

Klaus Behnam Shad

THE SORTING OF HUMANITY

Schemata and Practices
of Human Differentiation

[transcript] Culture & Theory

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement, Key Questions, and Objectives

Throughout history, human societies have repeatedly established structures that privilege certain individuals and groups within their specific contexts, while marginalizing or oppressing others. From the slave-owning societies of ancient China, Egypt, Babylon, and Rome to the complex social stratifications of contemporary times and today's globalized world, the practice of sorting and classifying people into differently valued categories based on group affiliation appears to be a persistent feature of human social organization. These practices, which are referred to as human differentiation, vary considerably depending on the historical period and geographic location under consideration. Such affiliations, structures, and hierarchies are frequently taken for granted. On a global scale, this unquestioned normality is evidenced by the common practice of classifying and subsequently treating people according to hierarchical schemes. For example, from a Western perspective, the term "Third World" is still typically used to refer to an "underdeveloped world," where the inhabitants are often regarded as "backward", and the societies are seen as failing to reach a state that is considered "normal" or "appropriate." At the local level, human differentiation is expressed through other forms of asymmetry, which typically result in binary and hierarchically structured groups of people. These differentiations, which encompass social, economic, ethnic, and gender-specific distinctions, are deeply embedded in social structures and significantly impact coexistence. The resulting group formations and attributions play a crucial role in perpetuating existing power relations and influencing access to basic resources, rights, and opportunities. This book analyses the manifold manifestations of differentiation practices and their culturally coded social orders. This study conceptualizes two distinct regimes of orders of difference, each operating with specific logics of cultural coding to categorize, hierarchize, and control human differentiation. The initial regime is founded upon primordial coding, which is defined by binary structures and is presumed to be "natural" in its distinctions. The second regime, marked by neoliberal encodings, reflects the neoliberal agenda and its inherent policies and narratives, which introduce other

dimensions of social hierarchization and discrimination. The regimes of orders of difference serve to illustrate the profound intricacy of the mechanisms that result in the exclusion or disadvantage of individuals on the basis of perceived and/or group-based differences. These socio-techniques demonstrate that the roots of discrimination are deeply embedded in the fundamental structures and narratives of a society, manifesting across various contexts. Despite the diversity of human differentiation practices, they all share a common feature: the social and cultural construction of certain individuals as “the others.” This construction functions as a basis for intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination and can lead to a comprehensive system of social oppression. Furthermore, it can precipitate armed conflicts, wars, pervasive displacements of populations, mass killings, and even genocides. Despite the adoption of the UN Charter of Human Rights in the aftermath of the Second World War, instances of violent conflict and the implementation of policies that flagrantly contravene the principles of human rights continue to persist. This has resulted in a state of perpetual warfare, the ascendancy of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, and a multitude of individuals who have been displaced and disenfranchised. Furthermore, Western societies demonstrate a pervasive culture of indifference towards individuals from underdeveloped regions, particularly the Middle East and vast portions of Africa. These regions have been engaged in geopolitical conflicts for at least 150 years, largely due to the exploitation of their natural resources, especially fossil fuels. Notwithstanding the fact that the prosperity and associated privileges of the West are largely based on this exploitation, there is a pervasive lack of awareness regarding the direct link between so-called Western progress and the resulting displacement, environmental and climate damage, and the systematic destabilization of the exploited regions. This spectrum of indifference is deeply rooted in the social and emotional capacities of geopolitically privileged collectives and significantly influences perceptions of what constitutes “normal.” Such attitudes not only reinforce internal social divisions but also sustain global power structures by providing them with a veneer of legitimacy through the use of specific narratives. In light of these considerations, the cognitive dissonance resulting from dependence on fossil fuels and adherence to a lifestyle that further reinforces this dependence through excess and waste requires a more critical and honest examination of these contexts. It is thus imperative to undertake a conscious examination and questioning of the culturally shaped schemas of indifference that are deeply ingrained in discourses, practices, and institutions. Such reflection is vital for grasping the intricate interconnections between power, culture, and identity, and is indispensable for formulating efficacious strategies to surmount inequalities and discrimination. The growing number of individuals who are perceived as “other” and the increase in cases of discrimination indicate the necessity for a critical reevaluation and transformation of our deeply entrenched patterns of perception and behavior. Consequently, despite their diversity and divergence,

the populations of Western democracies are confronted with a number of pressing issues in the 21st century:

- *What forms does human differentiation currently take, and for what specific reasons does it occur?*
- *What specific cultural codes and logics underlie these differentiations?*
- *On what cognitive, emotional, and physical foundations are these human differentiations based?*

The present work explores the pertinence of these guiding questions within the German context. In light of these guiding questions, it becomes evident that the current practices of human differentiation are in fundamental conflict with the self-image of liberal-democratic systems. This self-image, which places emphasis on individual freedom and human rights on the global stage, particularly in the context of the nation-state, is predicated on the assumption that ethnic, religious, cultural, and national differences are irrelevant to one's own identity. However, the social realities in many Western societies starkly contrast with this ideal, especially when established privileges are under threat. The most evident manifestations of privilege are currently linked to the possession of certain citizenships that offer privileged living standards and opportunities, primarily in affluent Western countries. The inherent contradictions in approaches to human differentiation give rise to tensions that prompt profound inquiries into the coherence and efficacy of democratic systems, as well as the nature of solidarity, or its absence. Therefore, the book addresses not only the question of selective access to fundamental human rights, but also the specific conditions of their provision and numerous neglected aspects of these systematized demarcation and categorization processes. These overlooked aspects are closely intertwined with emotional, neurobiological, and sociocultural mechanisms through which groups emerge, define themselves in a distinction against other groups, and find recognition for both themselves and the other group by being deemed "recognizable" through special coding. It is a fundamental tenet of social systems that boundaries and regulations are established, particularly in regard to questions of inclusion and exclusion. This is done in order to preserve and consolidate the specific structure of the social order on which they are imposed. The methods by which humans differentiate themselves may vary depending on the context and change over time, but they are not arbitrary. Rather, they are imbued with particular meanings that contribute to reproducing the prevailing normative orders. The function of these practices extends beyond the mere classification and categorization of individuals within social systems. They are, in fact, crucial for the maintenance and reinforcement of existing power structures and relational dynamics. Moreover, these differentiation practices reflect cultural, economic, and political dynamics that are deeply entrenched in society. The apparent contradic-

tion is that they are an essential component of social cohesion and identity, whilst simultaneously representing a source of social tension and conflict. This renders the discussion of the topic particularly challenging from a radically self-reflexive perspective. In liberal societies, the practices and justifications that accompany the demarcation and sorting of individuals must be carefully balanced to avoid jeopardizing the democratic foundations and core values of liberalism. This challenge represents a normative paradox inherent to the triad of freedom, equality, and security. Achieving a balance that supports individual freedoms and equality while ensuring collective security is a complex endeavor. A profound comprehension of the historical, cultural, and emotional influences that inform our notions of belonging and otherness is vital for a critical examination of patterns of differentiation and discrimination. It forms a foundation for the creation of future pathways that will lead to more democratic communities. A more profound comprehension of the interrelations between political sentiments and the categorization of individuals as “other” is contingent upon the acknowledgment of the pivotal role played by group dynamics and identities. Group identities are frequently constructed within a context that is profoundly emotionally charged and characterized by an ideological pursuit of utopian forms of unrestricted recognition. The normative program inherent in this concept places significant emphasis on central values such as tolerance, equality, and inclusion. It suggests that actively recognizing and appreciating diversity can facilitate the creation of an inclusive environment where individuals can freely develop their identities. Furthermore, the normative program aims to cultivate a heightened sense of belonging and to facilitate social cohesion founded upon mutual respect. However, this ideological stance can result in the obscuration or underestimation of an inherent contradiction when an idealized notion of pluralism and multiculturalism is advocated. Such perspectives on society may prove inadequate in addressing the challenges and essential prerequisites for transforming diversity into genuine social cohesion. The failure to consider the multifaceted nature of social issues carries the risk of promoting a simplified and often unrealistic view of social issues, thereby intensifying the underlying conflicts. This book is an investigation and analysis of the various mechanisms that employ socially and culturally defined notions of “normality” and “deviance” to influence the reproduction of patterns of inclusion and exclusion within social groups. Both discursive and performative means are employed to evoke feelings of belonging, solidarity, and conformity. The role of culture and emotions in this process is pivotal, functioning as indispensable instruments for regulating group-based intentions. This study pays particular attention to culturally coded schemas that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of specific social orders by influencing particular emotions. These emotional elicitation schemas also facilitate the labeling and segregation of groups that are mistakenly perceived as homogeneous, thereby perpetuating social structures of inequality and existing power

dynamics. A novel aspect of this work is the development of a theoretical framework that conceptualizes affective, cognitive, and bodily schemata as interconnected elements. These schemata are integrated into the systemic and non-linear structure of social systems by means of the latest research on social cognition and drawing from sociocybernetics, thereby opening new perspectives. An analysis of these processes reveals the complex ways in which culture and emotions interact to construct and reinforce social realities. An examination of the ways in which cultural norms and emotional responses influence perceptions of group membership and exclusion facilitates a more profound comprehension of the intricacies of social interactions. This understanding is crucial for recognizing the subtle yet powerful forces that underpin the seemingly natural boundaries between “us” and “them.” The emphasis on group dynamics and the subsequent enhancement of culturally defined schemata within social systems of liberal societies constitutes a fundamental element of the theoretical frameworks employed to examine hierarchies and mechanisms of differentiation.

The systemic-anthropological approach, as outlined here, endeavors to develop a differentiated understanding of freedom within the framework of analyzing cultural coding practices and human differentiation shaped by regimes of orders of difference. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to consider not only the social, cultural, geopolitical, and historical surface structures of social systems, but also to delve into the psychological, neurobiological, evolutionary-psychological, and group-based structures that sculpt individual identities. This approach represents an innovative integration of psychological anthropology with systems theory, whereby the concept of freedom is discussed in a transpersonal context and within the framework of a complex social system. This social system reflects the actual impact of global contexts on society and the individual, taking into account the intricacy of cultural coding practices and the resulting human differentiation. The argument put forth is that individual and collective freedoms within the regimes of difference delineated by cultural codes cannot be regarded as if they were isolated phenomena. Rather, they are inextricably linked with a complex network of social, economic, and political forces shaped by global interactions and the dynamics of cultural coding. By integrating the perspectives of psychological anthropology and systems theory, the multiple levels and dimensions of differentiation and freedom are examined. This approach allows for a more profound examination of the mechanisms that shape and negotiate cultural identities and affiliations, as well as the challenges that arise in the pursuit of social justice and equality. To this end, the concept of two parallel regimes of ordering difference is introduced: the primordial and the neoliberal coded regimes. Together with their associated narratives and discursive logics, both are sustained neuroculturally through specific forms of cognitive-affective-bodily schemata. These schemata function similarly to conditioning and encompass cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions. The

interplay between cultural codings—whether primordial or neoliberal—and the internalization of these contents, considered as a process of subjectivation, interacts with geopolitical and economic policies aimed at conditioning and controlling individuals and groups through specific practices of differentiation, classification, and hierarchization according to their codings. The intertwining of these elements forms the foundation of the present analysis and provides insights into the complex mechanisms that shape the construction of social realities. This work emphasizes the importance of geopolitical and hegemonic dynamics in shaping processes of differentiation. It aims to explore the complex mechanisms that lead to the categorization and social positioning of people, thereby regulating inclusion and exclusion within social structures from a transdisciplinary perspective.

1.2 Contribution and Significance

This study takes a transdisciplinary approach, which helps bridge the gap between theories of differentiation practices as espoused by natural science and cultural studies and recent developments in systems theory. Furthermore, insights from psychological anthropology are connected to these theoretical frameworks. This integration allows for a comprehensive analysis of the complexity of human differentiation practices by considering both the structural aspects of contemporary societies and the deeply embedded evolutionary-anthropological, biopsychological, sociocultural, and geopolitical dynamics that provide the foundation for and continuously shape these structures. The incorporation of current research findings on social cognition, based on the so-called 4e's (Embodied, Embedded, Enactive, and Extended), facilitates a deeper understanding of how individuals perceive, interpret, and act within their social world through comprehensively conceived schemata. Enriched by insights from social psychology and evolutionary anthropology, this approach adds crucial dimensions to the analysis of human differentiation. At the core of this approach is the nuanced consideration of schemata, which are no longer understood as exclusively psychological constructs or cognitive structures. Instead, they are conceptualized within a holistic framework that integrates diverse theories and approaches from the fields of cognition, emotion, physiology, neurobiology, social systems, and geopolitical constellations. Cultural codes are regarded as pervasive mechanisms that operate across the intricate levels of social systems. The integration of evolutionary-biological and psychological-anthropological frameworks into the conceptualization of schemas of difference facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the persistence of specific patterns of thought and injustices. This comprehensive perspective identifies the significant role of cultural and biological factors in the persistence of discriminatory practices and inequality. These intricate interactions between individual and collective

experiences, social norms and values, and historical and geopolitical influences are manifested through cultural codes that exert a profound influence on both individual and collective perception and behavior. This innovative heuristic allows for a comprehensive understanding of the deep structures of social differentiation processes by delineating the multiple forces that shape and influence individual and collective behavior, while also addressing existing gaps in theories and approaches to human differentiation.

While this book shares an interest in processes of human differentiation with sociological approaches such as Stefan Hirschauer's theory of human differentiation (Hirschauer 2014; 2021; 2023; Hirschauer and Terjung 2024), it departs from them in several decisive respects. Hirschauer's framework offers a finely grained reconstruction of the social, linguistic, material, and institutional practices through which human categories are produced, stabilized, and hierarchized. Its analytical strength lies in the detailed description of differentiation as an enacted social process, closely aligned with ethnographic and microsociological observation. The approach developed here, by contrast, is situated within a socio-cybernetic and anthropological framework that explicitly extends beyond the level of observable practices and classificatory regimes. Rather than asking primarily how differentiation is enacted, this study addresses the question of why processes of human differentiation exhibit such remarkable stability, recurrence, and resistance to normative intervention across social contexts and historical periods. To account for this persistence, the analysis foregrounds cognitively, affectively, and bodily operative schemata that structure perception, evaluation, and social orientation prior to, alongside, and beneath explicit discursive and institutional categorizations. Drawing on transdisciplinary insights from cognitive science, social psychology, neurobiology, and evolutionary research, the book conceptualizes human differentiation as anchored not only in social orders, but also in embodied modes of perception, affective salience, and cognitive economies of attention and categorization. In doing so, it opens an explanatory avenue that shifts the analytical focus from situational enactment to the underlying conditions of persistence. These cognitively-affective and bodily schemata do not determine differentiation in a reductionist sense, nor do they replace sociological accounts of classification, boundary-making, and segregation. Rather, they function as stabilizing conditions that render social differentiation plausible, repeatable, and resilient, even in contexts that formally promote equality or inclusion. From this perspective, human differentiation emerges as the outcome of recursive couplings between social structures and relatively stable perceptual-affective dispositions. The contribution of this book therefore lies less in refining typologies of social differentiation than in explaining their robustness and cross-contextual recurrence. By integrating socio-cybernetic, anthropological, and cognitive-affective perspectives, the analysis advances an explanatory level that remains largely implicit in practice-oriented and ethnographically grounded theories of human differentiation.

By considering various axes of differentiation as foundational elements in the examination of social differentiation processes within complex social systems, this approach introduces two concurrent regimes of difference orders—the neoliberal and the primordial—each operating according to its own logic. These regimes facilitate the analysis of the constitution and maintenance of power and domination relations through differentiated coding practices. While the neoliberal-coded orders of difference emphasize the mechanisms of economic policy influences, the primordially coded orders focus on essentialist-based categories. The interweaving of these regimes in contemporary society sheds light on intricate interactions and overlaps that supplement existing intersectional models, thus making a significant contribution to a more profound comprehension of the mechanisms of human differentiation. This approach is predicated on the notion that the formation of identification processes in individuals and groups is shaped not only by their social relationships and affiliations (social dimension) but also by the thematic and functional contexts (factual dimension) in which they operate.

This approach integrates considerations of intersectionality with a profound anthropological dimension, resulting from a synthesis of the aforementioned schemata across disciplinary boundaries. Furthermore, an additional temporal dimension is incorporated by considering the impact of historical events and global dynamics on contemporary practices of human differentiation. It is emphasized that the formation of social identities is not only shaped by interpersonal relationships and affiliations but also by content-related, action-related, temporal, and anthropological contexts in which individuals act. By incorporating systems theory perspectives, particularly those pertaining to recent advancements in the field, a nuanced understanding of the information processing mechanisms and communication selection criteria of social systems is achieved. This sociocybernetic approach uncovers the ways in which the construction of social reality is not only shaped by individual and collective identities, but also by the self-referential mechanisms of complex social systems. This system-theoretical perspective broadens the scope of the intersectional framework of analysis by demonstrating how the structural interconnectivity of disparate social systems and their distinctive processes of communication and differentiation contribute to the sustenance and reproduction of power asymmetries. In the course of this, the multidimensionality of human differentiation is emphasized by moving beyond simplistic models to draw a comprehensive picture of social interdependencies and their influence on individuals and groups. Adopting a transdisciplinary approach to human differentiation allows us to challenge traditional perspectives on social complexity. Integrating various dimensions of social complexity and their interactions allows us to gain insight into how they shape both individual and collective experiences.

1.3 Structure and Outline

The structure of this study is methodically arranged in a manner that allows *each principal chapter to address a distinct dimension of human differentiation*, thus facilitating a systematic building upon the insights developed in the preceding chapters. This progressive organization allows for an exhaustive exploration of the myriad factors influencing human differentiation, encompassing foundational biological and psychological elements and extending to more complex social and geopolitical determinants. This approach ensures a nuanced comprehension of the multifaceted nature of human differentiation across a range of disciplines and contexts. The *recurrent examination of fundamental themes* in this volume fulfills two distinct didactic and methodological purposes. Primarily, it aims to deepen the understanding of theoretical concepts. Secondly, it offers students a structured orientation. Given the often perceived complexity of systems theory approaches, their detailed, step-by-step discussion across different chapters allows for a well-founded examination of the respective content. This facilitates comprehension of the interdependencies of human differentiation processes by persistently examining recurrent themes across diverse contexts. The book's didactic presentation renders it a valuable study tool for both advanced readers and students.

Chapter 2 commences with a detailed introduction to the foundational theoretical and conceptual components of the study. This chapter delves into the essential theoretical and conceptual frameworks of contemporary system theory, drawing on the seminal works of Gregory Bateson, Niklas Luhmann, Helmut Willke, and Armin Nassehi. It explores foundational concepts and the latest theoretical developments that elucidate how systems organize and perpetuate themselves. The objective of this chapter is to synthesize these advanced theoretical perspectives to establish a robust analytical framework that will support the exploration of complex social phenomena throughout the book, specifically focusing on the mechanisms of human differentiation. By elucidating and integrating the contributions of Bateson, Luhmann, Willke, and Nassehi, this chapter emphasizes the relevance and utility of system theory in understanding the intricate mechanisms that govern social systems and contribute to human differentiation. Understanding these foundational theories equips readers with critical insights into the structured ways social systems influence behavior and societal norms, providing a deeper comprehension of the continuous processes that shape and justify social order and inequality.

Chapter 3 delves into the evolutionary-anthropological foundations of human differentiation, tracing developments from the emergence of *Homo sapiens* through the impact of cultural selection and the development of complex social systems since the Neolithic period. It incorporates insights from evolutionary anthropology and

psychology, with a particular focus on Michael Tomasello's work on collective intentionality and its influence on social collaboration and group cohesion. The discussion examines how these evolutionary foundations persistently shape social structures and behaviors, drawing attention to the role of ingrained evolutionary traits and cultural practices in shaping contemporary social categorization and differentiation. By integrating biological and cultural evolution, this chapter offers a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms behind social categorization and identity formation. While addressing potential deterministic fallacies, the chapter incorporates the significant role of evolutionary and anthropological foundations in the analysis of human differentiation. This nuanced approach ensures that the evolutionary bases are considered critical yet not deterministic, recognizing the complexity and multifaceted nature of human social behavior and differentiation. This perspective helps in understanding not only the historical context but also the ongoing influence of these foundational aspects on current social dynamics.

Chapter 4 delves into the social psychological underpinnings of group-based emotions and behaviors, analyzing key phenomena such as in-group favoritism and the ostracism of those perceived as outsiders through the lens of the Minimal Group Paradigm. This analysis seeks to uncover how these behaviors surface across diverse social contexts and their consequent effects on social cohesion and conflict. Firmly rooted in social psychology, and particularly informed by the seminal work of John T. Jost, the chapter offers an in-depth exploration of collective system justification theory, previously introduced in Chapter 2. This theory is vital for deciphering the psychological mechanisms that underpin and amplify group-based identities and social differentiation, providing a critical lens through which to view the justification and maintenance of systemic inequalities. The primary aim of this chapter is to shed light on how psychological theories profoundly shape our understanding of group dynamics and enhance our grasp of social inequalities. The chapter employs a variety of theoretical frameworks to illustrate the significant influence of social psychological processes on individual and collective behaviors within social groups. It is grounded in well-established psychological theories and emphasizes the crucial role of group emotions and behaviors in shaping social structures. Furthermore, it discusses the psychological foundations that propel group cohesion and conflict, setting the stage for subsequent discussions on strategic interventions and policies designed to address and alleviate social inequalities.

Chapter 5 makes an excursion into the field of neurobiology, wherein it presents a number of significant findings and theories that are indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of human differentiation. It explores the neurobiological foundations that shape human behavior and social interactions, which are crucial for comprehending the multifaceted forms of human differentiation. The chapter intro-

duces significant insights from neurobiology, demonstrating how these biological processes influence social behavior. By incorporating a neurobiological perspective, this chapter enhances the discussion traditionally dominated by social and cultural analyses, offering a more comprehensive view of the mechanisms driving human differentiation. The theoretical foundation of this chapter is heavily informed by the pioneering work of Jaak Panksepp, who identified key neurobiological mechanisms underlying emotional responses associated with the brain's reward and punishment systems. Panksepp's research provides vital insights into how these foundational neurochemical processes influence the formation of human groups and the establishment of social bonds and behaviors. His contributions to affective neuroscience are critical for understanding the emotional systems that significantly impact social bonding and behaviors, pivotal for the nuanced understanding of group identities and social structures. The purpose of this chapter is to present a comprehensive view of the biological bases of human behavior and social interactions, crucial for fully understanding the processes of social categorization and identity formation. This exploration enhances the interdisciplinary approach of the book and lays the groundwork for further discussions that repeatedly draw on the mechanisms of neurochemical reward and punishment.

Chapter 6 analyzes the complex interplay between social cognition, emotions, and affective responses that shape human differentiation, introducing the concept of schemata as autopoietic generators of meaning. Schemata integrate sociocultural, affective, cognitive, and bodily dimensions to form robust frameworks for understanding human behavior and social categorization. This chapter synthesizes the biopsychological and anthropological dimensions previously explored, specifically integrating insights from Chapters 3 to 5, presenting schemata not just as passive structures but as dynamic systems that actively shape and perpetuate the mechanisms of social categorization and identity formation. Special attention is given to binary-coded affective meaning attribution processes (BCAS) within differentiation schemata. These processes are crucial for understanding the automated, often unconscious coding processes that underpin social interactions and judgments, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of these themes in subsequent chapters. Drawing on the works of thinkers like Shaun Gallagher, Tobias Schlicht, and Jaak Panksepp, as well as Gregory Bateson, the chapter discusses how cognitive processes are inherently influenced by social interactions and cultural contexts. It illustrates how schemata are shaped by and continue to shape these interactions, reinforcing or challenging existing social structures and identities. The chapter serves as a critical juncture in the book, linking the theoretical discussions of schemata with broader social and cultural dynamics. It provides a detailed examination of how individual and collective identities are shaped and maintained through complex interactions between biological, psychological, and cultural forces. This discussion sets the stage

for exploring specific instances of human differentiation and analyzing the systemic structures that reinforce such distinctions in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 7 investigates the so-called macrosocial anthropological constants, which are enduring patterns in human history and social organization specific to modern humans since the Neolithic era. Macrosocial anthropological constants concern social patterns of dominance, organization, and resource security. The chapter explores how they have been shaped and reshaped by cultural codings and social practices over time, emphasizing that their applicability and manifestations are closely linked to the development of complex social systems since the Neolithic era. Macrosocial anthropological constants illuminate the historical and cultural origins of social differentiation patterns and help understand how long-term social, economic, and political dynamics form the basis for current forms of human differentiation. They enable a profound analysis of the mechanisms that shape and sustain social identities and hierarchies. This chapter focuses on macrosocial anthropological constants and reflects universal human behaviors that have been adapted and modified by specific cultural codes and social practices over time. By integrating insights from cultural anthropology, based on the work of Christoph Antweiler, the chapter investigates the universality and variability of these patterns. Antweiler's approaches, which explain how human societies organize and reorganize around certain key constants, provide an essential framework for analyzing the mechanisms of human differentiation. The examination of these constants deepens our understanding of how deeply ingrained social structures and practices influence contemporary challenges of human differentiation, including social stratification and inequality. This analysis paves the way for further discussions on the influence of these constants in contemporary societies, particularly in the context of global asymmetries.

Chapter 8 scrutinizes the intricate processes through which specific semantics and lines of difference are strategically encoded within social systems. It examines how signs acquire meanings and how distinct coding logics delineate these lines, with a particular emphasis on the distinctions between primordial and neoliberal coding. This chapter also explores the impacts of these codings through autopoietic processes and entropy minimization, emphasizing how cultural codes shape social identities and organizational structures by conditioning patterns social and cultural expectations, which are understood as subjectivation. Drawing on poststructuralist approaches by thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Umberto Eco, this chapter discusses how meanings are constructed and disseminated within cultures, profoundly influencing identity formation and the architecture of social structures. This analysis provides deep insights into the role of cultural coding in both sustaining and transforming social orders.

Chapter 9 builds upon the insights from previous chapters to further enrich the intersectional perspective by analyzing two distinct regimes of difference, each defined by its own logic and historical context. This chapter integrates and deepens the exploration of human differentiation discussed earlier, enhancing our understanding of the complexities and overlaps within intersectional practices of differentiation. It specifically emphasizes the crucial roles of autopoietic schemata and subjectivation in reproducing social inequalities through sociotechniques, with a particular focus on the influence of neoliberal policies that drive the implementation of subjectifying practices, including systemic indebtedness and the penalization of poverty. This analytical approach moves beyond traditional categories of identity to expose the foundational mechanisms that reinforce societal divisions. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Patricia Hill-Collins, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, the chapter offers a detailed examination of complex social hierarchies and their intersections. It provides a thorough understanding of how various regimes of difference operate within the social structures of liberal democracies, focusing particularly on Germany, and how these structures are both sustained and contested.

Chapter 10 explicitly integrates geopolitical and hegemonic dimensions to critically examine how global asymmetries and power structures influence human differentiation and social inequalities. This chapter delves into historical contexts such as decolonization wars, the rise of US hegemony, and the strategic use of resources like oil, providing a comprehensive backdrop for understanding the influence of global dynamics on social structures. It examines schemas of indifference related to concepts of “freedom,” excessive behavior, and selective recognition, and discusses their profound effects on social identities and differentiation processes. The theoretical framework for this analysis draws significantly on the works of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose discussions on geopolitical and economic factors provide critical insights into the mechanisms through which global power dynamics shape human social structures and identities. This chapter aims to illuminate the complex interplay between global political-economic structures and the everyday realities of human social differentiation.

Chapter 11 provides an early, concise summary that critically examines whether diversity functions as an ideology and explores the challenges and contradictions inherent in social integration. It focuses on the ideological blind spots around inequality and discrimination and the resultant calls for recognition that frequently arise within the context of human differentiation. By analyzing how the idealization of diversity can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in social integration efforts, the chapter probes deep into the limits and potentials of recognition policies within the framework of social differentiation.

Chapter 12 synthesizes the central findings of this work and offers a comprehensive overview of the analyzed concepts and theories. It accentuates how various forms of classification, categorization, and hierarchization of humanity—termed human differentiation—despite their diverse manifestations in different contexts, reveal universal commonalities. These commonalities align with a central theme that emphasizes the interconnected and multidimensional nature of human differentiation in present-day societies. The identified pattern of the five primary domains of human differentiation demonstrates that analyzing these practices within the context of social inequalities, through the integrative combination of various perspectives and approaches within a systemic-anthropological framework, enables a profound and nuanced understanding of cultural and social dynamics. These reflections significantly contribute to the debate on the potentials of social integration and recognition. By framing the boundaries, practices, affects, and the narratives that underlie and support these practices not as morally good or bad, but as components of a comprehensive anthropological understanding, a deeper insight into the structural foundations of social inequalities is achieved. This approach considers historical, geopolitical, anthropological, neurobiological, and psychological dimensions of social differentiation. It opens new avenues for analyzing and shaping cultural and social dynamics by deepening the understanding of the overlapping and interacting dimensions of social complexity and the multifaceted nature of human differentiation. This contributes to the development of more nuanced and effective recognition policies and raises awareness of the diverse mechanisms that uphold social inequalities. Ultimately, it becomes evident that the study of human differentiation not only deepens the understanding of the structural foundations of social inequalities but also opens new perspectives for the analysis of cultural and social dynamics. These reflections play a crucial role in the debate on the possibilities and limits of social integration and recognition policies.

2. Sociocybernetics: Foundations of Systems Theory

This chapter introduces the systems theory epistemological program as an analytical framework for a comprehensive consideration of the key aspects of the practices and maintenance of human differentiation, as discussed and reflected upon throughout this book. The integration of systems theoretical approaches, particularly those of the recent and next-generation complex systems theories, in combination with those of collective justificatory systems, offers a comprehensive insight into the dynamics of human differentiation practices as well as the mechanisms that reinforce and legitimize inequalities in social systems. These perspectives are frequently neglected in anthropological studies of human differentiation. In considering the present application, the specific focus is on systems theory as applied to social systems, an approach referred to as sociocybernetics. This field is a systemically conceived social and cultural science that deals with the dynamic processes of self-organization, control, and stabilization within social systems. A distinguishing feature of sociocybernetics is its emphasis on the interdependencies between individual actions, social structures, and cultural frames of meaning, a departure from the conventional focus in systems theory. This perspective is of particular significance within the analytical framework developed here, as it encompasses not only the maintenance of social order but also the emergent, frequently nonlinear dynamics that can shape and transform social systems. By centering on autopoietic processes and structural couplings, this theoretical framework enables a nuanced examination of the mechanisms that stabilize, transform, or legitimize human differentiation. In this work, the terms "system theory" and "sociocybernetics" are used synonymously, as sociocybernetics can be regarded as a further development of classical system theory. This conceptual equation maintains coherence and reflects an analytical perspective that emphasizes the stabilization of social orders and dynamic, emergent processes. By placing greater emphasis on the interdependencies among individual actions, social structures, and cultural frames of meaning, sociocybernetics enhances systems theory analysis, enabling the capture of complex social phenomena in a more differentiated manner. The strength of general systems theory lies in its transdisciplinary scope, which has developed in response to recognizable systemic challenges across diverse scientific fields. As a

holistic, heuristic, and epistemological tool, it transcends disciplinary boundaries, offering a comprehensive framework for analysis (Willke 1987, 3). In view of the increasing complexity of human societies and social systems driven by modernity and globalization, simple categorizations and deductive approaches reach their limits when it comes to grasping and interpreting practices of human differentiation in depth. The reality of social systems and the dynamics of human differentiation are simply too complex and too nuanced to be fully grasped by simple, deductive procedures based on general theories or categories. While the focus of social and cultural science analyses on subjective experiences and everyday lifeworlds provides a valuable starting point, its limitations become apparent when seeking deeper insights into the meta-levels of social systems and their interactions, particularly concerning mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Against this backdrop, this transdisciplinary study aims to offer new perspectives on human practices of differentiation through a systemic-anthropological approach. Reductionist explanatory approaches that restrict differentiation processes and orders to simplified dimensions imply a linear and causal relationship between said processes, whereby any given process is dependent solely on the preceding one. This reductionism results in the culturalization of social phenomena, which in turn impedes more intricate analyses of the underlying structures and dynamics. The objective of the presented prism is to illustrate the intricate interconnectivity and mutual influence of social phenomena, thereby facilitating a comprehensive intersectional perspective. In the context of the present cognitive program on human differentiation and the role of social categories within diverse social systems, which is based on systems theory, it is essential to recognize that systems theory does not operate as a macro-theory and cannot be interpreted as a conventional social theory (Jahraus et al. 2012, 62). In other words, it provides an overarching heuristic and epistemological framework that enables an analysis of the complex and dynamic interactions between different levels of social systems, without reducing them to a single explanatory level. Systems theory, rather than adhering to traditional discussions about micro and macro levels, introduces a distinction between interaction, organizational, and societal systems. This differentiation is not about establishing a hierarchy among these system types, but rather about understanding how transitions occur between different levels within social systems. These transitions cannot merely be explained by a preference for micro or macro levels. Instead, they require a nuanced analysis of the dynamics that enable movement and influence across these different scopes of human interaction (Luhmann 1997b, 812). This study is grounded in a systems-theoretical approach to human differentiation, which serves as its epistemological and methodological foundation. This framework acknowledges the complexity and dynamics of social categories and identities, extending beyond the limitations of conventional macro-level theories. This approach is aware that social phenomena are not merely present at the macro level; rather, they are shaped in intricate ways by the interplay among various

social systems, including individual interactions, organizational structures, and the broader society. This perspective allows for an intersectional analysis, thereby providing profound insights into the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the construction of social identities. By emphasizing the interconnectivity of social phenomena, it allows for a comprehensive examination of the mutual influences between disparate levels and categories of society. This, in turn, yields a more precise understanding of human differentiation and offers a nuanced analysis of the underlying power structures and legitimation processes. The system-theoretical and differentiation-theoretical elements and findings employed in this work, which commonly entail normative implications in numerous system-theoretical approaches, are interpreted descriptively throughout. This study initially challenges the traditional separation between psychological, physical, and social systems as commonly delineated in systems theory. While this distinction may facilitate the analysis of various operational levels within systems theory, it proves overly restrictive for a comprehensive examination of human differentiation. Such a division is inadequate in that it fails to acknowledge the complex interactions and mutual influences that exist between these levels, particularly in terms of the formation of social identities and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In the study of human differentiation, where the interdependencies of thought, emotion, and physical existence are of pivotal importance, this rigid separation does not sufficiently capture the dynamic interplays. In view of these shortcomings, an integrative approach is put forth, which incorporates a refined adaptation of operational distinctions. This approach acknowledges the essential interconnections between mental, social, and bodily systems as a fundamental aspect of the formation of meaning and significance. By facilitating structural coupling, it enables a more detailed examination of the manner in which cognitive-affective-bodily schemata facilitate communication across systems through the encoding and decoding of information. In this context, structural coupling emerges as a crucial mechanism that facilitates the transfer and transformation of meanings and significance across different levels of human experience. This methodology allows for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics involved in human differentiation and the pervasive interplay of systemic influences. An integrative approach inevitably gives rise to a number of aporias and challenges, which must be addressed in order to advance the field. From one perspective, this approach permits a comprehensive understanding of the intrinsic complexity and interdependence of human differentiation. Conversely, it necessitates meticulous navigation between the maintenance of the distinct autonomy of each system and the acknowledgment of their profoundly intertwined interactions. A strategic partial separation allows for the adaptive tailoring of theoretical perspectives to the specific characteristics of the subject matter. Nevertheless, this approach may also result in an incomplete representation of the nuances of communication processes between systems. The objective is to achieve a

balance that preserves a nuanced view of individual systems while simultaneously enabling a holistic integration of their interdependencies. The implementation of this integrative strategy demands substantial theoretical acuity and methodological rigor in order to effectively address the inherent complexities and challenges. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of structural coupling and the codes that facilitate the transmission and transformation of meaning and significance across systemic boundaries. Moreover, it necessitates ongoing critical reflection on the strategic decisions regarding the partial adoption of operational distinctions. It is of the utmost importance to exercise due care and attention in this regard to assure the robustness and responsiveness of the approach to the dynamic interactions that occur within and between systems. This will ensure that the analysis of human differentiation processes is enhanced. Chapter 6, which focuses on affective-cognitive-bodily schemata, builds upon empirically grounded research in social cognition and advocates for an integrative perspective that analyzes the interplay between mental processes, bodily states, and social dynamics. This paradigm enables a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that drive human differentiation by encompassing the full spectrum of influences, from psychological and physical to societal. It illustrates the necessity of a comprehensive analysis that not only examines the social constructions of identity and belonging but also considers the psychological and bodily processes that underpin and shape these social categories. It is of the utmost importance to recognize these interdependencies in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the power structures and legitimation processes that form the foundation of social systems and their differentiation practices. In this context, the principles of systems theory provide a robust framework for knowledge that extends beyond the contributions of individual scholars. This framework integrates the collective insights and logics of systems theory, thereby harnessing the synergistic potential of its various approaches. By embracing this comprehensive approach, the chapter seeks to synthesize a plethora of perspectives, thus enriching the comprehension of the inherent complexities within social systems and processes. This methodology transcends the limitations of a single theoretical perspective, striving to present a dynamic and nuanced portrayal of human differentiation. This depiction seeks to encapsulate the intricate and interwoven dimensions of social reality, offering a multifaceted analysis that encompasses the multifarious factors that shape human differentiation. The application of the system-theoretical cognitive program to the study of human differentiation is intended to enhance theoretical understanding by incorporating both individual and structural perspectives. The systemic-anthropological approach is concerned with elucidating the relational and dynamic relationships that exist within social systems. It examines the manner in which systemic structures and individual actions interact to produce and maintain social stratifications and identities. This approach offers insights into the mechanisms that facilitate or impede social integration and

equality, as well as the adaptive responses of social systems to changes and challenges. Although the terms “relational” and “dynamic” are frequently encountered in academic discourse, the far-reaching implications for research methodology and practice are seldom fully acknowledged. The approach taken here, complemented by systems justification theory, puts forth the necessity of incorporating non-linearity and the multiplicity of feedback loops—both positive and negative—into the analytical framework. It should be noted that no claim is made to completeness, and the limitations and challenges of the systems theory approach are openly addressed. In order to provide a balanced understanding of the applicability and limitations of the systems theory approach, the limitations and points of criticism of the analytical method used are not excluded.

2.1 Challenges

In the field of human differentiation, a modern sociocybernetic approach requires the acknowledgment of the autonomy and independence of social systems. These systems are distinguished by intricate differentiations that are culturally and socially constructed, and they function in accordance with their own distinctive logic and dynamics. Consequently, any interventions aimed at addressing social inequalities or enhancing inclusion must be designed with a comprehensive understanding of these internal dynamics. The proposed approach emphasizes the significance of acknowledging and prioritizing the complex and mutually reinforcing relationships between diverse identity categories and their associated social contexts. It is imperative to underscore that any intervention or endeavor aimed at social transformation with regard to differentiation must be meticulously attuned to the internal structures and meaning systems of the affected social groups. This ensures that efforts are contextualized in a manner that is appropriate to the circumstances and effectively resonate with the targeted communities.

The *first challenge* inherent to a comprehensive approach, dedicated to the topic of human differentiation—a central theme in all social science disciplines—is to proceed in a *synchronous, cooperative, and co-evolutionary manner*. This necessitates an acknowledgment of the autonomy and intrinsic logic of social systems, as opposed to an attempt through direct external control to exert influence upon them. The traditional methods of centralized planning and direct control of social processes, as exemplified by the socialist approach, are incompatible with the intrinsic characteristics of social systems, such as complexity and self-referentiality. Such attempts to inadmissibly simplify complex social systems—that is, to *trivialize* them or to steer them directly from above or from outside—have not only lost credibility in socio-political terms but have also demonstrated that repressive practices cannot guarantee

long-term successful control over systems (Willke 2014b, 193). This perspective suggests that effective strategies for mitigating inequality and discrimination cannot be externally imposed; rather, they must emerge from within the systems they aim to transform. This approach fosters organic growth and development by allowing for the evolution of effective strategies from a system's inherent dynamics. This notion is repeatedly referenced throughout the discussion, particularly in the context of cultural coding, its associated regimes, and the ways in which this work's approach differs from conventional intersectional frameworks. A significant challenge for the systemic-anthropological approach is to navigate the complex and sometimes contradictory roles that cultural codes play in the formation of identities and affiliations within social systems. This dilemma is addressed through an examination of two coexisting regimes of differentiation: the primordial and the neoliberal. These are outlined in Chapters 8 and 9. Neoliberal codings are shaped by market dynamics and individual achievements, whereas primordial codings are based on attributes that are perceived as unchangeable.

The *second challenge* of this approach arises from the necessity to address the fundamental paradox inherent in the liberal-democratic model. Considering the limitations of top-down control measures, it is imperative to examine the viability of alternative political frameworks within Western societies. The recognition that social systems are inherently nonlinear and defined by intricate relational dynamics challenges the conventional wisdom that top-down control can effectively address complex social issues. This realization implies the necessity of investigating alternative political frameworks that are more compatible with the intricacies of social systems while remaining consistent with the democratic paradigm. While this critical examination throughout the book points toward such explorations, a detailed investigation into alternative political frameworks is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates the value of considering frameworks that respect the autonomy of social systems while addressing existing social challenges, striking a balance between system independence and the necessity for meaningful social change.

The *third challenge*, which arises from the dominance of neoliberal doctrines, is further complicated by the post-democratic threats to freedom through manipulation and subtle systemic constraints that are neoliberal in nature. In contrast to more overt forms of coercion and physical violence that have traditionally posed a threat to freedom, post-democratic threats are manifested through more insidious forms of influence that often evade detection and remain hidden. This neoliberal influence creates a context in which the complexity and opacity of social categorization and differentiation practices are not only intensified but also strategically employed to obscure the mechanisms of human differentiation. As a result, the seemingly invis-

ible and indirect methods of neoliberal systemic constraints erode traditional categories of inclusion and exclusion, thereby diminishing the capacity of individuals and groups to effectively resist discrimination and inequality. These subtle manipulation techniques present significant challenges to understanding and addressing social injustices, as they are inherently compromising to societal perceptions of freedom and autonomy. It is therefore imperative to adopt a critical and reflective approach to the systemic and structural conditions that give rise to these issues. The challenge of conceptualizing “freedom” in Western societies is intricately linked to discourses on regimes of differentiation and cultural codings. By examining the interconnections between cultural codes and social structures through a systemic anthropological lens, we can gain a more sophisticated comprehension of the intricacies surrounding the concept of freedom in the contemporary era. This comprehensive examination elucidates the manner in which social systems both construct and constrain the liberties and opportunities available to disparate groups, thereby offering indispensable insights for confronting the challenges posed by neoliberal influences on freedom and social justice.

The *fourth challenge* comprises the complex task of examining the intricate interplay between social, economic, political, and cultural forces. The objective here is to identify the intersectional mechanisms of differentiation and discrimination that shape the formation of social identities, influence patterns of affiliation, and regulate processes of inclusion and exclusion. To gain a deeper understanding of this complex issue, research must move beyond examining individual experiences and rigorously examine the influence of emotions, discourses, and power structures on the unequal distribution of power and resources. A profound comprehension of these dynamics is essential for the development of more equitable and inclusive social systems. Moreover, a systemic anthropological approach necessitates a nuanced comprehension of the inherent tensions and contradictions that have emerged from the various functional differentiations since 1945. This relational conceptualization of functional differentiation asserts that society is not merely a conglomerate of its differentiated parts. Instead, it is more accurate to posit that society is best conceptualized as a network of interdependent elements that are interconnected in a non-linear and non-binary fashion. This complexity gives rise to a multifaceted experience of belonging or exclusion, shaped by the intricate interplay of social, economic, political, and cultural forces that inform the formation of identities and the construction of lifeworlds. The concept of community is often presumed to be universally applicable; however, it can be challenging to apply this assumption consistently, given the significant analytical challenge of accounting for the distinct differences between individuals and groups. It is imperative to perceive society not only in terms of its social representation but also in terms of its factual reality. While the social dimension may project an image of a unified, homogeneous community, the factual

dimension reveals a diversity and disparity that challenge this perception. This disjunction between the conceptual understanding of society and its actual structure and dynamics points to the tension between the semantic portrayal of social phenomena and their real, often intricate, and contradictory manifestations. A critical distinction emerges, akin to that between the visible layer of social norms and values and the concealed, structural mechanisms that shape the social fabric.

