

11 Diversity as Ideology? Challenges and Contradictions of Social Integration

In light of prior research findings, particularly the tendency of social systems to maintain stability and coherence through autopoietic mechanisms and self-referentiality, as well as the recognition that deeply embedded differentiation schemata, which are embedded in cultural coding and geopolitically strategic emotional marking practices, cannot be readily transformed, the question arises in the concluding chapter as to the extent to which diversity can be genuinely achieved in highly complex social formations. The demand for the recognition of “all” identities and lifestyles represents a fundamental aspect of discussions pertaining to diversity and integration in democratic, functionally differentiated societies. Although this assertion initially appears to be forward-thinking and welcoming of diverse perspectives, it is, in fact, fundamentally flawed. This stance reflects an attempt to address the challenges of social complexity by constructing simple, comprehensible orders that foster a sense of community and belonging. It situates those who demand universal recognition in a morally superior position, yet it fails to take into account the complex prerequisites for authentic recognition and inclusion. By adopting an ideologized perspective that disregards the essential conditions for transforming diversity into actual social cohesion, they exacerbate the underlying issues rather than resolving them. This approach offers a simplified view of social problems that is often at odds with reality, lacks a robust scientific foundation, and resembles more an ideological echo than a critical and nuanced analysis. It is a common practice in politics, academia, and the media to portray diversity and pluralism as unconditional and context-independent ideals, without sufficient consideration of the distinctions between social, factual, and temporal dimensions initially mentioned. This perspective is understandable when one considers the suffering and pressures that many people endure as a result of various forms of differentiation. The utopian demand for universal recognition is both naive and counterproductive. In order to achieve true recognition, two invaluable resources are required: *time and authenticity*. This perspective is not in conflict with the principles of diversity, recognition, and inclusive practices; it is, in fact, aligned with them. Nevertheless, the intrinsic value of recognition is entirely undermined when it is employed for egocentric self-affirma-

tion and moralization through unrealistic expectations and ideologically charged approaches, without effecting meaningful systemic change. The assumption that diversity inherently fosters social cohesion is inherently contradictory, resulting from a conflation of the social and factual dimensions within functionally differentiated societies. The factual dimension is concerned with the examination of substantive differences, including cultural, economic, and phenotypic characteristics. In contrast, the social dimension is focused on the analysis of interpersonal relationships, power structures, and interactions between individuals and groups. The contradiction arises when diversity in the factual dimension is assumed to have positive impacts on the social dimension, without consideration of the complex mechanisms required for a transition from differentiation to integration. In practice, the transition from recognizing diversity (the factual dimension) to fostering social cohesion (the social dimension) requires active and deliberate efforts. The mere existence of diversity in the factual dimension does not guarantee the development of solidarity and a sense of belonging in the social dimension. Conversely, cultural, economic, and social differences, in the absence of active intervention to address and transform them into inclusive structures, have the potential to intensify tensions and conflicts, thereby undermining social cohesion. The normative agenda that underlies this concept signals the core values of tolerance, equality, and inclusion. The proposition is that by actively recognizing and valuing diversity, an inclusive environment is created where individuals can freely develop their identities, thereby fostering a stronger sense of belonging and social harmony based on mutual respect. However, this ideologized lens often fails to recognize or underestimate the inherent contradiction, thereby promoting an idealized vision of pluralism and multiculturalism. Programs that purport to advance diversity without subjecting the aforementioned dimensions to rigorous scrutiny tend to neglect both the challenges and the essential conditions necessary to transform diversity into genuine social cohesion. Furthermore, the oversimplification of complex realities, which reduces diversity to simplistic categories and identities, disregards the intricacy of individual experiences and the interconnectivity of disparate forms of discrimination. The issue of symbolic politics also requires consideration. This phenomenon substitutes real change with initiatives that are limited to symbolic gestures, thereby leaving structural inequalities intact. Moreover, an emphasis on specific forms of diversity may unintentionally reinforce existing power structures by recognizing and promoting only those differences that are deemed “acceptable.” The preferential treatment of white, Christian Ukrainian refugees in Germany regarding employment, housing conditions, and asylum processes, in comparison to dark-skinned Muslims, exemplifies the concept of “acceptable” differences. This bias reflects the compatibility of certain differences with existing social norms and power structures, while other differences are marginalized or subjected to discriminatory practices. Such selective acceptance of diversity demonstrates how the promotion of particular “acceptable” differences

