018, 153). In this setting, there is a notable emphasis on clean production and consumption among the in-group, whereas exploitation and environmental degradation are frequently externalized to groups perceived as foreign. This dynamic is particularly evident in the global dietary shift toward increased consumption of animal proteins, which relies heavily on the intensive use of fossil fuels for animal feed production (Sloterdijk 2016, 127). This practice not only exemplifies a selective engagement with sustainability but also the discrepancies in the distribution of environmental responsibilities. Wealthier nations frequently maintain more rigorous environmental standards within their own borders, while outsourcing environmentally detrimental practices to less developed countries. This not only exacerbates global inequalities but also contributes to the intensification of environmental crises in these marginalized regions, reflecting the intricate interrelationship between economic practices and environmental impact across diverse societal groups. By prioritizing ostensible sustainability within their own borders, societies perpetuate the pretense of prosperity while externalizing the environmental and social burdens onto outgroups and future generations. The selective implementation of sustainability practices enables the construction of narratives of cleanliness and responsibility at the domestic level. However, the actual costs associated with this lifestyle are often externalized onto those who are less able to manage or escape these impacts. This strategy not only deepens global inequalities but also places a significant burden on future generations, who will be forced to face the repercussions of this unsustainable consumption. This discrepancy between perceived and actual sustainability calls into question the moral and ethical foundations of the prevailing global economic paradigms. The concept of cognitive distortion, as presented here, flows into the schema of indifference. This mindset plays a pivotal role in the ongoing reproduction of power relations and differences, despite the fact that these dynamics are frequently not overtly manifest. This analysis extends well beyond the simple critique that democratic societies frequently act contrary to their Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality, which are fundamentally grounded in oppression, violence, and destruction. For example, the fossil fuel-driven lifestyle that is prevalent in Western countries is in stark contradiction with the values that are often proclaimed to be representative of the West. This discrepancy between espoused ideals and actual practices, manifested in wasteful resource consumption, illuminates a profound ambivalence within Western cultures. It is evident in how social systems selectively process information, negating or minimizing external realities according to their own internal logics and communication codes. Furthermore, the lifestyle that remains inaccessible to countries designated as "underdeveloped" exemplifies this disparity, even as these nations pursue "democratic development" and strive toward a similar model of affluent capitalism (Lessenich 2018, 80). This lack of consistency exposes the fundamental contradictions inherent to Western social structures, raising doubts about the sincerity of their professed values. This scenario exemplifies the systemic exclusion and the constrained capacity for reflection within the system. The deeply entrenched structures of indifference do not merely overlook or minimize the disparities; rather, they actively reinforce a status quo that privileges certain groups while marginalizing others. This attitude of exclusion and ignorance toward the ecological and social costs reflects a systemic externalization that is deeply embedded in the structures and practices of Western societies. The specific functions and communication codes of the functionally differentiated systems of the West foster a lifestyle predicated on the externalization of costs and the disregard for consequences impacting non-member systems and environments. This creates a complex dynamic of inclusion and exclusion, which shapes the everyday reality of a Western lifestyle reliant on fossil fuels. At the same time, it draws attention to the systemic ambivalence between the proclaimed ideals and the actual practice. This scenario also indicates a limitation of the system-theoretical perspective, as the current situation requires transformative changes—not only in climate and environmental policy but also in addressing the fundamental living conditions of exploited population groups. This is necessary so that reliance is not placed solely on the empty signifier of "human rights." The schema of indifference obscures the lived realities of those who are most acutely affected by the consequences of fossil fuel dependency. Such circumstances are frequently disregarded or trivialized. As a result, a multifaceted attitude emerges among those who are geopolitically privileged, whereby the realities of the lives of the exploited are eclipsed by a selective perception that prioritizes comfort and denial over confronting and addressing systemic injustices and disparities.