2.2 Introduction to Key Terms and Concepts

This chapter delves into the evolution of systems theory since Niklas Luhmann, enriched by subsequent theorists' contributions, and integrates other pertinent theories critical for analyzing human differentiation. Central to this synthesis is Helmut Willke's control theory approach, complemented by John T. Jost's theory of system justification. The latter, grounded in extensive empirical research, has been refined through numerous studies and meta-analyses into a coherent framework. This synthesis not only functions as a heuristic and epistemological tool for examining human differentiation but also sets the stage for addressing the issues and core topics that are further explored in subsequent chapters.

2.2.1 Functional Differentiation

This section examines the concept of functional differentiation, a fundamental tenet of systems theory, and its application to the study of human differentiation. Particular attention is paid to the interplay of social, material, and temporal dimensions and their distinct functions within society. The acknowledgment of these dimensions permits the discernment of the multiplicity of social roles and functions, as well as the delineation of the challenges and strains that individuals confront in an increasingly intricate and differentiated global landscape. Moreover, a critical examination of functional differentiation discloses its problematic aspects, including the oversimplification of social evolution and the dichotomous framing of "traditional" versus "modern" elements. The concept of functional differentiation delineates the segmentation of contemporary societies into autonomous subsystems, including the economy, politics, education, and law. Each of these subsystems serves a distinct purpose and is governed by its own logic and regulations. This segregation contributes to the overall complexity of societal structures. From an evolutionary perspective, functional differentiation has supplanted earlier forms of social organization, including segmentary (based on familial or tribal affiliations) and stratificatory (based on hierarchical class structures) differentiations (Nassehi 2012, 65).

Segmentary differentiation represents the most fundamental form of social organization, often observed in archaic societies. In this structure, a social system is divided into comparable segments, such as families, tribes, or villages. The actions undertaken within these segments are fundamentally aligned with the collective needs and commonalities of the group (ibid.). As societies evolve and become more complex, the segmentary differentiation model is superseded by a *stratificatory differentiation* model. This is due to the fact that societal roles are not uniform, as not all members are able to address the same challenges simultaneously. This transition is precipitated by the necessity to manage the increasing societal complexity that cannot be adequately addressed under conditions of equality (ibid., 66). Consequently, the emergence of subsystems that are inherently unequal is a phenomenon that arises from the stratificatory differentiation model. This approach is predicated on the notion that social inequality acts as a pragmatic mechanism for the distribution of responsibilities and the management of complexity within a paradigm of ostensible social equality. This shift in focus entails a transition from an egalitarian framework to one where inequality is institutionalized through the creation of varied social roles, rights, and duties across different subsystems. In contrast, *functional differentiation*¹ introduces a more intricate and specialized level of complexity through the establishment of a diverse and interdependent array of autonomous subsystems, including the economy, politics, and education. Each subsystem is designed to address specific aspects of societal needs, thereby enhancing the efficiency of information processing and problem-solving. However, this complexity requires continuous efforts to coordinate and integrate these diverse functions to maintain social cohesion and ensure systemic stability. This form of differentiation reflects a sophisticated evolution from simpler societal structures, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between independence and interdependence within present-day societies. In order to integrate the tenets of systems theory with those of functional differentiation, *three key dimensions* must be considered: the social, factual, and temporal dimensions. It is thus imperative to examine the ways in which societies construct and negotiate meanings along a spectrum of axes. These dimensions constitute organizational frameworks that facilitate the elucidation and interpretation of the world, emphasizing certain perspectives while excluding others, much like analytical lenses (Nassehi 2021, 27).

The *social dimension* pertains to the nature of social relationships and interactions within social systems. This dimension is concerned with the participants in communication processes, examining the nature of social relationships and interactions

1 The term “functional differentiation” is employed to delineate both the concept itself and the third form of differentiation within the social structure.

within social systems. This dimension encompasses all facets of communication, interpersonal relationships, power structures, and social norms and values. It examines the individuals or groups engaged in interactions or relationships.

The *factual dimension* addresses the content-related or thematic aspects of communications and interactions within a system. This dimension focuses on the specific content or themes that emerge from communication and interaction within a system. It examines the biological, cultural, or economic characteristics that are pertinent to the classification and comprehension of differences. It examines the discourses and bodies of knowledge that shape notions of identity and difference, analyzing the processes by which knowledge about “otherness” is produced, disseminated and institutionalized, and its role in maintaining processes of differentiation.

The *temporal dimension* encompasses the study of time and its effects on social phenomena. This dimension allows for the differentiation between past and future, thereby providing insights into the manner in which historical contexts and developments shape present and future social processes. This approach underscores the significance of grasping the historical evolution of societal constructs and how these legacies shape present and future dynamics.

By integrating these dimensions, sociologists and theorists can gain a more comprehensive view of present-day society, recognizing how these interrelated aspects interact to form complex social orders and structures. The process of human differentiation, when considered within the context of the social, factual, and temporal dimensions, illuminates the formation and categorization of individual and collective identities within the complex structures of contemporary societies. In functionally differentiated societies, individuals are categorized not only on the basis of their social relationships and roles (social dimension) but also according to their roles in knowledge and activity sectors (factual dimension), as well as the temporal aspects of their existence and actions (temporal dimension). The differentiation between the social and factual dimensions permits a more profound comprehension of the processes involved in societal classification and their impact on the interactions between individuals and groups. The social dimension is concerned with the relationships among individuals and the nature of their interactions. In contrast, the factual dimension is concerned with the content of these interactions, examining the specific topics being discussed or acted upon. The temporal dimension introduces the historical and future contexts, examining the role of past experiences and future anticipations in current activities. In terms of human differentiation, this implies that individuals are distinguished not only by their social roles and relationships but also by their involvement in various function-specific systems, such as the economy, education, or legal frameworks. Each of these systems is governed by its

distinct codes and logic, which contribute to the differentiation of individuals within contemporary societies. Such participation and the identities it fosters are not static but rather dynamic and evolving over time, due to changes in personal development and societal shifts. In consequence, functional differentiation within society gives rise to a multitude of identities and affiliations that transcend the confines of conventional social categorizations, such as class or profession. This contributes to the intricate tapestry of complex social life. Nassehi addresses the fundamental challenge of managing the internal complexity that arises from the diversity of content differences and the varied needs of society's members (ibid., 28). The optimal social structure would be one in which all individuals are afforded equal rights, obligations, and access to resources. In practice, the existence of differing abilities, interests, and social backgrounds gives rise to a situation in which the needs and contributions of individuals within society vary considerably. The direct management of these substantive differences within a framework of social equality is an inherently complex task, which can often prove overwhelming for social systems. By situating the issue of complexity within the social dimension, whereby different social positions and subsystems engender inequality, society can more effectively distribute and manage complexity. Each subsystem and social position performs specific functions, contributing in unique ways to the overall system. Such differentiation allows society to address its internal challenges and the needs of its members in a more flexible and efficient manner. Consequently, the various positions entail disparate tasks, roles, functions, and, notably, distinct statuses. This stratification, while serving a functional purpose, introduces a new set of challenges related to the question of fairness and the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Nassehi 2021, 29).

In contemporary Western societies, amidst a myriad of specific challenges, there has been a shift in focus from questioning *who* will solve problems to considering *how* these problems can be solved. This transition enables the circumvention of structural constraints that previously impeded the participation of certain groups in problem-solving processes in stratified societies. Society is divided into distinct functional systems, each addressing a specific domain of problem-solving. Each of these systems functions in accordance with its own code of conduct, which determines its distinctive approach to problem-solving. For example, the scientific system operates on a binary logic of true or false, the economic system on a binary logic of profit or loss, and the political system on a binary logic of power or powerlessness. The ability to differentiate between functional systems thus permits the examination of challenges from a multiplicity of viewpoints, thereby necessitating a diverse, subsystem-specific approach to societal issues. As a result, contemporary societies in Western contexts are distinguished by a distinctive form of differentiation that eschews a singular, central organizing principle. In contrast to a centralized representation of social unity that unifies all, various subsystem-

specific perspectives exist that are both indispensable and replaceable in terms of their functional contributions. This structure fosters a more dynamic and responsive societal framework, capable of adapting to the evolving complexities of today's life. On the one hand, *each functional system is indispensable* due to its specialization and unique capacity for addressing specific issues. This implies that no other system can replicate the functions or problem-solving capabilities of another without compromising efficiency and effectiveness. To illustrate, the legal system is the sole entity capable of resolving legal disputes, while the economic system is the only one able to manage economic transactions in an effective manner. On the other hand, *while the functions of these systems are indispensable, their structures and methods are substitutable*, meaning they can evolve over time to meet new challenges or adapt to shifting societal conditions. The education system may, for instance, introduce new pedagogical approaches, the healthcare system may adopt novel treatment protocols, and the political system may implement new participatory mechanisms. The dual nature of adaptability and evolutionary potential in social systems within a dynamic and ever-changing environment ensures that broader society remains functional amidst fluctuating internal and external conditions. The evolutionary flexibility of social subsystems, as evidenced by modifications to their structures and functions, directly influences the categorization and integration of individuals and groups within these systems. This dynamic adaptation of systems provides the foundation for a differentiated classification of people, underscoring the necessity to consider the functional requirements and distinctive criteria of subsystems in the process of human differentiation. In the context of human differentiation, the classification and evaluation of individuals and groups by various subsystems exhibit considerable variation. While certain social, economic, and cultural categories may be essential for inclusion within one system, they may be deemed irrelevant or even exclusionary in another. This context-dependent and variable assessment of individuals and groups demonstrates that social categorizations and identities are neither static nor universal. Instead, they are fluid and shaped by, as well as adaptable to, the functional imperatives of the respective subsystems. The adaptability and capacity for renewal inherent in Western societies confer resilience and dynamism, particularly noticeable within their specialized subsystems. This characteristic significantly influences the processes of human differentiation, thereby drawing attention to the interaction between system-specific roles and the broader social fabric. Gaining a deeper understanding of human differentiation through this lens is crucial, as the complexity of current societal structures often results in overwhelming demands on individuals. These demands arise not only from the necessity of navigating multiple subsystems but also from the requirement to continually adapt to changing roles and expectations within these frameworks (Bauman 2008, 2003).

The accelerated expansion of information, roles, and expectations in our globally interconnected society places significant demands on individuals, frequently exceeding their capacity to process and adapt. In light of these circumstances, it is imperative to develop a theoretical framework that can elucidate the multifaceted aspects of human differentiation and delineate the processes through which individuals and groups establish their sense of orientation and construct their identities within these intricate structures. The intricacy of present-day society can be daunting for both individuals and groups as they strive to comprehend and navigate their multifaceted social roles and identities within a functionally differentiated system. Identities across various social categories operate as semantic anchor points, providing orientation amidst the complexities of today's world. These identities, or rather the *spectrum of possibilities for identification*, foster a sense of belonging and collective identity across a broad range of social dimensions. In a functionally differentiated society, the multifaceted nature of human differentiation is evident not only in the array of social roles and functions but also in the rich tapestry of identification opportunities rooted in ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and national dimensions. These *diverse identities also serve an integrative function*, providing a sense of belonging that transcends mere functional distinctions and imbues both individual and collective identities with meaning. However, this mode of integration presents several challenges. Such an approach may result in oversimplifications that obscure the true complexity of social reality, leading to the marginalization or exclusion of individuals who do not conform to dominant identity categories.

As functional differentiation encourages specialization and autonomy across societal domains, each system develops its own distinct logic and standards of rationality, which contribute to societal fragmentation. This fragmentation intensifies social complexity, thereby necessitating from individuals a considerable degree of flexibility and adaptability to effectively navigate and act across diverse contexts. In this context, the formation of ethnic and national identities can be seen as a means of establishing a coherent and accessible structure amidst the multitude of social experiences and structures. These identities function as mechanisms that cultivate a sense of community and belonging, despite the profound functional differentiation and the accompanying uncertainties and complexities. Such a process can result in the perpetuation of exclusion and inequality, as well as the obfuscation of the structural challenges and injustices inherent in a functionally differentiated society. From this perspective, an examination of human differentiation requires a nuanced understanding of the complex nuances of social structures and the multifaceted roles that ethnic, cultural, national, religious, gender, and other identities play as both integrative and simplifying mechanisms. It is crucial to reassess the equilibrium between acknowledging diversity and promoting social integration. Consequently, it is of paramount importance to develop methodologies that respect both individual and collective identities while addressing structural challenges,

with the overarching objective of establishing a more equitable and inclusive social order. This nuanced approach requires not only an acknowledgement of the multifaceted nature of identities but also an active engagement with the underlying issues that affect social cohesion and equity.

The traditional dichotomy between “modern differentiated” and “traditional” societies, as suggested by functional differentiation, is subjected to critical reevaluation in this analysis. The advent of global connectivity and the resulting cultural intermixing across multiple modernities and value systems have precipitated a reorganization of social structures within Western contexts, rendering the simplistic binary of “modern” versus “traditional” increasingly obsolete. This evolution requires a critical reassessment of the conventional dichotomy that is still often presumed in scholarly discourse. A comprehensive analysis of the interrelationship between neoliberal and primordial coding logics reveals that attributes previously regarded as “pre-modern” continue to persist and exert influence within ostensibly progressive societies. This interplay illustrates the continued relevance of the regimes of orders of difference. The objective of this analysis is to acknowledge and delineate both the enduring presence of traditional codings in contemporary contexts and the co-existence of diverse coding logics in the contemporary globalized framework. The concept of functional differentiation is explored in depth globally, with particular attention devoted to its manifestations in neoliberal and primordial coded practices of subjectivation and conditioning. The central metacode of inclusion/exclusion, pivotal for understanding social structures, intersects with traditional codes and acts to constrain freedom within exclusion zones by confining communication to personal networks (Luhmann 2002a, 684). This dynamic impedes the effective operation of functionally differentiated subsystems. Moreover, the metacode inclusion/exclusion process acquires a spatial dimension. This is due to the fact that functional systems are able to operate effectively in certain global regions but are constrained in others as a result of the predominance of personal networks. A distinction can be made between “normal” regions, which are typified by fully differentiated systems, and those which are characterized by the inclusion/exclusion metacode. The role of personal networks, particularly in the Global South, is subjected to close examination in order to ascertain their significant influence on regional functionality (*ibid.*, 459). The functional differentiation inherent to the system-theoretical approach is designed for universal applicability. This has come about as a result of the rejection of moral and religious worldviews and through adaptation to the conditions of high complexity in world society (Gonçalves 2016, 62). This transition towards functional systems inaugurates a new era of objectivity, secularity, complexity, and alignment with prevailing societal demands. Communication across various societal sectors must adapt to this complexity by aligning with the functions of the subsystems, thus fostering a social structure universally based on the principle of functional differentiation. Nevertheless, the assertion of universality does

not negate the existence of regional discrepancies in the configuration of social systems. The pervasive implementation of functional differentiation, in conjunction with the tenet of universal equality, is obscured by a neoliberal agenda that has a profound impact on innumerable individuals through the use of potent codifications. This agenda engenders an imaginary distortion in Western societies (*ibid.*, 65), promoting the belief that self-referential functional systems can function independently of unequal conditions. This perspective idealizes the image of liberal democracies while failing to acknowledge their inherent shortcomings. This illusion persists, particularly in Western contexts, which are geopolitically privileged. However, empirical evidence from intersectionality research indicates that informal mechanisms, such as personalism and social origin, exert a considerable influence on social mobility and status (Jackson et al. 2022; Collins 2000; Lareau 2011; Rivera 2015). The neoliberal codings intensify the mechanisms of exclusion that are embedded within social processes, while simultaneously obscuring the actual inequalities and power structures that this work's systemic-anthropological perspective seeks to address. The dissemination of functional differentiation throughout global society coincides with the implementation of a neoliberal agenda that may be described as "regime-like," as discussed in Chapter 9. A comprehensive examination of this topic will be presented in subsequent sections of this book.

2.2.2 Social Systems

Social systems provide a crucial framework for understanding human differentiation, as well as for navigating and exerting power and domination, and for constructing and reconstructing identities and social orders. These systems are of great importance in understanding the intricacies and nuances of social interactions and the power relations that shape these processes. Social systems are defined as dynamic networks of interactions and communication patterns that are organized around common functions and goals. They possess the inherent capabilities of self-organization and self-regulation, which are known as autopoiesis. The autopoietic characteristic enables social systems to effectively manage complexity and adapt to their environments.

Social Systems and Autopoiesis The autopoietic nature of social systems—which is characterized by their ability for self-organization, reproduction, and regulation—is manifested through their self-referentiality and operational closure. The concept of autopoiesis offers an explanation of how systems are capable of autonomously producing and sustaining themselves through continuous internal interactions and transformations. This self-sustaining mechanism is of great consequence for the adaptability and longevity of social systems, as it enables them to respond dynamically to internal and external changes while maintaining their

structural integrity (Maturana and Varela 1980; F.J. Varela et al. 2017). This concept represents a fundamental premise for the comprehension of social systems, which are distinguished by their self-referential and autopoietic nature. These systems are in a state of constant development and self-sustainability, driven by a process of self-reference. Social systems operate based on their own unique structures and codes, employing the distinction between self-reference and external reference to effectively manage complexity. This distinction allows them to maintain and regulate their interactions with the environment. By focusing on their intrinsic dynamics and operational procedures, social systems are able to adapt to external alterations while maintaining their fundamental functions and identity. The ability to distinguish between and respond to internal and external influences is a crucial aspect of their resilience and ongoing adaptation (Luhmann 1996, 61). The concept of autopoiesis, which characterizes a self-sustaining process, provides the central framework of the systemic-anthropological approach to human differentiation presented here. By applying systems theory to social phenomena, one can gain insight into the mechanisms through which social systems actively engage in their own design and evolution. This engagement occurs through the continuous generation and communication of meaning, employing specific codes.

Social Systems, Complexity Reduction and Semantic Codes In social systems, the continuous production and processing of meaning act as fundamental guides for social behavior, assisting in the management of environmental complexity. The establishment of order within these systems is achieved through a complex array of communicative actions that not only sculpt internal structures but also facilitate the system's adaptive alignment with external conditions. Communication functions as the primary medium for the creation and transmission of meaning in social systems. The exchange of symbols, language, and cultural codes enables individuals to construct and disseminate meanings, which in turn exert an influence on collective realities and social orders. This process of continual creation and reformation of order demonstrates the dynamic nature of social systems, which exist and evolve as a result of the interplay between social, psychological, and material dimensions. This analysis presents a novel reconceptualization of the traditional systems-theoretical distinction between psychological, physical, and social systems, with the aim of fostering a more holistic understanding of social systems. In this approach, social systems are not defined solely by their structural or functional characteristics. Instead, they are conceptualized as dynamic entities, shaped by the intricate interconnections between individual psychological processes, physical conditions, and social interactions. This integrative approach permits a nuanced appreciation of the complex nature of social orders, which are marked by emergent phenomena and non-linear progressions. The non-linearity and emergence observed in social systems indicate that meaning not only reflects but also drives the emergence of new structures and

patterns. This exemplifies the transformative power of integrated social dynamics. The dynamic interactions among individuals, shaped by meaning, catalyze emergent orders and phenomena that significantly influence the evolution of systems. Even minor alterations can precipitate extensive and unforeseeable impacts on the system as a whole. An appreciation of the interconnectedness across system levels enhances our comprehension of social process complexity and emphasizes the formation of social realities through a continuous, reciprocal dialogue between individual experiences, physical states, and social structures. Systems emerge as a result of differentiation from their environmental context, which may also contain other systems. A system is defined by a network of interdependent relationships among its elements, which together configure the system's structure. In accordance with the principle of autopoiesis, the reduction of complexity is identified as a fundamental function of social systems. These systems facilitate the management of the vast complexity of the world by establishing a connection between this expansive complexity and the limited human capacity for conscious information processing. This process entails establishing order within chaos and delineating boundaries that simultaneously define and maintain the system's integrity. By focusing on these interactions and their effects, we can gain insight into the adaptive mechanisms that allow social systems to not only sustain themselves but also evolve (Luhmann 1991, 116). As previously stated, human capabilities are largely immutable due to inherent limitations (Schroer 2017, 279). Systems manage complexity by establishing internal and external domains, thereby differentiating between the system's interior and its external environment. The differentiation thus allows for the creation of areas with reduced complexity (Luhmann 1991, 116). The environment from which a system emerges has a profound and fundamental impact on its continued sustenance. Social systems, as self-referential and autopoietic entities, originate and persist through a constant self-reference. This self-referential nature enables them to manage complexity and orient themselves within an exceedingly intricate environment. Systems establish their identity by delineating themselves from their surrounding environment and functioning in accordance with their distinctive structures and codes. This process of self-reference is inextricably linked to the generation of meaning, as systems continuously create meanings to maintain their identity and ensure their continuity. The capacity to generate meaning provides social systems with the necessary orientation in a dynamic and ever-changing environment. The interplay between self-reference and external reference establishes a distinctive connection, enabling social systems to sustain specific environmental relations defined by their primary distinctions and operational modes (Willke 1987, 69). Social systems interact with their environments through a distinctive process of self-organization and regulation. This process is governed by the fundamental distinctions and operational modes of the systems in question, which may be understood as their internal mechanisms and rules. The distinction between self-reference and external reference enables social

systems to generate the information necessary for their autopoiesis (Luhmann 1996, 607). Semantic structures are indispensable for the successful completion of this process. It follows that social subsystems are dependent on the application of specialized semantics, which facilitate the implementation of system-specific communicative operations (Willke 1987, 66).

Semantic codes are of crucial importance in the rapid and precise classification and interpretation of communications, as they serve to encode and decode meanings. These mechanisms are indispensable for the proper functioning of social systems, as they facilitate the reduction of complexity and the effective management of communication. Coding is of paramount importance for the establishment and maintenance of semantic order within social systems, forming the foundation for mutual understanding and coordinated action. The evolution of specialized semantics in social systems, including the emergence of jargon, symbols, memes, and specific concepts, is driven by the need to meet unique communication and information requirements. These semantics facilitate comprehension of complex subjects within the system, thereby enhancing its organizational and regulatory capacities. They enable rapid, clear communication and decision-making. They are indispensable for maintaining operational cohesion and system autonomy, providing an internal framework for understanding that is distinct from the external environment. This thesis employs the concept of *structural coupling* (see Chapter 2.2.7) to examine the transmission of meaning facilitated by codes. This study examines how social systems actively configure their structure and dynamics through the use of communicative codes embedded in cultural codings. This examination offers a more profound understanding of the self-referential nature of social systems by emphasizing the pivotal role of cultural codes in shaping and maintaining systemic organization and identity. By means of differentiation practices, social systems establish a distinction between themselves and their environment, thereby defining a unique identity. These practices facilitate effective complexity management by enabling systems to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information, thereby influencing system responses to environmental changes. The environment of a social system is comprised of not only other social systems but also physical and symbolic elements. The interactions between a social system and its environment are characterized by mutual influences. The environment provides the context for the system's internal processes, while the system's actions can potentially alter its environment. Moreover, social systems exert a proactive influence on their surrounding context, particularly in the context of human differentiation. This is achieved by the creation, maintenance, and reshaping of social norms, values, and practices, which subsequently define the boundaries and possibilities for individual and collective actions. The concept of social systems engaging actively with their environments will be further developed and emphasized throughout the remainder of this book. Social systems are conceptualized as both closed and open, which represents

an apparent paradox that is a fundamental aspect of autopoietic systems' function (Luhmann 1997a, 68). The concept of operational closedness pertains to the internal logic and self-sustainability of a system. These attributes are maintained through recursive processes that operate independently of external influences. This indicates that a system's fundamental mechanisms are generated and sustained by the interconnectedness of its own operations. Concurrently, social systems exhibit a form of openness (ibid., 69), which stems from their interaction with the environment. Despite the fact that autopoietic systems are governed internally and their operations are not directly influenced from the outside, they are nevertheless receptive to information and stimuli from their surroundings. This enables them to respond adaptively. This openness pertains to the system's environmental sensitivity, or its capacity to detect changes and adjust its structures accordingly. This interaction with the environment strengthens operational closure, thereby enhancing the system's overall complexity and adaptability. The conjunction of operational closure and environmental openness enables social systems to sustain dynamic stability, continuously reproducing their internal order while adroitly negotiating the challenges and opportunities presented by their environmental interactions. This equilibrium between closure and openness is of great consequence for the evolution and persistence of social systems (Endreß 2023, 202).

2.2.3 Self-Referentiality

Self-reference describes a system's ability to use its own elements, operations, or communications as the foundation for subsequent operations. This internal dynamic enables the system to function based on its own structure. As operationally closed, self-referential systems, they operate solely on the basis of their own structures and operations. By means of self-reference, these systems generate and modify their constituent elements and structures, thereby creating a cyclical process of self-maintenance and adaptation. This operational closure does not isolate the system from its environment; rather, it forms the foundation for its autonomy, enabling the system to evolve and adapt while preserving its fundamental identity and functionality (Aretz 2022, 190). Self-reference encompasses a level of autonomy where information and processes are internally generated, processed, and adapted, centering primarily on the system itself rather than external influences. Characterized by internal feedback loops, a self-referential system uses its own states or structures as the foundation for further developments and operations. This principle of self-referentiality defines the ability of social systems to refer to themselves, thereby managing, controlling, and adapting based on this inward focus. Consequently, such systems are shaped not so much by external factors but rather by the manner in which they internally manage processes based on their own structures and historical context. This autonomy is pivotal for maintaining systemic

integrity and adaptability, allowing systems to evolve through self-driven modifications (Luhmann 2002b, 118). Self-referential systems exhibit an inherent capacity for evolution and adaptation through a continuous process of self-organization, modifying their structures and operations over time to respond to both internal and external changes. This evolutionary capability is of critical importance for the maintenance and enhancement of the system's viability in a dynamic environment. The theoretical underpinnings of this adaptive capacity can be found in second-order cybernetics, which posits that systems are dynamic entities characterized by feedback loops and internal self-observation processes that enable ongoing adaptation and transformation. The adaptability of self-referential systems is therefore conceptualized not merely as a response to external stimuli, but rather as a proactive process driven by the system's internal structure and historical context. This framework elucidates the impact of a system's internal states and past experiences on its reactions and evolutionary trajectory.

Additionally, the concept of emergence is central to understanding self-referential systems, referring to the rise of new properties and behaviors that cannot be directly predicted from the system's individual components. Emergent phenomena result from complex interactions within the system, organized and modulated by self-referential processes. These properties are intrinsic to the overall system and cannot be reduced to the actions of its parts alone; they are a result of the system as a whole. In scientific discourse, the concept of emergence is frequently investigated in domains such as consciousness research, social networks, and ecological systems. These fields illustrate how the interactions of simpler entities can yield complex and unforeseen patterns. This is indicative of the pivotal function of internal interactions and relationships, which are coordinated through self-referential mechanisms, in fostering non-linear and unpredictable developmental trajectories. Emergent properties, therefore, represent both a challenge to comprehension and a wellspring for new possibilities and innovations within self-referential systems.

The concept of *self-reflexivity* represents a sophisticated form of self-referentiality, which is a defining feature of *second-order systems*. These systems are distinguished by their capacity for self-observation and reflection, which sets them apart from other forms of self-referential systems. In contrast to basic self-referential systems, which utilize their operations and structures exclusively for the purpose of reproduction, second-order systems possess the capacity to observe, evaluate, and critically reflect upon these processes (Müller and Müller, 555). This elevated degree of reflexivity enables such systems to adopt a meta-perspective, thereby enhancing their capacity to subject their functioning to rigorous scrutiny, critically examine the processes and structures that constitute them, and recognize the conditions that define their existence. This attribute is of particular importance in social systems, as it provides a foundation for complex phenomena such as learning, adaptation, and innovation. Self-reflective systems are capable of contextualizing their actions and

decisions within a broader framework, thereby influencing their developmental trajectories and survival strategies. In the domain of second-order cybernetics—a field that delves into the observation of observations—this self-reflexivity is subject to particularly close scrutiny. This approach incorporates the observer into the analysis, acknowledging that each observation is contingent upon the observing system's structure and operational dynamics. Second-order cybernetics employs a critical examination of the introspective capabilities of systems, including those of a scientific and social nature. This enables a profound comprehension of both the systems themselves and their environments (Maldonado and Concha 2022). The distinction between first-order and second-order systems is fundamentally contingent upon the presence and extent of reflexivity and self-awareness. First-order systems are distinguished by self-referential processes that facilitate their reproduction. In contrast, second-order systems are distinguished by their enhanced capability to observe, interrogate, and act based on these reflective insights.

2.2.4 System Justification and the Role of Communication in Upholding Normative Orders

In accordance with the tenets of system justification theory, individuals frequently engage in unconscious efforts to perceive existing social structures as legitimate and justified. Individuals typically demonstrate a proclivity to endorse and rationalize the prevailing social, economic, and political structures. This proclivity to reinforce the status quo exhibits considerable individual variation and is susceptible to alteration contingent on circumstances and personal proclivities (Jost 2020, 62). In essence, it is about reducing cognitive dissonance and reinforcing a sense of predictability and security. The theory of system justification will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4.6. This section will introduce the fundamental concepts and demonstrate their relevance within the context of the system-theoretical approach to communication and the intersectional concept of articulation. This step situates system justification theory within a broader context, which is essential for a more profound comprehension of the book. The systematic, step-by-step approach to system justification theory, and its subsequent detailed elaboration, are designed to facilitate comprehension of the underlying complex concepts. The repeated references to system justification theory serve to emphasize its crucial role in the core theme of the study, thereby reinforcing thematic coherence and underscoring the continued relevance of the theory to the topics under discussion. Moreover, the necessity for existential security must be investigated from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives. This includes an examination of terror management theory and the concept of death awareness (see Chapter 4).

In the context of systems theory, the motivation to justify a system should initially be understood as a fundamental anthropological mechanism that promotes

stability and homeostasis within a social system. The act of justifying existing social arrangements maintains the status quo. From the perspective of systems theory, this can be interpreted as a form of negative feedback². This negative feedback functions to counteract changes or disruptions in the system, thereby promoting systemic stability. The integration of system justification theory, understood as a deep psychological need for security, enhances the systems theory approach to communication. In systems theory, communication is regarded as the fundamental process through which social systems establish and maintain their structures and boundaries. This enables systems to organize and perpetuate themselves by constructing and processing meaning. A renewed focus on the role of communication within social systems enables a more profound examination of the way social realities are constituted. Social systems undergo continuous transformation through recurrent communication processes that not only delineate their own structure but also shape prevailing norms and values. Communication, therefore, depicts not only superficial interactions but also embodies fundamental processes that contribute significantly to the legitimization of the system. It is notable that the impulse to justify systems extends beyond individual phenomena and is significantly promoted and reinforced by social communication within social systems. This suggests that the inclination to justify the system is not merely a product of individual or group preferences; rather, it is sustained and legitimized by the communicative content that circulates within the system. Communication can be defined as the synthesis of three elements: information, which conveys externally referential content; utterance, representing the self-referentiality of communication; and understanding, which observes the distinction between communication and information, determining the mode of connection between self-reference and external reference (P. Fuchs 2012, 91). When the concept of system justification is integrated into this framework, it becomes evident that communication processes within social systems serve not only operate as a means of exchanging information or coordinating actions, but also as a mechanism for legitimizing existing social, economic, and political arrangements. The acceptance of the status quo, as postulated by system justification theory, is reinforced by communicative actions that reproduce specific ideologies, stereotypes, and norms. Such communicative actions contribute to the construction of a social reality in which inequalities and power structures appear to be natural, justified, or unavoidable.

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- 2 In contradistinction to *negative feedback*, which is aimed at stabilizing the system and restoring it to a state of equilibrium, *positive feedback* promotes the intensification of changes that may result in the system's departure from its original state. In this context, it is noteworthy that the terms "negative" and "positive" do not imply any normative judgments in sociocybernetics; rather, they describe functional processes within a system.

A significant challenge in the discourse on system justification is the frequently indistinct delineation between the concepts of “groups” and “social systems.” There is a diversity of opinion regarding the distinction between groups and systems, as well as the manner in which they interact with regard to the justification of social structures. Some perspectives consider groups to be subsystems within a broader social system, whereas others view groups and systems as distinct entities with unique dynamics and functions. In this study, the term “social system” is defined as an overarching structure that encompasses groups, collectives, and cultures without being confined to them. While social systems manifest universal properties in their organization and functioning, they are invariably shaped by specific linguistic, cultural, and hegemonic contexts. This dual perspective asserts that social systems function as both general frameworks and contextually grounded phenomena. Within the scope of this work, this methodological approach is applied to the German-speaking Central European region, enabling an analysis of social systems as they operate within their historical, social, and geopolitical contexts. This broader perspective clarifies the role of communicative processes throughout the system, facilitating a more profound awareness of the manner in which system-justifying beliefs are disseminated and reinforced through social communication, transcending mere group identities. This, in turn, contributes to the stabilization and legitimization of the entire system. This perspective renders evident the intimate interconnection between systems theory and system justification theory, particularly with respect to the role of communication. Communication functions as a crucial mechanism through which social systems not only define and maintain their existence and structures but also continuously renegotiate and reaffirm the legitimacy and normative order of these systems.

While discursive and media forms of communication within social systems primarily stabilize existing social orders and satisfy psychological needs for system justification, the intersectional concept of articulation (see Chapter 9.1) offers a more expansive perspective on dynamic communication processes in these systems. The term “articulation,” as used here, refers to the communicative process through which a multitude of social forces—including economic interests, political ideologies, cultural norms, and social identities—are not only interwoven but also actively negotiated. This approach enhances our comprehension of the intricate interactions and resulting intersections between disparate social categories. The ongoing articulation of individual subject positions within social systems generates semantic boundaries, defined by the logic of difference, and mediated by cultural codes. These boundaries contribute both to the stabilization and questioning of normative orders. As detailed in Chapter 8, cultural codes enable the transfer of meanings through the formation of structural couplings, which are inherently provisional and subject to continual modification. These structures reflect the ongoing

dynamics of meaning differentiation and exemplify the continual reshaping of identification possibilities. The ongoing reassessment of cultural codes presents a persistent challenge to the normative foundations of social systems, while simultaneously facilitating their reorganization. In social systems, this process pertains to the dynamic adaptation and interpretation of cultural norms, values, beliefs, and symbolism that are fundamental to social coexistence. Cultural codes, which are deeply embedded and frequently implicit, regulate social interactions, inform interpretations of events, and influence the formation of identity. These codes are not static; rather, they are dynamic and evolve in response to shifts in social, political, economic, and technological contexts. Cultural codes are reinterpreted through discourse, media, art, education, and legal decisions, thereby introducing new perspectives and opportunities into societal perceptions. This ongoing reinterpretation is essential for societal adaptation to changing circumstances, integration of innovations, and conflict resolution. It plays a pivotal role in the evolution and transformation of social structures by continuously redefining the grounds of coexistence. The aforementioned principles exemplify the malleable and self-referential nature of social systems. The collective justification structures, which may be defined as networks of shared norms, values, and beliefs, are not only shaped by communication but are also subject to continuous renegotiation and reinforcement. The concept of non-linearity is of central importance in this context, as social processes and phenomena are observed to follow complex and unpredictable patterns. This suggests that the endorsement or rejection of social systems by individuals cannot be determined based on individual factors or identity characteristics alone. Rather, the interplay between disparate social, economic, and political forces can result in unanticipated outcomes and dynamics. Moreover, the phenomenon of intersectionality affects how individuals perceive and justify social systems. The concept of intersectionality illustrates that an individual's justification of a social system is not contingent on their position within a single social category. In addition, it is also influenced by the complex interplay of these categories.

2.2.5 Social Complexity

The concept of social complexity, particularly relevant in the context of human differentiation, is especially pertinent when considering the multi-layered nature of globalized and differentiated social formations (for further details, please refer to section 2.2.1). Societies that have embraced globalization exhibit a complex interdependence and networking, both locally and globally, which amplifies the complexity within their social, economic, and political frameworks. Social complexity is distinguished by several key attributes, including interdependence, dynamism, emergence, self-organization, adaptability, diversity, and differentiation (Donnelly 2023, 14; Carmichael 2019; Mitchell 2009; La Porte 2015). The combination of these

features provides an illustrative overview of the interconnectedness and resultant intricacies within the decision-making arenas of social systems. This heightened complexity reflects not only the multitude of interacting layers but also the broad spectrum of potential outcomes that can influence system behaviors and societal trajectories (Willke 1987, 23). This type of complexity is primarily characterized by the dynamic relationship between a system and its environment. This relationship should not be viewed as a static state; rather, it should be considered a continuous relational process. The dynamic interplay permits the system to undergo constant adaptation and response to environmental changes, thereby elucidating the fluid nature of system-environment interactions. This line of thinking calls for a shift in focus from the mere existence of systems within a fixed framework to a more active engagement with and modification of the contextual landscapes that shape them (Luhmann 1970, 115). In this context, attention is directed not merely to the extensive range of prospective structural associations, but also to the conscious selectivity evident in the establishment of these links. The crucial aspect is the way a system discerningly elects specific links from the multitude of potential options and eschews others. This selective process is of great consequence for the creation and maintenance of functional orders within the system. This process guarantees that the system can organize and streamline its operations in an efficient manner by focusing on connections that enhance its functionality and coherence, while discarding those that do not contribute to its intended goals (Luhmann 1996, 47). The practice of selective networking allows social systems to establish simplified orders within their inherently complex structures. This unity of complexity is expressed through relationships of mutual facilitation (Kappeler et al. 2019). Elements and subsystems within a social system both enable and constrain each other's functions and development, thereby fostering an adaptive and dynamic balance. These interactions are non-linear, often yielding unpredictable patterns and outcomes that subsequently shape the system's evolution. The emergence of new patterns and structures from these interactions provides further evidence of the critical aspect of social complexity. The emergence of new phenomena cannot be attributed to the intrinsic properties of individual elements; rather, they arise from interactions that generate novel properties and functionalities. Such emergent properties enhance the system's adaptability and resilience by providing innovative solutions to emerging challenges. In an exceedingly complex world, *meaning* serves as a selective and orienting mechanism, distilling the vast array of potential experiences and actions into a manageable subset. As previously discussed, social systems are constituted in such a way as to manage and mitigate complexity. They help create a link between the intrinsic complexity of the world and the restricted capacity of humans to process information in a conscious manner. This capacity is largely determined by human biology. This management is achieved through the establishment of systems that distinctly demarcate their internal environments from external influences. The differentiation

between the internal and external realms of a system allows for the creation of zones with reduced complexity, thereby facilitating more effective system management and adaptation (Luhmann 1970, 123). The evolution of social systems is driven by the constraints of human cognitive abilities, which are increasingly challenged by the complexities of contemporary societies. This has led to the emergence of specialized roles and functions within social systems, as discussed in the context of functional differentiation. By compartmentalizing tasks and responsibilities, social systems facilitate the management and distribution of modern complexities, enabling individuals to focus on specific areas of expertise (Schroer 2017, 278). As social complexity increases in response to continual growth in group size, there is a corresponding need for advanced internal differentiation. This process of diversification acts as a vital mechanism for addressing and resolving the challenges posed by rising complexity. The cultivation of a variety of subsystems and roles within a social system allows for the productive harnessing of complexity, rather than mere management of it. This stratification enables systems to respond adaptively to changes and to incorporate the diverse needs and viewpoints of their members effectively. Consequently, social systems evolve in a dynamic manner, thereby enhancing their capacity for self-organization and adaptation to fluctuating environmental conditions. Therefore, it can be argued that the continual internal differentiation of social systems is indispensable for the maintenance of their functionality and stability in the context of the complexities of social interactions. In contrast to other systems and complexity theory approaches, the principle of individual *agency* is not negated or trivialized in the present approach; rather, it is integrated into the dynamic interplay between individuals and societies. The concept of individual agency plays a pivotal role in the phenomenon of emergence, which pertains to the emergence of social phenomena and behaviors that are not entirely predictable. Although human mechanisms of feeling, thinking, and acting influence social systems, the rigid “either/or” dichotomy, as espoused by strict methodological individualism on the one hand (human existence is determined entirely by individual will and agency) and rigid structuralism on the other (social structures dominate life), is rejected. Instead, a dynamic interplay is recognized in which neither individuals nor structures alone determine social realities. Rather, both are seen to stand in complex interaction with each other. The remainder of this study will examine various forms of agency, including evolutionary-anthropological behaviors that manifest as automated, schematic processes (also known as system-1 processes) (Kahneman 2013; Kannengiesser and Gero 2019; Faghihi et al. 2015), agency also manifests in reflexive, open-ended, and unpredictable processes, which are processed in the cerebrum (system-2 processes; see, in particular, chapters 3 and 6). Agency is a broad concept that encompasses a multitude of possibilities, which are always embedded in the matrix of social complexity. This complexity is composed of several key components, including interdependency, non-linear dynamics, emergence, self-organiza-

tion, adaptivity, diversity, and differentiation. These elements are discussed in further detail in the following sections. Although there is considerable diversity in the approaches taken to the complexity of social systems, the present study will primarily focus on the core elements of those complexity theories that operate in a multi-level system. The actors, or “agents” (Carmichael 2019, 8), exhibit a degree of autonomy and interdependence, typically acting in accordance with established norms (Miller and Page 2007, 101). However, they are also subject to individual and unpredictable behavior (Schneider 2014, 135). These actors may be individuals, companies, or cohesive groups that differ in their status and power, particularly in terms of access to essential resources. Another pivotal element pertinent to our discourse and previously alluded to in the aforementioned *challenges* (see Chapter 2.1) is the empirical discovery of the absence of centralized control in complex systems that directs the actions of individual components (Carmichael 2019, 12; Day 2024, 18). In this generative perspective, it is the adaptations of the actors that give rise to emergent patterns through iterative and reciprocal adaptation processes. These actors act in a *decentralized* manner, whereby their behavior is responsive to changes within the system and to the actions of other actors and thus undergoes adaptation. The concept of “fitness” is of central importance in this context, as the actors are constantly striving to optimize their results in the course of interactions with their environment (Holland 1996, 49; Kauffman 1993). The capacity to adapt within network-like and decentralized structures is a fundamental aspect that unites all approaches within the field of complexity theory, despite their significant differences. Stable collective structures never emerge from centralized authority; rather, they emerge from the network-like units themselves. This represents a bottom-up explanation of social phenomena (Mitchell 2009; Schneider 2014, 136; Miller and Page 2007, 147). The outcomes of these coevolutionary processes, driven by the actions of the actors to enhance their individual fitness, manifest as transient and unstable equilibrium states that generate system behavior with limited predictability. This property is frequently referred to in the literature as an emergent phenomenon. The concept of emergence, which is frequently discussed in this work, posits that the activities of a system are more and different than the sum of the individual actions at the lower (local) level (Day 2024, 18). In contrast to linear systems, in which the sum of their parts is the sum, contemporary social systems, which are at the center of our analysis of human differentiation, are never linear or predictable. In this context, it can be stated that the whole is never the sum of its parts and thus is not a result of a simple cause-and-effect relationship (Theise 2023, 9). A variety of phenomena are associated with the behavior of complex systems, including chaotic change, emergence, bifurcations (see Chapter 8.3.2), and self-organized criticality. The organization of complex social systems is based on feedback loops (Day 2024, 19), which in this book are conceptualized as cultural codes. However, there is still no generally accepted nomenclature for the effects observed in adaptive systems.

2.2.6 Double contingency

The concept of double contingency is of great consequence when attempting to comprehend the ways in which humans differentiate themselves within societies that are themselves functionally differentiated. The concept of contingency indicates that events, states, or decisions could have occurred otherwise, and thus that they are neither necessary nor inevitable (Luhmann 1996, 184).