can act to strengthen existing social hierarchies without adequately addressing the underlying causes of inequality and exclusion. The establishment of a binary gender system, whereby the categories of “man” and “woman” are deemed the only “acceptable” and even obligatory ones, represents a further instance of the narrowing of diversity to a narrow set of “acceptable” differences. This follows a sustained effort to gain broader recognition of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. This leads to the crucial question of who or what entity determines what is deemed acceptable, and on what basis. This leads to the question of whether this is a valid position for all, or only for the majority or for conservative groups that seek to retain their power. The attitude described here, which is held by the majority of the major political parties in Germany, implicitly neglects and marginalizes non-binary and LGBTQ+ identities by promoting a narrow understanding of gender and sexuality that does not reflect the full range of human experiences and identities. Furthermore, in view of its increasing importance, diversity is on occasion deployed as a means of furthering institutional or political objectives and enhancing one’s own image (a phenomenon known as “gender and rainbow washing”). The process in question fails to adequately consider the needs and rights of the groups in question, thereby contravening the principles of ethical practice. Nevertheless, this does not imply that efforts towards diversity and inclusion are inherently ineffective or undesirable. It is thus imperative to subject such initiatives to rigorous scrutiny in order to ascertain their authenticity and ensure that they genuinely address the concerns and needs of the groups in question. It is of the utmost importance that diversity efforts do not merely amount to a means to enhance an image or to fulfill superficial quotas; rather, they must aim to bring about profound structural change. This requires a comprehensive consideration and reflection of the dimensions discussed in detail in this book within the respective context. In this regard, future anthropological and empirical cultural studies may benefit from a comprehensive analysis and reflection on these dimensions of diversity. Otherwise, the multifaceted dimensions of human differentiation and diversity will be overlooked, resulting in a superficial representation of diversity. Furthermore, the issue of structural inequalities and discrimination will remain unaddressed. The failure to consider the aforementioned dimensions not only detracts from the analysis of structural challenges but also produces effects that privilege certain identities and marginalize others. Such dynamics exemplify the intricate interplay between advocacy for diversity and the unintended consequences that may impede the very objectives of inclusivity and equity (Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017; Gündemir, Martin, and Homan 2019; E.S. Brown 2022). Other studies demonstrate the ambivalent effects of diversity strategies that concentrate solely on institutional labels or management. These approaches may neglect or even overlook various primordial coded dimensions of discrimination. This oversight can result in strategies that fail to address the deeper, ingrained aspects of bias, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of diversity initiatives (Bereni,

Epstein, and Torres 2020; Doane 2017; Kirby et al. 2024; Rissanen 2021; Apfelbaum, Stephens, and Reagans 2016). The empirical evidence of the ineffectiveness of diversity training has been extensively documented in academic literature (Dobbin and Kalev 2018; Bezrukova et al. 2016; Kalev, Kelly, and Dobbin 2006). In particular, the obligation to participate in training can engender resistance and even strengthen or create negative attitudes towards the target groups. Other studies indicate that the primary objective of numerous diversity training programs is the generation of economic profit, rather than the emancipation of disadvantaged individuals (Ely and Thomas 2020). Neither the neglect of existing social inequalities through “diversity blindness” nor the symbolic, moralizing, or commodifying approaches to inclusion—which merely offer superficial lip service without a deeper engagement with relevant social dimensions—are effective. The lack of awareness of existing social inequalities due to “diversity blindness” and the utilization of inclusion approaches that are based on symbolic, ideologized, moralizing, or economically motivated factors, which, in the absence of a comprehensive examination of the pertinent social dimensions, merely represent superficial gestures of inclusion, has been demonstrated to be an ineffective strategy. The assumption that every identity should be universally recognized and treated equally at all levels is flawed in that it fails to consider the limited resources of time and authenticity. These are essential for a more profound comprehension and an authentic appreciation; they become valuable precisely because of their scarcity. Moreover, it is not about recognizing every identity and attitude. It is implausible that anyone would desire the recognition of fascist, dehumanizing, and violence-glorifying views and their respective proponents. It is reasonable to inquire as to whether there is a genuine desire for the equal recognition of fundamentalist, fanatical, and backward-looking ideologies. The moralization and instrumentalization of diversity by individuals in politics and academia who prioritize success and pursue ideological rather than scientific approaches often result in the reproduction of ideological narratives rather than a well-founded analysis. Without a more profound comprehension of the ramifications, these individuals disseminate vacuous rhetoric and advance a simplified perspective that is not empirically substantiated and disregards the intricacy of the dimensions under discussion. In a society where there is an abundance of information and a multitude of identity claims, the implementation of genuine recognition is made more challenging and may potentially become a mere formality. The attempt to institutionalize universal recognition may inadvertently result in the creation of new forms of exclusion. This is due to the fact that certain criteria are set which favor certain groups, thereby establishing a hierarchy of worthiness. The laudable aspiration for universal recognition ultimately proves ineffective since certain identities are, in practice, regarded as “more equal.” This exemplifies the constraints of a society in which all identities are to be equally acknowledged. The debate surrounding gender-inclusive language and its advocacy as a tool for fostering greater inclusion and