This selective attitude is inherently linked to a spectrum of emotions, including resentment, anger, and fear, which are directed towards the individuals or groups affected. These emotions are mobilized as protective mechanisms through the use of stereotypes and discourses that portray "the others" as dangerous and threatening. Such selective indifference to the lived experiences of those who are exploited is evidenced by a defensive stance that is not only aimed at preserving material privileges but also at protecting a threatened self-image. The schemata that emerge from these processes enable those who are privileged to evade confrontation with their own role in the global context of inequality, thereby maintaining their position and self-image. In this context, any disruption to the social order in Germany is perceived as a threat to personal prosperity, which in turn gives rise to the pejorative "demonization of others" in defense of the prevailing order. The practice of indifference allows many geopolitically privileged individuals to dismiss the demands of refugees and to demonize them in order to maintain a global structure that ensures their wealth. The resulting affective reactions demonstrate a paradoxical indignation at the suffering of others, reminiscent of secondary anti-Semitism, where hatred of Jews arises *not in spite of, but precisely because of*, the historical burden of guilt and the Holocaust's enduring memory. Similarly, negative sentiments toward "the others" (e.g., "Muslim refugees") emerge not despite their adversity, but rather as a direct consequence of the perception of this hardship and the challenges it presents to one's own privileged status. The condescending rhetoric directed towards refugees, Muslims, and individuals not identified as belonging to a geopolitically privileged group demonstrates a profound apprehension regarding the potential loss of material advantages. This fear contributes to a cycle of exclusion and dehumanization, thereby reinforcing structural inequalities and impeding meaningful social integration and empathy.

The cultural media and interfaces that shape our perception of the world play a key role in reinforcing schemas of recognition and non-recognition. These schemas are not only embedded in individual and collective sentiments and behaviors but also in the cultural practices that shape and sustain social ties, identities, and global inequalities. The messages conveyed by cultural codes (discussed in Chapter 8) reach individuals who are inclined to accept them unquestioningly due to evolutionary, neurobiological, and psychological factors, even in the absence of explicit identification with discriminatory content. Such affective practices establish regimes that threaten democratic institutions and values by propagating specific relationships of difference and belonging through cultural coding and normalizing diverse patterns of discrimination and segregation. These practices of differentiation, whether symbolic, material, conscious, or unconscious, structural, or institutional, constrain the life possibilities of groups defined through primordial coding. This consolidation of power confers benefits upon the privileged, particularly in terms of the authority to interpret social phenomena and conflicts, as well as privileged access to knowledge, wealth, and influence. The process of identifying with the self-image constructed in this manner and distancing oneself from those perceived as "other" reinforces both the individual's self-concept and the existing social order, while sustaining systemic inequalities. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these projected "others" are utilized not only to confront the foreign but also to manage aspects of the self that are deemed unacceptable. This dynamic of projection and differentiation helps maintain psychological stability and social conformity by externalizing unwanted or conflicting aspects of the self into the "other," thereby preserving a cohesive self-image and supporting the prevailing social structures that benefit the dominant groups (Mecheril and Haagen-Wulff 2016, 130). The indifference displayed towards the plight of refugees, whether they perish at sea or endure substandard living conditions in camps and shelters, not only upholds a social order that safeguards the interests of the privileged, but also protects a fragile self-image. This selective indifference and the associated schemas function as mechanisms for concealing Europe's historical, political, and economic responsibilities for the global conditions from which it benefits. This responsibility, however, does not imply a linear assignment of blame, but rather points to the complex interdependencies between European prosperity and global inequalities, which drive migration and flight. These circumstances play a significant role in the causes of flight and migration. Selective indifference enables those in privileged positions to maintain a comfortable distance from the consequences of policies and practices that underpin their lifestyles. Such a stance effectively shields them from confronting the harsh realities that others endure as a direct result of these policies. By disregarding or downplaying the challenges faced by refugees, societies evade confronting the uncomfortable reality that their prosperity and security frequently result from the instability and insecurity experienced by others (Mecheril and Haagen-Wulff 2016, 128). This not only has the effect of exonerating those who benefit from the status quo from taking meaningful action to address the root causes of displacement and migration but also allows the sorting and categorization of individuals and groups to continue. Schemata of indifference fulfill a foundational socio-psychological function by orienting a community toward a constructed threat, effectively concealing the fragility of a primordially coded "we." The construction of a "dangerous other" alongside an "endangered we" serves to legitimize one's own privileged status within a given social order. Therefore, *practices of human differentiation are inherently reliant on these schemata of indifference*, which are propagated through various discourses as well as through sophisticated rhetorical and visual means, particularly in contexts where power dynamics are particularly sensitive. These schemata establish normative patterns of behavior and emotional responses, delineating which human lives are deemed worthy of attention, compassion, and mourning within dominant discourses, and which are systematically overlooked or neglected. Moreover, they legitimize military actions and conflicts by promoting uncritical acceptance of such measures through persistent repetition and the shaping of collective memories. Such schemata define the boundaries within which empathy is extended or withheld, constraining the limits of compassion and sympathy. In this manner, these schemata not only justify violence and affirm existing power structures, but also cultivate selective empathy and attention, affording certain groups privilege while marginalizing others. This selective engagement has a profound impact on social cohesion and ethical orientation, shedding light on the deep entrenchment of indifference within the mechanisms of social control and identity formation (J. Butler 2010, 44).