The term “simple contingency” is used in the context of systems theory and social science to describe the potential for variation in the actions or states of systems or individuals. It indicates that these occurrences are not predetermined and may vary in different circumstances. In the context of human differentiation, this implies that distinctions such as gender or social class are not intrinsic or immutable; rather, they are shaped by social conventions, norms, and values. These distinctions are contingent, shaped by decisions that could have been otherwise, indicating that traditional methods of categorizing and sorting individuals are not the sole possibilities. There are always alternative ways of conceptualizing and acting upon the notions of identity and belonging. This emphasis on the contingency of human differentiations reiterates the role of social constructions in the formation of identities and social categories. While certain prevailing tendencies, which will be explored in greater detail later in this book, persist, the shift from a society predominantly interpreted through religious frameworks to one that views social developments as a conscious choice among alternatives represents a profound transformation. This shift signifies the evolving nature of social interpretations and the choices they entail, thereby marking a significant evolution in the understanding of social dynamics (Willke 1987, 29). As a concomitant of this paradigm shift, there is an intensifying emphasis on the justification of decisions, which simultaneously elevates the probability of conflict. Consequently, the management of an increase in contingency is only feasible when effective mechanisms for regulating conflicts have been established. This context elucidates the relationship between complexity and contingency. The term “complexity” is used to describe the decision-making environment in which a system must respond to external demands. This multitude of potential outcomes presents a significant challenge for the system. In contrast, contingency pertains to the alternative actions available to the system, thereby distinguishing it from the problems that arise from the variety of potential actions (*ibid.*, 32). This distinction is of paramount importance, as it reveals that while complexity provides the framework for decision-making, contingency delineates the potential pathways a system can pursue. In this context, the capacity to select and modify courses of action in managing system dynamics and potential conflicts represents a fundamental anchor point.

The term “double contingency” is used to describe a situation in which the actions of two or more actors (either individuals or social systems) within an inter-

action are based on mutual expectations and reactions. This introduces a level of inherent unpredictability, as the actions of each actor are influenced by the expectations and reactions of the other actors involved. In the context of human differentiation, this concept suggests that both self-perception and the perception of others, as well as the categorization of individuals, are continuously shaped through a process of mutual observation and adaptation. The integration of social and factual dimensions illuminates the manner in which social categories and identities are not only constituted in response to the nature of interactions (social dimension) but also in relation to the subjects under discussion (factual dimension). The mutual expectations and inherent unpredictability of others' behaviors within the social dimension necessitate the structuring and negotiation of identities and differences. The uncertainty inherent in double contingency renders each participant a "black box" to the others, thereby creating a compulsion to define and negotiate role expectations and social categories in order to render interactions predictable and comprehensible (Luhmann 1997a, 337). The social dimension places emphasis on the mutual expectations and the unpredictable behavior of other actors. In contrast, the factual dimension introduces a further layer of complexity by focusing on the content and topics that are central to these interactions. The processes of producing, disseminating, and institutionalizing knowledge about differences and identities play a significant role in the discursive construction and establishment of human differentiation. Therefore, the negotiation of identities occurs not only within the social context but is also inextricably linked to the material dimension, encompassing norms, economic conditions, and educational stipulations. Moreover, the principle of non-linearity is crucial in understanding that the interactions among individual actions, social expectations, and factual conditions are fundamentally unpredictable. This principle is pivotal in illustrating that changes in social structuring do not straightforwardly stem from individual actions or decisions. Rather, they emerge from a complex interplay of various factors. The concept of non-linearity underscores the inherent dynamism and fluidity of social categorization processes. Consequently, relying on a simplistic cause-and-effect logic, confined to a limited set of dimensions, is inherently inadequate for comprehensively capturing the nuances of human differentiation. Instead, a more profound and nuanced examination of the diverse and often unexpected trajectories that identities and social categories may follow over time is necessary. An intersectional and multi-methodological approach is essential for examining discrimination, and a willingness to embrace serendipity is crucial. The concept of serendipity—the discovery of unexpected findings in the search for something else—is linked to that of non-linearity and double contingency through their shared elements of unpredictability and openness to new possibilities. The notion of non-linearity signifies that developments and interactions are neither straightforward nor predictable, while double contingency accentuates the mutual indeterminacy in social interactions. The concept of serendipity enhances

these ideas by focusing on the potential for innovative insights and solutions that emerge from the unexpected convergences and divergences within these dynamic processes. Within the theoretical framework of intersectionality, the concept of non-linearity signifies the impossibility of reducing the outcomes resulting from the interaction between diverse identifiers, identities, and categories to a mere summation or prediction. An individual's life experience cannot be reduced to a mere addition of their identity attributes. Rather, it is shaped by the intricate, dynamic, and often unanticipated interactions between these characteristics. To illustrate, the experiences of a Black woman cannot be reduced to a mere sum of the experiences of women and Black individuals. It is thus imperative to examine the specific conditions that emerge from the intersection of racism and sexism and their intertwined impacts. The concept of double contingency helps further accentuate the inherent complexity and non-linearity of the formation of social categories. This insight is indicative of the necessity of considering both social and factual dimensions in the analysis of human differentiation. This is required in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the layered, intersectional experiences of individuals. Identities and differences emerge and evolve through a continuous process of social interaction and factual confrontation, shaped by the mutual influences of social expectations and substantive matters. The concept of double contingency sheds light on the intrinsic unpredictability and variability of social categories and identities within a complex, functionally differentiated social context. This concept highlights the crucial function of double contingency in navigating diversity.

2.2.7 Structural Coupling

The concept of structural coupling pertains to the way systems undergo adaptations and evolutionary processes at the internal structural level. These changes are driven by the conveyance of information through the medium of coded meanings. These coded meanings constitute interfaces that facilitate the exchange of relevant information between different systems, thereby enabling them to retain their distinctive modes of operation and autonomy. The process of "coding" involves the transformation of information within and between systems, with the objective of ensuring comprehensibility and connectivity. This process encompasses both the encoding of experiences and states into forms that can be communicated and the decoding of these forms in accordance with the internal logic of the receiving system. These processes form the foundation for structural coupling, which enables systems with disparate logics to exchange information and contribute to mutual development. In this integrative approach, structural coupling is regarded as a means of mediating intricate interactions among cognitive, affective, and bodily processes and their relationships to other systems. The exchange of information and influence across different levels is facilitated by coded meanings, which in turn enhance the self-orga-

nizing and self-referential dynamics of systems. This model proposes that emotional states, physical sensations, and thoughts are interconnected through specific codes, thereby enabling the effective communication of these elements—and, ultimately, meanings—across system boundaries. Empirical research frequently corroborates the assertion that specific emotional states and thoughts are coded to facilitate communication across system boundaries. A notable illustration can be found in studies on mirror neurons, which demonstrate how the observation of others' actions is encoded and processed in one's own brain, thereby providing a neural basis for empathy and social understanding. Interdisciplinary research provides further insight into the ways in which physical processes and social interactions intersect. The study of emotional contagion and the influence of body language in social contexts provides profound insights into the reciprocal influence of physical and emotional states on social interactions. For example, research has demonstrated that stress reactions can be transmitted from one individual to another, while positive emotions such as joy or fear can also influence social interactions. As will be thoroughly examined in Chapter 6, the notion of structural coupling is strongly corroborated by the latest research on social cognition. It is essential to recognize that conceptualizing structural coupling as a means of transmitting meanings between systems is firmly anchored in the tenets of embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive cognition. These theories provide a compelling and plausible framework for understanding how cognitive processes are situated within the physical body and deeply integrated with the environmental and social contexts in which they occur (Schlicht 2023; Newen, Bruin, and Gallagher 2018; Gallagher 2023). When these perspectives are considered collectively, it becomes evident that cognitive processes extend beyond the boundaries of the individual, operating as integrated phenomena within complex social and material contexts. Instead, they are profoundly rooted in the biological, social, and material contexts that individuals navigate. The influence of embodied experiences, which are grounded in the biological and physical mechanisms of the body, extends beyond the cognitive and affective processes of individuals. These experiences also play a significant role in shaping interactions with the environment and other systems. This interplay between the body's experiences and their impact on cognitive functions and social interactions demonstrates the inextricable connection between an individual's physical state and their cognitive and social dynamics (Shapiro 2019; Setti and Borghi 2018; Guillaume et al. 2016; Guy and Dove 2016). These experiences are conveyed through specific codes that serve as conduits between disparate system levels, thereby facilitating the integration of heterogeneous cognitive processes. Moreover, individuals and their cognitive processes are deeply embedded within their social and physical environments, which play a pivotal role in shaping their cognitive schemas. This embeddedness evinces the importance of contemplating the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments, which is enabled by structural coupling. Moreover, the concept of ex-

tended cognition enhances our comprehension of cognitive processes by underscoring that external artifacts and environmental structures are not mere adjuncts but are integral components of the cognitive system. Integrating these perspectives at the level of substance demonstrates how structural couplings extend beyond internal processes to include external resources, which are actively incorporated into the generation of meaning (Telakivi 2023). The enactive perspective ultimately maintains that cognitive structures are in a state of continual flux, arising and developing in response to active engagement with the surrounding environment. This perspective postulates that cognition is a process that is continuously shaped by the dynamic interplay between the individual and their environment. Consequently, the construction of understanding and knowledge is not constrained by the boundaries of the mind; rather, it is developed through continuous, reciprocal interactions with the social and physical world (Sepúlveda-Pedro 2023).

The involvement in social and physical activities is of paramount importance for the advancement and transformation of multidimensional schemata. This places significant emphasis on the function of agency in the generation of meanings within the context of structural coupling. This concept is consistent with Bateson's sophisticated epistemological principle that information and meaning do not originate from static entities. In contrast, they arise through active perception and the differentiation of differences (Bateson 1999). In accordance with this framework, a system generates information by identifying significant distinctions (see Chapter 6.4). This perspective encapsulates the essence of structural coupling, which enables mutual adaptation and influence among systems through the intricate exchange of encoded meanings. Bateson's insights show that meanings are not intrinsic to events; rather, they are produced through the systems' abilities to discern relevant differences. This mechanism is of critical importance to the functioning of autopoietic systems, which maintain their organization and structure through the continuous self-regeneration of their components and the ability to perceive and respond adeptly to environmental stimuli. This dynamic process exhibits the proactive engagement of the system with its environment, driven by its inherent capacity to discern pertinent distinctions that shape its evolutionary trajectory. The concept of structural coupling can be understood as a mechanism through which systems can engage in the exchange and co-production of meanings (Baraldi, Corsi, and Esposito 1997, 187). This is achieved through the application of the principle of differentiation of differences (Rieger 2003, 328; Luhmann 1997a, 114). Affective-cognitive-bodily schemata and cultural coding play a pivotal role in this dynamic process, enabling systems to interact and adapt to one another. This interaction is contingent upon the recognition and interpretation of differences, which enables systems to extract and process information from their environment in accordance with their own distinctive logic. The transfer of meanings between systems

is mediated through coded messages, such as symbols, language, and gestures, which are generated by one system and interpreted by another based on its specific schemata and cultural coding. Affective-cognitive-bodily schemata function as internal frameworks that shape how information is perceived, emotionally assessed, and physically experienced, thereby guiding the generation, processing, and interpretation of meanings. These schemata are closely associated with cultural codes, which determine the acceptability or significance of emotional responses, cognitive assessments, and bodily experiences within a specific cultural context. The generation of meaning through system interaction is a dynamic process that relies on the continuous identification of relevant differences and their integration into both individual and collective contexts (Luhmann 1997a, 108; Bateson 1999, Chapter 3). This process is mediated and shaped by affective-cognitive-bodily schemata, which not only guide individual experiences and interpretations but are also influenced by cultural codes. These codes provide a common understanding and a shared language, thereby facilitating the transmission of meanings and contributing to the co-construction of social realities. Affective-cognitive-bodily schemata and cultural codings not only enable systems to decode messages but also facilitate the generation and adaptation of meanings that align with individual needs and collective norms and values. Consequently, the co-production of meaning should be regarded not as a linear or static process, but rather as a dynamic and iterative exchange that intricately interweaves individual experiences with cultural contexts (Rieger 2003, 327). The encoding of meanings represents a central mechanism of structural coupling, whereby one system transforms the differences noted by another into a format that is comprehensible and operational within its own framework. This process of encoding and decoding allows systems to modify information in a way that facilitates effective communication across the boundaries of individual systems.

2.2.8 Power, Domination, and Network-Hierarchies

A fundamental methodological assumption provides the foundation for the development and application of a transdisciplinary cognitive program for analyzing human differentiation. In this work, the sociocybernetic theories are employed primarily in a descriptive manner, rather than in a normative one. This approach eschews a rigid categorization of system types, instead focusing on the analysis of power dynamics, control, and the legitimization of power structures. This multifaceted analysis of power and domination is essential for understanding regimes of difference. In accordance with systems and complexity theory, power, domination, and, as will be demonstrated, “network hierarchies” are regarded as meta-codes, in a poststructuralist sense as relational conditions and simultaneously as macrosocial anthropological constants. This is particularly evident in highly differentiated contemporary societies, which communicate via cultural codes (see Chapter 8) and

thereby activate specific neurobiological systems, including System 1 (automated, intuitive processes) and System 2 (conscious, reflective processes) (see Chapters 3–5). These systems constitute the foundation for schemata that inform social practices and differentiations and are embedded in power and domination structures. This is to be understood as an attempt to adopt an integrative perspective on the psychological, biological, schema-related, anthropological, cultural, and geopolitical dimensions of social order discussed in the main chapters of this book. This is done in order to identify the ways in which power and domination structures are continuously reproduced and stabilized. In this analysis, the dimensions are not ordered hierarchically or given epistemological priority. Instead, a holistic approach is taken to reveal the complex interactions between the levels. This does not imply that one dimension is superior to the others. The goal is to analyze the diverse schemata and practices of human differentiation in the specific context of Germany, thereby shedding comprehensive light on the interconnections between cultural, biological, psychological, and geopolitical factors.

This study closely examines the inherent difficulties in governance, as well as the paradoxes and complexities that frequently emerge. These are often perceived as anti-democratic and conducive to the establishment of hierarchies. The analysis extends to the global repercussions of functional differentiation and its extensive consequences, including exploitation, wars, and inhumane practices. Furthermore, the analysis considers the generally oblivious stance of geopolitically privileged groups. It goes without saying that within privileged groups, many subgroups exist that are affected by exploitation and disadvantage on different levels and by no means lead an elite life, yet still belong to the privileged on a global scale. The present considerations focus on the phenomenon of power, examining the necessity of maintaining social systems and orders through the continuous reduction of complexity and the securing of resources. This encompasses hegemonic structures that are bolstered by military and political apparatus, as well as organizations that are structurally integrated with their respective populations and communicate with each other through distinct codes. In the context of *macrosocial anthropological constants*, the critical role of resource security for the survival and stability of empires is further elaborated in Chapter 7. The central argument of the present discussion is that no complex society can survive without efficiently and sustainably securing its energy sources. This proves the vital link between the maintenance of hierarchies and the control of essential resources. The structuring of hierarchies is not merely a characteristic of social order; it is also a vital element in ensuring the availability of resources that are crucial for the survival and prosperity of societies. In discussions of power and domination, the concept of morality is deliberately excluded from consideration. Historically, morality served as an integrative mechanism within earlier forms of social organization. However, since 1945, the prevailing secular norms have replaced these moral frameworks as a means of mitigating conflicts (Willke

2010, 19). This transition is embedded in the normative structures that shape hierarchies, power, and domination, particularly in relation to the role of democracy and markets. Beyond understanding human differentiation practices, the goal is also to explore how political majorities can be formed in the long term within entrenched social systems, rather than establishing definitive truths. All social systems, including hegemonies, are autopoietic, that is, they are capable of self-organization and self-reproduction. This understanding is of great importance for comprehending the dynamics of power and domination, particularly in relation to the processes that sustain social orders and power structures. The realization that each system autonomously ensures its own maintenance through self-referential and self-organizing processes evokes the necessity of resource management and complexity reduction as foundational elements within these systems. As a result of the continued expansion of globalization, the maintenance of these conditions has become an increasingly challenging endeavor. The pursuit of moral imperatives, particularly in the realms of politics and media, frequently manifests through the advocacy of universally framed concepts such as human rights. This phenomenon will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 8, where it will be discussed in the context of the cultural coding of “empty signifiers” (Laclau 2007). Nevertheless, the pursuit of a universal morality is ultimately futile due to its inherently circular nature. The issue is not with human rights themselves, but rather with the ongoing efforts to ground these rights in a source of legitimacy that is external to the social systems they seek to address morally (Willke 2010, 37). The external grounding of these systems frequently creates obstacles to the integration and acceptance of human rights within them. Moral arguments frequently assume the existence of an independent, universally recognized foundation, which is not an empirically verifiable proposition. However, no such basis exists, which ultimately renders attempts to establish a universal morality futile. The concept of functional differentiation gives rise to a multitude of moral and justifiable interpretations, which in turn places the notion of universal social justice under considerable strain. This fragmentation gives rise to a state of “moral confusion,” which is further compounded by the intensifying forces of globalization (Willke 2010, 62). As globalization becomes increasingly intertwined with all aspects of human life, the need for a global political governance system capable of coordinating these processes in a manner that is both just and legitimate remains a significant challenge. This absence is particularly evident in light of the waning of US hegemony, a phenomenon that will be further discussed in Chapter 10. The intrinsic necessity to diminish complexity and preserve social order requires the targeted and hierarchically organized coordination of these intricate processes. However, the nature of social systems indicates that they cannot be rigidly controlled or dominated hierarchically, as no single element or segment can exert control over the entire system. This implies an inherent limitation of power within social systems, which presents a significant challenge. The analysis acknowledges that human societies have histor-

ically generated and are likely to continue generating hierarchies. However, it also acknowledges that the very nature of power and hierarchies is undergoing significant transformations in the 21st century. This shift occurs within the context of globalization, which can be defined as a process in which the functional systems of contemporary, functionally differentiated societies are interconnected across national borders (Willke 2020, 10). These systems evolve within global contexts, establishing their own logics and operational modes, thereby progressively dissociating from the dictates of their originating nation-states (*ibid.*). The conventional view of power structures as strictly hierarchical and top-down is now being replaced by a recognition of a more intricate reality.

In the initial decades of the 21st century, the formation of hegemonic power is increasingly shaped by a combination of decentralized networks and a simultaneous centralized exercise of power. This phenomenon will be further examined in the subsequent sections of this book under the term “neoliberal regime.” It would be erroneous to assume that decentralized networks inherently promote egalitarianism. Rather, they tend to permeate existing hierarchies, which in turn can no longer be understood as straightforward top-down command systems (Williams 2020, 83). Instead, dynamic power structures emerge in which networks and hierarchies interlock and reinforce each other, with traditional distinctions between horizontal and vertical forms of organization becoming increasingly blurred. If social complexity is consistently linked to a dynamic understanding of power—both hierarchical and network-like—then central dimensions of hegemony in complex social systems can be derived. First and foremost, the phenomenon of hegemony in such systems is contingent upon the interactions between the various differentiated domains and functions. In this context, power and domination can be understood as a processes of utilizing, or even exploiting, the interactions between and within these functional areas. Moreover, complex hegemony offers fundamental principles that establishes an explanatory framework for understanding the integrated dynamics between different social spheres of activity, particularly with regard to human differentiation. In alignment with the perspectives of Gramsci and Foucault, the concept of power is fundamentally decentralized, no longer conceived as a centralized authority but rather as a phenomenon that is mediated by a multitude of social practices, discourses, and institutions. In addition to its direct role in domination, power also permeates social relations in subtle and often invisible ways. Gramsci places considerable emphasis on consent as a primary source of power (Gramsci 1971, 57), whereas Foucault directs attention to discursive and disciplinary mechanisms. Both perspectives view power as a productive force, influencing the formation and stabilization of identities, social orders, and norms. This perspective is based on the aforementioned approaches, particularly the system-stabilizing aspects (see Chapter 4.5 and Chapter 8.3), and expands the understanding of power by emphasizing the emergent, self-organizing, and self-reproducing properties of social systems. The concept of

power and domination is understood as a dynamic and adaptive phenomenon that is not limited to central actors or institutions. Rather, it arises through non-linear interactions between different functionally differentiated domains and their actors. These structures of power and domination give rise to behaviors that are deeply rooted in anthropological constants and result from feedback effects within a complex network of social and cultural processes. This indicates that power functions not only through hierarchical leadership or discursive control, but also through the emergent dynamics of networks that are constantly reorganizing themselves. Such forms and practices of power are not entirely predictable, as they are shaped by the interactions of the actors and structures involved, which in turn react to changes in their environment. This gives rise to power phenomena that operate at different levels and permeate both hierarchies and networks. The present approach broadens our understanding of these processes by incorporating anthropological, socio-psychological, and biologically evolved variables (see Chapters 3–6) that have been central to differentiation practices and human forms of domination since the Neolithic (see Chapter 7). These factors now constitute deterritorialized and decentralized regimes that are rooted in neoliberal practices (see Chapters 9 and 10). They operate both militarily and geopolitically through transnational networks, supranational institutions, and global capital flows (Hardt and Negri 2001, 2009). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 10, this hegemony is no longer predicated on traditional forms of sovereignty; rather, it is based on the flexible and fluid structure of global capitalism. This structure is characterized by a capacity for dynamic adaptation and integration of various power actors, thereby creating a self-organizing and adaptable form of power that facilitates the management and consolidation of geopolitical and economic interests on a global scale. The functioning of domination is no longer based on physical coercion and direct control. Instead, it is carried out through subtle mechanisms of control, which are known as sociotechniques, and through the process of consensus-building. These mechanisms are deeply rooted in social and cultural practices of subjectivization and conditioning. Hardt and Negri further develop this approach by stressing the pivotal function of global networks and new technologies in reproducing and reinforcing power relations. This form of hegemony is emergent and self-organizing, as it arises from the interplay of economic, political, and cultural processes at the global level and reproduces itself continuously. The neoliberal regime is no longer constrained by traditional hierarchies or primordial codings; rather, it is defined by adaptive networks and decentralized power structures that facilitate flexibility and adaptability. The exercise of power and domination is becoming increasingly mediated by technological infrastructures, digital communication networks, and global markets. This results in the continuous reproduction of the hegemonic order, which is supported by autopoiesis, the principle of self-reproduction and self-maintenance of complex systems. In this sense, such regimes establish the conditions for a dynamic, self-sus-

taining power structure that operates on a global scale. This structure simultaneously integrates or neutralizes new forms of resistance, depending on their intensity and whether they reach a critical mass. Those resistance movements that lack sufficient strength to traverse this threshold are typically absorbed by the system, transformed, or incorporated into existing power structures. It is only when a movement has developed sufficient pressure and influence to reach this critical mass that it can potentially bring about a disruption of the hegemonic order. Otherwise, these movements remain constrained by the self-organizing processes of the neoliberal regime, where they become managed forms of dissent that do not pose a significant threat to the system's stability. Therefore, differentiation processes are intrinsic to the autopoiesis of social systems. Both discursive practices and deeply rooted cognitive-affective-physical schemata play a role in this process, collectively generating a complex and constantly evolving network of power relations. In this way, power becomes a fluid and adaptive principle that cannot be reduced to a clear hierarchy or a single discursive mechanism. Rather, it must be understood as the result of multiple interacting forces in a complex social system. Both Foucault and complexity theory recognize power as a dynamic and decentralized phenomenon. In both approaches, power is not regarded as a fixed, centralized phenomenon, but rather as a dynamic process embedded in everyday relationships, practices, and structures. Power is not solely repressive; it is also productive, as evidenced by its role in producing social orders, differentiations, and identities. In this context, the formation of the subject is understood similarly, but on the basis of different theories. Subjectivity itself emerges both through discourse and through non-linear interactions and systemic feedback effects between various functionally differentiated areas. The mechanisms of subjectivization and conditioning (see Chapter 8.3) are an indispensable element of the systemic-anthropological comprehension of power. Differentiation practices emerge through institutional and discursive mechanisms that constitute social categories such as normality and deviation and are stabilized through power-knowledge complexes. These mechanisms influence the formation of subjects and social identities by differentiating and marginalizing certain groups. The complexity theory approach offers a complementary perspective by incorporating the dimension of emergent dynamics within an adaptive social system. Additionally, it incorporates the anthropological and biological variables discussed in Chapters 3–6, which are reflected in the concept of schemata. The concept of power relations is understood in this context as a consequence of autopoiesis and adaptive processes that emerge through the interplay of networks and hierarchies. While power structures are shaped by centrally controlled practices, they are ultimately derived from the interactions of the actors and structures involved. Such systems are subject to constant change and adaptation, which can be described as a process of *guided self-organization* (Williams 2020, 138). In this approach, *hierarchies emerge within networks, and networks permeate existing hierarchies, which may be described as “network hierarchies.”*

The latter are contingent upon cultural codes that structurally couple the various elements of complex social systems. The interweaving of hierarchical and network- or “rhizome-like” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) power relations, which extend across different interacting dimensions, is exemplified in detail in chapters 8 to 10. This exemplification makes clear how these different power structures interlock and mutually determine each other in dynamic processes, leading to a complex, constantly changing, and adaptive power constellation. This new perspective recognizes that power is dispersed across interconnected systems that feature both vertical and horizontal dynamics. An appreciation of the structure of social systems necessitates an understanding of the concepts of *vertical and horizontal differentiation*. The term “vertical differentiation” is employed to describe the hierarchical organization that exists within society. This differentiation is manifested in various forms, including disparities in power, status, and resource distribution, which can be observed in the existence of different classes or income brackets. In contrast, “horizontal differentiation” denotes the segmentation of society into disparate functional domains or sectors that coexist and fulfill distinct social roles. Such fields or systems include, for example, those of business, education, and religion. The current conceptualization of regimes of difference orders captures the interplay between these differentiations by integrating both vertical and horizontal structures. This integration illustrates the complex interconnections between hierarchical power structures and functional divisions. The intersectional overlaps demonstrated in this approach reveal how mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion operate across multiple levels, influenced by a confluence of social, cultural, and political dynamics that permeate both vertical hierarchies and horizontal sectors. From this perspective, hierarchies are not solely conceptualized in terms of dominance and submission; rather, they are also conceptualized in terms of their functional roles within networks. One might posit that power is not merely exerted through overt control, but also through the capacity to manage and influence information and knowledge. As a result, lateral world systems emerge, which in turn give rise to corresponding global institutions. It is noteworthy that politics represents a significant exception to this trend. A unified global political system remains largely absent, with democratic processes still significantly influenced by national boundaries. The United Nations Security Council represents a marginal exception to this rule (Willke 2023, 192). This dynamic and often paradoxical development—in which global institutions proliferate while the role of the nation-state is increasingly questioned—facilitates a deeper comprehension of the inherent complexities and tensions within contemporary social systems. These complexities and tensions become particularly evident when considering the global and hegemonic dimensions. The rise of global structures, occurring concurrently with the decline in the capacity of nation-states to govern, calls for a reassessment of our conceptualizations of power, governance, and justice in an increasingly interconnected world. This shift presents a challenge to the efficacy of traditional hierarchies and order

principles at a time when global issues have come to overshadow local solutions and the constraints on exercising power have become increasingly apparent. This scenario elucidates the paradox that, while hierarchy and order are indispensable for the stability and functionality of social systems, an overly rigid exertion of power can compromise the flexibility and adaptability of these systems. The current ambiguity regarding the role of nation-states in a globalized context is reflected in the challenges to implementing universal principles such as freedom, democracy, and justice. The ability of nation-states to govern is facing increasing scrutiny, even as citizens' expectations for state services and their efficacy grow, often placing undue strain on these structures. This intensifies the paradox of social justice in the context of the interplay between power and domination. The limited capacity of nation-states to govern and their impact on social justice give rise to significant questions. The growing intricacy of globally interconnected systems illustrates that conventional governance frameworks, founded upon the tenet of national sovereignty, are proving to be increasingly insufficient. This situation reveals a fundamental paradox inherent to liberal democracies: the discrepancy between the public's expectations of state services and the actual governance capabilities of states. The assumption that governments are capable of managing societies is undermined by the acknowledgment of the intricate and self-regulating nature of functionally differentiated societies. This gives rise to pressing concerns pertaining to self-referentiality and the self-governance capabilities of social systems, with power and domination occupying a pivotal role. The capacity of power structures within specific systems, such as political frameworks, to exert comprehensive societal control is inherently constrained. This is due to the profound paradoxes inherent to democratic systems and the limitations imposed by traditional conceptions of power, domination, and control. The discrepancy between the concept of globalized justice and the actuality of evolving, hierarchically structured power distributions, coupled with the diminishment of sovereignty through global neoliberal strategies, are crucial elements in comprehending human diversity. In contrast to the individual, the state cannot be understood in simplistic terms. This represents a common flaw in moralizing discourses that advocate for aid to poorer, exploited nations. The aspiration for a global equilibrium of justice between historically oppressed and oppressing entities has become increasingly impractical in this context. Such perspectives are similarly flawed due to their reliance on linear cause-and-effect reasoning, which fails to adequately capture the complexities of global interdependencies. In a context characterized by intricate power structures and dynamic power shifts, where losses of sovereignty due to global neoliberal strategies are evident, simplistic causal connections must be replaced with an appreciation for the intricate and reciprocal nature of global processes. Moreover, the advancement of justice and equality necessitates a shift in perspective that goes beyond the assumption that global justice issues can be resolved through isolated or sporadic actions. Instead, it requires a

continuous and critical examination of the structural elements that sustain inequality and injustice. It is similarly crucial to acknowledge the interdependence of the global economy and the free flow of information, which necessitates the formation of novel forms of cooperation and solidarity that transcend conventional boundaries and identities. The necessity of mechanisms to secure and legitimize stable power structures is evident; however, the inherent limitations of power also demonstrate the extent to which it can be effective. Power, which hinges on recognition and acceptance, may falter in the face of resistance, rejection, or a deficiency in legitimacy. The tension between the necessity of power to maintain social order and its intrinsic limitation or “fragility” (Willke 2014b, 137) reflects the intricate nature of dominance and control on a global scale. This limitation is consistent with the previously discussed concept of “moral confusion” and the evolving conceptions of justice within global contexts. The strategic and repetitive invocation of moral arguments in politics and the media often results in cyclical, exhaustive debates over the question of who holds the moral high ground. In conclusion, however, this question remains unresolved. Power and domination are relational and dynamic, continuously interacting with social, economic, and media structures in a complex and evolving manner. This interplay, shaped by a multitude of discourses and practices—including moralizations—illustrates the dynamic nature of power relations and their continuous renegotiation. In a globally connected world marked by interdependencies and a multitude of actors, the distribution of power is becoming increasingly decentralized and diversified. The structure of power relations is significantly influenced by non-state actors and transnational networks. The intrinsic contingency and uncertainty associated with issues of justice coincide with the inherent complexity of power relations, necessitating a theoretical approach that is sensitive to ambiguities and the need for adaptability. Simplistic moralizations that attempt to resolve complex power questions are inadequate and fail to capture the true dynamics of power and domination. Against this backdrop of limited power and the need for legitimacy, the fundamental paradox of governance re-emerges. This is because no single entity can effectively “lead” the whole, yet there appears to be no viable alternative to this arrangement. This situation exemplifies the inherent tension between the necessity for leadership within complex social systems and the practical infeasibility of any single entity—be it an individual, a group, or an institution—exercising complete control over the entire system. This paradox is particularly evident in democratic systems, where power is decentralized and grounded in the principle of popular representation. The democratic form of government is susceptible to two fundamental vulnerabilities inherent to this paradox (Reinbacher, Oberneder, and Wesenauer 2020, 218). *Firstly*, the inability to implement strategic, long-term decisions in democratic systems reflects the broader governance paradox, namely that leadership within complex systems is unable to effectively control the whole. This is attributable to the decentralized nature of power in democracies,

where the presence of multiple actors and competing interests renders the pursuit of unified, long-term goals challenging. The imperative for immediate electoral success frequently eclipses the necessity for long-term societal welfare, reflecting the difficulty in maintaining a strategic direction that aligns with the complex demands of a functionally differentiated society. *The second vulnerability* is the slow learning and adaptive processes of democracies, which also reflect the challenges of managing a complex, interconnected global system (ibid.). The necessity for consensus within a democratic system and the influence of diverse interest groups contribute to a system's inertia, which mirrors the broader difficulty of achieving coherent action in a globally networked and functionally differentiated world. This sluggishness in adaptation and learning indicates a broader issue: the capacity of a system to integrate new information and respond effectively to changing environments. This is crucial for managing the uncertainties and contingencies inherent in global power structures. Collectively, these shortcomings illustrate the inherent difficulties of democratic systems and the broader challenges associated with the management of power and governance in an increasingly complex and interconnected global environment.

2.2.9 Inclusion and Exclusion

Inclusion and exclusion constitute fundamental mechanisms within social systems, playing a pivotal role in their formation and structuring. In order to fully comprehend a social system, it is essential to acknowledge the elements that it excludes, given its intrinsic self-referential nature. These mechanisms are not only central to the formation of systems but also provide a foundation for differentiation theory, which elucidates the genesis and evolution of systems. *The inevitability of exclusions, the dynamics of negating exclusions, and their nuanced semantics are of paramount importance* for an understanding of the schemata and practices associated with human differentiation. This section will discuss these aspects and subsequently apply them to case studies within the framework of the schemata throughout this study. Moreover, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion invariably possess a historical dimension, which will be elaborated upon later in this subsection, particularly concerning the socio-structural background essential for analyzing these mechanisms. In the period following the Second World War, liberal democracies have undergone significant developments, with members being categorized into subsystems based on a range of criteria and qualifications. Such categorizations are reflective of the historical and cultural contexts that exert influence and shape the structuring of social systems. The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, along with the various forms of communication that accompany them, are considered an inherent and fundamental aspect of the processes of human differentiation. These mechanisms are deeply embedded within the structures of social systems, exerting a profound in-

fluence on the manner in which individuals and groups are included or excluded within these systems. The levels of interaction, organization, and society are fundamental to the social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. These components determine who is included or excluded across a range of levels. At the level of interaction, personal encounters operate to shape perceptions of belonging. Organizations, through the establishment of formal structures and hierarchies, determine who is granted access to resources and positions. From a societal perspective, legal and political frameworks systematically include or exclude groups, with the support of ideological narratives that present themselves as fair while concealing underlying inequalities. The obfuscation or *denial of exclusions* and differentiations within the social systems of liberal democracies represents a pivotal aspect for the analysis and comprehension of the underlying structures and practices of human differentiation. In Western societies that are highly technologized and characterized by differentiation, there is a tendency to obscure the negations that occur within the context of inclusion and exclusion. Such societies frequently diminish the significance of exclusions and inequalities by espousing a narrative of universal equality of opportunity and fairness. This emphasis on formal equality and meritocracy has the effect of obscuring systemic disadvantages and exclusions (Stichweh 2016, 226). From the perspective of discourse analysis, dominant narratives espouse the principle of equality for all individuals. This, however, obscures the tangible barriers that systematically exclude certain demographic groups from participation. The implementation of ostensibly neutral rules and procedures by institutions has the effect of creating systematic disadvantages for specific groups. Individuals tend to internalize these social norms, leading them to perceive failure or exclusion as personal shortcomings rather than as the outcomes of structural inequities. The existence of such *mechanisms of negation and invisibilization* serves to complicate the perception and discussion of inclusion and exclusion, thereby inadvertently prolonging the persistence of existing inequalities. As will be discussed in greater detail later in this volume, the negation and invisibilization of exclusions are closely intertwined with system-stabilizing and ideological narratives that are structurally embedded in social systems via their cultural codes. Moreover, the phenomenon of negation and invisibilization is further compounded by the increasing number of individuals seeking inclusion within these social systems, particularly in the context of a globalized world society. Despite the aspirational thesis of full inclusion, which aims to integrate all individuals into all functional systems, the practical critiques and limitations of this ideal are readily apparent. The considerable number of individuals and groups seeking inclusion results in exclusions that are frequently subtle and implicit due to the limited capacity to accommodate all unaddressed entities. This situation demonstrates the practical constraints of comprehensive inclusion, rendering exclusions invisible and perpetuating the illusion of complete integration while many remain marginalized. The concept of comprehensive inclusion fails to account for the intrinsic boundaries

that exist within systems, which are negotiated and communicated in both explicit and implicit ways. The frank acknowledgment of exclusions is incongruent with the self-perception of Western liberal democracies, which aspire to be perceived as inclusive and just. Consequently, exclusions are frequently implemented in a subtle manner in order to maintain the perception of inclusivity. These implicit processes obscure the reality that full inclusion is impractical, as systems inherently operate with selectivity and limitations. A defining characteristic of Western democracies is the portrayal of exclusions as forms of inclusion, with the concept of “inclusion” frequently cited as an overarching code. The greater the frequency with which a term is employed, the more it tends to encompass its antithesis (Dumont 1980, 224). The simultaneous appearance of exclusions as inclusions is exemplified by the existence of total institutions, such as prisons (Foucault 2008), refugee shelters (Behnam Shad 2021), and mental institutions (Goffman 1961). Although these institutions appear to integrate individuals, they simultaneously function as mechanisms of exclusion within the broader social structure. These institutions are governed by precise regulations that delineate which authorizations and access rights remain in effect even within their confines. From the sociocybernetic perspective, this presents a seemingly contradictory phenomenon: social systems maintain and stabilize themselves through the simultaneous inclusion of some and the exclusion of others. These exclusionary processes are frequently obscured by their presentation as forms of inclusion. This illustrates that inclusion and exclusion are not only concurrent but also interdependent, jointly shaping the boundaries and functionality of social systems. In this regard, Stichweh’s examination of inclusion and exclusion as a hierarchical opposition is particularly illuminating (Stichweh 2016, 228). The contemporary practice of exclusion is frequently presented in the context of ideologies of resocialization and reintegration. In this context, the exclusions that result from such practices are regarded as provisional measures with the objective of eventual reintegration. This interpretation, which views inclusion and exclusion as hierarchical opposites, acknowledges both the distinctiveness of the divisions and the dynamic, potentially reversible nature of these situations. In many cases, inclusion occurs concurrently with exclusion. Conversely, an extensive and time-consuming inclusion effort may preclude the possibility of pursuing other commitments simultaneously. The hierarchical aspect of the dialectic between inclusion and exclusion does not imply stability or immutability. In contrast, the two-level structure of this opposition drives the dynamics within the relationships of inclusion and exclusion. From the perspective of systems theory, this illustrates that social systems are inherently structured through a dual movement of inclusion and exclusion. These processes are perpetually in flux, ensuring that the boundaries and functionality of social systems remain dynamic and adaptable. Inclusion and exclusion are mutually reinforcing processes that collectively shape the social order and its continual transformations. This dynamic also gives rise to a covert approach to managing exclusions, whereby they are presented

as forms of inclusion. It is evident that social systems maintain their stability and adaptability by managing these dual processes in a flexible manner. The development of analytics for understanding inclusion and exclusion draws upon two significant socio-structural backdrops. The first is the reliance of social systems on communication, which is a key factor in understanding the role of participation in these communicative processes. Secondly, the diversification of reference systems results in a complex array of participations across various social systems, leading to a web of simultaneous, interconnected, or distinct inclusions and exclusions (*ibid.*, 179). The examination of inclusion and exclusion within functionally differentiated societies is becoming increasingly vital, particularly in view of the pivotal role of communication as a foundational mechanism of social interaction in contemporary frameworks. Contemporary social systems are distinguished by their capacity to segregate themselves from their environments through communicative processes, as elucidated in discussions on the various theoretical aspects of systems theory. In this context, the processes of inclusion and exclusion constitute the primary regulatory mechanisms that define the limits of participation within these systems. These systems are markedly selective, determining inclusion and exclusion based on precise criteria and designated functions (Stichweh 2016, 180). The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in social systems are highly contingent and mutable. These mechanisms are subject to constant change, influenced by shifts in the political, economic, and cultural landscapes, which in turn redefine the criteria for participation and exclusion. In light of these developments, there has been a notable shift in emphasis within Western contexts, moving away from traditional approaches to poverty and inequality and towards a more concentrated examination of inclusion and exclusion in communicative processes. Historically, poverty was primarily conceptualized as a material hardship, characterized by poor housing conditions or malnutrition. In the contemporary era, however, poverty is increasingly defined in terms of social exclusion and powerlessness, as evidenced by restricted social participation and limited communication opportunities. The advent of neoliberal policies has prompted a shift in the discourse surrounding poverty and inequality. These policies have resulted in a conceptualization of poverty as a form of socio-economic exclusion and lack of agency, which has in turn given rise to frameworks that prioritize inclusion and exclusion. The advent of a market-oriented society, accompanied by a reduction in state intervention, has resulted in the emergence of more nuanced structural inequalities, while simultaneously reaffirming the significance of individual responsibility. This shift necessitates a comprehensive examination of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion to gain a more profound understanding of the social dynamics that emerge within neoliberal contexts. The evolving conceptualization of poverty is reflected in the increasing prominence of information and communication theories within the social sciences. This theoretical shift is less an independent innovation than a response to the structural transformations brought about by the

communication-centric nature of current social systems. In social systems that are based on communication and are pluralistic in nature, the personal environments of individuals are either included or excluded. These processes can be elucidated by two fundamental dimensions of human differentiation practices: the situational mechanism of addressing individuals and the structure-forming mechanism of forming expectations toward these individuals.

In the German context, *primordial coded* characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and origin (see Section 8.1.2.1) play a pivotal role in the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The term “situational mechanism” is employed to describe immediate, situation-related decisions based on these immutable characteristics. To illustrate, individuals with a migration background frequently encounter disadvantages in the German labor market, particularly those with discernible ethnic characteristics. A review of the literature indicates that applications with names that are perceived as foreign are less likely to result in job interviews, even when the qualifications of the applicant are deemed to be equivalent (Kaas and Manger 2012; Carlsson, Fumarco, and Rooth 2018). A comparable bias is discernible in the housing market, where landlords frequently demonstrate a proclivity for applicants who lack a migration background. This preference becomes manifest during property viewings (Auspurg, Lorenz, and Schneck 2023; Horr, Hunkler, and Kroneberg 2018; Sawert 2020). The influence of gender on inclusion and exclusion is also a significant factor. Women frequently experience professional setbacks, such as a lack of promotion opportunities and diminished influence in meetings, which are largely attributed to pervasive gender stereotypes (Weichselbaumer and Winter-Ebmer 2005; Birkelund et al. 2021; Weichselbaumer 2020; Fernández-Reino, Di Stasio, and Veit 2023). Moreover, it has been observed that concerns about personal safety have prompted women to avoid certain locations and activities, such as using public transportation at night. Such avoidance can manifest in subtle forms of social exclusion.

An individual's socioeconomic background represents another significant contributing factor. In the context of the education system, children from families with limited educational resources or belonging to certain social classes may be subject to discriminatory practices. Such attitudes may manifest as teachers holding less ambitious expectations for these children, which may subsequently impact their educational opportunities and outcomes (Steinmann 2019; Rusert and Stein 2023; Kunyu et al. 2020; Dollmann 2021; Kristen and Granato 2007; Schuller 2018; Diehl, Hunkler, and Kristen 2016). In everyday life, the phenomenon of exclusion from specific social circles on the basis of one's region of origin or social class is a common occurrence. This is evidenced by the prevalence of such experiences in everyday discourse and social activities. The term “situational mechanism” is employed to draw attention to the context-dependent and frequently implicit nature of these decisions. These mechanisms are triggered in specific situations, directly influencing whether an individual is included or excluded. In Germany, such mechanisms are especially significant,

as they are deeply embedded in everyday social interactions and institutional processes.