fairer conditions illustrates the complexity of shaping diversity. Although the adoption of gender-inclusive language is connected to the commendable objective of promoting diversity and equality, it is clear that the realization of these ideals cannot be assumed as a given or as a guarantee for creating more inclusive and equitable conditions. In the context of highly complex and densely interconnected social relationships, it is practically impossible to fully accommodate every individual and group without overwhelming the system. In managing complex systems, many details at generalized levels of interaction must be deemed irrelevant or at least not indispensable. The development of organized complexity is feasible only through the controlled management of detail relevance and its simplification in forms of interaction between subsystems. In complexity theory, this concept is known as the principle of “optimal loss of detail” (Willke 2014b, 26). A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics and a careful evaluation of the impacts and limitations of linguistic modifications are crucial to effectively realizing diversity and equality. While linguistic adaptations and the pursuit of emancipation are undeniably positive, their effectiveness should not be prematurely regarded as a universal remedy. The introduction of gender-inclusive language, aimed at promoting equality and diversity, encounters practical, linguistic, and ideological challenges. Particularly, the moralizing compulsion to adopt specific linguistic forms can generate rejection and contempt rather than recognition and appreciation. The social system cannot be trivialized through ideologized coercion, but emancipatory efforts can gradually alter schemata through objective communication. If the dimensions to be differentiated are not sufficiently considered, there is a risk of promoting a simplified and often unrealistic view of social issues, thus exacerbating underlying problems. These dimensions include not only the differences in content (factual dimension) and the interactions and communications between individual actors and levels (social dimension), but also the time dimension and the anthropological dimension. As previously outlined in Chapter 2.2.1, the intricacy of human differentiation in functionally differentiated societies is evident not only in the array of social roles and functions, but also in the multifaceted *ways and possibilities of identifying* with these roles and functions. These provide individuals and groups with apparent points of reference within these intricate structures, despite the potential ambiguity or hybridity of these identifications. They transcend the boundaries of conventional categorization, giving rise to novel forms of affiliation. Consequently, ideas of ethnic, cultural, gender-related, and national identities also fulfill an integrative function. In Western societies, which are characterized by functional differentiation, these contribute to the creation of social order that extends beyond the mere division of functions. However, at first glance, this may appear to be disorder, as is evident in the case of gender identification possibilities. These identities provide both individual and collective identities with a superordinate meaning and create a superordinate sense of belonging, for example, in the form of “being on the side of” or “being opposed

to.” Incorporating the *time dimension*, connected to geopolitical dynamics, unveils the historical origins and global influences that shape contemporary discourses and practices of differentiation. Events such as decolonization wars, the establishment of US hegemony, the neoliberal order, as well as migration movements and the unequal global distribution of resources significantly influence current forms of human differentiation. These historical factors affect the social perception of difference, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and responses to current challenges. Historical continuities, processes of change, and ruptures significantly influence the practices of human differentiation and are manifested in cultural codes that assign meanings. The *anthropological dimension* manifests in the concept of schemata. The development of differentiation practices into schemata of (in)difference within the context of cultural codes is grounded in evolutionary-biological and psychological-anthropological foundations of human perception.