This type of human differentiation requires targeted conditioning and corresponding schemata, which often occur on a daily basis in a ritualized manner within the media and various discourses. For example, it is evident in the practice of news reporting that certain events are selected for coverage while others are overlooked, and that the focus is placed on certain aspects of an event while other details are downplayed or ignored. The schema of indifference depicts how specific wars, armed conflicts, and human lives are classified as relevant or irrelevant based on their alignment with the prevailing practices of one's own social systems. These attributions of meaning are culturally coded and contingent on their geopolitical importance, are situated along a spectrum of (ir)relevance in ritualized forms of commemoration and memory. In her work, Judith Butler demonstrates how discourses surrounding war, such as those pertaining to the Iraq War and the Guantanamo Bay detention camps, influence emotional responses and ethical attitudes through the selective framing of information. This framing influences public perception and emotional responses in a manner that aligns with culturally preferred values and behaviors, effectively managing public sentiment and ethical engagement with global events. This process has the effect of reaffirming the dominance of existing power structures by maintaining a focus on narratives that serve the interests of the prevailing social systems, while marginalizing or entirely excluding those that might challenge or complicate the preferred narrative. These processes condition societies to accept a particular view of the world that aligns with specific interests, often at the expense of a more comprehensive and equitable understanding of global affairs (J. Butler 2010, 2009). This phenomenon can be understood as an ongoing pattern of human differentiation that co-evolves with human affects, cognitive processes, and cultural dynamics. In the context of the media and political landscape, conflicts and wars are addressed and evaluated in a manner that is deeply rooted in the patterns of human differentiation discussed in this book. To illustrate, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is subjected to rigorous daily examination in the media and political discourses of numerous Western countries. The question of whether Ukraine should be provided with weapons and military technology is a topic of considerable debate. This extensive attention and dedication to Ukraine stands in stark contrast to the relative indifference shown towards other wars and conflicts. Former peace activists in the West have recently become increasingly vocal in advocating for greater military expenditure and engaging in discussions about advanced weaponry. However, conflicts in countries such as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar appear to receive minimal attention within Western societies. Similarly, the ongoing extraction of ores, which fuels the trade in diamonds and gold in markets such as Antwerp and New York, continues unabated, with no apparent consideration of the dire consequences for local populations, including the number of children falling ill and dying under harsh conditions. It appears that these circumstances do not receive the level of attention that they warrant. The suffering and lives of these individuals are culturally constructed in a way that allows daily business to continue uninterrupted even after these issues are brought to light. These discrepancies in attention and response are not merely inadvertent oversights; rather, they reflect deeply entrenched cultural norms that asymmetrically value human lives. This coding influences the content of media agendas and shapes the collective consciousness within Western societies. As this discourse develops, it encourages readers to critically evaluate the structural mechanisms that enable such narratives to persist: the selective empathy, the overlooked atrocities, and the continuity of daily activities despite their grim repercussions. The appeal for contemplative consideration draws attention to the fact that each individual bears responsibility for maintaining these biased narratives. It demonstrates how tacit acquiescence and routine involvement reinforce established cultural frameworks.