In addition to primordially coded characteristics, the role of neoliberal coding in practices of differentiation and hierarchization is also of crucial importance (for further details, please see Chapter 9). The formation of expectations is frequently informed by neoliberal criteria, including economic performance, professional qualifications, and social status. These long-term, structural expectations exert a significant influence on how individuals are perceived and treated within a system and ultimately determine whether they are integrated into or excluded from it. In a neoliberal context, an individual's worth is frequently evaluated based on their economic productivity and contribution to the market economy. Consequently, individuals with higher incomes and greater economic capital are often the beneficiaries of preferential treatment. In Germany, this dynamic is evident in the healthcare sector, where individuals with private health insurance typically receive superior and more expedient access to medical services in comparison to those with statutory insurance. Furthermore, economic performance has a considerable impact on housing options, with wealthier individuals able to access more desirable neighborhoods and higher-quality properties (Pfeifer 2011; Trappmann et al. 2019). The neoliberal discourse places a significant emphasis on professional qualifications and continuous training. This approach posits that individuals with higher qualifications will enjoy enhanced career opportunities and greater social recognition. The prevailing orientation of labor market policies is to promote the interests of highly skilled workers, which often has the consequence of reducing the support and improving the working conditions of low-skilled workers. Those who are long-term unemployed and possess low levels of skill are collectively perceived as less valuable to the economic system, resulting in their marginalization. A further significant criterion of neoliberalism is social status, which is closely associated with consumer behavior and participation in social networks. This is evident in the differential access to social and cultural facilities. Those with higher social status are more likely to gain access to high-quality educational institutions and cultural events. These networks and the associated social capital strengthen their position within society, thereby facilitating access to further resources and opportunities. Conversely, individuals of lower social status often have limited opportunities to engage with such networks, which consequently maintains their marginalized position. In contemporary societies, the processes of inclusion and exclusion are not merely one-dimensional or linear states of belonging or non-belonging. Rather, they result from complex interactions among various subsystems. In terms of exclusion, this may entail the failure to acknowledge the individual in question or the dissolution of previously held expectations regarding them. The phenomenon of exclusion is particularly pronounced when it occurs in a cumulative manner across several subsystems or in a sequential linkage. Although individual instances of non-belonging may initially appear inconsequen-

tial, they can have significant implications for those affected when these exclusions are compounded and interconnected, often in an intersectional manner, leading to widespread social exclusion. It is therefore evident that an analysis of inclusion and exclusion within a pluralistic society is of great importance, given that multiple, interconnected, or independent inclusions and exclusions coexist (Stichweh 2016, 183).

In order to elucidate the nuances within the analytics of inclusion and exclusion, it is essential to understand the structural conditions that form the foundation for these concepts. These conditions pertain to the way individuals and groups perceived as “different” are treated and recognized. The initial structural condition pertains to one’s status within a social system, which is conveyed through a multitude of codes. This membership requires that social systems maintain a degree of closure, enabling them to differentiate between those who are considered insiders and those who are regarded as outsiders. A second condition pertains to the way individuals perceive “others” as discrete and clearly delineated social entities. This perception often results in individuals being viewed as a unified entity, which can lead to the neglect of their distinctive attributes and complexities. Historically, societies have utilized this reductionist perspective of the “other” to determine whether an individual should be incorporated as a member or marginalized. The third structural feature examines the intricate relationship between historical semantics and the sociology of difference markers. This approach employs a multi-level model that conceptualizes society in several hierarchically organized strata, thereby facilitating the development of a comprehensive social theory. Each layer within this model establishes specific norms and expectations for individuals and possesses unique mechanisms for inclusion or exclusion. This permits a sophisticated comprehension of the multifaceted and frequently intersecting nature of social interactions and power dynamics. Moreover, the concept of intersectionality builds upon this multi-level framework by identifying the intersections of various social categories and their impact on individual experiences and identities. This perspective permits an examination of the ways in which an individual may simultaneously traverse multiple social strata, and of how such interactions shape the individual’s inclusion or exclusion within diverse social systems. The intersectional approach demonstrates that the inclusion or exclusion of individuals is not determined by a single characteristic or social category, but rather by the complex interplay of multiple identity facets across different social levels. In a socially differentiated system that is organized *both horizontally and vertically* (see Chapter 2.2.8), which encompasses a multitude of independent systems along with hierarchical structures, it is essential to recognize the multidimensional nature of social interactions. This complex organization enables each system to apply distinct criteria for inclusion and exclusion at varying levels, from the local to the national. As will be discussed in greater detail later in this book, the principle of intersectionality is an invaluable tool for grasping

the intricate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within the two dominant orders of difference: the primordially coded and the neoliberally coded regimes (see Chapter 9). This perspective is particularly pertinent when considering the integration of refugees, who navigate these regimes across various sectors, including healthcare, education, and employment, and at different administrative levels. The concept of intersectionality affords a more profound examination of the pervasive nature of these inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. This illustrates that the various identity traits and social categories are not operating in isolation but rather are embedded in a complex network of relationships that shape and influence the structural conditions within these regimes. These insights are essential for comprehending the intricacies of social reality, where individuals are subject to a multitude of forces, often contradictory and non-linear, that act simultaneously. Such complexity indicates the profound and inescapable embedding of systems of inclusion and exclusion within the social structures of contemporary liberal democracies. In these systems, individuals are included or excluded in specific systems on a selective basis and to varying degrees. In this context, individuals are consistently included or excluded from specific systems in a selective manner and to varying degrees. In addition to the aforementioned factors, subsequent chapters will examine other pivotal elements of group-based inclusion and exclusion dynamics. These dynamics are integrated into the theory of schemes and practices of human differentiation in a systematic manner. This theory elucidates the processes through which individuals gain or are denied access to resources, opportunities, and social networks. It identifies the mechanisms that underpin the apparent inclusiveness and exclusivity of social structures and elucidates the structural conditions that enable and give rise to these dynamics.

3. Evolutionary-Anthropological Foundations of Human Differentiation

3.1 Introductory Thoughts

This section examines the evolutionary-anthropological foundations that shape human behavior and social structures. It is imperative to integrate evolutionary-anthropological insights in order to gain a more profound comprehension of the fundamental mechanisms that drive the formation and sustenance of social differences and dominance within human differentiation practices. This interdisciplinary approach provides a comprehensive framework for examining the fundamental behaviors that drive group formation, the consolidation of social systems, and the narratives that perpetuate existing social orders. These behaviors, which are deeply embedded in our evolutionary past, influence our susceptibility to group dynamics; however, they do not predetermine our actions. These dynamics will be examined in greater detail later in this work, particularly through the lens of holistically conceptualized schemas. It is of considerable significance to engage with these insights, particularly from a social science perspective. While maintaining a critical stance towards deterministic and universalistic interpretations, this discussion enhances our understanding of human group behavior and system justification. Such discussions provide the basis for a more nuanced comprehension of the complex interplay of social dynamics involved in human differentiation practices.

This section addresses the challenge of synthesizing transdisciplinary perspectives that encompass both the evolutionary origins and the cultural plasticity of human behaviors. Concurrently, this methodology may be susceptible to oversimplification and potentially misleading interpretations, which may unintentionally mirror the shortcomings of social Darwinism and genetic-biological reductionism. These flawed interpretations have historically been employed to justify inequality and dominance. It is therefore essential to acknowledge that genetic predispositions and biological constants do not inevitably determine specific social or cultural patterns. The naturalistic fallacy, which erroneously deduces ethical or social imperatives from biological facts—that is, it equates “is” with “ought” or natural states with social norms—illustrates the fallacy of directly transforming biological

conditions into social norms without acknowledging the complex socio-cultural dynamics involved. It is therefore important to refrain from the uncritical transfer of evolutionary findings to present-day human social dynamics. The uncritical application of evolutionary theories in social analysis carries the risk of misrepresenting social hierarchies and global power disparities as natural phenomena. The concept of progress, as espoused by Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin, has historically been employed to justify the moral superiority of certain groups. This ideological foundation provided the basis for the imperialist and colonialist perspectives that were prevalent during the Victorian era and continued to inform the doctrines of fascist and National Socialist ideologies. These perspectives espoused a deterministic view of human evolutionary development, known as unilinear evolutionism, which failed to take into account the harsh realities of colonial violence and exploitation. The application of biological-evolutionary models in human social contexts frequently results in the promotion of an idealized “natural order” wherein social underclasses are perceived as inherently deficient. This perception leads to the view that welfare support is a catalyst for dependency rather than empowerment. In the name of social Darwinism, progress is presented as an inevitable consequence of relentless competition, thereby legitimizing the existing socioeconomic hierarchies and inequalities as natural phenomena. These perspectives have historically provided a rationale for significant social injustices and continue to inform contemporary discourses on “developed” and “underdeveloped” societies, despite mounting scrutiny and critique of these terms. The integration of systems theory perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and structures that influence such differentiation processes. Consequently, societies are conceptualized as intricate, self-organizing systems, distinguished not by linear or unidirectional causal relationships, but by a complex network of interactions and interdependencies that shape their social phenomena. This approach rejects the notion of simplistic causal interpretations, instead acknowledging that social hierarchies and power inequalities do not stem from an inherent “natural order,” but rather emerge from the intricate dynamics within social systems (see Chapter 2). By prioritizing self-organization and emergence, it facilitates the integration of insights from evolutionary anthropology into the examination of the dynamics and structure of societies. This theoretical stance emphasizes the manner in which genetic and evolutionary predispositions are shaped and influenced by sociocultural and systemic factors. It challenges the notion that social or cultural outcomes are directly produced by deterministic biological processes. The transdisciplinary perspective presented here, which unites evolutionary-anthropological insights with a broader social analysis, offers a nuanced understanding of the genesis, evolution, and potential transformation of social orders (further discussed in Chapter 7, “Macrosocial Anthropological Constants”). The intricate nature of human social structures must be acknowledged, and the simplistic tendency to

apply reductionist evolutionary models to the complex phenomenon of human coexistence must be avoided. Conversely, a comprehensive rejection of scientific insights into human differentiation as mere social constructs can result in equally flawed interpretations of phenomena such as discrimination and differentiation. This point is particularly pertinent in relation to the forthcoming discussions on schemata, which are inextricably linked to human cognition and neurobiology, as detailed in subsequent chapters. These schemata are activated by cultural codes and practices that elicit emotional responses, which people often find difficult to resist and typically conform to reflexively. This discussion will examine such cultural codes in greater depth, with a particular focus on the context of power politics. This investigation will examine the strategic linking of fears, resentments, disgust, and threats to certain groups constructed by society. The influence of these emotional responses, elicited through cultural coding, can be attributed to their foundation in automatisms that are rooted in both evolutionary and biological factors. In light of the presented system-theoretical metaframe, the debate over whether biology influences culture or vice versa becomes a relatively secondary issue, given that systems are always structurally coupled with their environments. It is of greater consequence to deliberately incorporate specific findings into a transdisciplinary understanding of human differentiation practices, eschewing circular debates or the reluctance to explore beyond one's disciplinary boundaries. A critical yet open approach to human differentiation practices necessitates a balance between acknowledging our evolutionary predispositions and emphasizing our capacity for cultural innovation and ethical behavior. By integrating insights from evolutionary anthropology and neurobiology in a conscious manner, a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of human social complexities, particularly in relation to group behavior, can be achieved. This knowledge not only elucidates the nuances of social practices but also cultivates an understanding of how these practices can be transformed and shaped to address social challenges and foster a more inclusive and equitable coexistence.

3.2 The Emergence of Human Cultures in the Evolutionary Process

The appearance of *Homo sapiens* represents a significant landmark in the evolutionary history of the hominid species. Approximately 300,000 years ago, anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) evolved from a lineage of earlier hominids. This period saw the advent of unparalleled developments in the realms of cognition, social organization, and cultural expression, thereby establishing *Homo sapiens* as a uniquely advanced species within the natural world (Shea 2023, 291). The process of *enculturation*, as conceptualized within the framework of Dual Inheritance Theory, identifies the concomitant evolution of biological and cultural charac-

teristics that differentiate humans from their evolutionary precursors. This theory postulates that humans are shaped by a dual inheritance, comprising both genetic evolution and cultural developments. This integration of biology and culture is fundamental to an understanding of the distinctive evolutionary trajectory of *Homo sapiens*, which distinguishes them from earlier hominid species (Boyd and Richerson 1985; L. Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 2020). Although the australopithecines, who lived approximately 4.5 to 2.5 million years ago, engaged in rudimentary cultural activities such as tool use and hunting, the evolution of *Homo sapiens* exemplifies the profound interconnection between cultural and biological development. In contrast to their forebears, humans are not constrained by a fixed set of inherited concepts or deterministic structures. Alternatively, humans are endowed with an inherent capacity for the evolution of sophisticated systems. This intricate tapestry of biological and cultural processes forms a complex, indivisible network that cannot be reduced to a mere collection of isolated components. The synergistic co-evolution of human cultures, neurological brain structures, and the phenomenon of consciousness constitutes a dynamic, relational network that resists reduction to separate elements. This evolutionary narrative encompasses millions of years and documents not only the basic survival activities of early hominids but also the progressive emergence of complex social structures and cultural practices. Innovations, social learning, and teaching—enhanced by selective learning preferences such as conformity and prestige bias—are of great significance in differentiating cultural heritage from genetic evolution. They facilitate the biocultural coevolution of our species (Heyes, Moore, and Tomasello 2023). A more detailed examination of these traits will be provided in the forthcoming discussion on cultural selection.

In the 20th century, it was a widely held view among scientists that humans possessed certain cultural abilities that were not exhibited by other species. Nevertheless, recent evidence increasingly challenges this hypothesis, suggesting that numerous traits previously regarded as exclusively human may in fact represent evolved forms of characteristics observed in other species. This growing body of evidence raises questions about the supposed uniqueness of human characteristics. For example, recent research indicates that orangutans engage in not only basic tool use but also complex behaviors that suggest the existence of cultural traditions within their groups. These findings reinforce the idea that there is a continuity between human and animal behavior, indicating that the distinction between human uniqueness may be more permeable than previously assumed (Whiten et al. 1999; Whiten and van Schaik 2007; Whiten, Horner, and Marshall-Pescini 2003; Horner et al. 2011; Horner et al. 2010). It is well-established in the case of chimpanzees that they possess an extensive cultural repertoire. This encompasses a multitude of behaviors and practices that are acquired and transmitted across generations, indicative of a sophisticated level of social learning and cultural transmission. Such observations challenge the traditional view of culture as

a domain exclusive to humans. Furthermore, these observations reveal striking parallels in the ways diverse species adapt and innovate within their respective environments (Boesch 2003; Boesch, Hohmann, and Marchant 2002; Boesch and Tomasello 1998). Through their observations, field researchers have identified a set of cultural patterns among chimpanzees that encompass approximately 30 different behaviors. These include the practice of “anting,” whereby chimpanzees utilize ants as grooming tools, the manifestation of specific greeting gestures that are exclusive to particular groups, and the execution of distinctive practices pertaining to reconciliation (Schnurr 2013, 46). The cultural repertoire of chimpanzees, which encompasses tool production and use, social rituals, and communicative gestures, reveals specific behavioral patterns that are not merely random or solely instinctive. These behaviors are intentionally transmitted and refined within groups, in accordance with the principle of identification with group goals. This process, while not as multi-layered and complex as that observed in *Homo sapiens*, constitutes a form of “cultural learning” that is significant in our analysis. The evolutionary record makes clear the part played by social interactions and cultural influences in the development of the brain, thereby demonstrating the profound connection between cognitive abilities and the intricate process of enculturation (DeFelipe 2011; Gamble, Gowlett, and Dunbar 2018). The evolution of the human brain and cultural capacities represents the culmination of a complex interplay of dynamic processes that promoted cooperative communication among our ancient ancestors and continues in modern human societies. Cultural and biological evolution have been inextricably linked throughout human history, and this process is exemplified by the significant expansion of the cerebral cortex, particularly over the past two million years. This growth has been integral to enhancing human cognitive abilities and cultural capabilities (Hey 2013). This phenomenon, particularly evident during the process of enculturation, is a distinctive feature of the species *Homo sapiens* in comparison to other primate species. It is noteworthy that the neocortex, the evolutionarily newest region of the cerebrum, underwent such a significant expansion that it had to fold into convolutions in order to fit within the confined space of the human skull (Lehmann and Dunbar 2009). After all, the human neocortex is approximately three times larger than that of the chimpanzee (Aiello and Dunbar 1993). The enlargement of the frontal lobe, and consequently the frontal cortex, is of considerable significance in this context, as it plays a fundamental role in a number of essential cognitive functions, including the processes of decision-making, problem-solving, and social interaction. This evolutionary expansion is directly linked to the escalating complexity of social structures and the demands of navigating and making decisions within increasingly large social groups. The enhanced capabilities of the frontal cortex facilitated more advanced processing of social information, thereby fostering the development of collective intentionality and subsequent social structures. Consequently, these evolutionary changes have

resulted in human infants being born with less developed brains, necessitating a prolonged period of dependency and leading to more extensive social interactions post-birth (Kirmayer et al. 2020, 66). The enlargement of the human cranium that occurs as a result of cerebral expansion introduces a greater degree of complexity to the birthing process. This results in newborns emerging with brains that are not yet fully mature. Consequently, a substantial proportion of neuronal development occurs postnatally, with notable influence from social and cultural factors (Eller 2019, 220). Throughout their growth and maturation, these brains are immersed in a multitude of social and cultural experiences, which exert a profound influence on the socialization process (ibid., 221).

3.3 Dunbar's Number and the Social Brain

The human brain has evolved over the course of six million years of hominid evolution to adapt to the conditions of tribalistic life, in which hominids lived in small, nomadic groups. These groups typically ranged in size from 120 to 150 members, a figure that aligns with the concept of “Dunbar's Number” (Zhou et al. 2005, 440; Antweiler 2016, 259). This concept, named after the anthropologist Robin Dunbar, postulates that there is a cognitive limit to the number of stable social relationships that an individual can maintain. This limit is closely linked to the size of the neocortex (Decety 2020, 219). The extant research supports the idea that the size and complexity of the neocortex, particularly the expanded regions of the cerebral cortex, correlate with the ability to manage and sustain larger social groups. This correlation indicates that as the neocortex developed to accommodate more intricate social interactions, it facilitated the formation of larger, more unified groups (Lehmann and Dunbar 2009; Powell et al. 2012; Ibrahim et al. 2021; Decety 2020). Empirically, these findings are based on the far-reaching and extensive research on the so-called *social brain* (Decety 2020; Chey 2023; Dunbar 2010; Graziano 2015). The “social brain hypothesis” offers substantial insights into the evolution of human cognition and social behavior through the lens of natural selection. This hypothesis notably draws attention to the correlation between the size of the neocortex and the capacity for managing social groups, positing that the complexity of social interactions within hominid groups significantly shapes social dynamics (Youm and Kim 2023, 217). The term “social group capacity” is used to denote the maximum number of individuals with whom one can maintain stable social relationships, contingent upon the cognitive capacity to process and sustain these social interactions. This capacity is intrinsically linked to human tendencies toward social engagement, cooperation, and altruism, which are seen as products of bio-cultural co-evolution. This interplay suggests that while our cognitive abilities provide the underlying framework for forming and maintaining social bonds, the complexity and dynamics of these

relationships reciprocally influence the development of our brain structures and social capabilities. Therefore, although our social tendencies are innate, they evolve dynamically as a function of, and in interaction with, the sociality of our environment. This evolution reflects an ongoing process of adaptation and development of our social skills in response to changing social structures and group sizes. It demonstrates a complex interdependence between brain evolution and social environmental factors. Dunbar's number represents the theoretical limit to the number of individuals with whom one can maintain stable social relationships. In other words, it is the number of people a person can interact with regularly. Although there is a possibility that these cognitive capacities could expand through evolutionary development, the specific conditions and timeframes necessary for such expansion remain uncertain and are a subject for further scientific exploration. Innate social tendencies are of great consequence, as they act as benchmarks for evaluating the behavior of others and are fundamental to social cohesion. These tendencies provide the foundation for the mechanisms of social decision-making and prosocial behavior, which are particularly evident in navigating various cultural contexts. It is evident that there is a constraint on the number of interactions that an individual can effectively maintain. It is, for example, virtually impossible to engage in regular and in-depth communication with every member of a large group. This limitation is not merely a matter of time or effort; it is also a cognitive constraint related to the processing capacities of the human brain (Daems 2021, 66). Despite the global connectivity enabled by modern technology, limitations such as time, technology, and language constrain our ability to interact effectively across broad networks. It is of the utmost importance to consider not only the breadth of interactions, but also their depth and longevity. The necessity of not every encounter leaving a long-lasting impression is an unavoidable consequence. The human brain's capacity for processing and storing information establishes inherent limitations on the number of social contacts that can be effectively maintained (*ibid.*). Furthermore, attempting to interact with every person we encounter gives rise to practical questions regarding the significance and productivity of these interactions. The exchange of information that the brain is required to process and store represents a central aspect of social interactions. Therefore, the cognitive capacity to process and store information imposes a fundamental restriction on the number of viable social connections that can be sustained. Insights from disciplines such as anthropology and psychology demonstrate how our cognitive abilities influence the structure of our social worlds (*ibid.*). The constraints of human social capacity play an instrumental role in the formation and sustenance of cohesive and efficacious communities, wherein mutual comprehension and effective communication prevail. An examination of the concept of the social brain reveals a profound connection between the physiological development of the brain and the evolution of social and cultural structures. The capacity to cooperate, engage in symbolic thinking, and cultivate complex social relationships has

been refined through the evolution of the human species, as evidenced by the ability to live in small groups over extended periods. These capabilities constituted the foundation for the advent of intricate societies and cultures that have exerted a profound influence on human existence over millennia.

Over the course of anthropogenesis, which spans approximately 6 million years, social groups have generally remained below Dunbar's upper limit. During this extensive period, the development of symbolic thinking, empathy, and complex social interactions occurred in conjunction with cultural achievements such as tool use and ritual practices. The existence of *Homo sapiens*, dated to around 300,000 years ago, underwent profound changes over the past 12,000 years, representing approximately 4 percent of its entire timeline. These changes were precipitated by the advent of agricultural societies. The aforementioned changes marked a transition to larger social structures that exceeded the typical group size of 150 individuals, thereby stimulating complex developments in the realms of politics and social organization. Consequently, within the entire spectrum of 6 million years of hominid evolution, this transformative era of the last 12,000 years represents a mere 0.2 percent of the total time span. Furthermore, the advent of language and the cooperative upbringing of children have emerged as fundamental traits that have undergone co-evolutionary processes at the biological and cultural levels, laying the groundwork for the emergence of today's complex societies. The human brain, particularly the neocortex, which is responsible for higher cognitive functions such as language, planning, and social cognition, has recently been subjected to unprecedented challenges during its developmental phases. A significant correlation has been identified between increased neuronal density and empathic ability, which is coupled with marked improvements in the regulation of emotional states, motivation, and "homeostatic needs" (Damasio 2011, 300). This link is also of consequence to the present analysis of human differentiation. In particular, the relationship between human social behavior, which originated in tribal communities, and the necessity to establish hierarchies, as well as the dynamics of power and dominance, is elucidated. These evolutionary stages are closely associated with the mechanisms of social reinforcement for conformity and punishment for nonconformity (Declerck and Boone 2016, 119). These mechanisms are supported by corresponding neurochemical processes that play a significant role in the reinforcement or discouragement of specific social behaviors (*ibid.*, 73). The neurochemical processes at play not only encourage adherence to social norms but also deter deviations, thereby stabilizing social hierarchies and maintaining order within groups. These dynamics, which are fundamental to an understanding of the biological basis of social behavior, will be further explored in Chapter 5.

The autogenic property of the brain, its capacity for self-organization and self-regulation, is a pivotal element in discourses on the social brain, particularly with regard to the evolution of social cognition, empathy, and action skills (Dux 2017, 45).

This capacity of the brain enables it to respond to social challenges through neuronal plasticity and adaptive learning processes. The capacity of the brain does not simply respond to external social stimuli; rather, it also generates and continuously adapts internal models of social interactions. This dynamic ability enhances our comprehension of social dynamics and facilitates the development of empathy and the capacity for theory of mind, which is the ability to understand and empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others. The autogenic nature of the brain lends support to the hypothesis that the evolution of the human brain is intimately linked with the need to function effectively in socially complex environments. It identifies the vital role of internal processes and mechanisms that underpin and shape the social behavior and cognitive skills essential for group living. These insights into the social brain are relevant to subsequent discussions in the book about human hierarchical and dominance behavior and the tendency to justify existing social systems, providing a foundational framework for understanding the complexities of social interactions and structures.

3.4 Cultural Selection and Biocultural Coevolution

The concept of cultural selection (Sperber 1996) elucidates the manner in which specific cultural forms of expression, symbols, and beliefs are favored and transmitted within social groups. This process is largely governed by the collective mentality of the group's members, facilitating the transmission and diffusion of ideas and practices that enhance group cohesion and effective adaptation to social and environmental challenges (Singh 2022, 267). The selective pressures exerted by environmental factors, social dynamics, resource availability, and other external challenges promote the emergence of adaptive behaviors. Research indicates that increasing social complexity in growing hominid communities created evolutionary pressures that spurred the development and refinement of cognitive abilities to conform to and manipulate social norms (Heyes, Moore, and Tomasello 2023). Cultural selection has been a pivotal factor in human evolution, establishing the foundations for sophisticated social interactions and the formation of resilient, unified communities. The interplay between biological and cultural dimensions, particularly in the context of learning agency during individual development, provides compelling evidence for the profound interconnectivity between culture and biology. The concept of competence to act, which is significantly shaped by cultural processes, reflects an individual's ability to effectively engage with their environment through the use of cooperative communication practices. This capacity for skill acquisition is not merely a feature of human adaptability; it is also evidence of the role of cultural evolution in shaping human development. Over millennia, the invention of increasingly sophisticated tools—such as the spear-thrower, which revolutionized hunt-

ing and food procurement, and the wheel, which transformed transportation and mobility—has led to significant adaptations in the human way of life. These examples demonstrate the manner in which cultural advancements have consistently reshaped human societies and their environments, thereby illustrating the profound impact of cultural selection on the evolution of human capabilities and social structures (Caldwell 2024, 2; Henrich 2016, 26).

Similarly, advances in food preparation, such as cooking, have played a significant role in both cultural and biological evolution. The practice of cooking has not only enhanced the quality of food by rendering it more digestible and increasing its nutritional value; it has also facilitated social interactions surrounding the preparation and consumption of meals. These communal activities surrounding food intake facilitated social bonding and cooperation, which are essential elements of cultural evolution. The act of gathering around a communal fire or cooking space bolstered social bonds and cultivated a sense of community and belonging, which were essential elements of cultural evolution. These gatherings provided a forum for the exchange of knowledge, narratives, and cultural values, thereby facilitating the social learning processes that are essential for cultural transmission. Moreover, the advent of cooking and the emergence of mealtime traditions played a decisive role in the formation of social norms and roles, influencing social hierarchy and cooperation. The division of labor in food preparation and gathering, which often occurs along gender lines, has implications for understanding the social organization and gender roles in ancient communities (Tennie 2024). Languages with expanded vocabularies constitute a critical factor in human development, enabling more precise communication and facilitating the improved exchange of ideas.

This enhanced linguistic capability permitted the articulation of more complex concepts and abstract thinking, which are essential for advanced problem-solving and planning. As language evolved, it became a foundational element in the development of complex social structures and forms of organization. The capacity to communicate effectively and disseminate knowledge efficiently within a group played a pivotal role in the formation of larger, more organized social units, such as clans (Eller 2019, 237). The co-evolutionary development of tools, the use of fire, family-like social structures, cultural traits, languages, and rituals occurred through an interactive feedback process, whereby each innovation influenced and interacted with the others. Cultural achievements not only impacted the immediate human environment but also shaped the selection pressures exerted on human genes. This resulted in a process of biocultural coevolution, whereby biological adaptations and cultural innovations were subject to a dynamic interaction, influencing one another in a continuous cycle. The evolution of the human brain, particularly the neocortex, provided the cognitive capacity for these cultural advances, which in turn were enhanced by them. This reciprocal relationship represents a pivotal topic of debate within the context of the social brain. The argument is made that cognitive enhancements have

contributed to the capacity for more complex cultural expressions, while conversely, these cultural expressions have driven neurological development. Notable examples of such cultural innovations include the advent of written language, which transformed the manner in which knowledge was documented, conserved, and conveyed across generations. This allowed for the continuity and accumulation of knowledge that would not have been possible with oral traditions alone. Moreover, the evolution of mathematical systems enabled more sophisticated planning and computations, which in turn facilitated the management of resources, the construction of projects, and the administration of increasingly complex societies. These cultural innovations did not occur in isolation but were part of a larger matrix of developments that included social structures and technological advancements, with each influencing and being influenced by the other (Henrich and Muthukrishna 2021, 20). The capacity to utilize tools, develop language, establish intricate social structures, and disseminate cultural knowledge across generations exemplifies the profound interconnection between our biological constitution and our cultural milieu (Shea 2023, 55). From the outset, the evolution of culture has been shaped by our evolutionary heritage, particularly our capacity for social interaction and emotional connection. These fundamental human traits established the foundation for the aforementioned innovations, which have been, and continue to be, critical factors in the success of *Homo sapiens*. Our innate capacity to form intricate social connections and to experience and comprehend a spectrum of emotions has not only propelled the evolution of communal and cooperative behaviors but has also facilitated the emergence of increasingly sophisticated tools, social structures, and cultural norms. These developments have enabled humans to adapt to a wide variety of environmental challenges and to occupy a range of ecological niches. The capacity for emotional connection, in particular, has facilitated the development of more profound forms of communication and collaboration, which are essential for the maintenance and evolution of social groups. Cultural selection mechanisms play a crucial role in the formation, maintenance, and legitimization of social systems. This insight is fundamental to the deeper analysis within our theoretical framework, which seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of human differentiation. Our framework is based on systems theory and augmented by the theory of system justification, thereby enabling a comprehensive examination of the impact of cultural forces on social dynamics. The processes of cultural selection facilitate the development and maintenance of specific norms, ideologies, and practices within social groups, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of established social structures and enhancing coherence within these systems. Throughout the evolution of the human species, these mechanisms have evolved in a manner that fosters mindsets and behaviors that support the status quo, justify existing power relations, and encourage individuals and groups to accept these structures, even when they may be disadvantageous to them. These dynamics are of critical importance for the creation of system coherence, which is

essential for the self-organization and autopoiesis (as discussed in Chapter 2) of social systems. While the specific forms of cultural selection mechanisms may vary across different contexts, they all facilitate effective demarcation from the environment and establish an internal order that is crucial for the survival and development of the social system.

Against this backdrop, the emigration of *Homo sapiens* from Africa marked a critical turning point that brought about not only geographical expansions but also significant cognitive and social developments. This migration resulted in an unprecedented broadening of the social and ecological niches that *Homo sapiens* had to navigate and master. In response to the emergence of novel challenges and environments, there was a heightened necessity for socially coordinated and innovative abilities, which in turn facilitated the further evolution of the social brain. This phase of human evolution offers an example of how established cultural selection mechanisms provided a foundation for social innovations and cooperative skills to flourish and adapt to changing living conditions. During this period, a number of innovative skills emerged, including the construction of watercraft, the manufacture of complex throwing weapons, and the creation of symbolic artifacts such as beads and jewelry. These developments reflect the advanced cognitive abilities and collaborative skills that were essential for early humans to adapt to diverse habitats and climatic conditions across the globe. The capacity to innovate and collaborate effectively in these novel and often demanding environments was not only a means of ensuring survival but also a factor enabling the flourishing of *Homo sapiens* in a range of geographic settings (Shea 2023, 99). The early and rapid onset of glacial conditions around 75,000 years ago, which persisted until about 15,000 years ago, necessitated significant innovation in order to adapt to the new environmental conditions. The harsh conditions resulted in the depopulation of “Neanderthal country,” which encompasses Europe and Western Asia, as well as other regions of northern Eurasia. Approximately 50,000 years ago, humans commenced the colonization of the extensive, frigid region known as the mammoth steppe. To survive in this challenging environment, humans developed advanced innovations in thermoregulation, including tailored leather clothing and freestanding architecture. These innovations constituted vital adaptations that enabled humans to sustain body heat and shelter effectively in the extreme cold (Shea 2023, 289). In addition to these practical innovations, humans also developed more complex strategies for managing fire and creating symbolic artifacts compared to Neanderthals and earlier hominins. The enhanced use of fire, not only for warmth and cooking, but also for landscape management and hunting strategies, marked a significant advancement in human ability to manipulate and control their environment. These innovations were not merely responses to environmental pressures; rather, they functioned as catalysts for further development in social organization and cultural complexity. As humans migrated eastward along the mammoth steppe, they encountered the peak

cold conditions of the Last Glacial Maximum, which occurred between 18,000 and 22,000 years ago. This severe climatic phase significantly impeded and eventually brought their spread to a standstill. The Last Glacial Maximum, which occurred between 18,000 and 22,000 years ago, imposed formidable barriers to human movement and settlement due to the intense cold, vast ice sheets, and challenging living conditions. During this period, the mammoth steppe, a vast and harsh tundra-like environment that spanned from Western Europe across northern Asia to North America, offered limited resources and demanded high levels of adaptability and resilience from human populations. The extreme cold had a significant impact on the availability of flora and fauna, which were critical for sustenance and survival. This, in turn, influenced migration patterns and settlement strategies. In order to survive, human groups had to develop sophisticated survival skills, including specialized hunting techniques and clothing, advanced shelter construction, and efficient use of available resources. These adaptations were of primary necessity for the maintenance of their populations and the preparation for eventual expansions once climatic conditions became more favorable (Pinhasi 2013). The transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer communities to settled agricultural societies, which occurred between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago during the Neolithic Revolution, constituted a fundamental alteration in the dynamics of population movement and human settlement (Bellwood and Dizon 2013). In particular, the increases in overall population size and density that were brought about by the advent of agriculture provided the incentive for large-scale migrations. Some of the earliest migrations were directed towards areas that were already being colonized by hunter-gatherers, particularly those situated in proximity to agricultural “hotspots.” These regions, which were fertile and rich in resources, became focal points for the expansion of agricultural practices, drawing in populations from less fertile areas (Shea 2023, 291). This shift enabled humans to cultivate crops and domesticate animals, thereby creating the conditions for the production of surplus food. This, in turn, provided the basis for larger populations and the subsequent growth of villages, which eventually developed into cities. This profound change in lifestyle constituted a significant transformation in the way human societies were organized and interacted with their environments. The capacity to produce and store surplus food led to advancements in social, economic, and political structures. The advent of settled agricultural life gave rise to the formation of more intricate societal hierarchies, a surge in trade, and the accumulation of wealth. These developments had a profound impact on the social and political fabric of these nascent communities. The consequences of this transformation were extensive, affecting not only local communities but also the broader patterns of human civilization. This laid the groundwork for further technological and cultural advancements, which in turn led to enhanced stability and the eventual rise of centralized state systems and complex civilizations. A comprehensive analysis of this seminal period in human history will

be presented in Chapter 7, wherein the long-term consequences and developments resulting from these foundational changes will be examined within the context of *macro-social anthropological constants*.

In other instances of major migration, uninhabited islands situated in proximity to continental masses were subsequently colonized. It is worthy of note that the great oceanic and Polynesian voyages, which commenced approximately 5,000 to 6,000 years ago, enabled human populations to reach distant oceanic islands (Shea 2023, 292). These expeditions were not merely examples of remarkable navigation and endurance; they also facilitated the transfer and adaptation of food production techniques to new destinations. As these populations took up residence in the islands, they adapted their agricultural practices to the distinctive climates and soils, frequently developing highly effective systems for managing land and marine resources. The introduction of crops such as taro and breadfruit, along with techniques like fish pond aquaculture, exemplifies the adaptation of agricultural practices by these communities to their new environments. Moreover, the warmer climatic conditions that prevailed during this period provided the impetus for the permanent colonization of the high Arctic. The indigenous peoples developed more sophisticated strategies for exploiting marine resources than their predecessors. These strategies included the seasonal hunting of marine mammals and the gathering of shellfish, which provided a stable food source for communities in the harsh Arctic environment (ibid.).

3.5 Collective Intentionality

The development of collective intentionality, a concept developed by Michael Tomasello, was a crucial factor in the migratory movements and expansion of *Homo sapiens*. This psychological framework pertains to the capacity of individuals to not only formulate shared goals and intentions but also to act upon them in a coordinated and cooperative manner. This capacity is fundamental to the formation of complex social structures and was crucial for the survival and success of humans in diverse environments. The capacity for collective intentionality enabled early humans to function within larger, more structured groups, where individuals could anticipate and align their actions with the intentions and behaviors of others. This capacity for shared understanding and mutual expectation is the foundation upon which social norms and cooperative strategies are built, which are essential for the management of communal life, the planning of migrations, and the adaptation to new environments (Tomasello 2020, 123).

In his work, renowned evolutionary psychologist Michael Tomasello presents a two-level model that captures the evolutionary transition in social and cognitive abilities that distinguishes humans from other primates. In the initial stage,

Tomasello concentrates on the concept of shared intentionality, which allows individuals to possess shared intentions and goals, thereby facilitating intense cooperation and coordination within small groups (Tomasello 2022, 126). This basic capacity provides the foundation for collaborative activities such as cooperative hunting or resource sharing and establishes the groundwork for mutual understanding and support. Building upon this, Tomasello develops the cognitive framework further to include the concept of collective intentionality. This progression encompasses the ability to recognize, develop, and uphold shared norms and values within larger communities that extend beyond individual interactions. This advanced level of intentionality enables individuals to comprehend and adhere to social rules and norms that are essential for coexistence within broader social structures (*ibid.*). The capacity for collective intentionality, which is characterized by an intricate interplay of cognition and emotion, has facilitated the development of complex organizational structures that surpass earlier forms of social organization. This adaptation of thoughts, feelings, and actions to the social norms of one's group has established a fundamental paradigm in human cultural evolution: identification with one's group. This identification proves to be a key factor in the long-term success of humans, allowing for the optimal utilization of their creative potential within social structures.

Affective resonance, which is facilitated by collective intentionality, is of great consequence in distinguishing humans from other primates and early hominids, particularly in the context of human differentiation. The formation of shared goals and intentions led to the emergence of a profound sense of belonging, which transformed human groups from loosely cooperative aggregates into tightly-knit communities with distinctive narratives and cultures (Tomasello 2020, 128). This deep-seated emotional and cognitive interplay within self-identifying groups has been a crucial factor in the formation and sustenance of highly efficient social structures. The shared emotional states and beliefs within a group, particularly concerning social norms and values, became a catalyst for enhancing human organizational and coordination capacities. This cooperative communication dynamic not only reinforced internal cohesion among growing communities but also provided the foundation for innovation and knowledge sharing. The collective focus on achieving shared goals, such as ensuring food security and protection, drove the evolution of certain emotional traits and social behaviors. The selection mechanisms favored those emotions and beliefs that supported adaptive strategies, such as empathy and the pursuit of social harmony. These traits have enabled human societies to effectively navigate challenges and seize opportunities, facilitating not just survival but also the flourishing of communities. The phenomenon of collective intentionality exerts its influence at two fundamental levels: On the one hand, it reinforces the internal cohesion and coherence of the group; on the other hand, it enables differentiation from external groups (Bennett and Sani 2008). When

collective sentiment is deeply entrenched within social groups, it cultivates a robust sense of belonging and identity. This sense of identity is frequently manifested through ritual actions, shared beliefs, and uniform behaviors, which help anchor members' emotional and cultural bonds, enhance internal coherence, and shield the group from external influences. As population density increases and competition intensifies, the ability to adapt to and comply with social norms becomes a crucial factor in maintaining group cohesion. Consequently, conformity emerges as a vital component of group dynamics. Cultural practices that are characterized by a pronounced group consciousness not only signal conformity but also establish internal cohesion. Such practices include rituals, ceremonies, and shared cultural narratives that help enhance group solidarity and draw a clear distinction from other groups. The human need for security and belonging naturally fosters social cohesion and mitigates cognitive dissonance. This drive enables the formation of cultural systems in which norms and values are not only shared among group members but are also actively shaped and lived out. Such environments facilitate the development of complex social and cultural structures, which in turn support the evolution of sophisticated societies (Heyes, Moore, and Tomasello 2023).

The following sections of this book will undertake a recurrent examination of the dual aspects of collective intentionality, namely internal cohesion and differentiation from outsiders. A significant aspect of human differentiation is the formation of norms within the context of collective intentionality. This process occurred concurrently with the emergence of objective thinking and group orientation. This evolution in thought extends beyond the mere generalization of individual perspectives or the aggregation of numerous individual viewpoints. Rather, it entails the capacity for abstract thought, the ability to generalize, and the formation of objective perspectives. These cognitive advancements are of critical importance as they provide the foundation for long-term normative views within societies. In this context, objective thinking is defined as the capacity to form ideas and judgments that are perceived as not merely subjective to any one individual but as holding universally within the group.

Gossip, understood as a mechanism for the maintenance and enforcement of social norms within the context of collective intentionality, constitutes a crucial element of social dynamics within human groups (Wiessner 2014). Gossip is not merely a conduit for the dissemination of information; it is also a crucial instrument for the consolidation and reinforcement of shared values and standards of behavior. It often focuses on transgressions of norms and the behavior of individuals, particularly those in prominent positions, thereby functioning as a covertly potent instrument of social regulation (Wiessner 2005). In the context of collective intentionality, the role of gossip in shaping group norms is of pivotal importance. This is achieved by identifying and marking behaviors as either acceptable or unacceptable. This dynamic function is of critical importance for the formation of a shared understanding of

norms and values, which lays the foundation for collective action. Gossip can result in sanctions such as collective criticism, exposure, ridicule, and even social exclusion. This makes gossip an effective modulator of social behavior that significantly contributes to group coherence and unity (Wiessner 2020). The substantial influence of gossip in maintaining social norms and influencing collective intentionality illustrates the intricate nature of social processes that consolidate social orders and group identities. This understanding prompts a reflection on the functions of gossip, which reveals that the development of objective thinking is an evolutionary response to the need to transcend the immediate, often emotionally charged, and subjectively shaped interactions within a group (ibid.). By facilitating a broader, more detached perspective, objective thinking allows individuals and groups to evaluate and respond to information in a manner that supports long-term group stability and adaptability. This evolution of thought processes represents a sophisticated adaptation to the complex social environments humans navigate, enabling more nuanced and effective social coordination and cooperation.

The capacity for *objective thinking* enables the critical analysis and evaluation of information that extends beyond immediate social dynamics. This, in turn, facilitates the formation of concepts and theories that aspire to intersubjective validity. This illustrates the necessity of transcending individual subjectivity in order to gain a perspective that encompasses the intricate interplay of social interactions and collective norms, which is crucial for progressive knowledge and understanding of the environment. The capacity for objective thinking is characterized by the ability to perceive phenomena in the world, particularly in contexts such as hunting and other cooperative endeavors, in a neutral manner, largely devoid of personal biases. This mode of thinking broadens the cognitive basis of early humans, facilitating a group-oriented comprehension that transcends individual perspectives. It establishes a meta-framework for interpreting intentions and emotions, thereby enhancing the ability of group members to coordinate their actions and goals effectively (Tomasello 2020, 141). This capacity for objective thinking enabled humans to move beyond subjective experiences and develop shared strategies and techniques that were instrumental in the success of hunting endeavors. It is noteworthy that this ability was not exclusive to male hunters; it enabled female hunters to collect, analyze, and disseminate information about animal behaviors and environmental conditions, which was instrumental in coordinating and planning hunting expeditions effectively. The capacity for objective thinking, characterized by an actor-neutral perspective, proved instrumental in the resolution of coordination problems that frequently arose when interacting with unfamiliar individuals who did not share a common background. This was of particular significance in hunter-gatherer societies, where interactions with individuals from outside the group or those with whom there was less familiarity could occur during migration or at communal gatherings. The evolution of objective thinking and its concomitant empathy was pivotal for effective communi-

cation and collaboration across a broader spectrum of group members. These cognitive abilities enabled individuals to engage in more sophisticated social interactions, which were vital for maintaining social cohesion and ensuring a shared understanding of social norms. The theory of collective intentionality significantly extends the concept of “Dunbar’s number,” which focuses on cognitive limitations and the maximum number of stable relationships one can maintain. This theory examines how humans develop the capacity to cooperate effectively in much larger groups through the establishment of shared intentions and goals. Cultural and symbolic aspects of human society, including language, traditions, and norms, facilitate the transcendence of social limitations imposed by Dunbar’s number, despite the persistence of cognitive limitations at the individual level. Collective intentionality plays a pivotal role in the formation of intricate social structures that extend far beyond the confines of intimate, personal relationships. It functions as the bedrock upon which the growth and sustenance of expansive, structured societies are built. This collective cognitive framework permits the establishment of shared goals and the coordination of group efforts on a scale that individual cognitive capacities are unable to manage independently. It incorporates cultural elements that provide a common ground for understanding and action, such as myths, laws, and rituals, which help bind larger communities together and enable them to function as cohesive units despite the absence of personal ties between all members.