This approach reveals the paradoxical nature of human information processing: capable of both swift comprehension and inherent limitations in capacity. By integrating these insights into our understanding of human differentiation, a comprehensive and realistic view of the functioning of social systems emerges. This deepens our understanding of how social systems handle diversity and pluralism and under which structural conditions recognition and inclusion are feasible. Evolutionary-biological approaches provide insights into innate mechanisms of perception that influence the recognition and categorization of differences. These predisposed tendencies play a central role in the construction and application of difference schemas by social systems to manage complexity and establish social orders. The psychological-anthropological perspective sheds light on the ways in which culturally shaped patterns of perception shape the development of difference schemas and identity constructions. It demonstrates how individual and collective experiences of difference and belonging are shaped by cognitive and emotional processes that impact social integration and the management of diversity. When these dimensions are overlooked, the result is often a situation of cultural conflict, as the assertion of absolute knowledge in such complex contexts typically leads to contention. In the context of these struggles for recognition, contempt can become pervasive, leading to an epidemic where the numerous contenders for recognition ultimately overwhelm and confuse one another, as well as the broader populace. When a struggle for recognition is initiated, it can result in a pervasive contempt that engulfs and overwhelms the multitude of contenders for recognition, leading to the erroneous assumption that the collective body of people can be reduced to a singular entity. This impedes collective comprehension and hinders efficacious discourse, thereby fostering a cyclical process of miscommunication and discord among disparate groups (Sloterdijk 2000, 31). Ideological influences are evident in the culture wars that are currently being waged in our society. Not only do these conflicts reflect

various social tensions, but they also function as a mechanism to shape opinions and strengthen the conviction that one is on the morally “right” side. These disputes are distinguished by a shift from an ontological culture of difference, which prevailed in estate-based societies and other historical contexts with hierarchically defined relationship models, to an egalitarian axiom. The aforementioned assumption implies that existing differences are irrelevant. The pursuit of recognition within a mass characterized by forced uniformity, which is ideologically motivated, does not result in the desired recognition and appreciation. The endeavor to establish such uniformity on a universal scale is inherently futile, as the aspiration for universal recognition is inherently undermined by the very demand for homogeneity itself (ibid., 88). Even in liberal democracies, the necessity for human differentiation remains an inherent aspect of social organization, despite the aspiration for the universal application of equal treatment. The imperative for uniformity ultimately leads to a diminution in the acknowledgment and esteem accorded to individual and collective identities, thereby engendering a culture of indifference. An ideologically superficial interpretation of diversity which fails to adequately consider the key dimensions contributes to the promotion of a culture of indifference. Demands for recognition that are couched in moralizing terms and met with indifference can give rise to a toxic form of contempt. Ideological demands that are influenced by a particular ideology fail to recognize that the pursuit of an egalitarian ideal can be counterproductive. It is possible that groups may emerge that, driven by envy and a fear of losing recognition, will seek to reinstate the old ontological hierarchy practices in a distorted form. From this perspective, the acceptance of one’s own schemata of (in)difference is a fundamental prerequisite for the realization of genuine diversity and inclusion. The examination of diversity gives rise to questions concerning its incorporation into social systems, prompting a critical examination of its potential and limitations. In order to achieve a more effective integration of diversity, it is necessary to engage in the active design of social and political frameworks. Such measures should facilitate the removal of barriers and the actual participation of all social groups. However, a realistic assessment of the possibilities and limitations must be made to avoid an exaggerated, utopian objective. The term “realistic” is used to describe the dimensions of human differentiation that have been identified from a systemic-anthropological perspective and that are valid for the respective context under consideration. The implementation of well-intentioned slogans and actions is insufficient to effect profound systemic change. To achieve emancipatory effects in specific contexts, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach that takes into account the interconnected dimensions of human differentiation, while also acknowledging the inherent complexity of social systems. To attain this, it is necessary to consider the complex interactions between biological, psychological, cultural, economic, geopolitical, and historical factors. A comprehensive grasp of these dimensions is indispensable for the formulation of efficacious strategies that facilitate the

dismantling of structural barriers and foster sustainable social transformation. It is essential to recognize and consider social systems in their entirety, with due attention to their inherent complexity. In this regard, it is imperative to eschew simplistic solutions or superficial gestures, as these fail to adequately address the root causes of discrimination and exclusion. Genuine transformation necessitates a critical examination and dismantling of the mechanisms that differentiate humans, including an introspective analysis of one's own biases and active engagement with the structures of power that perpetuate social inequalities. The mere presence of diversity does not inherently result in greater social cohesion. Rather, it is evident that sustained and, most crucially, long-term endeavors are indispensable for surmounting the prevailing inequalities and fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.