In this context, it is essential to acknowledge the numerous "wars on terror," though a detailed discussion of these conflicts is beyond the scope of this analysis. These conflicts are of pivotal importance in the current forms of categorization and differentiation of individuals, populations, and regions. The multitude of wars and military interventions, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, and the resulting refugee crises starkly exemplify this assertion. It is evident that the majority of military interventions and wars in these regions are not primarily driven by the emancipation of girls and women or the establishment of democracies and human rights. Instead, they are largely motivated by the pursuit of securing and controlling natural resources that are crucial for the sustenance of life in geopolitically privileged societies (see Chapter 7). Although it would be simplistic to categorize all wars waged by the USA and NATO as purely exploitative, a realistic assessment must acknowledge that the pursuit of sustainable economic profit—thereby significantly improving one's own living conditions—plays a critical role. Such profit is frequently associated with the systematic exploitation of marginalized populations, further entrenching their subjugation within existing power structures. An examination of the intricate relationship between geopolitical strategies and the socio-economic motives behind military actions reveals the necessity to investigate the long-term consequences on global inequality and stability. The decision to adopt an abstract position from a systemic-anthropological perspective in this book does not diminish the explosive nature or the often one-sided media and political narratives surrounding certain wars and crises. Indeed, the very nature of these narratives is such that they are unlikely to be displaced by a more nuanced analysis. The resistance to the exploitation of land and natural resources, which constitutes a fundamental aspect of capitalist expansion, is often perceived as a significant threat to established privileges. The conflicts over these resources, which occur within the context of the global economic system, exemplify the tension between those who challenge the prevailing worldview and its dominant actors and those who defend the status quo. The existence of global resistance to hegemonic forces in its diversity precludes the possibility of simplistic categorization as either legitimate or illegitimate, or as resistance or terrorism. This illustrates the non-linear intricacies of geopolitical dynamics. It is of urgent importance to gain a nuanced understanding of these categories, considering the specific contexts, and to avoid the pitfall of indifferent relativization. An analysis of forms of resistance must account for the non-linear interactions among various systems within the contexts under study. In lieu of categorizing these interactions under overarching rubrics such as "postcolonialism," a more sophisticated methodology is imperative. It is both impractical and simplistic to assume a singular, homogeneous interpretation of suffering. This assumption is predicated on a linear mode of thinking that oversimplifies the complexity of global realities. A rigorous and comprehensive examination of conflicts and resistance must acknowledge the complex and interwoven nature of global struggles. *It is imperative to eschew simplistic and Manichean interpretations that reduce intricate conflicts to the simplistic dynamics of a sporting contest between two opposing sides.* To engage with these issues in a meaningful way and to develop meticulous positions on human differentiation, it is essential to adopt a multi-faceted understanding of them. This implies the recognition of the various dimensions of human differentiation. In this context, the term "non-linearity" refers to a phenomenon whereby the outcomes of actions are not directly proportional to their causes. This implies that even minor changes or interventions can potentially give rise to significant and widespread consequences that are difficult to predict with certainty. Furthermore, uncritical and linear thinking often leads to the fallacy of attributing broader social conditions to individuals, groups, or even entire nations. This frequently results in the misguided assumption that retribution or reparation—minor external influences on systems—can resolve the "problem," which in turn leads to the attribution of blame and the presumption of the superiority or absoluteness of one's own position. The understanding of how cultural coding and affective-cognitive-bodily schemas shape the perception and interpretation of phenomena such as resistance and exploitation, as well as other global dynamics, remains a critical area of research. By subjecting these influences to close scrutiny, a more profound understanding and an informed critique can be developed. The multitude of adversities and significant injustices that persist globally cannot be addressed by attributing responsibility to a single group. The construction of group identity and the accompanying sense of self-righteous, quasi-divine judgment, which often includes a desire for control, tends to trivialize complex issues. It is imperative to recognize and challenge these dynamics in order to develop a more nuanced and effective approach to understanding and addressing global issues. The categorization of specific actions as resistance or terrorism cannot be based on the assumption that there is a direct causal relationship between the motivations of the actors, their methods, and the social responses they elicit. Instead, it necessitates an investigation of the intricate and frequently indirect pathways through which these actions give rise to social transformations or responses. An appreciation of non-linearity enables an understanding that the construction of "enemies" or "victims" in social narratives is influenced not merely by specific actions but also by historical, cultural, and social contexts that evolve over time. It is important to note that even the hegemonic dynamics of exploitation, as discussed in this book, should not be automatically deemed immoral or evil. This may initially be challenging for some readers to accept. The pervasive assumption of a just world, wherein adversities are deemed to be directly attributable to wrongdoing (Just World Hypothesis), is revealed as a misleading and enduring schema. It is unfeasible to expect a resolution to conflicts that have persisted for decades or even centuries. The acknowledgment that chaos and ungovernability are more prevalent than order can be a source of unease. This discomfort is further compounded by the realization that as societies become increasingly complex and functionally differentiated, the challenges they face also increase in parallel. As discussed in other chapters of this book, the growing sense of being overwhelmed is emblematic of our times, akin to the proverbial pink elephant in the room. It stresses that attempts to apply straightforward solutions to intricate issues—such as attributing culpability, vilifying, and pursuing retribution—are not only insufficient but actively counterproductive. These approaches fail to address the underlying complexities and may inadvertently exacerbate the very issues they aim to resolve. The need to address the increasing complexity and concomitant overwhelming demands of contemporary social issues requires a transcending of traditional thought patterns in order to develop new ways of understanding and addressing these challenges. Adopting an attitude of resolute protest against perceived injustices while avoiding the pitfalls of simplistic blaming, demonization, and the pursuit of revenge can be effectively linked to the concept of second-order observation. This approach, which examines how a system perceives, interprets, and responds to both its environment and itself, provides a reflexive perspective that transcends superficial judgments. This analytical approach allows for a critical examination of one's own assumptions, as well as the filters and structures that shape one's perceptions. Through this profound introspection, we can attain a comprehensive comprehension of the intricate nuances that shape the phenomenon of injustice. An informed and nuanced approach to protest that moves beyond mere blame allows us to address not only the symptoms but also the systemic causes of the injustices in question. The application of second-order observation in the context of protest against injustices represents a commitment to pursuing structural change through a process of critical questioning of the deeply entrenched assumptions and social structures that constitute the foundations of the existing order. This endeavor necessitates a willingness to consider complex solutions that can effectively address the multifaceted challenges we face.