Reflective thinking represents a further pivotal aspect of early human cognition and social interaction. Rather than evolving directly from objective thinking, it emerged as a complementary cognitive ability during hominid evolution. This form of thinking enables individuals to engage in introspection regarding their own mental states and those of others, as well as to adopt a variety of perspectives. An enhanced cognitive capacity facilitates the interpretation and anticipation of behaviors and expectations within a social environment. The capacity for reflective thinking is a vital component in the formation and maintenance of social norms. It enables individuals to comprehend and internalize the unwritten rules and standards of their communities, thereby aligning their behaviors with communal expectations. This capacity has played a significant role in human cultural development and the evolutionary trajectory of social systems. Furthermore, reflective thinking facilitates collective discussion about norms, enabling groups to reach a consensus that forms the foundation for new behavioral standards. This dynamic and flexible adaptation to evolving norms allows social groups to respond effectively to environmental changes and shifts within the community. The iterative process of reflection and adaptation underpins the resilience and continuity of cultural and social structures, promoting cohesion and stability in human societies.

Another noteworthy attribute of the bio-cultural and cognitively, affectively, and socially synchronously evolved human capacity is the concept of *dual system models* (Kahneman 2013; Kannengiesser and Gero 2019; Faghihi et al. 2015; De Houwer 2019;

Alter et al. 2013). These models, which are closely related to the development of Homo sapiens and collective intentionality, posit the existence of two distinct systems of cognition, each characterized by a set of contrasting properties. Such characteristics include, for instance, speed, slowness, intentionality, unintentionality, consciousness, and unconsciousness, in addition to associativity and propositionality. In the literature, these are frequently designated as systems 1 and 2, respectively. The two thinking systems represent disparate modes of information processing and decision-making. System 1 represents a rapid, intuitive mode of cognition that occurs unconsciously and automatically. The system responds to immediate social stimuli and employs heuristics, or mental shortcuts developed through evolution, to facilitate rapid decision-making (Kahneman 2013, 24). This is particularly advantageous in situations where prompt judgments are necessary, such as in identifying willingness to cooperate or in evaluating group dynamics. In the context of collective intentionality, System 1 plays a significant role, as it allows individuals to react rapidly and efficiently to social stimuli. These intuitive processes are deeply rooted in evolutionary history and form the basis for spontaneous, instinctive cooperative actions. System 1 plays a pivotal role in fostering trust, initiating cooperation, and identifying cues indicative of a unified front among group members. System 1 behavior is often associated with a sense of ease because it is automatic and effortless. It is based on experiences and intuitive reactions that require little conscious effort and thus consume less cognitive energy (Kahneman 2013, 66). In contrast, System 2 represents a slower, more deliberate, and analytical mode of thinking, which is employed when more complex and long-term decisions must be made. System 2 is responsible for the cognitive processing of norms and rules, as well as for the reflective and rational assessment of social situations. This mode of thinking is of importance with relation to the establishment of social norms, shared objectives, and strategic collaboration that extends beyond immediate action. In Tomasello's theory of collective intentionality, the capacity to reflect on one's own actions and align them with the goals and expectations of the group is manifested in System 2. This enables humans to act both instinctively and in a manner that aligns with the long-term well-being of the group and the complex social systems made possible by collective intentionality. The two systems interact dynamically, thereby enabling the complex social cognition described by Tomasello as a prerequisite for collective intentionality. System 1 is an indispensable prerequisite for efficient social interaction, providing the foundation for the establishment of trust and for prompt cooperative decision-making. In contrast, System 2 ensures the sustainable reflection and strategy development within the group and consumes more cognitive resources. Consequently, this results in the capacity to engage in cooperative short-term actions while pursuing long-term, collective objectives. This development had a seminal impact on the advent of culture, institutions, and social norms. The insight of the dual system models is significant in this context, but it should not be regarded as absolute. It is

important to note that these models should not be regarded as strictly dualistic, as they could imply a degree of determinism that does not accurately reflect the complex and dynamic processes involved in human cognition and sociality. Rather than assuming a fixed dichotomy between intuitive and rational thought processes, it is more precise to assert that these systems are in a constant state of change and interact adaptively in diverse social and cognitive settings. In light of the book's emphasis on the interconnectivity of diverse systems, including physical, social, mental, cultural, and geopolitical, the dual system models offer valuable insights. However, they represent only a portion of a more comprehensive picture. The objective is not to impose inflexible categories on human cognition; rather, it is to comprehend how these systems operate as overlapping, complementary, and frequently concurrent mechanisms. Consequently, apparent contradictions, such as those between intuitive and conscious processes, can be understood as part of a complex, adaptive structure. This has enabled the development of highly flexible and collective social structures. The objective of this chapter is to comprehend the interactions and transitions between the various systems of thought not as mutually exclusive entities, but rather as dynamic processes that collectively facilitate and reinforce the collective intentionality of the human being. The relationally acting systems interact with each other, with schemata serving as a pivot point. In the schemata of differentiation, System 2 breaks through the automated, unconscious processes of System 1 through conscious reflection anchored in the cerebrum. This reflection is controlled by an instance called the "self," which is empirically difficult to grasp. The transcendence of System 1 by System 2 comes at the cost of abandoning the pleasurable feelings associated with the rapid, unconscious differentiation processes of System 1 in favor of deeper, more reflective choices. Conscious reflection, which requires more cognitive resources, is thus literally responsible for the loss of the pleasurable feelings associated with automated processes. This will be discussed in more detail in the context of the binary coding of affects within the framework of schemas of differentiation (see Section 6.4). Nevertheless, it would be an error to draw any linear conclusions up to this point in order to avoid oversimplification of the complex processes of human cognition. The objective of this approach is to eschew oversimplification of the intricate processes of human cognition. In contrast, it illustrates the integrative relationship between social, cultural, and cognitive systems. Consequently, *the rapid and almost automatic processing and analysis of information* has constituted a critical element for the survival advantage that humans have enjoyed over the course of evolutionary history. The close *integration of affective, cognitive, and physical structures* has facilitated this process, which has been internalized and now occurs with minimal conscious effort. This integration resulted from the co-evolution of the various cognitive and social abilities previously discussed in this chapter. The convergence of emotions, thoughts, and physiological responses, which is discussed in greater detail later in this book under the concept of schemata (see Chapter 6), plays a central

role in the processes of meaning attribution and the formation of group identities. The concept of schemata elucidates the symbiotic relationship between emotions, cognitive processes, and physiological reactions, which imbue perceptions and interactions with meaning and direction. This dynamic interplay is not only crucial for individual psychological functioning but also has profound social and cultural implications. This has implications for how we perceive social groups, respond to complex social scenarios, and demonstrate cultural norms and values in our everyday decision-making. These integrated processes enable individuals to respond rapidly and adaptively to their environments, thereby enhancing their capacity to navigate social complexities and maintain cohesion within their groups. By streamlining the processing of social cues and automating certain responses, schemata facilitate human functioning within increasingly expansive and intricate social structures.

The advent of modern humans gave rise to a novel form of life organization, one that is distinguished by a symbolic-medial existence enabled by the faculties of thought and language. This form of organization is based on the fundamental biological structures of human existence but is constituted at a distinct level: the sphere of thought, which undergoes its formative process through language. The evolution of conceptual frameworks at this abstract level has conferred a substantial advantage on modern humans in comparison to other hominids. From the perspective of biocultural coevolution, it becomes evident that human social learning and cooperative behavior are shaped by a complex interplay between genetic predispositions and cultural transmission mechanisms, including group-based identification and dynamics. This perspective provides insights into the ways in which human societies adapt to their environments and the role of cultural innovations in overcoming challenges. This illustrates the crucial function of culture in human evolution and as a means of ensuring group survival. The concept of selection is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented. A prevalent misconception is the reductionist notion of “survival of the fittest,” as postulated by Herbert Spencer. This concept is misleading when applied to the social organization of humans. Spencer’s model posits a perpetual conflict over genetic survival. However, a more accurate characterization of human evolution is that it is a process of *successful cooperation*. The various modes of communication that facilitate this cooperation are of critical importance, with the evolution of emotions playing a pivotal role within the framework of bioculturally evolved behaviors. The expression of emotion serves two key functions: firstly, it reinforces group cohesion, and secondly, it facilitates effective communication. They facilitate the formation and maintenance of cultural practices and social structures based on collective intentionality, which are indispensable for the flourishing of social systems. This sophisticated comprehension of human evolution signifies a transition from a perception of competition as the principal determinant of survival to an acknowledgment of the preeminent significance of collaboration and cultural adaptation. Cultural practices and social structures are of great consequence

in the consolidation of power and authority. This is accomplished through the consolidation of leadership structures, the establishment of symbols, rituals, and traditions, and the integration of social hierarchies into the collective consciousness. Social norms and legal systems, which are products of cultural constructions, regulate behavior, control access to resources, and establish mechanisms for conflict resolution. Such structures facilitate the establishment of orderly power relations and efficient coordination within communities. As manifestations of social structures, these elements are the outcomes of a prolonged process of cultural evolution, which has yielded efficacious strategies for the maintenance of power and the safeguarding of the community. This evolutionary process has not only facilitated the stability of social groups but has also enabled them to adapt to new challenges and environments by institutionalizing effective strategies for managing power dynamics and resource distribution.

4 Group-Based Behavior

4.1 Minimal Group Paradigm

The formation of in-group and out-group distinctions represents a pivotal area of investigation within the social sciences, with scholars employing a multitude of disciplinary approaches to examine these concepts. Within this interdisciplinary framework, the theory of social identity, significantly shaped by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues in the 1970s (Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel 1978; Tajfel 1982a; Tajfel 1982b), occupies a prominent position. This theory postulates that the aspiration for a favorable self-perception motivates individuals to favor members of their own group and devalue members of other groups. A central concept within this theory is the minimal group paradigm, which illustrates the intrinsic tendency of individuals to differentiate between ingroups and outgroups, even when the distinctions are inconsequential. This paradigm has been subjected to considerable scrutiny, particularly with regard to the question of whether the predominantly economic experimental approaches are capable of adequately capturing the complexity of social identification processes. The utilization of particular distribution matrices in these studies has been subjected to criticism for its potential for oversimplification. Nevertheless, the fundamental observation that people inherently tend to form and maintain social categories remains highly relevant (Tajfel et al. 1971). Tajfel's research findings evidence an inherent human tendency to categorize the social world, which gives rise to the formation of in-groups and out-groups. A review of the literature on in-groups and out-groups reveals a consistent finding: individuals tend to favor their own group. This proclivity has been documented even in laboratory settings where group affiliation was randomly assigned, without any prior relationships or shared characteristics among the members. This proclivity persisted even when participants were aware that their group assignment was arbitrary. The aforementioned studies were based on such experiments (Platow and van Knippenberg 2001) which have deepened understanding by demonstrating that people not only prefer their own group but also perceive this preference as fair and just, particularly when favoring members of their own group over those of the out-group. This insight delineates that identification with the in-group

and the resulting preference are deeply embedded in our cognitive and affective patterns of perception and behavior. These dynamics will be further elucidated in the context of “schemata” (see Chapter 6). Therefore, the inclination towards social categorization is not merely a process of division; rather, it encompasses a range of judgmental behaviors that significantly impact how individuals interact with and evaluate others within the constructed categories (Harmon-Jones et al. 2003; Baron and Banaji 2006; Hertel and Kerr 2001; Stanley et al. 2011). The inclination to accentuate contrasts between categories while attenuating contrasts within categories engenders a prosocial disposition toward one’s own group and a concomitant devaluation of other groups. Prosocial behavior within groups is notably evident in the pronounced willingness to make amends for offenses committed by group members. In contrast, this tendency is significantly diminished when the reference group is an outgroup. Individuals are more likely to provide compensation to those within their own group who have been wronged, whereas they exhibit a greater propensity for antisocial and discriminatory behaviors towards members of outgroups. This dichotomy represents a fundamental aspect of group dynamics, whereby members of the in-group typically receive empathy and solidarity, whereas those in the out-group are often subjected to indifference or hostility (Wildschut, Insko, and Gaertner 2002; Gaertner and Insko 2001, 2000).

The categorization of individuals into groups has been demonstrated to result in the expression of a preference for the group to which one belongs. This preference frequently manifests as a bias in the distribution of resources, whereby members of a given group tend to receive a greater allocation of resources than those in a different group (Hertel and Kerr 2001). This preference is frequently attributed to the influence of underlying sociomotor dynamics, whereby individuals tend to favor their own group as a means of enhancing their social self-esteem. However, within the minimal group paradigm, this in-group preference can also be understood through the lens of social norms or scripts that provide behavioral guidelines specific to the context in question (*ibid.*). The reinforcement of loyalty and conformity within a group not only fosters a preference for and identification with the group itself but also solidifies the norms and expectations that govern the group’s behavior. This dynamic contributes to the maintenance of social cohesion within the group; however, it can also result in the exclusion of individuals and a resistance to change. The adherence to and fortification of these social norms sustain a cycle of preference that supports the status quo within the group, frequently at the expense of fairness and equality towards those outside the group. This mechanism plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of social hierarchies, fostering the persistence of social and cultural divides (Piff, Martinez, and Keltner 2012; Cichocka et al. 2022; Chayinska and Minescu 2018).

Furthermore, empathic responses are subject to profound influence from group affiliations (Golec De Zavala 2023). When individuals from one’s own group

encounter adversity, empathic reactions are intensified, a phenomenon that is evidenced by increased amygdala activity (see Chapter 5). In stark contrast, empathy is significantly diminished when out-group members encounter similar challenges (Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021, 24). Consequently, empathy—a fundamental human capacity for resonating with the emotional and motivational states of others—is predominantly limited to those identified as belonging to one's in-group. This selective distribution of empathy has significant implications for the dynamics of shame and punishment within the in-group. The reservation of empathy for in-group members not only fosters understanding and forgiveness but may also result in more lenient reactions to infractions. The encouragement of internal group solidarity cements positive social behaviors and mutual support yet simultaneously introduces the potential for bias in judicial responses. In contrast, diminished empathy towards out-group members frequently results in harsher judgments and punitive measures against them, bolstering group boundaries and intensifying social stratifications. This differential empathetic engagement thus demonstrates the dual role of empathy in both the promotion of in-group cohesion and the maintenance of intergroup disparities.

4.2 Group-Based Identifications and Collective Identity Formation

Collective emotions represent a significant social phenomenon in this context. Individuals with a strong identification with their group often experience emotions such as guilt, shame, or pride in response to the actions of a fellow group member, as though they themselves had undertaken the action. These powerful emotions are essential elements of the profound interconnectivity within the group, illustrating how individual identities are influenced by group affiliation (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012; Sirin, Valentino, and Villalobos 2021, 28; Bennett and Sani 2008, 69). These instances of collective emotion are of paramount importance for comprehending the dynamics that shape group behavior, as well as for elucidating their role in uniting groups around shared objectives or in confronting collective challenges. These findings demonstrate the significant influence of group identification on individual behavior and perception, providing insight into the mechanisms underlying social cohesion and influence. This type of emotion, which is engendered through group identification and manifests a profound sense of unity and shared responsibility, is distinctively absent among our closest animal relatives, the apes. This absence emphasizes the unique role of this emotion in human social structures (Tomasello 2020, 129). The mechanisms of group identification will be a central focus of the subsequent discussions and arguments presented in this book, particularly in relation to the exploitation of cultural codings of security and protection for political ends. This exploration includes the identification and implementation of suitable

objectives for the externalization of the aforementioned needs and emotions, primarily through the construction of enemy images, as exemplified by those seen in the realm of penal populism (see Chapter 9). Additionally, the theory of *terror management* should be mentioned here (Greenberg et al. 1990; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1999). This theory elucidates how individuals confront the existential dread of mortality by adhering to cultural beliefs and values that impart a sense of continuity and significance. This framework provides an explanation for the profound psychological foundations that drive humans to align with cultural norms and practices that mitigate their most profound fears and anxieties (Arrowood and Cox 2020; Routledge and Vess 2019). From this perspective, the emphasis on security and defense against external threats contributes to assuaging fundamental, existential anxieties for both broad collectives and more defined national or supranational entities. These existential sentiments are closely associated with the concept of mortality salience. The recognition of one's own mortality intensifies the aspiration for cultural paradigms that provide a shield against the inevitability of death. This impulse is also evident in what are termed *realistic group conflicts*. The theory of realistic group conflicts posits that tensions between groups may have their origins in genuine competitive scenarios. Realistic group conflicts emerge from competition for scarce resources, such as employment opportunities or housing. These conflicts manifest when groups, whether defined by social, ethnic, or national characteristics, perceive that the gain of one group will result in a loss for another, potentially exacerbating existing tensions and heightening hostilities. Such conflicts frequently arise from the incompatibility between disparate systemic operations, leading to heightened demarcation processes, particularly during periods of crisis. In such periods, political and social leaders frequently utilize terror management strategies, which may include framing external threats to stress the necessity for security and a sense of belonging within one's own group. This emphasis on external threats can entrench the cohesion of the in-group, yet it frequently results in the intensification of nationalistic sentiments. The concentration of attention on external threats can be an effective strategy for deflecting scrutiny from internal issues and forging a collective identity by establishing clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders. In this context, cultural worldviews and identities are employed as defensive mechanisms against the existential dread of mortality, thereby reinforcing the cohesion of the in-group while amplifying divisions between distinct groups.

4.3 In-groups and Out-groups: Dynamics of Appreciation and Depreciation

It is particularly noteworthy that even social categories that are perceived as neutral can be imbued with evaluative dimensions that give rise to social stereotypes.

For instance, diligence may be associated with one's own social group, whereas laziness may be attributed to an outgroup (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2012; Dunham, Baron, and Banaji 2006). These constructed associations, which are flawed in terms of both their content and their epistemological and logical validity, foster moral judgments that have a significant influence on the way individuals perceive their own group and may potentially lead to a distortion of their perceptions. An additional phenomenon worthy of consideration in this discourse is the enhancement of self-esteem, which is closely associated with the process of social comparison. This mechanism enables individuals to assess and categorize their own social identity as well as that of others. Favorable social comparisons that benefit one's own group solidify the positive attributes of the in-group, thereby increasing self-esteem. This dynamic, known as the *positive distinctiveness of the in-group*, results in a systematic inflation of the positive representation of the in-group's achievements, while the accomplishments of out-groups are often minimized. The concept of *social identity* was developed within this theoretical context. The concept of social identity encompasses all aspects of an individual's affiliation to various social categories, including associated traits and value judgments. In the context of social psychological research, the term is defined as a constellation of affiliations shaped by the totality of ascribed character traits and the consequent evaluations. Consequently, the presentation of a positive image of one's own group in conjunction with a negative portrayal of external groups often results in a sense of satisfaction, which bolsters solidarity within the in-group while simultaneously exacerbating divisions with the out-group. This phenomenon is particularly evident among those who follow sports (Cikara, Botvinick, and Fiske 2011; de Bruijn et al. 2009; Van Bavel, Packer, and Cunningham 2011; Carvalho et al. 2022). Even when their own team is not involved in the competition, sport fans experience *schadenfreude* when a rival team loses. Such reactions are regulated at the neurochemical level by the mesolimbic dopamine system, a topic explored in greater detail in Chapter 5. This system plays a pivotal role in the "schemas" that govern the intricate interplay between affective, cognitive, and physical dimensions, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6. When a rival loses or one's own group wins, dopamine is released, amplifying the emotional response and enhancing the development of the associated feelings.

This form of self-assessment is not merely a matter of making factual comparisons; rather, it is a process that requires a more nuanced view of the subject matter. In the event that the performance of one's own group is deemed to be inadequate, the dimensions of comparison can be adjusted in a manner that still presents the own group in a relatively more favorable light. This strategy, which is known as *social creativity*, enables individuals to maintain a positive social identity even when circumstances are less favorable. This adaptive mechanism reflects a fundamental psychological need to maintain and enhance one's self-esteem through affiliation with groups that are perceived as successful or superior. It demonstrates the com-

plex psychological mechanisms that govern group loyalty and competition (Wenzel, Mummendey, and Waldzus 2007). The malleability and capacity for modification of the human self-concept, particularly in relation to the formation and reinforcement of evaluative standards, serve to protect or enhance the self-image and social identity. This underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of the human psyche (Mazziotta, Mummendey, and Wright 2011). This adaptability exemplifies our deeply ingrained proclivity to favor individuals who are perceived as similar or as belonging to one's own group. Such preferences may manifest in a number of ways, from a sense of solidarity within one's own group to discriminatory attitudes towards those outside of it. The minimal group paradigm indicates that even the most basic and seemingly inconsequential group categorizations are sufficient to engender loyalty and a preference for one's own group.

This psychological inclination to favor one's own group provides the foundation for more profound social dynamics, such as *group-based narcissism* (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 215). This phenomenon discloses not only the intrinsic human aspiration for affiliation and validation but also the capacity for these aspirations to engender exclusionary or even antagonistic conduct toward those identified as outsiders. This interplay between group allegiance and social identity profoundly impacts interpersonal and intergroup relations, influencing social cohesion and conflict. In political psychology, the concept of group-based narcissism is frequently utilized to elucidate in-group dynamics marked by *exaggerated self-love and self-esteem* (Golec de Zavala 2024, 19). This phenomenon is closely linked to an ideology of superiority, whereby members of a specific group—defined by factors such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, or other social categories—hold the belief that their group is inherently superior in value and virtue compared to others (Bizumic and Sheppard 2022, 199). Group-based narcissism is typified by a tendency towards collective overconfidence, which is sustained through a process of internal affirmations and selective perception of the external world. Members of such groups are inclined to accept information that reinforces the group's exaggerated self-image while disregarding or undervaluing evidence that contradicts this image. This selective acknowledgment and rejection fortify the ideology of superiority, thereby providing group-based narcissism with a *narrative structure* (Golec de Zavala and Federico 2018). This narrative historically and culturally legitimizes the perceived exclusivity and superiority of the ingroup, thereby heightening sensitivity to any perceived threats that could tarnish the reputation of one's own group (ibid.). Such heightened sensitivity frequently gives rise to unfavorable responses to external criticism or perceived conspiracies directed against the ingroup. For example, the negative responses of Chinese participants towards the United States triggered by the appearance of US celebrities on Chinese magazine covers illustrate this phenomenon (Gries et al. 2015). Such reactions illustrate the defensive stance that group-based narcissism can foster, influencing intergroup relations and potentially intensify-

ing conflicts based on perceived affronts or challenges to the group's esteemed status (ibid.). Collective narcissism functions as mechanism to amplify internal beliefs and to shape, in a selective manner, a perception of reality within a given group. In many cases, this process fosters a defensive and hostile stance toward any external influences that may potentially lead to a weakening of the fragile self-image of the aforementioned group. This attitude is cultivated through the use of *narrative strategies, including the creation of myths, selective interpretation of historical events, and the glorification of the group's distinctive accomplishments*. These tactics deepen internal cohesion and solidarity, while simultaneously fostering a sense of differentiation from other groups that are perceived as inferior or threatening (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 217). A review of the literature on the relationship between collective narcissism and political preferences suggests that collective narcissism is a significant predictor of support for parties or candidates perceived as populist. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the narcissistic national narrative encapsulated in Donald Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again." The analysis revealed that individuals exhibiting pronounced national narcissism tendencies were disproportionately likely to support Trump in the 2016 US election, even when controlling for factors such as ideology, authoritarianism, and ethnicity (Golec de Zavala and Federico 2018; Bocian, Cichocka, and Wojciszke 2021). A comparable phenomenon can be observed in Eastern Europe, where a correlation has been identified between national narcissism and the electoral success of national-populist parties. This includes the Polish Law and Justice party and the Hungarian Fidesz party (Lantos and Forgas 2021, 78). The strong inclination to maintain a favorable and independent image of one's national group frequently results in political decisions that may ultimately prove disadvantageous to the group in the medium to long term. For example, research has demonstrated a correlation between national narcissism and reduced support for environmentally friendly initiatives. Concurrently, there is an observed tendency toward greenwashing, whereby actions are taken to project an environmentally responsible image rather than implementing genuinely sustainable practices (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 222). Furthermore, national narcissism has been identified as a predictor of support for environmentally harmful policies, such as intensive coal mining and the deforestation of the UNESCO-protected Białowieża Forest in Poland. These policies have been shown to have severe environmental and social ramifications (Cislak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018). The 2016 Brexit referendum saw a significant influence of national narcissism on the decision to leave the European Union. This was driven by a desire for autonomous political decision-making at the national level. This emphasis on sovereignty directly resulted in the profound economic and social consequences of Brexit, thereby demonstrating the complex interrelationship between a nation's self-image and its political decisions (Eker, Cichocka, and Cislak 2022, 222). In the context of German politics, the rhetoric and policies of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party exemplify a promi-

nent manifestation of collective narcissism, characterized by a far-right and nationalist-populist stance. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) espouses a highly narcissistic narrative that glorifies the restoration of a supposedly lost national greatness and purity in Germany. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is the party's endorsement of a "re-migration policy," which is intended to reverse the integration of immigrants and reinforce the "German identity." This stance represents a regressive and somewhat infantile yearning for a return to an idealized past, untainted by the complexities and challenges of today's world. Additionally, it employs rhetoric and allusions to National Socialism in its symbolism and word choice, thus making it evident that it is drawing upon and aligning itself with that ideology. Such aspirations are firmly embedded in collective narcissism, emerging from the conviction that one's own group possesses a distinctive status and must be safeguarded from external influences. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Germany. For example, the construction of the United States' border wall along the Mexican border, Hungary's immigration policies, and the "security policies" of the Turkish government can be seen as manifestations of ethno-nationally coded self-aggrandizement. These measures provide evidence of the effective use of populism, fear-mongering, and self-glorification by governments to influence public opinion and policy. The intimate link between group-based narcissism and ideologies of superiority gives rise to a self-perpetuating cycle in which ideological beliefs magnify the narcissistic exaltation of one's own group, thereby creating a self-reinforcing feedback loop. This dynamic intensifies animosity towards groups that are perceived as foreign or different. In this context, any challenge to the group's ideology is perceived as a direct assault on its collective identity, which heightens tensions and deepens divisions.

4.4 Critical Perspectives and Limits on Theories of Group Bias

The phenomena described in the minimal group paradigm have been observed to persistently manifest within human societies. The specific meanings attributed to different social stratifications can vary significantly across cultural contexts, exemplifying the critical role of social and cultural interpretation in the formation of "us-versus-them" constructions. However, the explanatory scope of the minimal group paradigm, as well as the analytical framework it provides for describing and investigating group formation processes and social discrimination, is constrained by significant limitations. While the paradigm offers valuable insights, its epistemological scope is limited; it does not account for the totality of social group phenomena. First and foremost, the paradigm places an undue emphasis on the role of categorization in group formation, frequently neglecting other pertinent factors such as shared objectives or external threats. Furthermore, the paradigm typically fails to consider the profound social and historical contexts that shape group interactions, thereby

failing to adequately address the intricate realities that underpin these dynamics. A further area of concern is the minimal consideration given to individual differences. The paradigm tends to overlook the influence of personal beliefs and experiences, which can have a significant impact on behavior within and between groups. Furthermore, the complex ways in which individuals construct their identities from a multitude of sources are oversimplified, resulting in an inadequate understanding of the multifaceted nature of social identities. The experimental conditions that underpin the paradigm's studies are often contrived and lack the complexity that would be present in real-world social situations. This limits the applicability of the findings to authentic contexts. Furthermore, the paradigm offers only partial explanations for phenomena of cooperation and solidarity across group boundaries and neglects to address the pivotal role of power relations and inequalities, which significantly influence group members' behavior and attitudes. It is therefore essential to complement the individual and collective group dynamics that are rooted in the theoretical approaches of social identity and the minimal group paradigm with insights on system justification and anthropological understandings of schemas and cultural codings. These issues will be discussed in greater detail later in this book; however, it is beneficial to present an overview of the primary critiques at this stage. The minimal group paradigm is insufficient for explaining phenomena such as the occasional preference for foreign groups. Furthermore, the minimal group paradigm is insufficient for elucidating the self-reinforcing and self-confirming nature of negative stereotyping of marginalized groups, such as non-white minorities in Germany, which can persistently perpetuate themselves. Such behavior, which confirms negative stereotypes within oneself, cannot be explained solely by the desire to defend one's own interests or those of one's group, as suggested by the minimal group paradigm. Instead, it indicates the presence of profound psychological proclivities to regard extant social, economic, and political structures as immutable and justified, as discussed in Section 4.5. This insight elucidates the manner in which stereotypes and other ideological instruments can be utilized to justify the oppression of particular groups. This perspective is further supported by the theories of social dominance, which posit that hierarchy and oppression are, to some extent, inevitable. This work rejects the notion of an absolute inevitability of so-called "naturalized" social orders. However, it does acknowledge tendencies that are universally rooted in the human organism and in social behavior. The process of naturalization of social orders refers to the way socially constructed differences and hierarchies are presented as immutable and inherent, rather than as the product of social construction and practice. This portrayal supports existing power relations and mechanisms of oppression by depicting social inequalities as natural occurrences, despite the fact that they are, in fact, the result of social constructions and practices. In particular, populist and radical groups and ideologies are responsible for the promotion, dissemination, and reinforcement of naturalized social orders. This topic will be fur-

ther elaborated upon in subsequent discussions on schemata. The critical examination of such constructions and the open discussion of specific human behaviors that contribute to the differentiation and categorization of humanity—a central focus of this book—are intended to facilitate the deconstruction of such naturalized orders. It can be reasonably argued that human tendencies do not inevitably result in specific behaviors. Indeed, such behaviors can be modified through sustained interventions.

4.5 The Theory of System Justification

Developed over several decades, the theory of system justification addresses critical limitations in both the minimal group paradigm and social identity theory. John T. Jost's framework delves into the psychological processes by which individuals support and sustain existing social, economic, and political systems, even those that disadvantage them. This theory is particularly significant to our examination of political psychology, aiming to unpack the motivations and consequences associated with upholding the status quo. According to Jost, people often unconsciously defend, rationalize, and reinforce prevailing social, economic, and political institutions and structures, without deliberate intention or awareness (Jost 2020, 61). A core tenet of system justification theory is the proposition that individuals are driven by an intrinsic desire to perceive their social environment as just and legitimate. This need often takes precedence over their aspirations for personal autonomy or a keen sense of justice (*ibid.*). This reflects a profound psychological impulse to conform to prevailing normative orders, which frequently results in the internalization of norms and values that entrench and reinforce existing inequalities. This inclination to justify the system is evidenced by a multitude of behaviors, including the endorsement of social hierarchies and the tacit acceptance of injustices. These actions are of great consequence in the maintenance of social cohesion, serving to mitigate conflict and promote group consensus. It is notable that the cognitive and motivational processes associated with system justification are similar across various demographic groups, including those who are privileged and those who are disadvantaged, and across different socio-economic statuses, genders, ages, sexual orientations, and ethnic, national, or ethnolinguistic identities (*ibid.*, 62). This widespread acceptance of the status quo illustrates the pervasive influence of system justification across diverse segments of society. Members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups frequently internalize existing hierarchies rather than challenge them, thereby implicitly or explicitly favoring those at the top over those at the bottom. John T. Jost's theory postulates that an intrinsic inclination towards maintaining the status quo compels individuals to preserve existing conditions, even if doing so could theoretically result in a more equitable system (Jost 2020, 62). This proclivity is driven by the

human desire for stability and the comfort of a predictable environment. The resulting behavior reflects the profound need for a stable and reliable social framework, which frequently occurs at the expense of potential advancements and progress. This aspect of system justification theory indicates that psychological needs for security and continuity play a significant role in shaping social dynamics and addressing social inequalities. As with all motivational forces in human psychology, the strength of the motivation to justify the system and its manifestations can vary based on situational (contextual) and dispositional (individual differences) factors. The motivation for system justification is activated or reinforced through a number of mechanisms. Firstly, the motivation to justify the existing social order is activated when the social order is criticized, challenged, or perceived as threatened. Secondly, the motivation for system justification is activated when the social order is perceived as inevitable or unavoidable. Thirdly, the motivation for system justification is activated when the social order is considered traditional or long-standing. In addition, the motivation to justify the system is activated when individuals feel powerless or believe that they are dependent on the social order and its authorities (Laurin 2018, 483).

System justification theory effectively addresses three fundamental human needs: reducing uncertainty through epistemic motives, mitigating threats via existential motives, and alleviating social discord through relational motives. The impact of these needs exhibits variability contingent on both situational contexts and individual differences, which, in turn, serve to modulate the strength of system-justifying motivations (Jost 2020, 64). This theoretical framework has been empirically validated by a series of meta-analyses that have identified specific triggers for system justification processes. These findings are of critical importance for an understanding of the subsequent discussion of the dynamics in question. It is worthy of note that a significant trigger is the human response to perceived threats to the social system. This is discussed in detail in a comprehensive evaluation of 38 studies conducted between 2005 and 2017 (Jost 2020, 320–326). The findings of this study support the hypothesis whereby individuals who perceive a threat to their social system are more likely to engage in system-justifying behaviors, which often manifest as an increased reliance on stereotypes to rationalize existing social, gender, and economic inequalities (van der Toorn, Jost, and Loffredo 2017; Jolley, Douglas, and Sutton 2018). Such behavioral shifts in response to systemic threats can help elucidate phenomena like the pronounced increase in nationalism and support for state institutions observed in the United States after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Moreover, further factors influencing system justification become evident. In the context of unfavorable social and political developments, such as restrictions on freedoms and the preservation of inequalities, individuals are more likely to accept these circumstances if they perceive them as unavoidable or inevitable. For instance, irrespective of their political persuasion, US citizens demonstrated heightened ap-

proval of Donald Trump's presidency one week following his inauguration, relative to the week preceding it. Moreover, individuals are more likely to accept existing inequalities within their country when restrictive emigration policies preclude the possibility of departure. A further significant factor is the perceived stability of the social system. A number of studies have indicated that people are more inclined to support enduring structures such as the Indian caste system or the capitalist systems in the United States and the United Kingdom. This is because such structures are perceived as long-established and traditional, in contrast to newer social phenomena. Given the variability in the motivation for system justification, influenced by various situational and dispositional factors, it is of the utmost importance to gain a deeper understanding of the specific mechanisms and beliefs that sustain this psychological phenomenon (van der Toorn, Jost, and Loffredo 2017; Jolley, Douglas, and Sutton 2018). Ideologies and collective beliefs play a pivotal role in the justification of existing social arrangements. For example, conservative and meritocratic ideologies are employed to justify social and economic inequalities by portraying the existing social order as just and appropriate. The endorsement of such ideologies may result in individuals supporting systems and structures that are not aligned with their interests, on the basis that these arrangements serve the greater good. Moreover, it is imperative to examine how individuals cope with the emotional and cognitive challenges that arise when they encounter information that conflicts with their beliefs, as well as to investigate the role of ideologies. This introduces another significant concept in system justification theory, namely that of *dissonance reduction*. A significant factor influencing the maintenance of existing social arrangements is the reduction of cognitive dissonance. Such dissonance arises when individuals encounter injustices or inequalities that are incongruent with their belief in a just world. To mitigate this emotional and cognitive burden, individuals frequently modify their perceptions and beliefs in a manner that aligns more closely with the observed realities. Such adjustments may entail rationalizing the existence of inequalities or minimizing their impact. By employing dissonance reduction, individuals can maintain a sense of contentment and coherence within their social environment, even when confronted with overt social and economic injustices. Individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups often find themselves in a state of internal conflict, torn between the urge to justify the social system in which they are embedded and the desire to enhance their self-esteem and that of their group. This conflict frequently results in system justification that is incompatible with efforts to enhance self- and group esteem, which in turn has a detrimental impact on factors such as self-esteem, group favoritism, and long-term psychological well-being (Bahamondes-Correa 2016; Kugler, Cooper, and Nosek 2010; Jost and Thompson 2000). Individuals who are disadvantaged and who firmly believe in the legitimacy of the prevailing system often experience ambivalence toward their own group and may favor the outgroup. This conviction is linked to a reduction in subjective well-being,

as evidenced by diminished self-esteem, heightened neuroticism, depression, and generalized anxiety (Jost and Thompson 2000, 229).

Another critical principle in system justification theory is its short-term palliative¹ role, benefiting members of both privileged and disadvantaged groups (Jost 2020, 67). The embrace of ideologies that reinforce the prevailing social order, such as the ideology of meritocracy, frequently results in individuals experiencing a transient increase in positive affect and a concomitant decrease in negative affect. Such emotional shifts result in an increased sense of satisfaction with societal conditions, which is not contingent on socio-economic status. This psychological comfort functions as a palliative, enabling individuals to reconcile with and accept social structures, thus temporarily alleviating personal discontent and criticism of the system. As a result, an enhanced sense of life satisfaction and short-term contentment is observed, affecting individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and levels of privilege (Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009; Wakslak et al. 2007).

System justification frequently functions as mechanism that bolsters individuals' favorable appraisals of the status quo, thereby curbing their motivation for change and dampening their predisposition to engage in collective actions aimed at societal enhancement (Jost 2020, 67). This motivation to maintain the status quo tends to result in individuals' resistance to social change, particularly when such change threatens the established social order. This resistance is partly attributable to the uncertainty that change introduces, which has the potential to erode the privileges and benefits that are primarily enjoyed by advantaged groups. Nevertheless, the willingness to accept social change under specific circumstances reveals a complex and nuanced dynamic. When changes are perceived as inevitable or are deemed highly likely, there is a tendency to accept the existing system. This adjustment is regarded as a pragmatic response to imminent changes, as opposing what seems inevitable may appear futile (*ibid.*). The acceptance of change is further reinforced when individuals believe that these changes will preserve certain aspects of the existing social system or its core values. Such partial changes are perceived as less disruptive to the system and its foundational principles, enabling individuals

1 In the context of System Justification Theory, the term "palliative" is used to describe the psychological mechanism that temporarily alleviates emotional discomfort and cognitive dissonance experienced by individuals when confronted with social injustices or inequalities. This palliative effect occurs when individuals espouse beliefs and ideologies that justify the existing social order, thereby reducing feelings of unrest or dissatisfaction with societal structures. This mechanism functions as a psychological buffer, enabling individuals to maintain emotional equilibrium by aligning their perceptions and beliefs with the perceived legitimacy of the system, despite any evident social disparities. This temporary alleviation of distress engenders a transient increase in positive affect and satisfaction with the status quo, providing a psychological reprieve that renders the prevailing social circumstances more tolerable, irrespective of an individual's socio-economic standing.

to reconcile the impulse to justify the system with the necessity to adapt or improve it. This indicates that people are more amenable to change when they perceive it as non-threatening to the essential aspects of their social environment. Regarding human differentiation, the manner in which social alterations are conveyed and contextualized is of paramount importance for surmounting opposition to these modifications. Demonstrating that social change is either inevitable or that it will maintain the fundamental values and structures of the existing system can significantly enhance the willingness to accept the necessary measures to address social inequalities and promote a more inclusive and equitable social system. The efficacy of this communication hinges on its capacity to reconcile the perceived inevitability of change with the maintenance of foundational elements of the extant social order. This mitigates the perceived threat to the system and enhances acceptance of progressive reforms.

Another intriguing aspect of the theory of system justification involves *stereotypes* (Jost 2020, 72). The inclination to affiliate with social communities and espouse shared patterns of behavior and meaning is reinforced by the tendency to utilize stereotypes as a means of legitimizing one's own group identity. The persistence of stereotypical patterns of thought, speech, and action, when practiced regularly, contributes to maintain existing social, economic, and political power imbalances and protect the status quo. Integrating these concepts with the desire for social belonging and the formation of shared ideas within groups demonstrates that social cognition and stereotyping are deeply embedded in the processes of system justification. These mechanisms enable individuals and groups to not only maintain and reinforce their social identities but also to legitimize and reproduce existing social systems (ibid., 75). Social cognition, therefore, plays a pivotal role in both the reinforcement and the subversion of social structures. Stereotypes function as instruments for the advancement of social cohesion and differentiation. At this juncture, the binary-coded attribution logic of schemata (BCAS), discussed in detail in Chapter 6.4, becomes particularly pertinent. The role of stereotypes in system justification not only complements the roles of self- and group-justification but also expands them to include previously unnoticed or unexplained phenomena. Stereotypes serve ideological purposes, particularly in the legitimization of the disadvantages experienced by certain groups and the framing of the poverty or powerlessness of some in comparison to the success of others as justified and even natural (Jost 2020, 81). A substantial body of sociopsychological research has demonstrated that individuals frequently ascribe a normative quality to social conditions, which is regarded as one of the most salient characteristics of social coexistence (Kay et al. 2009). The argument presented is that social stereotypes function as a means of legitimizing current social systems and the positions and actions of both individuals and groups. This is achieved by drawing upon theories and findings related to self-perception, attribution, cognitive conservatism, social role allocation, behavioral confirmation, and

belief in a just world. This concept helps elucidate why individuals occasionally espouse attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets that bolster the prevailing social, economic, or political system and its status quo, even when this gives rise to ostensibly contradictory behaviors such as out-group favoritism or negative self-stereotyping and high levels of stereotype conformity. These phenomena cannot be fully explained by the tendency toward self- or group-justification alone, as they often appear contrary to the immediate interests of the individual or group. Instead, they legitimize and maintain the existing system as a whole. This suggests that system justification is a powerful phenomenon that can profoundly influence social conduct and attitudes, even when they may not align with immediate personal or group interests (Jost 2020, 79).

Although system justification theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding why people often support and justify existing social systems, it also has its limitations and weaknesses. It offers insight into the complex psychological processes underlying this support. A noteworthy limitation is the potential for oversimplification with regard to the diversity of human motivations and behaviors. By focusing predominantly on the proclivity for system justification, the theory may inadvertently diminish the significance of other pivotal factors that shape individual and collective actions, including personal experiences, cultural divergences, and situational variables. Furthermore, the theory may encounter challenges in explaining changes within systems that emerge as a result of resistance or revolutionary movements. The dynamics of social change are frequently intricate and driven by a multitude of factors that extend beyond the propensity to justify systems. Therefore, the theory is unable to fully account for the mechanisms that give rise to system-critical attitudes and behaviors. The theory of system justification may also contribute to the depoliticization of social inequalities. This is because it presents the perception of these inequalities as a mere consequence of psychological justification processes, without sufficiently considering the structural and material conditions that produce these inequalities. This perspective may result in a diminished perception of the importance of political and social interventions aimed at combating these inequalities.

The application of system justification theory in the context of human differentiation may also vary across different cultural and social contexts. The efficacy of system justification in a specific context may be perceived differently in another. Although the theory is firmly rooted in decades of rigorous research, further empirical verification is still required to substantiate its universality across diverse cultural boundaries. Despite its limitations and weaknesses, the theory of system justification is an integral part of the theoretical framework of this book, particularly in terms of sociocybernetics and social cognition related to affective-cognitive-bodily schemas. The relationship between the inclination towards systems justification and these theoretical perspectives facilitates our comprehension of the processes through which social systems are sustained and transformed, as a result of the inter-

play between individual psychological processes and collective structures. The systems theory perspective, which emphasizes the complexity and dynamics of social systems, is enhanced by the insights from systems justification theory. This integration demonstrates the manner in which individual propensities to preserve the status quo interact with the structural and functional elements of social systems. Consequently, the theory enhances the systems theory perspective by elucidating the function of psychological mechanisms in maintaining and, on occasion, challenging systemic structures. Concurrently, the theory of system justification functions as a conduit between the realms of social cognition and social systems. It illuminates not only the way affective-cognitive-bodily schemas influence individual perceptions and behaviors but also the extent to which they facilitate the legitimization of social systems. These schemas, which are deeply ingrained in human experience, play a pivotal role in the processing of information and the guidance of behavior, often reinforcing existing social structures. The integration of system justification theory permits a more profound examination of the interactions between affective, cognitive, and bodily processes and their impact on social order. By synthesizing these theories, the book reveals novel insights into the mechanisms through which social cognition, shaped by affective-cognitive-bodily schemas, is mobilized to maintain systems. Furthermore, it illuminates the potential for social change. This approach extends our comprehension of the formation and sustenance of social orders through both individual and collective psychological processes, as well as the profound social and cultural contexts in which they function.

5 Neurobiological Foundations: Mechanisms of Reward and Punishment

This chapter presents an excursus on the neurobiology of sociality within the context of human differentiation. It introduces a further dimension that is frequently overlooked in social and cultural science discussions, despite its significant importance. In this transdisciplinary study, scientific and particularly neurobiological insights are of paramount importance, as they constitute an integral component of the processes of human differentiation. These insights are just as relevant as the cultural aspects of coded meanings or emotional components, albeit manifesting differently, operating on a distinct level, and possessing a different nature. The genesis of collective identity is profoundly rooted in our neuronal architecture, reflecting both evolutionary and anthropological dimensions, yet it also reflects the social and cultural dynamics from which it arises. The formation and perception of collective identities are not solely the result of biological predispositions; rather, they emerge from a circular interplay of biological, cognitive, social, and cultural factors. This holistic perspective acknowledges that individual and collective identities are shaped in a complex process of social and cultural evolution, whereby biological foundations interact with cultural and social practices. The subsequent discussion and analysis of the concepts of schemata and cultural codings demonstrate that these should not be perceived in a unidimensional manner. Instead, their interaction with the bodily dimensions of human existence, the environment, and the social systems individuals engage with is of paramount importance (see Chapter 6).

An examination of the role of *reward and punishment* in neurobiological research offers significant insights into the mechanisms underlying human differentiation. These mechanisms are inextricably linked to the dynamics that sustain and legitimize specific social systems. Neurobiological responses to social rewards and punishments not only reinforce the formation of ingroup and outgroup distinctions but also facilitate the maintenance of systems that are characterized by inequality and dominance. These processes facilitate the acceptance of hierarchies within social systems by neurobiologically “rewarding” positive evaluations of the ingroup and negative evaluations of the outgroup with pleasurable states. Such reinforcement cements the tendency towards system justification, whereby individuals perceive

existing social, economic, and political inequalities as legitimate and justified. Additionally, it facilitates the development of a dominance orientation, which is conducive to hierarchical relationships and the supremacy of the ingroup. In this regard, neurobiological mechanisms are integral to the maintenance and reinforcement of social and cultural systems. These processes underpin both individual and collective inclinations to legitimize and justify existing social orders, thereby playing a crucial role in the reproduction of structured inequalities and hierarchies.

The role of dopamine and the processing of emotions are of central importance with regard to the neurobiological dimension of human differentiation. The limbic system and other key brain regions play a pivotal role in emotional processing (Panksepp 1998, 42). In this system, the amygdala is of great relevance for emotional responses and threat detection, while the hippocampus plays a pivotal role in the formation of emotional memories (*ibid.*, 217). Moreover, the prefrontal cortex oversees sophisticated cognitive processes, including decision-making and social interactions. It does so by integrating emotional and rational inputs to inform behavior. The **mesolimbic pathway**, often referred to as the brain's reward system, is indispensable for processing signals related to rewards (Numan 2015, 19; Achterberg and Vanderschuren 2023). This is particularly the case with regard to those derived from positive social interactions, such as successful cooperation or peer recognition (Massaccesi et al. 2024). The mesolimbic dopamine pathway is a principal component of this system, as it plays a pivotal role in regulating experiences of pleasure and motivation through the modulation of dopamine levels. This pathway is of great importance with regard to the emotional and motivational aspects of human behavior, particularly in the context of neurobiological studies pertaining to human differentiation.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter, which is to say a type of chemical messenger that transmits signals between nerve cells (neurons) in the brain. It plays a key role in a number of critical functions, including movement control, reward and pleasure processing, mood regulation, and attention and learning modulation. Dopamine is intrinsically linked to feelings of reward and pleasure, enhancing the desire for activities or objects that are perceived as pleasurable or rewarding. This quality makes dopamine a fundamental element in the development of motivation, influencing behavior towards rewarding experiences and away from those deemed unpleasant. The neurotransmitter exerts a pivotal influence on the formation of habits and decision-making processes, encompassing both the physiological and psychological aspects of human behavior (Mehta 2020; Bzdok and Dunbar 2020; Kanske and Murray 2019). Moreover, dopamine plays a role in the development of addictive behaviors, whereby actions that result in repeated drug use are reinforced. In the context of social interactions, dopamine is released during positive experiences, thereby enhancing one's sense of well-being and encouraging the maintenance of certain behaviors. In light

of these findings, it can be concluded that the effects of dopamine are comparable to those of substances such as alcohol or cocaine (Young, Gobrogge, and Wang 2011), which stimulate its release. The release of dopamine is also observed during sexual activities. In humans, merely contemplating sexual experiences can also elicit the release of dopamine. This illustrates the extensive influence of dopamine on both physical pleasure and psychological reinforcement, which is essential for comprehending the social and motivational dynamics of the human condition (Chow et al. 2024; Rincon-Cortes and Grace 2023; Cloutier et al. 2008). Dopamine is synthesized within the mesolimbic dopamine system, which is primarily located in the ventral tegmental area (VTA) of the brain. The VTA plays a pivotal role in the reward processing mechanism. Dopamine neurotransmitters are dispatched from the ventral tegmental area (VTA) to various brain regions, including the *nucleus accumbens* and the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for a range of functions including decision-making, self-control, and social situation analysis, integrates input from the nucleus accumbens in order to assess potential courses of action based on anticipated rewards. These interconnected structures constitute a vital part of the mesolimbic pathway, elucidating the neurobiological underpinnings of social interactions, reward experiences, and motivational states. This network provides an illustrative example of the manner in which the brain interprets and responds to reward signals, exerting a considerable influence on behavioral responses within social environments.

Let us reexamine the *nucleus accumbens*, which is frequently referred to as the “reward center” of the brain. This brain region plays a crucial role in regulating our experiences of pleasure and motivation. Engagement in activities that are essential to our survival or well-being—such as eating, drinking, or social interaction—activates the nucleus accumbens, thereby providing a rewarding experience. However, its function is not limited to the processing of rewards. Furthermore, the nucleus accumbens plays a substantial role in social reinforcement, prompting individuals to engage in behaviors that enhance social recognition and group affiliation. Positive feedback from the social environment, such as recognition or approval from peers, activates this area, thereby reinforcing social behaviors that are aligned with group norms and values. This mechanism is of great importance in encouraging conformity to the social norms and values that define group identity (Wei, Zhao, and Zheng 2013; Wu, Luo, and Feng 2016). The nucleus accumbens exerts a decisive influence on the drive for social affiliation and recognition, prompting behaviors that facilitate conformity within the group. This inclination has a profound impact on social structure and group dynamics, reinforcing cohesion and, at times, suppressing individuality. The neurochemical foundations of social conformity, particularly through the activities of the nucleus accumbens, offer new insights into the processes of subjectivation, conditioning, and adaptation to dominant power structures and social

norms, as explored in Chapter 8. Throughout these processes, individuals engage in active identity and behavioral modification in order to align themselves with the expectations and norms of their social system (Izuma, Saito, and Sadato 2008). This mechanism elicits an augmented sense of well-being and fosters the maintenance of behaviors that align with the desired outcome. The brain's reward system strengthens these behaviors, acting as a neurochemical catalyst for the internalization of social power dynamics and exerting a profound influence on the individual's self-concept. This internalization process is complex, forming individual identities and beliefs within the context of collective expectations and norms. Individuals may suppress their personal desires, needs, or beliefs in order to achieve social conformity and the subsequent dopamine-induced reward, which is driven by dopamine—or more accurately, by the pleasurable experiences it facilitates (Watt and Panksepp 2016, 4). Given that dopamine functions similarly to an intoxicating and addictive substance, non-conforming behavior can be seen as a withdrawal of reward, thereby rendering the process of conditioning to social norms a profoundly significant phenomenon. This dynamic aligns with the concept of bio-culturally co-evolved collective intentionality, which is discussed in depth in Chapter 3. Additionally, scientific studies have demonstrated that envy and *schadenfreude* are intricate emotional states that are processed by the brain's dopaminergic systems. It is noteworthy that the regions activated during episodes of envy are associated with pain sensations, particularly when individuals are exposed to the excessive happiness and popularity of others. The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), which is activated during feelings of envy, plays a pivotal role in the regulation of these emotions (Takahashi et al. 2009; Xiang et al. 2016). In contrast, feelings of *schadenfreude* have been observed to activate the ventral striatum, a region of the brain that plays a pivotal role in reward processing and the experience of well-being (Wang et al. 2024; Sun et al. 2024). The activation of dopaminergic regions during reports of a fictional person's misfortune provides evidence that the dopamine system mediates emotional states associated with resentment, hostility, and envy. Consequently, neurochemical motivation introduces an additional layer of complexity to the intricate analysis of human differentiation in group-based comparisons, fostering motivations for achieving personal superiority and deriving pleasure from the failures of others. The processes of social categorization and value assignment are largely automatic, intertwined with prosocial behavior and group identification. This fosters prejudice by accentuating the positive attributes of the in-group while simultaneously devaluing those of the out-group. This process, which is further intensified by the minimal group paradigm, solidifies the distinctions between collectives that are perceived as in-groups and out-groups. Guided by a covert logic, it is designed to evoke a sense of collective identity. The mesolimbic dopamine pathway is of pivotal importance with regard to the consolidation of group affiliations. The release of dopamine in response to social stimuli, such as conformity or imitation, has been observed to

elicit positive emotions and reinforce group bonding. While these mechanisms enhance group cohesion and solidarity, they also perpetuate prejudice and discrimination by neurochemically endorsing in-group favoritism and out-group devaluation. It is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of the neurobiological foundations of social categorization, as it has a profound impact on the formation of social bonds and shapes social perceptions and judgments. The insights gained into the mesolimbic dopamine system provide insight into group-based behaviors, thereby illustrating the extent to which these processes are embedded in our neural architecture. These insights direct our attention to the amygdala, another crucial brain structure that significantly impacts our social interactions and associated emotional responses. The mesolimbic system elucidates the neurochemical basis of our feelings of belonging and group dynamics. In contrast, the amygdala offers further insights into the emotional factors that shape perceptions and responses to individuals who are perceived as different due to their sociocultural background.

The *amygdala*, an almond-shaped structure situated within the temporal lobe, represents a principal element in the processing of emotional stimuli and exerts a profound influence on our responses to social categories and “others.” The amygdala plays a vital role in the evaluation of threats and emotionally charged memories, which are essential for the formation of prejudices and the consolidation of group identities. The amygdala plays a pivotal role in differentiating between the self and other groups by regulating both innate and learned fears, thus supporting the processes of human differentiation. The amygdala’s dual role in threat evaluation and emotional memory establishes its integral function in categorization processes and group-based identification (Panksepp 1998, 196). The amygdala, a critical component of the limbic system located beneath the neocortex and present bilaterally in both hemispheres of the brain, plays a pivotal role in linking thoughts and memories with emotions (Matthies et al. 2012). This function is of vital importance for the regulation of behaviors associated with aggression and the fear response, including the processing of perceived threats during hostile interactions (Swaab and Meynen 2023; Ibrahim et al. 2022). The amygdala is especially responsive to individuals who display threatening behaviors, such as aggressive gestures and facial expressions, which can evoke an instinctual fear response (Pinker 2012, 738). The amygdala serves as a primary site for both innate and learned fear responses, playing a pivotal role in emotional processing and the regulation of fear reactions. The amygdala is a key player in the formation of emotional memories, which in turn affects how individuals perceive and respond to their social environment (Asede, Joseph, and Bolton 2020). Innate fears are instinctive responses to specific stimuli or situations, often triggered automatically without prior exposure or learning. For example, an innate fear of potentially dangerous animals, such as snakes or large predators, can prompt an immediate reaction from the amygdala, thereby facilitat-

ing survival responses without the necessity for personal, painful learning experiences (Zaki et al. 2022). In contrast, learned fears originate from direct experiences and learning processes. The amygdala is a vital structure in the development of fear responses to specific objects, faces, or skin colors, which occur through conditioning or learned associations. When an individual is exposed to a threatening or traumatic event, the amygdala encodes this experience, thereby influencing future reactions to similar stimuli. This phenomenon, known as fear conditioning, is characterized by the amygdala's capacity to form and retain emotional memories, which are then reactivated in subsequent encounters with the related stimulus. This phenomenon exemplifies the function of the amygdala in facilitating both immediate and learned fear responses, which contributes to the dynamics of emotional regulation and responses to perceived threats (Lei et al. 2022; Zaki et al. 2022). Furthermore, the amygdala has been identified as a crucial structure for the recognition and processing of fear signals, as well as the orchestration of corresponding bodily responses. Individuals with damage to this region often exhibit an impairment in the recognition of facial expressions indicative of anger and aggression. A prominent feature of both ape and human behavior is the connection between aggression and the emotions of fear and anxiety, which is evidenced by the presence of an amygdala in both species (Kalin, Shelton, and Davidson 2004, 5506). This connection is especially pronounced in individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), where the amygdala may exhibit exaggerated responses to minor fear stimuli and delayed normalization (Prager, Wynn, and Ursano 2016; Nicholson et al. 2018; An et al. 2021; Haris et al. 2023). A shift in focus from the amygdala to the insular lobe allows for an examination of another critical area involved in the processing of complex emotions. The insular lobe has functions that extend beyond those of the amygdala, playing a vital role in the evaluation of disgust and moral judgments. The significance of this area is particularly evident in how emotional responses impact social interactions and judgments, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the neurobiological foundations of these processes.

The *insular lobes*, or *insulae*, are located within the lateral sulcus of the brain, situated between the temporal, frontal, and parietal lobes. They are integral to a variety of functions that facilitate the integration of internal perceptions and external social interactions. They play a pivotal role in the processing of emotions and are essential for the perception of complex social emotions, including affection, ridicule, scorn, hatred, disgust, and empathy (Sapolsky 2017, 58). Furthermore, the insulae are essential for interoceptive awareness, which pertains to the recognition of internal states such as hunger, thirst, and pain. Furthermore, this region of the brain is involved in integrating sensory information, particularly taste and tactile sensations, and is essential for social interactions, particularly in empathizing with and understanding others' emotions. Furthermore, the insular lobes are implicated in a

range of cognitive functions, including attention and decision-making, particularly in contexts where risk and reward assessments are necessary. These diverse functions provide evidence of the insula's fundamental role in mediating between bodily self-awareness and dynamic social exchanges. The use of ridicule and scorn directed at individuals or groups perceived as foreign not only elicits intense emotional responses but also stabilizes in-group solidarity (Hodson, Rush, and MacInnis 2010, 660). The role of disgust in the formation of in-group and out-group boundaries is a crucial one. The insular lobe's response to signs of spoiled food—which activates the amygdala to trigger reactions such as nausea, retching, facial contortions, and turning away—demonstrates its fundamental role in immediate physical and emotional responses. This response to potentially harmful substances, initiated by olfactory or gustatory stimuli, is analogous to the social domain, where analogous mechanisms of disgust and aversion are observed in the context of out-groups (Sapolsky 2017, 59). From a political and strategic standpoint, these responses are structured in a way that provokes an immediate and involuntary aversion towards external entities. This is achieved by drawing upon the same rapid and involuntary neural pathways that govern our avoidance of spoiled food. This instinctual response remains unaltered until higher cognitive processes in the cerebral cortex engage in reflective thinking to assess and potentially reject these prejudiced associations. The following chapters will examine in greater detail the role of these affective-cognitive-bodily schemata in the differentiation and marginalization of groups within social structures. Moreover, the connection between the insular lobe and the amygdala, which is responsible for feelings of disgust, is also activated during moral judgments. It is notable that the mere act of contemplating morally reprehensible acts can evoke neurobiological responses that are analogous to those elicited by the visual presentation of disgusting animals or foods. These neurobiological mechanisms illustrate how disgust can be strategically utilized as a marker to differentiate from and demean undesirable foreign groups. The association of disgust, threat, aggression, and anger with minority groups represents a long-standing practice of denigration of members of such groups. This insight is fundamental to the analysis of emotion markers within the framework of cultural coding, as discussed in Chapter 8.

The integration of neurobiological perspectives into the study of human differentiation provides novel insights into the underlying mechanisms of human social behavior, elucidating the ways in which biological processes and social dynamics influence our interactions. While neurobiological variables in discriminatory practices may be susceptible to misuse, they are not inherently linked to social exclusion. Instead, these variables engage in a complex interplay between biological predispositions and social influences. The aforementioned neurobiological elements and dynamics play a pivotal role in emotional responses to perceived "otherness," yet they do not function in isolation. These systems are part of a broader neural network that is in-

fluenced by social learning, cultural contexts, and individual experiences. This suggests that reactions to social signals are shaped by a multitude of factors that extend beyond neurobiological variables. It is imperative to acknowledge the indispensable function of concentrated neurobiological systems in processing social stimuli, particularly those pertaining to exclusion and devaluation. The instrumentalization of emotions such as hatred and envy against particular groups provides an illustrative example of how such reactions, including threat, resentment, and disgust, can be neurobiologically triggered and manipulated across diverse cultural, identity, and gender lines to influence public opinion. The substantial, though not deterministic, influence of these factors challenges the prevailing notion in the predominantly social constructivist cultural and social sciences, revealing the need for a deeper appreciation of the interplay between biological and socio-cultural factors. The integration of diverse theoretical perspectives offers insights into the significance of cultural norms and values in shaping biological predispositions. This synthesis depicts how these interactions give rise to a multitude of behaviors pertaining to group membership and differentiation across a range of cultural contexts. This illustrates the human capacity to deliberately alter and regulate one's responses, despite the presence of biological processes that may facilitate the development of social fears and prejudices. Consequently, group-based social exclusion is not regarded as an inevitable or inherent aspect of human behavior. Instead, it represents a challenge to surmount biological biases through deliberate strategies, including education, social interaction, and critical reflection. The objective of these strategies is to mitigate the misuse of biologically based systems and to enhance a holistic understanding of social recognition and exclusion processes. The following chapter presents a synthesis of the theoretical frameworks discussed thus far, articulated through the concept of affective-cognitive-bodily schemata of differentiation. From the perspective of contemporary systemic-anthropological inquiry, these schemata play a crucial role in human differentiation.

6 Schemata of Differentiation

The following section explores the role of schemas as fundamental elements of social cognition in the context of human differentiation. These schemas are grounded in evolutionary-anthropological and psychological foundations and are instrumental in enabling humans to differentiate and categorize. The comprehensive theoretical and empirical foundation of this book illuminates the underlying reasons for the persistence of certain cognitive biases and inequities in human differentiation. Schemas exert a profound influence on how individuals perceive, think, feel, and behave, as well as on how they internalize and entrench social norms and values. Schemas function as the underlying frameworks that shape personal experiences and uphold the complexities inherent in social structures and identities, through affective, cognitive, and somatic processes.

6.1 Social Cognition

This conception of social cognition encompasses all cognitive, affective, and bodily processes that both facilitate and result from interactions with others. Accordingly, the established term “social cognition” may be somewhat misleading, as “cognition” typically refers to thought processes and should ideally be augmented with the qualifiers “affective” and “bodily.” Social cognition represents a fundamental aspect of human experience, encompassing a range of processes and mechanisms through which individuals perceive, analyze, store, and react to information and stimuli from their environment. These processes include empathy, mentalization (the intuitive understanding of mental states, such as feelings, thoughts, and desires, in both oneself and others), the formation of stereotypes, the experience of cognitive dissonance, the development of self-knowledge, and phenomena of self-deception (Schlicht 2023, 13). It is similarly acknowledged that emotions and moods exert a pervasive influence on social interactions and are in turn shaped by them. This comprehensive perspective incorporates the critical role of emotions in directing attention, influencing decision-making processes, and forming memories. In light of these considerations, it becomes evident that cognition and

affectivity are inextricably linked. Given these insights, it is imperative to reframe the conceptualization of schemata as a multifaceted phenomenon, transcending the limitations of its traditional categorization as solely cognitive, physiological, or affective. In contrast, the current systemic-dynamic affect logic views these categories as being integrated in a seamless manner. In essence, social cognition provides the foundation for all practices of human differentiation, demonstrating the intricate interconnection between cognitive processes and emotional states in influencing human behavior and social structures. The perspective on schemas, social cognition, affects, and emotions presented here merges insights from traditional cognitivist theories with the latest findings from research on social cognition. It focuses on the four principal dimensions of social cognition: embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (Gallagher 2023). This approach offers a comprehensive framework that not only enhances our understanding of the body's integral role in cognition but also broadens our conceptualization of differentiation schemata by emphasizing the interactions between the body, environment, culture, and the broader ecological system. This model categorically rejects the Cartesian dualism of mind and body through its seamless integration of thinking and feeling. The mechanistic explanations characteristic of cognitivism have frequently been the subject of criticism. These explanations liken the brain to a computer and reduce complex social interactions to simplistic, brain-centered processes. The prevailing cognitivist perspective tends to assume that thoughts are merely the result of external data being processed and mapped through syntactic operations as representational units within the brain. These perspectives posit that cognitive processes are associated with discrete neural activities within the cerebral cortex, analogous to the functioning of a computer (Sellars 1957/1999; Putnam 2011). Nevertheless, this cognitivist perspective is becoming increasingly recognized as inadequate for fully capturing the spectrum of human social cognition. By adopting a more holistic view that recognizes the brain as dynamically engaged with its environment—through embodied actions, embedded contexts, extended networks, and enactive engagements—this approach challenges the limitations of earlier models. The proposal offers a more fluid understanding of cognition, one that acknowledges the profound shaping of our mental processes by our physical bodies, our social environments, and the ongoing interactions between the two. Historically, theories of the mind, including prominent theory of mind, modularity theory, and early cognitive approaches in anthropology, have portrayed social cognition as fundamentally automated, akin to the operations of a computer. These theories frequently conceptualize social cognition as a series of automatic processing steps triggered by external stimuli, analogous to the functions of an intricate computer processor. However, the perspective advanced here reinterprets social cognition and the associated schemata not merely as functionalist elements akin to components of a vast computer, but rather as fundamental building blocks of human differentiation.

Accordingly, they are of great consequence with respect to the comprehension and interpretation of perceived data, extending beyond mere automated responses to encompass a more comprehensive and integrated approach. This revised viewpoint draws significantly on the insights of systems theory and enactivist approaches (F.J. Varela et al. 2017), which regard cognition as inherently embodied action (Gallagher 2023). These frameworks stress the significance of the body not merely as a mere conduit for external stimuli, but rather as an active and engaged participant in the cognitive process. This shift in perspective moves away from the traditional views that isolate the mind from the body and environment. Instead, it proposes that cognition is shaped by dynamic and continuous interactions with the surrounding environment. Cognition is inextricably linked to the experiences made possible by the sensorimotor capabilities of a particular human body, which are always situated within broader psychological and cultural contexts. Consequently, the actions of an individual cannot be considered in isolation from the perceptions and the associated cognitive processes that inform them. The actions of an individual are influenced and guided by perceptions, which are in turn shaped by the environment. This suggests a dynamic interplay between the individual and their social and material surroundings. This approach demonstrates the profound interconnectivity between cognition and its surrounding physical and social environments, indicating a dynamic exchange where each action exerts influence upon and is reciprocally influenced by these contexts. Furthermore, the systemic nature of these interactions demonstrates the complexity of human behavior, which is shaped by nonlinear processes that resist straightforward deduction. Despite an in-depth understanding of the underlying schemata, predicting outcomes remains a challenging endeavor. This inherent unpredictability enhances our investigation of human actions within their respective ecosystems, augmenting our comprehension of these intricate dynamics.

6.2 Emotions and Affects

The development of individual and group-based feelings and the associated identification processes are particularly relevant in the reflection of human differentiation practices and coding processes in social systems. This phenomenon is complex and influenced by a myriad of factors and structures from diverse realms. As previously discussed, this circumstance will be explored in greater depth in the subsequent sections. The objective here is to examine the nature of affects and emotions in the context of integration and cohesion within communities. From a systemic-anthropological perspective, this study examines the affective dynamics that fulfill both divisive and unifying functions within group structures. Particular emphasis is placed on the manner in which emotional influences, through the process of cultural

coding, contribute to the differentiation from external entities and bolster solidarity and unity within the group, thereby enhancing communication within their respective social systems. Emotions are fundamentally automatic response programs that are universally understood and triggered by identifiable objects or events. These responses act as central mediators for the structural coupling between systems, as part of the affective-cognitive-bodily schemata. This mechanism permits the integral role of emotions to be revealed in the intricate interplay between individual and collective behaviors, as well as in the broader systemic dynamics.

Emotions are elicited by specific objects or events and possess a foundation that transcends cultural boundaries. However, the manifestation of these emotions is shaped by cultural norms and practices. Basic emotional reactions, including fear, anger, sadness, joy, disgust, and surprise, exhibit universal elements observable across a range of species, including primates (Damasio 2011, 136). Nevertheless, the ways in which these emotions are experienced, interpreted, and expressed vary considerably across different cultures. These variations in emotional expression and interpretation are reflective of the respective social norms, values, and communication styles that are characteristic of each culture. The universality of these emotions, their automated processes, and the corresponding expressions is rooted in the fact that these emotional action programs are innate, not learned. While the intensity or duration of each emotion may vary slightly in different circumstances, the fundamental pattern remains strikingly consistent across all physiological levels, from bodily movements and changes in internal organs like the heart and lungs to hormonal adjustments (ibid.). The constancy of emotions, along with their predictability and stability as instinctual action programs, is rooted in their origins in natural selection and evolutionary imperatives encoded in the genome. These genetic directives have remained largely unaltered throughout the course of evolution, thereby ensuring the existence of a specific and reliable brain structure (Damasio 2011, 137). The fundamental role of emotions in the survival and development of individuals means that they are established reliably early in development. The underlying mechanisms of emotion in the human brain and physiology remain largely consistent, regardless of the specific circumstances and contexts involved. It is similarly crucial to acknowledge the unique characteristics of emotions. This particularity is evident in the ways that disparate cultures experience and contextualize emotions within their respective social frameworks, frequently through mechanisms such as reward and punishment. Indeed, the question of whether emotions are universally or particularly experienced is a challenging and contentious one, as they resist simplistic binary classifications. In consideration of the extensive array of emotions that are shaped by a multitude of cultural perceptions and influences, it is untenable to make a universally valid, ethnocentric assertion about emotions. For the purposes of this analysis, it is essential to recognize that emotions are intricately

woven into the fabric of the mental and physical systems of the human body and are shaped by a set of fundamental biological baselines that are inherent to our species.

The specific circumstances and emotional context determine whether emotions will motivate action or inaction. From a systemic-anthropological perspective, emotions not only function as adaptation mechanisms of the system to its environment but also as a means of supporting autopoiesis. Emotions give rise to motivational behavioral patterns that either facilitate the maintenance of systemic equilibrium or drive the requisite adaptations, thereby playing a pivotal role in both the stability and evolution of living systems. These dynamic adaptation processes illustrate the system's capacity to respond adaptively to internal and external stimuli, thereby ensuring resilience and functionality in a context of constant change. Emotions, therefore, constitute a central element in the process of systemic self-organization, facilitating learning and autopoietic evolution through the motivational influence they exert on action. In this way, our emotions direct our actions in a manner that is specifically adapted to the circumstances at hand. Emotions such as fear, joy, and sadness give rise to distinctive patterns of action or inaction (Kurth 2022, 223). This demonstrates that emotions are multidimensional phenomena that necessitate evaluation and are significantly influenced by situational and sociocultural contexts. Nevertheless, these variations do not affect the fundamental recognizability of the emotion, as the basic behavioral characteristics remain consistent.

The *intentionality* of emotions—their specific content and purposefulness—is interpreted as a systemic operation that acts to reduce complexity. Emotions facilitate the evaluation and direction of responses, thereby enabling the effective management of the vast array of information and ambiguity present in the environment. They facilitate the recognition of patterns, the establishment of priorities, and the navigation of our surroundings in an effective manner. These processes of complexity reduction and pattern recognition are essential for the self-organization and adaptability of the system in a dynamic and often unpredictable world. Therefore, emotions operate not only as internal signals but also as key mechanisms that modulate the resonance between the mental system and its environment, facilitating the integration of internal states and external demands. In addition to their impact on physiology and motivations, emotions exert a significant influence on cognition. They shape where attention is directed, the conclusions drawn, and the beliefs formed. These cognitive processes are inextricably linked to the evaluation of a situation or context, which plays a pivotal role in the genesis of emotions. The evaluation of a situation as threatening, challenging, or rewarding elicits specific emotions, which in turn influence our perception of reality and affect our decision-making processes. This dynamic reflects the complex interactions within the mental system, which is in constant communication with its environment. An expanded comprehension of emotions and affect indicates that they are not constrained to the boundaries of the individual mind or body. Instead, they permeate and extend

beyond the boundaries of the self, becoming embedded in the social and material structures of our environment. This perspective recognizes that our emotional experiences are enhanced and molded by the dynamic interplay between the individual and the environment, resulting in a continuous co-construction of subjectivity and intersubjective space.

In numerous social and cultural studies, a distinct separation is frequently drawn between the concepts of “affects” and “emotions” (Ahmed 2014; Massumi 2021; McCormack 2023). *Affects* are defined as a congruence of motivations, feelings, and goals that have not yet been subjectivized and thus are not classified or narratively captured within existing sociocultural categories. Although the reasons and arguments for this differentiation are substantial and acknowledged, certain logical and theoretical inconsistencies emerge within the context of this approach, necessitating a critical examination. For example, the rigid dichotomy between affect and emotion may fail to account for the fluid transitions and reciprocal influences among emotional phenomena. Such a strict dichotomy can result in an artificial segmentation of the human experience, which fails to capture the full complexity and dynamism of affective states. The notion of affects as pre-discursive and not yet subjectivized fails to acknowledge the influence of individual interpretation and cultural conditioning in shaping affective experiences. This view posits that affects exist in a kind of pre-social vacuum, which may not fully align with the complexity of human experience and the intrinsic interplay between the individual and culture. Furthermore, the assertion that affects are not classified within sociocultural categories and thus remain narratively inaccessible undervalues the significance of linguistic and narrative mediation in affective states. The ability to name and narrate affects is of great importance in articulating and understanding our emotional and affective landscape, and in integrating these experiences more fully into our social and cultural understanding. To address the identified shortcomings in reasoning and theoretical inconsistencies, it is imperative to develop an integrative model that acknowledges the intricate interdependence of affects and emotions. This model takes into account the significant influence of subjective experience, social mediation, and cultural contextualization in the emergence and expression of affective states. It is acknowledged that affects and emotions exist on a spectrum, ranging from direct, physical reactions to deeply reflected and socially integrated experiences. In this framework, affects are regarded as indispensable mediums of communication and as mediators of structural coupling between systems, facilitating mutual influence and adaptation. Accordingly, this approach does not regard affects and emotions as entirely distinct entities but rather distinguishes between them to the extent that affects serve as foundational, frequently preconscious reactions that establish initial contact and resonance between the individual and the environment. Affects are regarded as the fundamental, often preconscious form of emotional experiences, distinguished by their intensity and brief duration.

In contrast, emotions represent a more advanced and socially influenced form of affective state. They are constructed upon the foundation of initial affects and incorporate them into more intricate emotional domains that are shaped by social norms, cultural interpretative patterns, and individual reflection. This distinction permits an understanding of the dynamic interaction and interdependence of affects and emotions within the context of human experiences and social interactions. From this perspective, holistic schemata can be conceptualized, offering a comprehensive view of the convergence of cognition, affectivity, and physicality in shaping perceptions and responses to the world. These integrated patterns emerge from the system's interactions with its environment and exert influence over both our physical sensations and our cognitive and emotional processes. The proposed model effectively addresses the discontinuities in theoretical logic by demonstrating that mediation through affects is not an external process to social and cultural contexts but rather is deeply embedded within them. The concept of affects as mediators of structural coupling acknowledges their role in influencing both the immediate bodily response and the complex social and cultural processes through which individuals engage with each other and their environment. The recognition of affects as a medium of communication is based on the insight that they are central factors in the construction of social reality and individual identity. Affects not only facilitate an initial, intuitive response to environmental stimuli but are also crucial for the development of shared meanings and the negotiation of social relationships. This comprehensive perspective illuminates the crucial function of affects in linking our immediate physiological responses to the broader sociocultural processes, significantly influencing both our individual experiences and our collective interactions.

6.3 Schemata as Autopoietic Generators of Meaning

The concept of schemata is posited here as a holistic entity, integrating cognitive, affective, mental, and bodily components, which facilitates the autopoietic organization of the individual. This permits a sophisticated interpretation of the information and a corresponding responsive action. The concept of schemata as autopoietic systems challenges the traditional boundaries between the mental, physical, and social realms, acknowledging the interconnected nature of human experiences. This model portrays the dynamic interplay between physical, psychological, and social systems, reflecting their mutual influence and interdependence. Cognitive and emotional processes are in a state of constant dialogue, reciprocally shaping one another and influencing social interactions. This integrated perspective facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of intricate behavioral and social dynamics, whereby shifts in one domain can resonate across others. In the fields of cognitive psychol-

ogy and anthropology, schemata are of great importance for the efficient processing of complex social information. They fulfill the polyvalent role of filters and active constructors of reality. Schemata are defined as orientation frameworks for feeling, thinking, and behavior that are embedded in and correspond with complex social systems, manifesting themselves on different levels. The concept of such a unit at work in humans, or an incorporated structure that shapes social roles and identities, was initially contemplated by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (Schütz 1983). Since then, it has been repeatedly addressed in philosophical anthropology and sociology. In the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of an ingrained, generative grammar (Chomsky 1972) gained prominence and was further developed by Jean Piaget, as well as by Pierre Bourdieu in the context of his concept of habitus (Bourdieu 2016 (1972), 1992 (1979)). This describes a largely routinized pattern of action that operates in conjunction with the individual. Similarly, schemata are deeply embedded in individual and collective behavioral patterns, exerting an unconscious influence on our actions. Additionally, it is important to distinguish between schemata and other forms of social structure. Schemata are not merely reactive structures; they are autopoietic, self-organizing mechanisms that actively contribute to the constitution and transformation of social realities. In this regard, they are not merely a product of external forces; rather, they are a dynamic force in themselves. This will become evident as the chapter progresses. Schemata that contribute to forms and practices of differentiation, as conceptualized at the conclusion of this chapter, are reevaluated through the lens of cognition as embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (Gallagher 2023). These four dimensions—*embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive*—establish a framework that situates the role of the body, the environment, and the interactions between organism and environment at the core of our understanding of schemata, thereby expanding our comprehension of differentiation schemata. The embedded and extended aspects of cognition highlight the importance of the social and material context, as well as the utilization of external artifacts in cognitive processes, which directly impact the social aspects of human differentiation. In contrast, the embodied and enactive aspects integrate the role of the body and its physical interactions with the environment, which impact the bodily level of differentiation. The schema approach places a priority on the individual's capacity to engage with complex social systems, with a particular emphasis on the interconnections between this approach and the evolutionary-anthropological adaptation systems that have been discussed in previous chapters. Of particular significance are the dual cognitive systems (see Chapter 3.5), designated as System 1 and System 2. System 1, which is characterized by automated, intuitive thinking, dominates behavior in routine and affect-driven situations. In contrast, System 2, which is more energetically demanding, conscious, and reflexive, is only activated when complex or new situations require deeper engagement. In general, schemata remain active and autonomous until such time as the cerebrum and conscious reflection (System 2) are engaged. This

evidence indicates that the individual is not merely a passive bearer of social structures; rather, they possess the capacity for active and flexible responses to changing environmental conditions. The capacity of schemata to self-organize enables individuals to actively shape their environment and to undertake transformative actions that contribute to the further development of the social system. As discussed in Chapter 6.4, the affective coding of meaning plays a pivotal role in this context. The schema approach offers a particularly fruitful avenue for examining the ways in which human differentiation is shaped by the intertwining of emotions and social structures. This establishes the way affectively anchored reactions can either stabilize or alter social differentiations. The schema approach broadens Bourdieu's concept of habitus and provides a transdisciplinary viewpoint on the dynamic transformation processes initiated by the interaction between social and mental systems. Furthermore, it incorporates decades of research on social cognition. When considered collectively, these perspectives offer profound insights into the intricate interplay among individual, social, and bodily factors that collectively shape the mosaic of human differentiation. By acknowledging the autonomy and interdependence of these levels, this approach allows for a more nuanced view of the multilayered processes contributing to the development of identity and difference, which in turn facilitates a richer understanding of the dynamics of human differentiation. This understanding considers not only the intrinsic characteristics of the individual but also their active role in shaping and negotiating their social reality. In the context of human differentiation practices, schemata function as indispensable tools of social cognition (see Chapter 6.1), playing a pivotal role in how social categories and group memberships are understood and processed. These processes are central to the perception and interpretation of differences between the self and others, and thus directly influence the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within social groups. Schemata facilitate the processes of classification and stereotyping by automating the categorization of individuals based on characteristics relevant to the context, such as socio-economic status, skin color, gender, age, or physical ability. In discussions of human categorization and sorting processes, schemata are of particular significance, as they are integral to their functionality and implementation. These are formed and shaped through the internalization of normative specifications of values and attitudes, to which individuals conform in a process of subjectivation (see Chapter 8.3).

6.3.1 Cultural and Social Dimension

Schemas represent a comprehensive framework of world perception, deeply embedded in cultural practices. The formation and application of schemas are inextricably linked to the fabric of human cultures, reflecting the profound influence of cultural and social dynamics on cognitive processes. Schemas emerge from the collective,

bioculturally co-evolved experiences of a community (for further details, please see Chapter 3) and are transmitted through communication and social interaction. Consequently, they manifest not only as individual mental structures but also as collective knowledge and cultural practices (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 51). They encapsulate cultural values, beliefs, and norms, and decisively shape how individuals perceive and interpret their social and physical environments (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992). These schemas are the result of lengthy evolutionary processes in which the capacity to process complex social information efficiently has conferred a survival advantage. These schemas impact the manner in which individuals interact and establish relationships, influencing expectations and interpretations in social interactions. Consequently, they facilitate the formation and sustenance of social networks and conceptions of justice. Moreover, schemata impact the perception of groups, delineating those regarded as part of the “in-group” from those regarded as “out-group.” They actively contribute to and perpetuate this construction. However, this perception is not fixed or immutable. Rather, schemas are inherently adaptable and can be reshaped through conscious reflection and learning behavior, allowing for flexibility and change in response to new information or changing circumstances. In our context, it is particularly relevant to recognize that schemata are not only individual cognitive structures but also multidimensional and dynamic core elements that contribute to the construction and maintenance of social systems and power relations. The concept of situated and environmentally integrated cognition (embedded cognition) posits that the environment plays a pivotal role in the formation of differentiation schemata. These schemata are situated within the specific contexts in which we act and interact, at times in an active manner and at other times in a passive manner. This indicates that differentiation does not occur in isolation but is influenced and shaped by the environment in which it emerges (Gallagher 2023, 16). Consequently, our thinking, feeling, and acting are significantly shaped by the surrounding environment (Rupert 2004, 393; 2009, 131). Although the concept of “situated cognition” is sometimes employed in a broad sense to describe forms of cognition that are embedded in the environment, the term “embedded cognition” is specifically used to denote the critical role that the environment plays in shaping our cognitive processes (Gallagher 2023, 17). A fundamental concept within this theoretical framework is that of “epistemic acts” (Maglio, Wenger, and Copeland 2008; Kirsh and Maglio 1994), which encompass conscious efforts to alter our environment in order to facilitate cognitive processes or overcome cognitive challenges. An everyday example of this is the act of writing down a shopping list, which allows us to offload our working memory. Furthermore, our cultural and social environments can either constrain or enable certain schema-related processes. It is crucial to consider the context in which these processes occur, as the physical, social, and cultural conditions under which we operate can either foster or inhibit specific ways of thinking.

This demonstrates the deep intertwining of our cognitive and perceptual processes with the broader environmental matrix.

The *ecological approach*, particularly Gibson's concept of affordances (Gibson 1986), in conjunction with more advanced theoretical perspectives (Wagman and Blau 2020), offers profound insights into the cultural and social dimensions of schemas by demonstrating how they evolve through interactions with the environment. This is accomplished by exhibiting the way they evolve as a result of their interactions with the surrounding environment. The differentiation schemas are deeply rooted in the action possibilities that are made available by our social and physical environments. The potential actions afforded by our surroundings, or affordances, shape the available courses of action in specific situations and thus exert a direct influence on the development of our schemas. In turn, these schemas inform our expectations of others based on criteria such as age, gender, or social status (Gallagher 2023, 17). From the perspective of ecological psychology, schemas are not to be regarded as isolated mental constructs; rather, they are inextricably linked to the physical and social conditions of our environment. The structure of our living environments, encompassing social norms and physical settings, exerts a profound influence on our categorization and interaction with the world and its inhabitants. For example, the spatial segregation of certain neighborhoods can either facilitate or limit particular patterns of social interaction and the corresponding differentiation schemas (Pagano and Day 2020, 38). A central tenet of the ecological approach to perception is its emphasis on direct perception. This perspective suggests that, despite the complex translation of the three-dimensional world onto the two-dimensional retina, three-dimensional aspects of the world can be perceived directly, without the need for mental representations or inferential processing (*ibid.*).

The concepts of niche construction and environmental anthropology provide a profound perspective on the study of the environmentally embedded dimension of differentiation schemata. These concepts delineate the extent to which humans and other living beings actively shape and alter their environments, thereby creating new possibilities for action—termed affordances—or modifying existing ones (Wagman 2020, 136). The term “niche construction” is used to describe the process by which organisms actively modify their surrounding environment to create new living conditions for themselves and their offspring. This incorporates both physical and sociocultural changes (Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014, 329). Humans occupy a unique position in this process, exerting a profound influence on their surroundings through the construction of dwellings, the formation of social structures, and the creation of communication systems and artifacts (Heft 2017). Environmental anthropology builds upon existing knowledge by examining the interactions between human cultures and their environments in greater depth. It investigates the ways in which cultural practices and beliefs shape the perception and utilization of

natural resources (Lockyer and Veteto 2013; Singer 2016; Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet 2017; Bollig and Krause 2023). This field of study examines the role of cultural schemata in governing interactions with the environment. These schemata are integral to both the construction of niches and cultural engagement with the natural world. Schemata function as cognitive, affective, and bodily frameworks that inform our perception and interpretation of the world and its inhabitants. They exert influence over expectations and assumptions regarding the behavior of individuals and groups in specific environments, as well as the roles and functions attributed to them. The affordances that emerge through niche construction can exert direct and indirect influences on the formation and manifestation of differentiation schemata. This intricate feedback loop elucidates the dynamic interplay between an individual's or group's environment and their cognitive and social structures, thereby demonstrating the profound embeddedness of humans in the ecological and cultural matrices of their surroundings. The social, cultural, and physical contexts in which individuals operate significantly shape the opportunities available to them, profoundly influencing social hierarchies and individual identities. The environment, shaped by deeply entrenched social structures, often affords certain groups privileged access to resources and opportunities, while simultaneously denying these benefits to others. Schemata are of great consequence in establishing power dynamics and social inequalities, as well as the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. These schemata form intricate structures that influence individual perceptions and actions and shape collective norms and values, substantiating their role as multidimensional frameworks that significantly impact our perceptions of belonging, identity, and diversity. The internalization of cultural values and norms by individuals serves to establish group identities and delineate group boundaries, thereby providing a means of legitimizing authority. Such notions of legitimacy and justice are embedded and sustained, with specific social orders frequently presented as "natural" and inevitable. This book examines instances where these cultural codings are made manifest, with the practice of racial profiling serving as a case in point. Moreover, it investigates the influence of stereotypical perceptions and prejudices about diverse social groups on the perception and treatment of individuals based on their assumed group affiliations. These stereotypes help to uphold discrimination and inequality by ascribing inferiority or lesser capability to certain groups. Moreover, schemata prescribe specific roles and expectations for individuals within society, thereby reinforcing existing power structures and enabling societal control. The resulting structures define who gains access to essential resources, rights, and opportunities, thereby establishing membership and exclusion criteria. These dynamics are of great consequence in maintaining social order and the distribution of power and privilege, and thus significantly determine who is integrated into or isolated from the community.