An examination of human differentiation requires a meta-reflexive perspective that is aware of existing power asymmetries and does not allow itself to be constrained by restrictive narratives. This entails examining the macro-social anthropological constants of power and domination that have persisted throughout human history. The enduring disputes surrounding oil and other crucial natural resources, which are integral to global power dynamics, provide a clear illustration of the considerable impact these factors have on the interactions between social systems. Control over such resources operates not only as an economic lever but also as a political tool that can define and solidify global power relations. In this context, the systematic exploitation of marginalized groups and their integration into existing hierarchies are recognized as continuations of historical patterns of power and domination that underpin the current global order (complex hegemony). This perspective reflects an understanding that practices of human differentiation often align with narratives that support the interests of one's own group, even if these narratives do not accurately reflect the actual categories of group affiliation. The challenge is to transcend these dichotomies in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and consequences of resistance actions. The schemata of indifference demonstrate a deeply ingrained anthropological constant: the securing and maximizing of one's own resources. This drive for efficiency does not primarily originate from a necessity for survival in geopolitically advantageous Western societies. Instead, it is a consequence of a pursuit of excess and a lifestyle that defines "freedom" at the expense of others. This pursuit fosters an affluence that is characterized by excessive consumption and the wastage of resources, while simultaneously reinforcing conditions of exploitation. The burden of these conditions is borne disproportionately by marginalized and exploited groups and regions. These behavioral patterns represent an adaptation that has been refined over generations through natural selection and cultural evolution, with the objective of ensuring survival and reproduction within a changing environment. These behaviors, attitudes, and social structures facilitate the simplification of complex social interactions, the strengthening of social bonds, and the effective management of conflicts. Such adaptive processes are of great importance for the maintenance of stability and cohesion within communities, enabling individuals to respond collectively to challenges and pursue shared goals. By optimizing the acquisition of resources, these schemata contribute to the long-term prosperity and identity of groups. It is paradoxical that in Western societies, this often serves less as a survival strategy and more as a means of pursuing greater accumulation and maintaining exploitative structures. This illustrates a significant discrepancy between the adaptive roots of these behaviors and their contemporary manifestations, which frequently perpetuate inequality and environmental degradation. Adaptive efficient behavior can be conceptualized as a social and cultural "survival strategy," enabling groups to safeguard and enhance their resources, power, and identity. However, this strategy reveals a paradox: in geopolitically favored Western societies, it is driven less by a genuine need for survival and more by a striving for excess and the perpetuation of exploitative relationships. This phenomenon is exemplified by a lifestyle characterized by excessive consumption and the squandering of resources. Concurrently, exploitation entails an unequal distribution of resources and the ecological and social costs associated with this way of life. The practice of second-order observation, which encourages a critical examination of one's own processes of perception and interpretation, provides a framework for understanding the paradox inherent in the schemata of indifference within Western consumer societies. This allows for the recognition that the pursuit of excess and the maintenance of exploitative relationships are not merely immediate responses to needs, but are deeply embedded in the cultural, social, and economic structures that define these societies. This insight aligns with critiques of oversimplification and the tendency towards indifference, illustrating that the maintenance of the status quo and the injustices associated with it represent active, albeit often unconscious, choices that necessitate critical reflection.