6.3.2 Cognitive Dimension

Identification with one's own group is nourished by a complex web of individual experiences alongside collective and cultural influences, together forming multi-dimensional schemas. These schemas are both products and integral components of the emotional and motivational dynamics that intertwine individual and collective aims. Within the framework of the minimal group paradigm, these schemas can result in social rewards or punishments. Their complexity allows for the meanings—or more precisely, interpretations of these meanings—to be altered through conscious, self-reflective processes typically occurring in the cerebral cortex. The adaptability of schemas is evident in their capacity to evolve in response to new insights and perspectives. This dynamic interplay is a key driver in the transformation of socially constructed identities. Schemas thus act as crucial mediators between sensory perception and behavioral responses, underpinning human information processing across perception, categorization, memory, and decision-making (Casson 1983, 430). Schemas are not merely passive repositories of accumulated knowledge; rather, they function as dynamic systems that draw from past experiences while simultaneously influencing future actions and cognitions. These mental frameworks are constructed from both personal and collective experiences, thereby endowing us with the capacity to transform specific situations into actionable skills. From an anthropological perspective, a multitude of studies concentrate on the cognitive aspects of schemas, which are frequently encapsulated under the term “shared cognition.” This concept pertains to the collective cognitive processes that enable members within a group to share knowledge and beliefs, thereby facilitating coherent and effective interaction and communication (Shackelford and Weekes-Shackelford 2021, 5491). In this context, cultural schemas, which are conceptualized as mental frameworks or structures, play a pivotal role. They not only organize experiences but also operate as interpretative tools for understanding the world and managing social interactions. Schemata are embedded deeply within cultural practices and exert a profound influence on the manner in which information is received, processed, and conveyed. They encompass a broad array of phenomena, including language usage, symbolism, social norms, and values (Colombo 2014). Related anthropological theories such as *cultural consensus theory* and theories of collective representation analyze the extent and quality of shared knowledge within a community (Gatewood 2011). These frameworks suggest that each culture possesses a systematic set of knowledge, which, when commonly held by the majority, establishes a foundation for cultural consensus (Bennardo and Kronenfeld 2011). An investigation of this consensus enables researchers to evaluate the precision and distribution of cultural schemas and their influence on individual thoughts and actions. Schemas are inherently adaptive, undergoing evolution in response to new social influences or information. This dynamic is particularly evident in instances of cultural encounter,

whereby disparate schemas converge, frequently resulting in the formation of novel cognitive and cultural syntheses. The field of cultural psychology has demonstrated that individual behaviors are shaped by social norms, which themselves reflect the cultural consensus within a community (Zou et al. 2009; McGuire, Manstead, and Rutland 2017). This body of work provides a crucial interface for examining the interplay between collective intentionality (see Chapter 3.5) and collective representations, which are essential concepts for comprehending group dynamics within cultural contexts. For example, the findings of McGuire et al. illustrate that participants, particularly older children, adjusted their resource allocation in accordance with the perceived norms of their own group (ingroup) and the outgroup. This behavior reflects not only an adaptation to specific situational norms but also a pronounced collective intentionality, manifesting in the capacity to justify actions in accordance with an understood group consensus. Additionally, discussions often center on mental architectures, cognitive systems (Bennardo and Kronenfeld 2011), and representational modules (Jackendoff 2007, 2002), with the physiological or bodily level frequently being overlooked. However, physical aspects, especially unconscious ones, are considered in approaches such as embodied speech and speech as action (Austin 1972; Hindelang 2010). These approaches integrate the complex interconnectivity of language, cognition, and culture. In this regard, the Neo-Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic relativity considerably enhances our comprehension of the cognitive aspects inherent to schemata. This hypothesis proposes that the structure of a language has a significant impact on the thoughts and perceptions of its speakers, demonstrating the influence of linguistic features on cognitive patterns. This implies that language is not merely a conduit for communication; rather, it actively influences how we comprehend and interact with the world. To illustrate, languages that possess a rich vocabulary for different shades of green can foster more intricate color perception schemes among their speakers, thereby demonstrating the adaptive nature of schemas. These schemas are not only shaped by individual cognitive processes but are also molded through collective experiences. The concept of shared cognition elucidates the processes through which linguistically mediated schemas are shared, negotiated, and modified within cultural groups. The concept of shared cognition pertains to the collective nature of knowledge formation and application, with language serving as the primary medium through which cultural norms and values are disseminated and internalized within a community. This framework puts forward the idea that cognitive processes are deeply embedded in social interactions, both influencing and being influenced by the linguistic and cultural environment. Linguistic differences not only impact individual perceptions but also influence the way knowledge and beliefs are communicated and consensually validated within groups. Despite its far-reaching implications, the Neo-Whorfian hypothesis, in its original deterministic form, is largely regarded as outdated in contemporary research. Contemporary perspectives acknowledge the sig-

nificant influence of language on cognitive processes but reject the notion that these influences are deterministic. The role of language in shaping thought is becoming increasingly recognized as one among many factors, with language interacting in complex ways with other cultural and individual determinants. In subsequent sections, the cognitive dimension is augmented by other essential aspects to provide further evidence that even a comprehensive, multidimensional view of schemata is not exhaustive. It is recognized that psychological anthropological research is still in a process of development and continues to evolve. This moderated perspective recognizes the formative role of language in cognitive processes and asserts the interconnectedness of linguistic structures with other cultural and individual influences. It presents a more intricate and nuanced depiction of cognitive schemas that more accurately reflects the complexity of human thought processes and reaffirms the necessity to rigorously examine and refine our models on an ongoing basis. In this framework, schemas are conceptualized as being shaped by dynamic interactions of diverse factors within the social and cultural context, exemplifying the fundamental principle of shared cognition. The interplay between collective intentionality and collectively shared knowledge demonstrates how social norms—as fundamental elements of cultural consensus—ensure that individuals do not make decisions in isolation but always in relation to the dynamic and often implicit expectations of their social environment. By adapting to or challenging these norms, individuals engage in the active construction and transformation of cultural realities. This perspective broadens the understanding of culture as a dynamic process sustained by its members, in which collective intentionality and cultural consensus not only coexist but also reinforce each other. These factors are fundamental to social cohesion and the continuous evolution of culture. An examination of these interrelationships enables anthropologists to gain a more profound understanding of the ways in which cultural stability and change are shaped by the everyday decisions and interactions of community members. It becomes evident that emotions and behaviors engage in a complex interplay, directed by cultural prescriptions that relate to meanings, reproduce them autopoietically, and ensure their transmission (see Chapter 8.4).

Moreover, schemata facilitate the integration of information from the past and the present, thereby paving the way for future comprehension (D'Andrade 1995, 180). They are the basis for our situational comprehension and our competencies across a range of real-world domains. Schemas emerge from the interaction between intrapersonal mental structures and the structures of the external world, leading to recurrent and shared interpretations of experiences. Cognitive science posits that these schemas are learned or innate dynamic elements that facilitate our information processing. They function as both data structures and processors, informed by past experiences and influencing future knowledge. This interconnection between past, present, and future is fundamental to the ability of schemas to establish intricate networks of relationships and meanings, thereby affirming their

crucial function in influencing our perception of the world and our interactions within it (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 62). As organic wholes, schemas facilitate the integration of knowledge and action in an intuitive and adaptive manner, allowing for the seamless interweaving of cognitive and behavioral processes. The function of cultural schemas in the transmission and reproduction of diverse understandings within social groups is evident from their significance within cultural contexts. Furthermore, sociocultural influences exert a considerable influence on the formation of our cognitive structures. Schemas are patterns that guide the processing of experiences, the formation of knowledge, and the shaping of practices, though they do not always adhere to conventional pathways. In contrast with the assumption that schemas are fixed entities, research indicates that they are, in fact, highly flexible and adaptable. This adaptability allows them to respond to new information and shifts in the social environment. This dynamic nature enables them to evolve continuously, reflecting changes in both individual and collective understandings, thereby playing a crucial role in the ongoing development of cultural and social landscapes. The following section will expand upon this understanding to encompass a person's physical existence and environment. It is, however, important to note initially that these frameworks exert a significant influence on the way information is interpreted and on the emotional reactions displayed in specific contexts.

6.3.3 Bodily Dimension

The bodily dimension accentuates the pivotal function of physiological and physical processes in the formation of schemata. When this aspect is taken into account, it becomes imperative to investigate and illustrate the manner in which bodily states are intertwined with cognitive and affective functions. The embodied cognition approach significantly enhances our comprehension of schemata by broadening the scope beyond the conventional emphasis on neuronal processes. This approach sheds light on the part that schemata play in decision-making and motivational processes, particularly in how specific emotions linked to these processes can be seen as evolutionary mechanisms that guarantee survival. To illustrate, in situations of acute danger, schemata that have been refined over many years of individual and collective experience are activated and utilized. The concept of schemata, which prepares the body for rapid reactions that are essential for the fight-or-flight response, serves as an exemplar of embodied cognition. At the beginning of the 2000s, the acknowledgment of the embodiment of human sensations and social cognition patterns marked a revolutionary shift away from the prevailing mental reductionism. Previously, reductionist approaches had oversimplified thinking, feeling, and acting to mere neuronal circuits, disregarding the intricate interplay between the body and its environment. Therefore, it is evident that schemata are not merely mental constructs; they are also deeply rooted in physical and physiological

experiences. The development and adaptation of schemata are significantly influenced by these physical and sensory experiences, which assign a fundamental role to them within the framework of embodied cognition. Extensive empirical research (Bruyn 1989) demonstrates that changes in our body perception markedly influence our interpretation of the environment. For example, postural adjustments, such as those occurring after bariatric¹ surgery, can profoundly alter our perception of space, thereby exhibiting how physical changes can reshape our cognitive and perceptual frameworks. Consequently, cognitive processes are not isolated within the brain but are profoundly integrated with our bodily experiences, continually influencing and being influenced by them (Natvik et al. 2019, 101). In this context, *embodiment* signifies that the structural features of our body, beyond the nervous system, critically shape our cognitive experiences. An illustrative example is our binocular vision, facilitated by the specific arrangement of our eyes, which enables us to perceive depth in objects (Gallagher 2005). Similarly, the placement of our ears influences our ability to discern the direction of sounds (Gallagher 2023, 11). Thus, perceptual processes are not merely influenced by body structure—they inherently depend on and incorporate bodily structures (Shapiro 2004, 190).

These insights reveal that schemata are influenced not only by proprioceptive² or motor processes but also by deeper affective processes that encompass emotions, moods, and basic physical states such as hunger, fatigue, and pleasure. The intertwined nature of embodied experiences and schemata collectively constitutes the bedrock of our perception and understanding of the world. Hormonal fluctuations, alterations in body chemistry, and visceral and musculoskeletal processes have a considerable impact on our perception, memory, attention, and decision-making abilities. These bodily processes are integral components of the schemata that shape and guide our interactions with the environment and our processing and response to information (Gallagher 2023, 12). The routine evaluative processes we engage in

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- 1 The term "bariatric" pertains to the medical field that addresses the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of obesity. Bariatric surgeries are surgical procedures conducted on the gastrointestinal tract with the objective of facilitating weight loss, typically in individuals for whom conventional weight loss methods, such as dietary modifications and exercise, have proven ineffective. These surgeries may entail, for instance, the reduction of gastric volume or the alteration of intestinal transit to diminish food intake and/or absorption.
 - 2 Proprioception refers to the perception of the position and movement of one's own body in space as well as the feeling for the position, movement and strength of one's own limbs. It is a form of sensory perception that provides the brain with information about the condition of the muscles, tendons and joints. Proprioceptive signals play a central role in the coordination of movements, balance and posture. They enable the individual to know where different parts of the body are located and how they move, even without visual information. This sense is fundamental for everyday actions such as walking, grasping objects or performing fine motor tasks.

countless times daily are also crucial. These evaluations often occur within cultural and social contexts, for instance, concerning individuals of a different skin color or in regard to their behaviors, eating, drinking, and consumption habits. They are intrinsically linked to the maintenance of physical homeostasis³ (Damasio 2011, 59), which is closely connected to our needs—the regulation of our body, our consciousness, and ultimately our survival. Therefore, neurobiological and neurochemical explanations are indispensable for understanding the nuances of human differentiation.

Embodied cognitions within schemas manifest in a multitude of facets of our everyday lives, thereby providing clear evidence of the profound integration of embodiment into our cognitive frameworks. To illustrate, the acquisition and utilization of language are rooted in the profound intertwining of embodiment with our cognitive structures (Hampe 2017; Ervas, Gola, and Rossi 2017). A critical examination of communication processes leads to the conclusion that meaning is not conveyed through language alone but is augmented by a multitude of physical expressions. It is an inescapable fact that communication invariably occurs in conjunction with gestures, postures, and other physical manifestations that provide context and depth to verbal exchanges (Thiering 2018, 298). For example, the act of nodding or shaking the head not only indicates agreement or disagreement but also confirms or modifies the verbal message. Similarly, actions such as rolling the eyes, taking a deep breath, or raising the eyebrows can indicate irony or skepticism, providing additional layers of meaning beyond the mere words spoken. These physical actions are integral to the schemas that frame our understanding of and reactions to social interactions. These behaviors are deeply embedded in our cognitive schemas and significantly impact our information processing and response tendencies. The complementarity of verbal and non-verbal communication is exemplified by gestures such as raising the hands in surprise or leaning forward to show interest, which enhance or refine the meanings conveyed beyond the verbal content. These physical components of communication illustrate that cognitive schemas encompass both mental and bodily processes. They illustrate the complex interrelationship between physical and cognitive elements in the formation and interpretation of social reality. These insights enhance our comprehension of the ways in which individuals negotiate their social

3 Homeostasis is the process by which living organisms maintain the stability of their internal environment despite changes in their external environment or internal conditions. This process involves a variety of regulatory mechanisms that ensure that essential variables such as body temperature, pH, blood glucose levels and salt concentrations are kept within narrow limits. Homeostasis is fundamental to the health and survival of organisms as it creates a constant and optimal internal environment for the functioning of all body cells and systems. When homeostasis is disturbed, various diseases can occur as the body is no longer able to regulate its internal conditions within vital limits.

environments and express their communicative intentions through a dynamic interplay of verbal and nonverbal means. Linguistic schemas, which develop within cultural communities through social interactions, encapsulate not only cognitive processing but also the bodily experience of the world (Logan 2017). Metaphors provide a clear illustration of this phenomenon, employing bodily experiences such as the sensation of being “high” to denote a positive mood and the sensation of being “low” to denote a negative mood. This significantly shapes how we conceptualize and communicate emotions (Hampe 2017, 117). The role of embodied cognition is further illustrated by the processes of spatial perception and navigation. The human capacity to orient and navigate through space is contingent upon an intricate synergy between cognitive maps, sensory experiences, and bodily movement (O’Keefe and Nadel 1978; Redish 1999; Chrastil and Warren 2014). Similarly, dietary practices and preferences are firmly established within the context of embodied experiences and sociocultural schemas (Vogts and Costandius 2019; Morrison 2002; Rozin 2005). The notion of what is considered palatable or repulsive extends beyond mere personal preference. It is significantly influenced by cultural norms and practices that imbue bodily experiences with specific meanings. The preceding examples establish that embodied cognition has a profound impact on our perceptions, actions, and sensations. This occurs through dynamic interactions with both the physical and social environments, which shape our everyday experiences and the ways in which we engage with the world around us.

The neurochemical regulation by substances in the body provides a molecular-biological foundation for social categorization processes that frequently result in either reward or punishment (Sapolsky 2017, 594; Everett, Faber, and Crockett 2015). This dynamic is analogous to the previously discussed connection between the mesolimbic dopamine system and group identifications (see Chapter 5). Individuals are susceptible to the formation of biased attitudes pertaining to groups, based on arbitrary distinctions, which give rise to “us versus them” sentiments (Gorman and Gorman 2018, 68). The association between selected traits and specific values and beliefs is rapidly established, and this linkage is immediately reinforced by hormones and neurotransmitters that generate feelings of confidence and well-being. The routine evaluation processes exhibit similarities to patterns observed in addictive behavior, particularly with regard to the anticipation of the next reward. These evaluative mechanisms categorize experiences and decisions using a binary code of reward and punishment. This system, which is driven by the release of specific neurotransmitters such as dopamine, plays a pivotal role in our reward system. Furthermore, neuropeptides such as oxytocin and vasopressin facilitate social competence and interest, which in turn give rise to behaviors indicative of empathy, including prolonged eye contact and the recognition of others’ emotions (Fischer-Shofty, Levkovitz, and Shamay-Tsoory 2013; Donaldson and Young 2009). The propensity to fa-

vor one's own group (see Chapter 4), often at the expense of others, is a well-documented phenomenon (Yu et al. 2021; Katsumi and Dolcos 2018; Gorman and Gorman 2018; Riecanaky et al. 2015; Everett, Faber, and Crockett 2015). Furthermore, these evaluations are sometimes reinforced by subsequent rationalizations for negative judgments, illustrating how deeply entrenched and self-reinforcing these neurochemical and social dynamics can be (Haidt 2001, 814).

In the context of human differentiation, group-based identifications are of pivotal importance. It is crucial to acknowledge that the groups under examination are invariably constructed and never homogeneous or monolithic. These concepts were examined in Chapters 3 and 4 in the context of evolutionary and psychological foundations of group dynamics. This establishes the foundation for understanding the role of embodied schemas and their integration within social structural contexts. This form of prosociality, which is deeply embedded in our cognitive, emotional, and physical actions, is not predetermined. This is a crucial realization that is often overlooked in academic discourse. The processes of thinking, acting, and feeling are inextricably linked to affective-cognitive-bodily schemata, which exhibit a comparable structural organization. This observation indicates the presence of a universal foundation for human experience. The consistency of emotional expression is evident not only between individuals in general but also across individuals from diverse societies and sociocultural backgrounds, as previously discussed in this chapter. However, the interpretation of these emotional expressions varies significantly across different cultural contexts. This variability in meaning attribution suggests that cultural codings influence our perception and interpretation of affective states, thereby allowing universal schemata of thinking, acting, and feeling to be recontextualized within specific social and cultural frameworks. This interaction arises from the dynamic interplay between universal human capacities and the diversity of cultural expressions, with cultural encodings playing a pivotal role in shaping both individual and collective identities. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the understanding that schemas are not merely cognitive structures but are also deeply rooted in bodily and affective experiences elucidates that our evaluations of individuals, ideas, and perceptions identified as "other" extend beyond purely mental processes. This is particularly evident in the context of binary-coded meaning attribution processes. An alternative perspective is that they constitute components of a comprehensive system that reflects both internal states and environmental interactions. These evaluations, therefore, represent intricate intersections of personal, social, and evolutionary experiences, emphasizing the nuanced and layered nature of how we perceive and engage with the world. From a systemic-anthropological perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of embodied actions and feelings as essential components within social systems, particularly in the context of feedback loops. These actions and feelings are not isolated; rather, they are con-

tinuously impacting the system, influencing its structure and function. Such actions contribute to the maintenance or modification of system dynamics by conveying information through physical expressions, which are then interpreted and processed by other members of the system. These interactions facilitate the system's capacity to adapt to internal and external changes, thereby maintaining or realigning systemic homeostasis. These embodied processes either affirm or challenge social norms, thereby facilitating an ongoing recalibration of the system and supporting its development and adaptability. This perspective illuminates the pivotal role of embodied interactions in the dynamic and continuous shaping of social systems, emphasizing the integral function of physical and emotional expressions in the collective life of a community.

6.3.4 Extended Dimensions of Schemata

The “extended mind” theory, which is often referred to as an “extended” or “externalist” approach to cognition, broadens the concept of social cognition by extending it beyond the individual's body to include external factors. This perspective broadens traditional views by incorporating external elements, including tools and technologies, social interactions, and environmental factors, into the framework of cognitive functioning (Gallagher 2023, 19). Since its inception in the early 2010s, the externalist approach to cognition has diversified, significantly enriching our understanding of cognitive processes (Menary 2010; Rowlands 2010; Rupert 2009).

The research into the extended mind hypothesis is typically classified into three theoretical “waves” (Telakivi 2023, 20). The *initial wave*, established by Clark and Chalmers, is grounded in functionalism and concentrates on the function of external elements within the cognitive system. In this view, instruments and artifacts that we utilize are considered part of our cognitive system insofar as they enable us to perceive and categorize aspects of our environment that would otherwise be inaccessible. This is articulated through the parity principle, a fundamental tenet of extended cognition theory, which postulates that an external tool or source of information can be regarded as an integral component of an individual's cognitive system if it performs the same functional task as an internal element of the cognitive process (A.C. Clark 2012; A. Clark and Chalmers 1998). In accordance with the parity principle, if an external element is incorporated into the cognitive processing system in a manner that renders it functionally equivalent to an internal cognitive process and facilitates the resolution of a cognitive task, it should be accorded the same cognitive status as an internal process. This principle challenges the traditional boundaries between the mind and the external world, suggesting that cognitive activities are not confined to the brain but can extend into the environment, provided that external factors function equivalently to internal cognitive mechanisms. This expanded view of cognition posits that individuals

are inextricably linked with their material and social environments. The theory suggests that these external elements play a significant role in assisting individuals in overcoming cognitive challenges (A. Clark and Chalmers 1998). In the *second wave* of the extended mind theory, the parity principle established by the first wave is set aside in favor of concepts such as complementarity and integration (Telakivi 2023, 21). The second wave of the extended mind theory explores the intricate dynamics between external and internal cognitive functions, emphasizing complementarity over equivalence. This nuanced approach suggests that external tools or environments need not mirror the cognitive functions they support or extend. Rather, they can provide distinct, yet complementary, advantages that enhance overall cognitive ability. To illustrate, although a notebook may not process information in the same way as the brain, it serves as a dependable external memory repository, thereby liberating cognitive resources for other tasks. This distinction allows for a broader understanding of cognitive augmentation, whereby different types of cognitive processes—whether internal or external—can work together in a synergistic fashion, with each contributing unique strengths that are not necessarily interchangeable but are mutually beneficial. By moving beyond the search for functional equivalence, this wave introduces a more flexible understanding of how external elements can integrate into cognitive processes, facilitating a richer and more effective cognitive system. This approach permits a more expansive range of technologies and artifacts to be regarded as authentic extensions of the mind. It emphasizes the way these elements augment cognitive capabilities by functioning in conjunction with internal processes, as opposed to merely replicating them. The *third wave* of the extended mind theory represents a comprehensive synthesis that builds on the insights from the initial and second waves, integrating these perspectives into a more holistic understanding of cognition (Gallagher 2023, 25). This wave takes a broad and inclusive view, exploring a diverse range of connections that span from the biological—such as neurons—to technological and sociocultural elements—like smartphones and writing practices. In this way, the discussion addresses gaps that may have been overlooked in earlier analyses, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnections between diverse tools and practices and the cognitive processes they influence. This latest wave challenges the conventional boundaries that have traditionally distinguished the internal from the external, as well as the natural from the artificial. The hypothesis put forth is that these divisions are not inherent or fixed but rather constructed through ongoing developmental and cultural processes. Accordingly, these boundaries are regarded as permeable and fluid, continuously shaped and reshaped by historical, societal, and technological forces. This perspective advocates for a dynamic view of cognition as a process that is perpetually evolving, shaped by a constant interplay between internal capabilities and external resources. The proposal suggests that cognitive frameworks are not only shaped by immediate physical and sensory stimuli but are also

significantly influenced by broader cultural and social constructs that evolve over time. In light of these considerations, the third wave encourages a reassessment of the conceptualization and comprehension of cognitive elements, advocating a perspective of cognition that is malleable, receptive to novel integrations, and responsive to cultural and technological advancements.

As we integrate increasingly intricate elements into our conceptualization of schemas, it becomes evident that the unpredictability and non-linearity of individual and collective actions concomitantly increase. This complexity presents a significant challenge to the prediction of behaviors based solely on schemas, given their function to simplify and categorize human experiences. As schemas encompass a wider range of influences, including biological, environmental, and complex social dynamics, they evolve from deterministic models to probabilistic ones. The interactions among these diverse variables, some of which may be unknown or only partially understood, contribute to the reduced predictability of actions. For example, the advent of new technology has the potential to alter social behaviors and cognitive processes in unforeseen ways, suggesting that influences on cognition may extend beyond immediate and apparent factors. This recognition of inherent unpredictability and non-linearity requires a cautious and nuanced approach to the study of human behavior. Consequently, the necessity of continuous research and adaptation in cognitive and social sciences is acknowledged, with the objective of refining theoretical models to more accurately reflect the dynamic nature of schemas and their extensive, interdependent influences.

6.3.5 Enactivist Dimensions of Schemata

The enactive approach offers a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion on differentiation schemata. It focuses on the dynamic interactions between organisms and their environments as the foundational elements for differentiation processes. Within this framework, the comprehensive 4E approach to social cognition—embodied, embedded, extended, enactive—merges these elements, rendering the distinctions between them largely inconsequential. Of particular relevance to our investigation of differentiation and categorization practices, enactivism draws upon a range of theories that incorporate phenomenological and systems-theoretical analyses of empathy, thereby providing novel insights and perspectives into social cognition (Schlicht 2023, 107; Gallagher 2023, 30; Colombetti 2013; T. Fuchs 2018; Zahavi 2014; Telakivi 2023, 12). Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, the pioneers of enactivism, initially articulated the concept that the mind is best understood as a form of embodied action. They introduced the term ‘embodiment’ to describe the multiple sensorimotor capacities of an organism (F.J. Varela, Rosch, and Thompson 1991, 172). These capacities are not isolated phenomena; rather, they are deeply intertwined with a multitude of biological,

psychological, and cultural contexts. By emphasizing the pivotal interconnection between mental states and embodied and embedded action, enactivism aimed to offer a compelling alternative to conventional mental theories that accord primacy to representation as their central tenet (Hutto and Myin 2013, 4).

The enactivist approach presents a challenge to the tenets of established cognitive theories, including those positing the primacy of theory of mind, modularity, and simulation. These theories are primarily founded upon computational and representational paradigms. In contrast, enactivism provides a critique of the rigid cognitivism inherent in these approaches (Telakivi 2023, 13) and proposes an alternative understanding of mental states that integrates their embodied nature and their intrinsic connection to the body (Schlicht 2023, 108). This integrative perspective elucidates the pivotal function of action—or enaction—in molding and adapting cognitive structures to the environment. Consequently, cognition is conceptualized as a form of embodied action. In this view, cognitive processes emerge from the repetition of sensorimotor patterns of perception and action, with each interaction contributing to the formation of cognitive development. In alignment with the systems theory paradigm, enactivism depicts living entities as dynamic systems engaged in continuous interaction with their surrounding environment. These systems are responsive, adapting to changes and perpetually refining their engagement with the surrounding context. This approach emphasizes the operational coherence and critical integration of cognitive systems with their environment, illustrating the profound intertwining of cognitive processes with the external world. This interplay exerts an influence not only on immediate responses but also on the formation of long-term cognitive adaptations (Colombetti 2014, 115). This approach is predicated on the notion that cognition is to be understood as enactivist action, a concept that diverges from the previously discussed dimensions of schemata in its systemic interaction with the environment. The environment is not merely regarded as a passive context; rather, it is considered an active and integral part of the cognitive system. Accordingly, meanings are not merely perceived; they are actively created and transformed through the dynamic interaction of perception, action, and the environment. This conceptualization views cognitive processes not as isolated mental functions, but rather as profoundly integrated with physical interactions and environmental contexts. This relational field is not merely a backdrop for cognitive activities; rather, it is an active participant in the formation and function of cognitive processes, continuously shaped and reshaped by these interactions (Telakivi 2023, 13). In this context, the term “relational” is employed to delineate the dynamic interactions between cognitive processes and the environment. This perspective posits that the environment is not merely a passive backdrop, but rather, actively shapes cognitive processes. This concept acknowledges that the mind is engaged in a continuous dialogue with external entities, including people, objects, cultural norms, and physical spaces, which, in turn, exert influence on cognitive activities. This per-

spective challenges the notion of the mind as an isolated processing unit and instead acknowledges its intrinsic connection with the surrounding environment. It posits that the mind is continuously responding to and influencing the conditions under which it operates. The relational field challenges the traditional view of cognition as confined to the brain. In contrast, the relational field posits that cognitive processes are fundamentally situated and dependent on ongoing interactions. In this way, the environment is regarded as an active participant in cognitive processes, providing resources that extend capabilities and setting constraints that guide development. This transition from an internalist perspective to a more integrated model redefines cognition as both a product and a producer of the relational dynamics with which it engages. The concept of a relational field in cognitive processes enhances our comprehension of intersectionality by illustrating how individual experiences and cognitive structures are profoundly influenced by overlapping social categories, including race, gender, class, and sexuality. The relational field postulates that cognitive processes are subject to dynamic influence from interactions with the environment. This perspective is consistent with the tenets of intersectionality, which elucidate the manner in which the convergence of diverse social identities impacts individual experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, the influence of human differentiation on cognitive processes is evident, as societal categorizations based on these identities markedly impact the formation of both individual and collective cognitive frameworks. The concept of relationality not only elucidates the interconnectedness of social factors and cognitive processes but also emphasizes the profound impact of social structures on cognitive evolution. In accordance with the enactivist perspective, schemata do not merely process information and associated meanings in a simplified, computational manner. Instead, they actively generate meaningful patterns through interaction with the sensorimotor network, thereby establishing the crucial importance of direct, physical engagement with the world in cognitive processing. Consequently, this perspective represents a significant departure from traditional, representation-based theories of cognition, offering a more dynamic and interactive understanding of the subject matter (Overton 2008, 55). The brain and the entire nervous system are not simply hardware; rather, they constitute an autonomous, self-organizing, and self-reproducing—i.e., autopoietic—system. This system actively creates its own meaningful patterns in interaction with the sensorimotor network, a concept that displays the brain's role not as a passive recipient of information but as an active participant in its interpretation (Willans, Rivers, and Prasolova-Førland 2016, 195). Consequently, the environment in which a person operates cannot be viewed as a predetermined or statically defined space that is directly represented in the brain. Instead, it is conceptualized as a relational field, dynamically shaped by the continuous interaction between the individual and their environment (Overton 2008, 56). This approach recognizes experience not merely as an epiphenomenal by-product of cognitive processing, but as a central compo-

nent of the system-environment interaction. It points out the bidirectional influence between an individual and their surroundings, suggesting that our cognitive structures are both shaped by and instrumental in shaping our interactions with the world. This reciprocal relationship is fundamental to the development and adaptation of our cognitive schemata, reflecting a more integrated and dynamic view of cognition (F.J. Varela et al. 2017; F.J. Varela, Rosch, and Thompson 1991, 199). The interrelated disciplines of systems theory, phenomenology, and cognitive science, when considered together, offer insights into the complexity of human experience. Each of these disciplines contributes unique perspectives and methodologies to this integrative approach, which collectively explore the intricate dynamics of human experience. In the enactivist understanding of schemata, aspects of willpower and morality are integrated seamlessly into the context of action-oriented interactions. The exercise of willpower and the performance of moral actions are both subject to the influence of social interactions and cultural practices. The way individuals perceive and morally evaluate their options for action is influenced by their integration within specific social networks and cultural practices. Schemata of differentiation function as a meta-program within the human system, facilitating both self-preservation in the sense of autopoiesis (discussed in the following subchapter) and the regulation of relationships with external social systems. As previously stated, these schemata are deeply embedded in cognitive, emotional, and physical processes, exerting influence over the manner in which information is processed, decisions are made, and actions are executed. These form the fundamental structure through which both individual and collective identities are established and sustained. In enactivist theory, knowledge and meaning emerge through action and interaction with the environment. Schemata of differentiation form internal models that define and stabilize individual and social identities through automated processes, yet do not rigidly fix them. Schemata are dynamic and adaptable, thereby exemplifying their function in the self-preservation of the individual system. Concurrently, they facilitate flexible adaptation to evolving social contexts. A significant argument for the function of schemata of differentiation as meta-programs is their capacity to internalize social roles and expectations, thereby aligning individual actions with prevailing social norms and values. This concept is further elucidated in Section 8.3, which addresses the mechanisms of subjectivation and conditioning. These mechanisms facilitate an individual's comprehension of their role within a social system and enable them to engage in behaviors that are consistent with societal expectations. These schemas are instrumental in navigating the complexities of social environments, providing individuals with consistent behavioral and interactive patterns that are in harmony with established norms. The mutual influence exerted by individual schemas of differentiation and social structures is elucidated by the interplay between the two. Social systems, including families, educational institutions, workplaces, and cultural bodies, provide the external conditions that

foster the growth and alteration of these schemas. Consequently, these systems exert a significant influence on the reinforcement or diminution of schemas, thereby influencing the dominant behaviors and identity traits within a culture. The concept of prereflective consciousness, as put forth by Paul Ricoeur, lends further support to this argument by demonstrating how schemata of differentiation operate at a profound, frequently unconscious level (Ricoeur 1968; Hems and Ricoeur 1971, 250). According to Ricoeur, these schemas subtly guide our volitional actions and moral judgments, functioning without the necessity for conscious thought (Vinicio 2023). This prereflective guidance facilitates a fluid integration of individual behaviors with societal expectations, substantiating the role of schemas as internal frameworks that not only reflect but also sustain the social order. The internalization of social roles through the dual processes of subjectivation and conditioning, as discussed in Chapter 8.3, is a crucial aspect for individuals to effectively comprehend and navigate their positions within social systems. This enables them to respond adaptively to social cues and pressures. The reciprocal relationship between individual actions and societal structures, which is mediated through schemas, represents a dynamic process. In this process, social norms are both shaped by and in turn shape individual behaviors, creating a cycle of social influence and adaptation. Schemas facilitate the recognition of actions as “our own” while simultaneously enabling compliance with social norms. The capacity to make decisions is contingent upon the reliance on pre-structured, often unconscious schema patterns, which act as a framework delineating the space of potential decision-making. Schemas are not merely passive filters; rather, they are active shapers of our interactions with the world, helping us to reduce complexity and evaluate action options. These interactions are shaped by social and cultural schemas that affect behavior and decision-making processes. The enactivist perspective challenges the assumption that “selfhood” is a fixed and independent foundation for action. Instead, it proposes that the sense of selfhood is the result of ongoing, dynamic processes that are influenced by social and cultural factors. In this context, it becomes evident that schemas are not merely reactive adaptations but actively contribute to shaping and changing the social environment. Through continuous interaction and feedback between individuals and social systems, schemas of differentiation are both reinforced and transformed. This dynamic interplay shapes individual and collective identity, fostering social cohesion while also driving social change. Daniel Wegner posits that the belief in free will is an illusion created by social and cultural mechanisms (Wegner 2004, 653). Individuals in Western societies often attribute their actions to conscious decision-making, though these decisions are frequently influenced by unconscious processes and prevailing social norms. This perspective supports the contention that free will is an illusion, analogous to the historical geocentric view of the universe. Consequently, the concepts of selfhood and willpower emerge as constructive illusions, facilitating effective navigation within intricate social structures. In his dis-

course on Western societal norms, Wegner emphasizes the ideal of human agency (Wegner 2002), which he articulates through a tripartite 'thought-will-action model' (Preston and Wegner 2005, 106). This model delineates agency as 'conscious, effortful, and intentional.' Intention, typically perceived as a premeditative state, manifests in consciousness shortly before the execution of an action. In the context of enactivism, the anthropological model of volition (Murphy and Throop 2010) is expanded to emphasize the dynamic interplay between the individual and the environment. The enactive approach to cognition asserts that intentions and actions do not simply arise from discrete conscious processes at the level of social cognition. Instead, they are cultivated through ongoing interactions with the environment and social contexts. Consequently, intentions are not merely the result of internal cognitive processes; they also emerge from mutual adaptation to and resonance with the environment. In light of this framework, Wegner's "thought-will-action model" is reinterpreted as a process whereby conscious intention is shaped and guided by a complex network of physical actions, sensory experiences, and social interactions. From a systemic anthropological perspective, the source of an intention—whether it arises from conscious awareness or is predetermined, as discussed in various academic contexts—is inconsequential. This approach posits that social systems function by generating and maintaining structures through recursive processes. Consequently, individual intentions and states of consciousness are profoundly enmeshed within the intricate social and cultural dynamics that shape them. In essence, this also renders the linear pursuit of the "origin" of an intention futile. These dynamics significantly influence behavior and decision-making processes within these systems. This is based on the understanding that individual agency and societal constructs are deeply interdependent. Accordingly, volitional and moral actions should not be considered in isolation, but rather as embedded within the recursive processes of social systems. These actions emerge from intricate interactions between individual intentions and the cultural and social dynamics that inform behavior. Consequently, an individual's moral decisions and actions are shaped not only by personal convictions but also by the structural influences and normative expectations of the social system in which they operate. When viewed in this light, acts of will and moral judgments are less expressions of autonomous decision-making and more manifestations of the reciprocal influence between the individual and the social context. This indicates that an individual's will and morality are shaped and directed by existing cultural schemas and social norms. Schemas, as meta-programs, provide preconscious structures that facilitate decision-making and moral actions. Furthermore, embodied actions illustrate this connection, demonstrating how cultural and social imprints are deeply integrated into daily behavior. For example, rituals and symbolic gestures manifest and reinforce cultural values and social structures, which in turn are shaped and reaffirmed by individual actions. It can therefore be argued that embodied actions are not merely expressions of internal states

but are in fact active engagements in and reproductions of social systems. The conscious experience of intention and moral choice is thus the result of an enactive process, wherein the individual engages in continual interaction with their environment. Schemata structure these interactions, enabling actions to be experienced as coherent and intentional, even when they are deeply rooted in unconscious and social contexts. From an enactive perspective, cognition and understanding emerge from action-oriented interactions with the environment. The evolution of schemata of differentiation enables individuals to construct meanings and learn by actively engaging with their surroundings. Schemata not only direct actions but also establish the foundation for subsequent learning and development, which is significantly influenced by the cultural and social environment. The enactivist approach brings to the fore the malleability and responsiveness of cognitive processes, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the interrelationship between individual actions, cognitive structures, and the socio-cultural milieu. This demonstrates how cognitive systems develop and function through a dynamic feedback loop comprising action, reflection, and adaptation. This establishes the fluid nature of cognition and its continuous evolution in response to environmental changes.

6.3.6 Autopoietic Dimension of Schemata

The concept of autopoiesis, developed in the 1980s (Maturana and Varela 1980) and subsequently applied to social systems as detailed in Chapter 2, describes how living systems autonomously produce and regenerate their structures and components through ongoing internal interactions and transformations (Luhmann 1996, 61). These autopoietic processes enable living systems to maintain their identities over time and to differentiate themselves from their environments. A fundamental characteristic of autopoietic systems is the establishment of a physical boundary that distinguishes them from their external environment, thereby enabling their existence as discrete entities within a given spatial context. In the field of cognitive science, the concept of autopoiesis has informed approaches that view cognition as an active, embodied, and environmentally integrated process, where perception and action are inextricably linked. Schemas, which are not static entities but rather dynamic and not solely anchored in cognitive, affective, or physical realms, should be regarded as living entities that continuously interact with the world and act as generators of meaning. They play a foundational role in the structuring and interpretation of experiences, undergoing constant evolution through the integration of new information and responses to environmental changes. This ongoing dynamic constitutes an integral part of the essence of autopoiesis, which is defined as the principle of self-organization and continuous renewal that is fundamental to living systems. Within the autopoiesis theory framework, schemas are regarded as exemplars of the self-organizing properties of living systems, which are pivotal

for comprehending their capacity to generate and evolve meaning. The autopoietic perspective on schemata, as explored in this book, provides a comprehensive understanding of the development and transformation of cognitive, affective, bodily, and social system structures through ongoing interactions between individuals and their environments. The principle of autopoiesis, which describes the self-organization of social groups and societies, elucidates the way these entities maintain and adapt their structures through internal processes, thereby preserving their identity and coherence. This self-organizational process is integral to understanding human differentiation, as it reveals how social and cultural identities are continually renegotiated and redefined through systemic interactions. Moreover, schemata are in a constant state of adaptation, assimilating new experiences and information, which can result in shifts in perceptions and evaluations of social groups. Similarly, an autopoietic system is capable of proactively adjusting to environmental changes in order to maintain its viability. This adaptability is of great consequence for the evolution of social norms and values and plays a foundational role in the emergence and transformation of differentiation processes. The theory of autopoiesis emphasizes the significance of recursive processes in the sustenance and evolution of systemic structures. This principle has significant implications for the understanding of cultural codes as mediators of structural coupling. The concept of recursion can be defined as a mechanism through which systems employ their own processes for the purposes of continuation and development. This process facilitates self-organization and self-regulation based on the continuous feedback between past and future states of the system. In the context of cognitive schemata, recursive mechanisms are demonstrated in the shaping of future perceptions and actions based on past experiences. This dynamic illustrates how cultural codes function as pivotal elements within the recursive cycle of experience, interpretation, and adaptation. New experiences are interpreted in light of existing schemas, with cultural codes both providing the framework for this interpretation and being modified by the ongoing integration of new perceptions into existing schemas. In this manner, they facilitate the system's ability to adapt to future situations and challenges. Furthermore, recursive processes and the role of cultural codes are of central importance with regard to human differentiation. They elucidate the way historical and cultural contexts shape contemporary social dynamics. Individual and collective identities and social structures are formed and reconfigured through the repeated application and modification of schemata in response to new experiences within given cultural frameworks. Cultural codes serve as mediators of structural coupling, facilitating and guiding the continuous interaction between the cognitive system and its socio-cultural environment. This demonstrates the transformative capacity of recursive processes and cultural codes in the ongoing evolution and differentiation of societies. They uphold or alter historically determined social patterns, thereby shedding light on the adaptive nature of cognitive and social systems. They facilitate a deeper

comprehension of the manner in which social categories and distinctions are not merely perceived but are actively generated and sustained. A detailed analysis of the interactions between schemata and autopoiesis in the context of human differentiation introduces new perspectives on the complexity and dynamics of social identities and differentiation patterns. Further, it reveals the transformative power of schemata as dynamic, autopoietic meaning generators. Schemata are not merely structures for organizing data; they are active agents in the process of meaning generation. They produce new interpretations and understandings continually through their interactions with the environment and with each other. This understanding is grounded in the significance of the human capacity to engage in conscious reflection and modification of schemata, which represents a pivotal step in transcending “schematically conditioned” responses and fostering more analytical and critical thinking. By questioning and adapting their schemata, individuals and groups actively contribute to the evolution of social structures and the reshaping of social identities. These processes of reflection and modification stress the crucial part played by both individual cognition and collective social practices in the dynamic processes of social categorization and identity construction. This is a continuous cycle of self-organization and adaptation that is deeply embedded in the autopoietic nature of schemata.

6.4 Binary-Coded Affective Meaning Attribution within Schemata (BCAS)

The following section presents a novel reconceptualization of an element of the schemata that has received minimal attention to date: the binary-coded and affective meaning attribution processes. This is achieved through the utilization of the aforementioned theories, in conjunction with Bateson's differentiation approach and the neurobiological findings pertaining to emotions. These processes, which are abbreviated as BCAS, describe the way emotional meanings are binary-coded and attributed. The model demonstrates that affective responses to stimuli are structured by fundamental dichotomous categories, such as pleasant/unpleasant or safe/unsafe. This enables the rapid and efficient processing of emotional information. This is of critical importance for real-time responses and provides the foundation for automated decision-making in cognitive systems. Furthermore, BCAS elucidates how an initial affective response undergoes a transformation through cognitive processing, resulting in a more differentiated and contextually adapted perception. This transformation is fundamental to comprehension and interaction with the environment and is instrumental in reducing and structuring complexity.

A crucial point of connection between cognition, affect, and physiology is the potential for automated schematizations to supersede or even supplant reflective

deliberation and analytical thinking (F.B. Simon 1993, 180). Analytical or logical-discursive thinking, which occurs in the cerebral cortex, necessitates conscious exertion and motivation to engage in reflection. In the absence of such effort, schemata are triggered as intrinsic parameters of self-organization and self-generation. Such automatisms frequently result in hasty judgments and decisions that are based on deeply entrenched but potentially insufficiently questioned premises. In the context of human differentiation, this indicates that behaviors of solidarity or non-solidarity are predominantly, if not exclusively, rooted in such schemata. In the absence of conscious reflection or questioning, the behavioral patterns resulting from these schemas tend to remain continuously activated. Schemata are based on group-based behaviors that are triggered neurochemically, for example by dopamine, and elicit either pleasant or unpleasant feelings. Consequently, it is, in fact, more favorable, in a literal sense, to adopt the perspective of one's own group in an uncritical manner. The role of hormones and neurochemical processes is largely automated, which often means that we are unaware of why an encounter with a person who is anchored in our mental schemata as "the other" triggers specific emotional reactions. This processual and dynamic nature of schemata is further reflected in their formation across affective, cognitive, and bodily levels. Notwithstanding the segregation of these domains in language, emotion, and cognition, which are situated in disparate regions of the brain, they constitute an integrated system in the context of the schemata conceptualized here. The inclination towards integration within human systems (see Chapters 3 and 4) frequently results in a convergence between cognitive and affective processes. In instances where this is not the case, efforts are made to instigate a state of harmony. On occasion, individuals embark on a frantic quest for justifications and evidence to substantiate the notion that "the others" should be regarded as "bad, evil, stupid, underdeveloped, or unemancipated." This dynamic interaction regulates specific coordinations of thinking and feeling, whereby the dichotomous logic of distinctions plays a pivotal role in affective meaning attribution processes. All schemata are founded upon a logic of differentiation that evokes a particular affective response. Many of these are linked to binary-coded dimensions of meaning that enable rapid action and represent a strategy for reducing complexity. The findings of cultural studies indicate that individuals from disparate cultural backgrounds encode emotional meanings in a comparable manner. No intermediate stages are observed in dichotomously coded schemas (Osgood, May, and Miron 1975; Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1967).