10.5 Consequences of Indifference

The final section of this chapter assesses the influence of the schemata of indifference on the geopolitical and strategic aspects of human differentiation from a German perspective. Particular emphasis is placed on the implications for foreign policy and security, and their influence on global power relations and orders of difference. The global structures of resource and human exploitation, as discussed in the preceding sections, have reached a critical turning point, characterized by three key aspects. Firstly, systems that are highly functionally differentiated are becoming increasingly disconnected from their social embedding and interactions with other systems. The autonomy afforded to these systems encourages a myopic perspective among powerful entities that prioritize their internal logic over the intricate demands of the broader social context. This disconnection frequently results in the emergence of one-dimensional and reductionist perspectives, which are particularly prevalent in systems that have a significant impact on the lives of people worldwide (Willke 2023, 15).

Secondly, the schemata of indifference, as detailed in Section 10.4, exacerbate this myopia by allowing the long-term ecological and social consequences of actions to be ignored or marginalized. These schemata not only support the maintenance of existing power structures and the exploitation of resources, people, and regions by shaping social perceptions and reactions; they also significantly influence ecological crises. By privileging certain responses and strategies to climate change while neglecting others, they exacerbate inequalities in resource distribution. This predominance of certain coding logics, particularly within economic and political systems, tends to prioritize short-term benefits and stabilization at the expense of long-term sustainability and resilience.

Thirdly, a deficit in cross-system collective intelligence (ibid., 151) results in resistance against adaptive and preventive measures in the context of ecological challenges. This collective intelligence, which is vital for identifying and responding to complex and long-term threats such as climate change in an appropriate manner, is undermined by the prevailing schemata of indifference. In lieu of cultivating interdisciplinary and intersectoral solutions that draw upon a comprehensive understanding of ecological, social, and economic interactions, these schemata foster a fragmented perception and management of global crises. This ultimately yields a critical deficiency in resilience to mounting ecological dangers, as the indispensable profound transformation toward sustainable modes of existence and business operations is impeded by the constraints of the system's intrinsic logics and the dearth of an integrative collective vision.

Resistance to change and innovation in addressing ecological crises not only impedes the effective reduction of climate change impacts but also exacerbates social and economic inequalities. This phenomenon occurs because the communities and regions most affected by climate change are often those with the fewest resources and opportunities to adapt and cope. The autonomy of functional systems, which prioritize their own interests over the collective interests of society, has resulted in a notable lack of diversity in geopolitical strategies. In Germany, this was evident in a pronounced dependence on Russian gas, which also hindered the transition to renewable energy sources and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This necessitated a reorientation of energy policy. In the context of the 1956 Suez Crisis, the strategic power position of the USA as a nascent global power was clearly demonstrated for the first time by its successful prevention of military interventions by Great Britain and France in Egypt. The military actions of these former colonial powers were primarily aimed at securing Western Europe's energy interests in the Middle East, a pursuit that the United States had previously supported to ensure its own energy security in the Western Hemisphere (J. Gupta and Chu 2018). The strategic decisions made during the Suez Crisis, which resulted in the estrangement of several European countries from their NATO ally, the United States, prompted a notable shift in energy sourcing, with a notable increase in reliance on Soviet and subsequently Russian energy sources. This shift was driven by the necessity to diversify energy supplies and reduce dependency on Middle Eastern oil, which was perceived as increasingly volatile due to political instabilities and Western interventions (H. Thompson 2022). The geopolitical shift towards Soviet, and subsequently Russian, energy sources reached a notable intensification in the 1970s, coinciding with the expansion of Europe's energy ties with the Soviet Union to encompass the natural gas sector. Despite the deepening energy alignment with the Soviet Union, particularly through the expansion of natural gas imports in the 1970s, Europe's "Concession" to US hegemony remained steadfast, illustrating the multifaceted strategy of resource security that underpinned the continuity of the US-EU relationship. Europe's efforts to diversify its energy supplies, especially by turning eastward, did not undermine the broader political and strategic alliance with the United States. Instead, it functioned as just one component of Europe's larger balancing act—ensuring energy security while maintaining crucial geopolitical ties to the US, thereby safeguarding its position in the global power structure. The intensification of relations with regard to energy resources marked a pivotal era in European energy strategy, further entrenching the continent's dependency on Eastern Bloc energy resources. As previously discussed, the period also saw the US dollar becoming increasingly linked to fossil fuels, a move that reinforced the United States' economic dominance and reinforced the global capitalist structures of exploitation, along with the international institutions that support them. The contemporary phenomenon of climate change can be seen as a direct continuation of the processes of capitalist globalization. This process has not only emerged from but has also functioned to sustain domination within the existing framework of human inequalities. In examining the complex intertwined nature of global economic systems and collective historical actions, it is challenging to identify specific agents responsible for the unfolding environmental catastrophe. Nevertheless, the accountability for carbon dioxide emissions and the environmental deterioration associated with industrialization is irrefutable. Moreover, this responsibility is not distributed evenly, as the industrialized nations that have historically benefited the most from fossil fuels bear a disproportionate burden for the resulting environmental impacts (Höhne et al. 2020). Furthermore, the complex intertwining of causes and consequences associated with global environmental issues, which often span multiple time periods and involve a multitude of actors with interdependent relationships, further compounds the challenge of determining responsibility. The intricate nature of global environmental issues presents a significant challenge to their effective resolution. The interwoven nature of global systems means that actions taken in one area can have unexpected repercussions in another, introducing a level of complexity that makes it difficult to identify the most effective way to address these problems (Rogelj et al. 2019). Europe's dependence on Russian energy resources was brought into sharp focus in 2008 when Russian President Vladimir Putin made his disregard for post-Soviet borders evident by intervening in Georgia. This action significantly constrained the European Union's capacity to respond effectively to its Russia policy. The events of 2008 provided a stark illustration of the geopolitical complexities that are inextricably linked with Europe's energy strategies.

As early as the 1990s, it became apparent that geopolitical interests would place limitations on the ability to effectively address climate change. The development of new energy sources was recognized as a decision with extensive geopolitical implications (Oualaalou 2020, 41). The United States' refusal to ratify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which aimed to limit greenhouse gas emissions, was predicated on the widespread belief among U.S. senators that an agreement imposing commitments solely on the United States, and not on China—then categorized as a developing country—would prove economically disadvantageous for the U.S. economy. As a result, the complex interrelationship between environmental policy and international economic competition became apparent. During the same period, the coalition government in Berlin, which held power from 1998 to 2005, began to shift its focus towards renewable energy and initiated the phase-out of nuclear power. This shift, while advancing environmental objectives, resulted in an unintended consequence of deepening Germany's dependence on Russian natural gas. Concurrently, Vladimir Putin initiated a strategic project spanning two decades with the objective of extricating Ukraine from the Russian gas transportation system. This would further consolidate Russia's control over gas supplies to Europe, thereby influencing European energy security and diplomacy (Chekunova 2023). The development and expansion of the Nord Stream gas pipelines, which run directly from Russia to Germany and circumvent traditional transit countries in Eastern Europe, typify the growing estrangement from the USA. Notwithstanding concerns expressed by the United States and certain European partners regarding the potential for increased reliance on Russian gas and the attendant geopolitical risks, these projects were pursued with considerable vigor. This situation brings to the fore the enduring influence of energy on international relations, suggesting that the advent of renewable energies has not fundamentally altered the role of energy in geopolitics. The transition to renewable energy sources is a lengthy process that is unlikely to rapidly resolve the geopolitical complexities surrounding fossil fuels. Since the 2010s, the United States and Russia have become increasingly competitive in the sale of natural gas to Europe. This is reminiscent of the dynamics that characterized the oil trade in the early 20th century (Dalby 2020, 134). These developments indicate the critical role of energy policy in international relations and its enduring impact on the formation and dissolution of alliances and conflicts between states over decades. In particular, the shared interest in fossil fuels has facilitated a tacit rapprochement between China and Russia, thereby demonstrating the continued influence of energy resources on geopolitical dynamics. Those who fail to consider these realities offer only an incomplete understanding of international relations. Energy will continue to be a pivotal element in the *Great Power Game*, and its effects are unlikely to diminish quickly, given the macrosocial and anthropological constants that govern global interactions. Germany's geopolitical estrangement from the United States with regard to energy policy represents a shift in functional systems and the emergence of national systems that are autonomous within a globalized context. The decisions to construct the Nord Stream gas pipelines and to gradually phase out nuclear energy are manifestations of this decoupling on a global scale. The autonomous decision-making processes, primarily driven by national interests, present a challenge to the coordination and cooperation among states that is necessary to address global challenges, such as climate change. This geopolitical shift and the resultant energy realignment also influence practices of human differentiation by reinforcing existing socio-economic inequalities and creating new ones, thereby impacting both domestic and international socio-economic landscapes. The dependence on fossil fuels from geopolitically unstable regions not only intensifies social inequalities through the volatility of energy prices but also exerts an influence on global socio-economic dynamics. Conversely, investments in renewable energy and associated technological developments have the potential to give rise to novel forms of social differentiation and hierarchization. For example, the establishment of new labor markets and the reallocation of economic resources through renewable energy initiatives have the potential to transform socio-economic landscapes. The energy policy decisions of individual states have a direct impact on climate change, and thus, on the global climate. The expansion of renewable energy sources and the phase-out of fossil fuels contribute to a reduction in CO_2 emissions, which is a positive outcome from an environmental perspective. Nevertheless, a continued reliance on fossil fuels may impede global efforts to mitigate climate change, given their environmental impact and the geopolitical instability of major fossil fuel-producing regions. Moreover, geopolitical alienation and the autonomy of national energy policies contribute to an increase in climate refugees. As the effects of climate change and the resulting socio-economic conflicts continue to displace communities, the necessity for a unified global response becomes increasingly apparent. Germany's geopolitical distancing from the USA on energy issues exemplifies the challenges posed by the decoupling of functionally differentiated systems and the myopia that results from the neoliberal ideology that pervades many contemporary Western governments. This decoupling impedes the urgent transition to sustainable ways of living and doing business, thereby demonstrating a failure to develop collective intelligence in addressing the escalating ecological risks. The inherent limitations of system logics and the absence of holistic, collective foresight—which could be defined as a form of action-oriented collective intelligence—present significant obstacles to the innovation and changes that are required in order to address ecological crises effectively. The broader dilemma of globalized functional systems is not exclusive to Germany; it is evident in the progressive detachment from nation-state ties and social self-regulation. This detachment has the effect of reducing the capacity for effective governance and coordination, thereby challenging the ability to steer global affairs effectively. It is not yet evident what form a new global governance structure might take, nor whether it will prove capable of managing the complex challenges currently facing the world (Willke 2023, 152).

The inertia of nation-state systems in implementing necessary adjustments and innovations to address ecological crises not only impedes effective climate impact mitigation but also exacerbates social and economic inequalities. The schemata of indifference discussed have a profound influence on the coding and shaping of internal and external relationships by social systems, with extensive consequences for human differentiation, global resource distribution, access opportunities, and power relations. The advent of novel forms of differentiation, such as disparate access to clean air and water, signals a transformation in the organization and perception of social inclusion and exclusion. In light of the insights and conclusions of this analysis, particularly the recognition that the world operates in a non-linear fashion and that no single part can independently control the whole, it becomes necessary to consider future actions. This realization may initially induce a sense of powerlessness, analogous to the situation on the Titanic prior to its sinking. However, it also presents opportunities for a more profound comprehension of the intricate dynamics and the prospective avenues for transformative change within these non-linear structures. The climate crisis presents global societies with the imperative to undertake a critical reevaluation of existing power structures and the dominance of certain coding logics. It requires the cultivation of an awareness of the limitations of these individual system logics and the acknowledgment of the necessity for a systemic perspective that can comprehensively grasp the intricate interactions between climate change and social disparities. It is thus imperative to cultivate such awareness and schemata in order to inform the development of policies and practices that can support the creation of a resilient, adaptive, and inclusive global community. The multifaceted challenges of climate change must be addressed collectively, with proactive measures undertaken in the spirit of a sustainable future for all.

The analyses presented in this work warrant acknowledgment of their potential to raise significant doubts about the possibility of emerging new collective identities and intelligences that could spontaneously generate schemes free from exploitation of people, the environment, and resources. This skepticism is based on an understanding of the obstacles posed by deeply entrenched structures and pervasive patterns of thought. Considering the tendency of social systems to maintain their stability and coherence through self-referential mechanisms, the notion of a sudden emergence of new, comprehensive collective intelligences appears somewhat utopian. The suggestion that transformative collective forms of consciousness might emerge under such circumstances is frequently employed as a rhetorical device in the concluding reflections of academic works. The objective of this approach is typically to provide an optimistic outlook or to foster hope for significant change. In light of the arguments and analyses presented, however, this hope must be regarded as highly optimistic. The objective of this book is not to foster unrealistic expectations or indulge in utopian fantasies. Instead, the objective is to provide a critical and realistic assessment of the current challenges and the constraints on the changeability of social systems. The aim is to develop a more profound understanding of the complexities of social dynamics without being unduly influenced by impractical visions of the future. To address the issues embedded in our global system, a paradigmatic realignment of existing schemata is required, as they are deeply woven into cultural coding and emotional markers. This presents an inherent dilemma: the necessity for fundamental change is at odds with the deeply ingrained tendency to preserve established structures and values. There is a considerable danger that the transformation that is so urgently required will be impeded by the continued existence of conventional structures and modes of thought. Such an outcome could have a markedly detrimental effect on sustainable social development.