The capacity for more nuanced distinctions and abstract reflection, which is distinct from the binary thinking characteristic of the limbic system, emerges in the domain of logical-discursive thinking, which occurs within the cerebral cortex. The binary codes of affective meaning identified in the empirical studies—active vs. passive, strong vs. weak, good vs. bad—function as cognitive shortcuts, enabling rapid judgments and decisions. These binary-coded semantics, which can be identified in

over twenty different linguistic contexts, facilitate expeditious decision-making by merely ascribing meanings and provide a rudimentary orientation framework for individual and collective action. Abstract thinking is less dichotomous in nature, as it extends beyond the confines of simple either/or reasoning and facilitates a more profound and intricate examination of concepts and phenomena. While cultural studies analyses, such as those conducted by Osgood and colleagues, demonstrate that individuals from disparate cultural backgrounds encode emotional meanings in analogous ways, frequently exhibiting a proclivity towards dichotomous categorization. However, the limitations of this approach are revealed when attempting to encapsulate complex realities. The aforementioned cognitive shortcuts, which facilitate rapid decision-making and action, are inherently dichotomous in nature. This leaves little room for nuances and finer gradations, which are of paramount importance in human experience and perception. In contrast, logical-discursive thinking, which occurs in the cerebral cortex, enables us to move beyond binary categories and to discern and process nuances and the intricacies of situations and concepts. This allows for the comprehension of concepts not merely as antithetical entities, but as situated within a spectrum of possibilities, encompassing a multitude of positions. Osgood and colleagues employed the semantic differential technique to examine the emotional evaluation of terms and concepts across diverse cultural contexts. The semantic differential is a research tool that is employed to ascertain the connotations that individuals ascribe to different words and concepts. The findings of the investigation demonstrated that there are indeed patterns in the way emotional meanings are encoded across cultures. The binary opposites under examination are an integral part of a broader affective space, which can be divided into three main dimensions. These dimensions include evaluation (good vs. bad), potency (strong vs. weak), and activity (active vs. passive). These dimensions are of fundamental importance, as they reveal universal patterns of affective meaning attribution that are consistent across different languages and cultures. They facilitate a more profound comprehension of the manner in which affective meanings are organized, exerting a considerable impact on emotional reactions to both linguistic and non-linguistic stimuli. The introduction of binary-coded affective meaning attributions (BCAS) builds upon this approach by employing binary categories to facilitate rapid and efficient processing of emotional responses. This process employs straightforward yet significant dichotomies, such as pleasant/unpleasant or safe/unsafe, which facilitate the structured and expeditious processing of intricate emotional data. Such coding is particularly efficacious for real-time responses to emotional stimuli and is indispensable for supporting automated decision-making in cognitive systems and artificial intelligence. The BCAS model illuminates the profound integration of emotions into cognitive processes by focusing on the continuous interaction between affective reactions and cognitive evaluation mechanisms. Immediate emotional reactions are systematically modulated by cognitive structures in order to form ap-

propriate responses to environmental stimuli. The initial emotional reaction is then refined by the cerebral cortex, which generates a situation-appropriate and adapted response that integrates both cognitive and affective components. This integrative view provides an expanded framework for understanding the interaction between emotion and cognition and demonstrates how affective responses are modified and controlled by cognitive contexts.

The study by Osgood and colleagues represents a foundational contribution to the field of emotional universality research, with significant implications for advancing our understanding of human communication and interaction. The study demonstrates that, despite cultural variations, specific affective meanings are universally applicable. This suggests the existence of shared human experiences and a common psychological foundation. Additional cross-cultural studies targeting binary-coded semantics have provided further evidence to corroborate these findings. As evidenced by research in comparative psychology and anthropology, analogous emotional responses to specific situations and concepts are observed in individuals across diverse cultural contexts, substantiating the proposition that emotional meanings are universally applicable. Further comparative studies have yielded additional evidence that certain aspects of human behavior, particularly those pertaining to emotionality, are too universal to be fully explained by culture-specific factors alone (Ekman 2021; Tomasello 2022; Antweiler 2016).

The BCAS operate on a level of temporal immediacy, whereby the reactions and attributions are initially pre-reflexive. This immediacy ensures that the initial reactions and attributions are largely similar across cultures. However, as soon as conscious reflection commences in the cerebral cortex, which is markedly influenced by socio-cultural contexts, these universal principles lose their direct applicability. Reflection allows for the consideration of cultural nuances and individual experiences, thereby facilitating a highly differentiated interpretation that varies considerably from one individual to another and from one culture to another. Therefore, while the immediate, binary-coded processes are universally applicable, their meaning and interpretation can differ significantly due to socio-culturally shaped reflections. It is important to exercise caution to avoid reductionism regarding the principles of BCAS, as they are integral to understanding schemata as conceptualized in this book. The universal element in the meaning attribution processes discussed in this subsection is based on the view that schemata are multidimensional systems that mediate between subjective experience and the external world. Functioning as catalysts, they facilitate rapid reactions and automated action. Notwithstanding the introduction of a multitude of linguistic and cultural nuances, affective attributions frequently adhere to a remarkably straightforward, binary logic. This results in a dichotomy between opposing states, such as good and bad. This reductionism permits the effective communication and processing of complex affective meanings.

Moreover, there is the additional factor of complexity reduction in relation to orientation. As discussed in Chapter 2, the distinction between system and environment is useful in understanding how individuals reduce the complexity of their environment. In this context, systems, specifically schemata, utilize differentiation to process information and establish order within the perceived environment. BCAS play a crucial role in facilitating the rapid orientation process. They function as highly efficacious filters, simplifying the complexity of environmental information by categorizing it into emotionally charged, binary groups, such as pleasant/unpleasant or safe/unsafe. This mode of information processing enables individuals to react promptly to pertinent environmental stimuli and to develop adaptive behaviors that are vital for their well-being and survival. Binary coding not only permits the differentiation between pertinent and superfluous stimuli but also serves to safeguard the identity and integrity of the system by delineating clear boundaries between the system itself and its environment. This fundamental principle of differentiation is essential for individuals to effectively navigate and make decisions in a dynamic environment. This allows the system to circumvent threats and capitalize on opportunities. This establishes a direct correlation between perception, emotional evaluation, and action. The observation by Gregory Bateson that understanding and cognition originate from the transformation of a difference (Bateson 1991; 1999, 412) has significant implications for the functioning of human cognition and communication within the context of BCAS. In other words, information does not exist in and of itself; rather, it is a construct that emerges through the act of differentiating between two or more entities. This difference-guided cognitive program indicates that understanding is initially based on a binary logic that builds on the identification and processing of differences. It also suggests that meaning is generated in the course of this perception and not from “reality” *per se*. Binary coding, or the recognition of differences in the sense of “this, not that,” forms the foundation upon which information is generated and processed. Therefore, understanding and recognition are defined by a transformation of difference, indicating that cognitive processes are oriented towards identifying contrasts and changes (Dehaene, Sergent, and Changeux 2003; Dehaene 2011). The capacity to discern and respond to (typically structured dichotomously) differences is indispensable for adaptation and survival in a complex and constantly evolving environment. Binary coding represents an efficient means of extracting meaningful information from the infinite variety of environmental stimuli. The transformation of difference, particularly within BCAS, represents an irrefutable mechanism through which the perception of differentiation—the indispensable foundation for the genesis of information and meaning—is translated into conscious cognition. This irrefutable premise that comprehension and acknowledgment emerge from the alteration of a distinction unequivocally substantiates the assertion that information and meaning are not inherent entities. Rather, they emerge exclusively

through the conscious perception and interpretation of contrasts. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the perception of color. While light waves exist objectively, it is the processing of these light waves by the human brain, specifically the differentiation between wavelengths, that enables the experience of color. The thesis that meaning is created through the transformation of differences is substantiated by the fact that color as such does not exist without cognitive processing. In the context of BCAS, it becomes evident that the original, immediate affective response, which is rooted in a binary difference model, is transformed into a more differentiated cognition through cognitive processing in the cerebral cortex. This pivotal transformation, which entails becoming aware of and reflecting upon the initial affective reaction, facilitates a more profound and sophisticated interpretation of perceived differences. The transformation of difference thus proves to be a fundamental component of human cognition and communication. It weaves a complex web of meanings and understandings from the simple identification of binary-coded differences. This mechanism acts as the foundation for the development of understanding and the interpretation of the environment. It enables us to transcend the limitations of direct, affective reactions and engage with the reality we experience in a conscious and reflective manner. In conclusion, the difference-based cognitive program represents an indispensable component of the human understanding process. The difference-based cognitive program implies that the recognition of differences occurs through the interplay of cognitive judgments, affective evaluations, and bodily sensations. In autopoietic systems, binary coding represents one aspect of a broader process of meaning attribution. Affective components, such as joy, fear, or sadness, which are triggered by specific stimuli and bodily sensations, such as hunger, pain, or relaxation, play a substantial role in the interpretation and evaluation of information. These processes are not merely reactive; they are also self-organizing and self-producing. This implies that schemata actively adapt and develop their structures on the basis of experiences and interactions with the environment. The interplay between bodily states and affective reactions is evident in the dimensions of evaluation, potency, and activity, which structure the previously mentioned affective space. Sensory experiences, such as the sensation of warmth from the sun or the feeling of coolness from water, influence the emotional valence (evaluation) of an event. These experiences have a significant impact on whether a moment is perceived as pleasant or unpleasant. The perception of a given moment is directly influenced by the affective evaluation of that moment. Moreover, physical sensations influence the perception of power or control within a given situation. A person's physical strength or exhaustion can alter their perceived potency (dominance or inferiority) when facing external challenges or during interactions. The level of physical activity, whether increased or decreased, has a direct impact on the arousal level associated with emotional states, ranging from high excitement and alertness to calmness and relaxation.

This, in turn, plays a crucial role in shaping responsiveness to environmental stimuli. BCAS represent an efficacious method of interacting with the environment, as they expedite the processing of information, facilitate adaptive behaviors, and are indispensable for maintaining system boundaries. These mechanisms play a pivotal role in the evolution and long-term stability of the system by establishing a connection between the internal and external environments.

Jaak Panksepp's research in affective neuroscience provides a fundamental neurobiological foundation for the BCAS model, as evidenced by his illustration of the binary-coded structures of emotional processing (Panksepp 1998). Panksepp identified neural circuits corresponding to basic emotional systems such as SEEKING (seeking behavior), FEAR (fear), RAGE (anger), and JOY (joy). These systems operate as binary functions within the brain, being either activated or deactivated in response to stimuli. This binary operation allows for a clear, direct response—either activating or remaining inactive depending on the stimulus. For instance, a threatening stimulus triggers the FEAR system, prompting immediate behaviors aimed at protection or escape, encapsulating a binary decision: respond or not. Similarly, the activation of the SEEKING system elicits either exploratory or goal-directed behaviors to pursue rewards or novel stimuli, showcasing a distinct binary choice between seeking and not seeking. This fundamental binary nature of emotional circuits enables rapid and decisive responses essential for survival, with each system's activation or deactivation leading to specific physiological and behavioral outcomes. Each system's activation or deactivation leads to specific physiological and behavioral outcomes. These outcomes are determined by a binary logic of triggering or inhibiting a response, which is both simple and critical. This binary logic demonstrates how affective processing in the brain is governed by binary operations and generates key behaviors that are necessary for adaptive responses to environmental challenges. Panksepp's findings also point to the role of specific neurotransmitters and hormones, particularly dopamine in the SEEKING system, in modulating these emotional circuits. This neurochemical modulation is pivotal in the binary processing of emotional responses, where dopamine significantly influences the dynamic balance between reward and punishment signals (see Chapter 5), thus modulating the strength of responses within this binary framework (Panksepp 1998, 148).

Furthermore, neurobiological studies confirm the pivotal role of the periaqueductal gray (PAG) as a neural locus for the binary coding of emotional reactions. In the PAG, decisions regarding various behaviors are made based on emotional input (Carrive and Morgan 2012, 2004; Buhle et al. 2013). The PAG activates specific neural pathways that trigger either flight, fight, or approach behaviors, thereby facilitating a direct and binary-coded response to emotional stimuli. These neurobiological decision-making processes exemplify the fundamental principles of the BCAS model, whereby simple, dichotomous categorizations are imbued with meaning through binary-coded affects.

In light of the aforementioned, the binary-coded neurobiological dynamics are analogous to the concept of Implicit Association Tests (IAT). IAT employ binary categorization to capture and analyze deeply rooted cognitive and affective reactions. The IAT is a method for measuring implicit attitudes or unconscious biases. It does so by assessing the speed with which individuals associate concepts (e.g., black or white people) with evaluations (e.g., good or bad). This measurement is conducted by rapidly categorizing stimuli into either consonant or dissonant pairings, which affects reaction times. Similarly, the BCAS model employs binary categories to assess and transform affective meaning attribution in a prompt manner following an event. In both methodologies, the rapidity of the attribution or response is a crucial indicator of the underlying affective states or cognitive evaluations. In the context of the BCAS framework, rapid categorization enables an expedient emotional response, which is operational in real time and aims to streamline the processing of environmental information. These processes are not merely reactive; rather, they reflect the deeply ingrained affective structures and preferences that are embedded within human cognition. In the context of the “other-race effect” (ORE) phenomenon (Fioravanti-Bastos, Seidl-de-Moura, and Landeira-Fernandez 2014), and “Other-Race Advantage” (ORA) (Kubota, Banaji, and Phelps 2012; Kurdi, Carroll, and Banaji 2021) the BCAS also exemplify how automated cognitive and affective processes influence our perceptions and evaluations of individuals belonging to other ethnic groups. The ORE makes it evident that schemas facilitate the recognition of faces belonging to one’s own ethnic group, thereby contributing to the cohesion of the group. Conversely, they can also promote the exclusion of individuals who do not belong to the same ethnic group. In contrast, the ORA employs schemata to expedite the categorization of faces perceived as “different,” thereby facilitating efficient processing but potentially resulting in a superficial evaluation that fosters prejudice and stereotyping. In both instances, the fundamental element of human cognition that employs simplistic, binary coding—that is, the dichotomy of good versus bad, and self versus other—has a profound impact on social differentiation and categorization processes. The challenge is to engage in conscious reflection on these schemata and to modify them where necessary in order to promote a more comprehensive and differentiated understanding of, and a more open attitude towards, the diversity of human experiences and identities. It is imperative to acknowledge that the condensation of intricate social phenomena into binary schemata represents a simplistic reduction that inadequately reflects the intricacies of human cognition and social interaction. It is important to note that this framework should be viewed as an analytical tool that focuses on specific aspects of BCAS, rather than as a comprehensive depiction of social and cognitive processes. It is essential to consider the temporal dimension of assessment processes, which frequently occur within milliseconds before reflective thinking is initiated. This allows for the initial evaluation to be sit-

uated within a broader context and for it to be re-evaluated based on the knowledge acquired by the individual.

In the humanities, particularly in the fields of social and cultural anthropology, the concept of an affective construction of orientation schemata that is universally applicable often presents a challenge. This is due to the fact that research and teaching in this field are strongly influenced by the axiom that all phenomena are socially constructed. The emphasis on social constructionism is in seeming contradiction to the assumption of universal affective patterns, which gives rise to extensive discussions and debates within these disciplines. From an epistemological standpoint, however, the acknowledgment of universal affective patterns does not negate the specific, culturally constructed character of social phenomena and the assumption of associated, culturally established emotions. Rather, these phenomena are viewed in a broader context that incorporates both cultural variability and the potential for universal foundations of emotional experience. The majority of contemporary theories of emotion concur that cognitive, physiological, neurobiological, and cultural elements interact within an integrative system. Emotions are regarded as multidimensional phenomena, and thus, cannot be reduced to a single aspect. From the outset, this view understands schemata not exclusively as cognitive, affective, or physiological-bodily, but rather in a holistic logic as an affective-cognitive-bodily system that emerges from complex self-organization and continuous self-creation (autopoiesis). Once these schemata are activated, they invariably deliver empirically verifiable affective judgments of meaning in binary coded form (e.g., good vs. bad, strong vs. weak, etc.).

7 Macrosocial Anthropological Constants

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 Cultural Codes

Normative orders in social systems, which are characterized by autopoietic and homeostatic structures, are manifested through practices and discourses that reflect the human propensity to prioritize and communicate the accentuation of personal values and goals. These orders establish criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of individuals or groups, defining the extent and nature of membership. These orders are inherently pluralistic, continuously in conflict with competing ideas and deeply embedded within hegemonic contexts. Therefore, they are not a neutral, blank slate. Building on discussions of social systems, system justification, and macro-social anthropological constants, an overarching question emerges regarding the nature of human differentiation practices:

What are the ways in which members of social systems recognize and influence the semantics, practices, and associated emotions, both intuitively and consciously, in order to actively contribute to the dynamics and stability of their system?

While the human tendencies discussed so far provide a foundation for understanding the processes of group assignment and exclusion, they do not fully capture the specific dynamics of differentiation and attribution, nor do they account for the multidimensional and pivotal role of affects and emotions in complex systems. To address this, a conceptualization of cultural codes is proposed, drawing on insights from anthropological, emotion-theoretical, systems-theoretical perspectives, as well as semiotic theories and post-structuralist views on subjectivation. This transdisciplinary theoretical perspective acknowledges the importance of *cultural codes as mediators of normative orders within the structural coupling* (see Chapter 2.2.7) between individuals and social systems. This approach integrates seamlessly with the autopoietically conceived schemata and, in contrast to strictly system-theoretical approaches, recognizes individuals as independent and sentient beings capable of agency. This perspective permits a detailed examination of the relationship between individual actions and social structures. By elucidating the dynamic interplay between personal experience and collective norms, it contributes to a more profound comprehension of the processes through which social realities are

constructed and reconstructed. Moreover, this perspective recognizes the pivotal function of affective and cognitive processes in the formation and evolution of social bonds and identities. It underscores the intricate nature of human sociality and the multifaceted mechanisms that underpin its reproduction and transformation. Cultural codes and affective-cognitive-bodily schemata facilitate the influence and adaptation of systems to one another through structural coupling. These mechanisms facilitate the dynamic generation of meaning by interpreting differences through schemata deeply rooted in cultural codes, thereby influencing how information is understood, felt, and physically experienced. These processes determine which reactions and evaluations are culturally deemed appropriate, thus fostering nuanced interactions between systems. Such codings establish a common language that articulates individual and collective meanings and facilitates the co-construction of social realities. The process of meaning generation is therefore a dynamic exchange imbued with individual experiences and cultural contexts. Cultural codes function as intermediaries in the formation, sustenance, and evolution of social orders. They delineate the boundaries and possibilities of individual and collective identities and actions within the systems in question. Additionally, they act as normative matrices that not only delineate boundaries and shape identities but are also deeply embedded in the mechanisms of social reproduction and subjective experience. As a result of continuous interaction and internalization of these codes, individuals are equipped to navigate the complexities of social worlds and engage in the collective creation and maintenance of social realities through the interplay of schemata. Although these processes are inherently intertwined, a model-like division into three components of cultural coding facilitates the establishment of a more coherent theoretical framework. This structured approach facilitates the elucidation of the intricate mechanisms through which meanings are conveyed, thereby fostering the creation of lines of difference and avenues for identification. The model-like classification is instrumental in understanding the multifaceted and often intersecting ways in which cultural codes are mediated and internalized, underscoring the necessity for a structured approach to analyzing cultural dynamics. An understanding of the processes of cultural coding is essential for grasping the ways in which humans differentiate themselves and for critically examining the autopoiesis of social systems. These mechanisms, which construct and sustain social orders and individual identities, are incorporated into our understanding of how cultural codes function and impact these systems in a systematic manner.

Cultural codes are conceptualized along three different dimensions and defined as follows:

Cultural codes:

- A. are configurations that assign meanings to signs while simultaneously defining specific lines of differentiation that delineate systems from their environments. Through the strategic encoding of particular semantics, these practices foster possibilities for cultural identification and solidify corresponding social realities (see Chapter 8.1);
- B. function as autopoietic elements within social systems, ensuring their self-preservation and self-reproduction by reducing entropy. Analyzing their structural coupling with the environment points out their pivotal role in actively shaping and sustaining social orders (see Chapter 8.2);
- C. create specific meanings that not only stabilize but also legitimize the social system by integrating these meanings into the system's structures through processes of subjectivation. These processes facilitate the internalization of codes by individuals, thus promoting the continual self-reproduction of these codes within the system (see Chapter 8.3).

8.1 The Strategic Coding of Specific Semantics and Lines of Difference (A)

Part (A)

Cultural codes are configurations that assign meanings to signs while simultaneously defining specific lines of differentiation that delineate systems from their environments. Through the strategic encoding of particular semantics, these practices foster possibilities for cultural identification and solidify corresponding social realities.

The first dimension (A) of cultural codes addresses two different aspects of coding practice: on the one hand, the purely semiotic practice of assigning signs to meanings (Chapter 8.1.1) and, on the other, the establishment of identification possibilities through lines of difference (Chapter 8.1.2).

8.1.1 Mapping of Signs to Meanings

The first aspect addresses the widely discussed semiotic perspective, where a code denotes the assignment of a specific sign (signifier) to a meaning (signified). In this framework, an intended meaning—what is to be expressed—is substituted by a specific sign, akin to replacing a word with a symbol that holds the same meaning for all participants within a particular context. This exchange process occurs in direct

communication between two individuals, governed by stringent rules that dictate how messages are encoded and decoded. The relevance of such codes is intimately connected to the social context and varies depending on where and among whom the communication transpires.

8.1.2 Constructing Lines of Difference through Strategic Coding Logics

The second aspect of the first dimension in definition (A) explores the formation of lines of difference that extend beyond the fundamental semiotic assignment of signs to meanings. These lines of difference provide meaningful opportunities for identification for both complex social systems and individuals. These lines are fostered by meanings and are mediated by specific cultural codings, including language, media, social networks, art, education, and other social practices, as well as memes. These codes encapsulate values, beliefs, behavioral norms, and role expectations, and determine what is considered “normal,” “desirable,” or “deviant” within a particular system through the meanings they ascribe. Concurrently, they delineate the boundaries of the system, thereby establishing a clear regime of belonging. In consequence, cultural codes play a pivotal role in the delineation and perception of boundaries between constructed groups within social systems. The necessity to reduce complexity, understood in terms of entropy, justifies the creation of these lines of difference, as detailed in section 8.2. The mediation and internalization of these codings occur through a complex interplay of different processes that are closely linked to the coding practices introduced at the beginning of this chapter. To ensure clarity and maintain the theoretical coherence of the model developed here, the specific process of subjectivation or conditioning is explored in greater depth in Chapter 8.3.

This raises the question of which logic currently governs the operation of cultural codes in Western, high-tech, affluent, and democratic societies with a high level of education, such as Germany. The aforementioned lines of difference represent constructed boundaries that play a pivotal role in the differentiation of individuals and groups on the basis of a multitude of characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, physical ability, age, and religion. The manner in which these lines of difference are coded may vary depending on the context and application. In the theory of human differentiation developed here, with particular reference to the aforementioned Western context, the focus is on primordial and neoliberal coding. These two coding logics function as fundamental lenses that facilitate the observation of specific codings, such as postcolonial, feminist, ecological, technological, multicultural, and socio-economic approaches, and enable their decoding. While these specific codings offer unique perspectives and analyses, they are deeply embedded in the structures of neoliberal and primordial logics and are significantly influenced by them. To illustrate, while feminist coding emphasizes specific aspects

of gender justice and power, it is deeply embedded in primordial logic due to its focus on fundamental issues of identification and belonging that underpin this coding logic. This foundational anchoring in primordial logic, coupled with neoliberal emphases on individual freedoms and market mechanisms, demonstrates the complex interplay between these coding strategies in shaping avenues for identification. Similarly, issues such as postcolonial dynamics or ecological challenges can be examined through the lens of neoliberal coding, particularly with regard to resource utilization, market dynamics, and global interdependencies. This intersectional integration provides a unified framework for examining the interplay between neoliberal and primordial coding logics, offering a robust approach to understanding the complexities and dynamics of differentiation within the context of this study. Therefore, a comprehensive framework is established that enables the understanding and analysis of all pertinent systems of meaning that generate differentiation.

In addition to the primary coding practices of neoliberal and primordial logics, a distinctive form of coding emerges, characterized by the use of *empty signifiers*. These do not represent conventional coding practices; rather, they function as flexible tools that are imbued with varying meanings, which are used to shape the possibilities for political identification and the formation of social solidarities. The distinctive quality of empty signifiers is their capacity for universal applicability. They transcend the boundaries of primordial and neoliberal coding logics, functioning as connectors that enhance diverse coding practices. Consequently, they introduce new dimensions of meaning attribution that extend beyond the traditional confines of existing coding logics, thereby enriching the analytical landscape with their versatile utility.

8.1.2.1 Overview of Primordial and Neoliberal Codings in Social Systems

Primordial coding is predicated on the assumption of immutable phenotypic and “original” characteristics (Vivanco 2018). It distinguishes between those who are considered insiders and outsiders within a social system based on a constructed and logically flawed understanding of “nature” and physical constitution (ibid.). A significant limitation of primordial coding is the assumption that certain characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation, are immutable, innate, and fundamental to an individual’s identity. This misconception stems from the essentialization and naturalization of socially constructed categories, which ultimately functions as a mechanism for normalizing social hierarchies. The substantive foundation for the patterns of differentiation inherent to primordial codings is drawn from various ideologies, including those that are sexist and racist in nature. A comprehensive examination of this subject is provided in Chapter 9.

The *neoliberal coding system* employs market logic and competitive principles to evaluate and categorize individuals and groups. This method is predicated on the assumption that market values and efficiency are the primary criteria for determining the value and social position of individuals within social systems. It encourages

self-optimization, individual accountability, and a focus on performance, which collectively contribute to a culture of differentiation where success and social status are strongly associated with economic achievement and competitiveness. However, differentiation within social systems does not adhere to a simple insider-outsider scheme; rather, it results in the formation of various classes and vertical stratifications. This results in a classist logic that subjugates the economically disadvantaged and those who rely on wages to a class that has privileged access to essential resources. This system of classification is based on the meritocratic ideology that values are to be evaluated according to financial and economic standards. As a result, the social sphere is being commodified. This reinterpretation of social relations in accordance with market efficiency results in the marginalization of those who fail to meet the neoliberal performance criteria, thereby further entrenching the naturalization of inequalities by presenting them as outcomes of individual effort or ability. Chapter 9 presents a critical examination of these mechanisms.

Primordial and/or neoliberal codes function as an interpretative meta-framework wherein differences among humans are not only perceived but also evaluated and hierarchized, subsequently influencing processes of social inclusion and exclusion. This meta-framework of differentiation practices reflects the intricate and multifaceted nature of human social structures, characterized by a complex interweaving of power relations and identity politics. The diverse coding of lines of difference not only establishes and negotiates possibilities for identification and group affiliations but also reproduces and legitimizes social hierarchies and inequalities.

8.1.2.2 Strategic Deployment of Emotional Markers

The first dimension is discussed in terms of the mediation of cultural codes of specific and influential semantics that refer to established patterns of internalization and specifically address and/or activate certain schemata. The strategic deployment of cultural codes to strengthen and legitimize normative orders through the utilization of emotional markers is a phenomenon that occurs across a range of contexts. In particular, the strategic generation and evocation of affects such as feelings of threat, resentment, fear, and disgust, which trigger immediate neurochemical reactions, are employed (see Chapter 5). This immediacy arises because the evocation of affects targets the cerebellum and can only be revised and modified through strenuous and energy-intensive reflections in the cerebrum. As previously stated, the concept of multidimensional schemata was introduced and explained in order to demonstrate the inextricable link between specific emotions and the normative framework of social systems. The minimal group paradigm, the theory of system justification, and the approach of macro-social anthropological constants are useful models for understanding certain group dynamics. However, these instruments do not permit an evaluation of the dynamics in question from a moral standpoint. The role of emotional reactions triggered by emotional markers within cultural codes in

the formation of distinguishing features within social structures is of central importance. These markings, whether experienced as approval or rejection, are pivotal in determining how individuals adapt or reject the meanings conveyed in the codes. The term “emotion marking” is used to describe the process by which specific emotions are deliberately linked to certain cultural codes with the intention of controlling their acceptance or rejection and thus influencing the normative orientation within the social structure. The association of emotions such as shame, pride, or fear with specific behaviors or identities enables the control of social dynamics and individual self-perception through the use of cultural codes. These affective reactions function as mechanisms that facilitate conformity or the condemnation of deviant behavior. It is therefore evident that they are of crucial importance in maintaining or challenging social orders. For example, primordial coding can be associated with emotions such as pride in a “natural” affiliation or shame if the individual in question does not conform to the “original” characteristics.

An empirically well-documented example of primordial coding of lines of difference and corresponding evocations of affect is that of the construction of white superiority. In both media and educational materials, historical achievements and cultural accomplishments are predominantly attributed to white people, while contributions from people of other ethnicities are marginalized or ignored. Such codings may result in individuals developing a sense of pride in their affiliation with the white majority community. Conversely, those who do not align with this image may experience feelings of shame or inferiority. This serves to reinforce the perception of white superiority and the demarcation from the “others” who are coded in this way and excluded from the social system. Primordially coded white superiority manifests not only in the media and educational materials but is also deeply rooted in geopolitical constellations of exploitation that have evolved historically and in the fossil fuel-dependent lifestyles of the West. These issues will be explained in the course of the book using various contexts.

Another pertinent context for the discussion of emotion labeling, particularly the *evocation of feelings of disgust* and the associated activation of the insular cortex, as previously outlined in Chapter 5, will be the focus of this section. The method of triggering disgust reactions with great rapidity and ease in the context of foreign group labeling is a phenomenon that has existed since the advent of humanity. One of the most extensively documented historical instances of the utilization of disgust labeling can be observed in its deployment as an anti-Semitic practice. The historical roots of anti-Semitic ideas and actions can be traced back to ancient Egypt (Mermelstein 2022, 344). Nevertheless, a discernible pattern of hostility towards Jews emerged, characterised by social classification, accompanied by pronounced value judgments and emotive responses, which reached a crescendo in aggressive conduct

and misanthropic sentiments. It is particularly noteworthy that Jews were accused with great vehemence of performing human sacrifices in their temples and of being descended from leprous slaves (Koller 2009, 9; Jankrift 2019, 27). In the Middle Ages, Christian communities, in particular, intensified these accusations by blaming Jews for a number of catastrophic events and epidemics, including the plague. During the Reconquista, the Christian reconquest of Spain from the Muslim Moors, the concept of “purity of blood” was established, marking the advent of racial discrimination in Spain that persists to this day (Koller 2009, 17). The extensive conversion of Spanish Jews to Christianity resulted in the emergence of numerous anti-Jewish ideologies, with the attribution of “impurity” representing a central and enduring component of stigmatization. In the context of the Spanish Reconquista, allegations were made that male Jews menstruated weekly. Furthermore, the Forced Conversion Edict of 1492 marked the first instance of Jews being classified as a “race,” a testament to the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in historical contexts and its continued evolution over time. The characterization of Jews as “cockroaches” in the German Empire provides an illustrative example of how dehumanization and emotional marking by disgust were employed as tools to facilitate exclusion and persecution. This rhetoric was designed to systematically exclude Jews from the human community and establish the foundation for state-sanctioned discrimination, exclusion, and ultimately, extermination. In this context, the function of emotion-marking exclusion was to serve as a powerful tool for intensifying collective feelings of dislike and hatred. The transition from dehumanization to physical persecution exemplifies the tragic consequences of such markers of disgust. These practices of emotion-marking, though in altered forms, have persisted and continue to require ongoing efforts to combat such mechanisms of differentiation and exclusion. In contemporary German society, there is a notable mobilization of feelings of disgust, resentment, and threat directed towards Muslims. However, similar sentiments continue to persist towards Jews, as evidenced by the continued presence of stereotypical associations with physical characteristics such as large noses or conspiracy theories related to the financial sector. These forms of demonization are not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, centuries ago, Immanuel Kant made disparaging remarks about Jews, referring to them as “vampires and devils” (Brumlik 2016, 46). These remarkably candid declarations by a philosopher bring to light the pervasive superstitious and simplistic perspectives of the era, which are evident in various discourses and among their proponents. Contemporary discourses within the political sphere that describe Muslim migration as a “flood” or “wave” evince an uncontrollable, contaminating force that threatens the “purity” of national identity. In addition to the insinuation of an inherent inability to integrate and the assertion that Muslims would be fundamentally unable and unwilling to adapt to “Western values” and ideas of freedom—a topic that is discussed in further detail in the chapter on schemas of indifference and in Chapter 9.4.3—there are numerous markers of disgust that defame

Muslims as a homogeneous group. Among the markers of disgust in contemporary German discourse are associations with dirt and impurity. The use of language that associates Muslim communities with “ghettos” or “slums” indirectly implies a lack of attention and resources. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the media portrayal of specific districts, such as Berlin-Neukölln or analogous neighborhoods in other metropolises, including Paris, London, and Brussels. Moreover, the portrayal of refugee accommodations as overcrowded and lacking in hygiene represents a form of disgust labeling. The pejorative use of language, such as the term “Islamization” in a negative context, indicates a perceived fundamental threat posed by Muslim life in Germany. Moreover, the utilization of caricatures or political rhetoric that dehumanizes Muslims serves to reinforce this negative imagery. Such depictions and linguistic expressions are not merely rhetorical devices; rather, they serve as a potent instrument for emotional labeling and differentiation. This is based on deep-rooted evolutionary-biological mechanisms that activate the emotion of disgust when individuals are confronted with tainted food or potential danger. In contrast to other living beings, humans also experience moral and aesthetic feelings of disgust, as discussed in Chapter 5. These reactions are not limited to physical danger or decay; rather, they are shaped by social norms and cultural values, such as the revulsion toward behavior deemed immoral or the rejection of representations considered aesthetically unappealing. Such responses are elicited by the interaction of the insular lobe with the amygdala, as evidenced by the activation of disgust responses when individuals are presented with visual representations of drug addicts or extremely unhygienic conditions. These complex responses are not merely subjective sentiments; rather, they are employed strategically within the context of emotional labeling to stigmatize and exclude specific groups. The use of these mechanisms for discriminatory purposes demonstrates the significance of neurobiology in the cultural coding of “otherness” and in the maintenance and consolidation of social systems and their hierarchies. It is also worth noting the indication of a persistent threat from Muslim individuals in the *security-terror dispositive* (M.d.M.C. Varela 2016, 65). This dispositive is reiterated in an obsessive and reflexive manner, evoking primordial fears and addressing the population’s fundamental need for security. A particularly insidious aspect of these practices is that they are frequently accompanied by expressions of affiliation and friendship. Such expressions do not improve the situation but rather serve to confuse people further. These ostensible expressions of belonging and friendship, such as emphasized gestures of solidarity or symbolic invitations to participation, may appear integrative at first glance but often stand in stark contrast to the simultaneously fueled fears and negative stereotypes broadly attributed to Muslims. These emotional markers ultimately serve to legitimize marginalization by inevitably linking demands for greater security with a constantly generated fear of terrorism and crime. A number of additional exam-

ples could be provided to supplement this account, but they will not be discussed in detail here.

In examining the cultural coding of emotional markers, particularly as they pertain to the heterogeneous and diverse groups of Muslims, a distinction between the factual and social dimensions offers insights into the mechanisms behind their dissemination and influence. An examination of the factual dimension reveals how the deliberate generation and utilization of specific emotions, such as disgust and threat, are employed in a targeted manner within well-defined discourses. This includes the thematic emphasis in media and political discourse, which frequently portrays Muslims in a negative light, as well as the functional aspects of such portrayals, which are designed to incite social apprehension and advance political agendas. An analysis of the communicative strategies deployed to reinforce specific images and narratives illustrates the impact of emotional markers on the formation of social perceptions and attitudes. An analysis through the lens of the social dimension reveals the complex network of relationship structures and affiliation constellations that are shaped by emotional markers directed towards Muslims. This approach evinces how individual and collective identities are shaped and transformed in the context of social interactions with groups that are perceived as foreign or threatening. The intensification of social dynamics through the use of negative emotions, such as disgust and threat, serves to promote the demarcation and exclusion of Muslims. This, in turn, affects the formation of self-group and out-group identities. These mechanisms serve to reinforce the social distancing between the groups in question and provide a rationale for discriminatory actions and political measures, thereby offering an apparent justification for exclusion and marginalization. The examination of these sociotechniques demonstrates the significant influence of emotional markers on the social fabric, indicating their function in reinforcing social hierarchies and inequalities. The deployment of emotional markers in the construction of enemy images rooted in primordially coded, ethnocentric and polarizing negative stereotypes plays a pivotal role in the upholding of violence-based affective orders. By entrenching discursive power that serves to consolidate social hierarchies and to aggressively defend privileges, such practices become a central instrument of hegemony and contribute to intensify social inequalities. Cultural narratives are employed as a means of legitimizing existing power structures. The concept of "epistemic violence," as defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 2008), is used to describe the ways in which certain discourses are utilized to exert power and marginalize minority groups. The privileged position of certain patterns of interpretation serves to normalize existing social orders and justify the oppression of specific groups.

The aforementioned dynamics substantiate the assertion that cultural coding can be conceptualized as autopoietic, exhibiting self-reinforcing and self-reproductive characteristics. The processes of cultural codification associated with

white supremacy are maintained and reproduced through a variety of social and institutional mechanisms, including educational systems, media, and geopolitical practices. Such systems establish a system of values and norms that serve to normalize and legitimize white supremacy (primordial coding), while simultaneously portraying other ethnic and cultural groups as inferior. In this manner, they play a substantial role in the maintenance and reinforcement of social hierarchies. One illustrative example is the ritualized appeals for donations for the “Third World,” in which black children are depicted in a state of apparent starvation, seated in the dirt. These codes are also evident in the repeated portrayal of individuals adhering to the Islamic faith, who are often perceived as being associated with backwardness. This is typically achieved through the reference to the oppression of women and the portrayal of certain practices as being “medieval.” However, there is a lack of analysis in this regard, particularly in terms of shedding light on the selective nature of these portrayals and their historical and geopolitical context. It is nearly ubiquitous that this context is embedded in hegemonic and exploitative relationships in which Western powers have contributed to the establishment of criminal gangs and bandits through coups and wars, who now act as government leaders and politicians.

Practices of primordial coding can also be understood as a mechanism for maintaining system stability. The *theory of system justification* (see Chapter 4.5) posits that individuals accept and defend existing social and economic inequalities because these structures fulfill basic human needs for knowledge, security, and interpersonal relationships. In other words, they serve to mitigate uncertainties, threats, and social disagreements (Jost 2020, 293). From an evolutionary perspective, inclinations could contribute to the justification of the system of social bonding and order, as the acceptance of inequalities can be interpreted as a sign of commitment to social harmony (Watts et al. 2016). Just as religious ceremonies have ensured the stability of social structures for centuries (Flannery and Marcus 2012), the rituals of self-valorization and external devaluation described above generate a sense of legitimacy within the social system by systematically neglecting essential contextual information and causal relationships. This is evident in appeals for donations for the “Third World” or in campaigns in which white people help non-white women to emancipate themselves from their husbands. Further examples will be examined in the context of the explanation of primordially coded regimes of difference ordering (Chapter 9). While such primordial emotional markers serve to strengthen identification with the group and reinforce boundaries against “others,” neoliberal codings often manipulate emotions such as fear of social relegation or feelings of guilt in cases of perceived individual failure in competition. The role of reward and punishment in this context is pivotal. Success in the market economy is rewarded with the evocation of positive emotions, whereas failure triggers the evocation of

negative emotions. These emotional markers reinforce the meritocratic ideology, which holds that each individual is responsible for their own success or failure..

The role of emotion markers in facilitating the comprehension of cultural codes and their integration into our collective consciousness is a crucial aspect of their function. By specifically evoking certain emotions through cultural codes, they reinforce the power of these codes and make a decisive contribution to social cohesion or division by significantly controlling the depth of identification with or distancing from predetermined role models and norms. Cultural codes and the affective reactions they elicit serve as foundational normative orders, establishing lines of difference. The autopoietic nature of cultural codes necessitates conscious effort to challenge and reshape the underlying structures and assumptions that support them when changes in these patterns are to be made.

In social science research, the perception of a threat from immigration has been identified as a significant predictor of racist attitudes and prejudices towards migrants. This perception influences not only individual prejudices, but also public opinion regarding restrictive migration policies and the development of migration-specific legislation (Schlueter, Schmidt, and Wagner 2008; Pettigrew, Wagner, and Christ 2010; Schlueter 2013; Zappulla et al. 2023; Sniderman, Peri, and de Figueiredo 2022; Blinder and Lundgren 2019; Wagner et al. 2006). The strategic linking of immigration with emotions such as fear represents a key tactic employed by political actors and the media to promote narratives that function as mechanisms for legitimizing restrictive measures. The utilization of affective-cognitive-somatic schemata in political communication to influence collective attitudes and policy decisions exemplifies the autopoietic nature of cultural coding, situated as it is in the dynamic interplay between social emotions, cultural coding, and policymaking. In connection with the regimes of orders of difference and the associated socio-technical methods, the strategy of presenting non-facts as suggestive triggers will be discussed in detail below on an analytical level. This will demonstrate how primordial and neoliberal logics converge and how networked, non-linear levels delineate and reinforce differences.

One striking example of the use of cultural coding and emotional markers in political communication is the ridicule of refugees by government officials. At a press conference in July 2018, the German Minister of the Interior made a jovial remark, noting that on the occasion of his 69th birthday, precisely 69 Afghan asylum seekers had been deported (Süddeutsche 2018). He presented this information with a smile, as it were, in a seemingly amused manner. Notwithstanding the incendiary nature of his remark, it did not precipitate a significant political upheaval or his resignation. With the exception of a few critical voices from the opposition, the comment was largely accepted. Notably, even the Federal Chancellor did not take personal action but maintained the Interior Minister in office, despite isolated—and thus insignificant—public expressions of outrage over the latter's comment. The

public mockery of refugees by a high-ranking political official demonstrates the strategic deployment of cultural coding and emotional markers to advance specific narratives. The minister's amusement at the deportations employed emotional markers that implied a dehumanization of the individuals involved and communicated complex social issues in a simplified, emotionally charged manner. This incident demonstrates how communication within the political system is employed to serve particular systemic functions, as evidenced by the legitimization of a restrictive migration policy. By employing humor to frame a serious political decision, the minister was able to shift public perception and mitigate potential criticism. He triggered cognitive schemas that resonate with preexisting ideas and prejudices about refugees in the public consciousness. His smile and jovial demeanor conveyed an affective stance that downplayed the gravity and implications of the situation. The absence of a significant political scandal or resignation in response to this statement lends further support to the proposition that political discourse and social dynamics are shaped by deeply entrenched cultural codes and affective resonance within the population. This indicates that such narratives and representations are either accepted by certain segments of society or fail to elicit sufficient resistance to result in significant political consequences. From the perspective of systems theory, the incident provides an example of second-order observation, whereby the manner in which migration and political decisions are discussed becomes the subject of observation and reflection itself. The reactions to the incident—both the absence of a major scandal and the presence of critical voices—reflect diverse observations and interpretations within the social system, illustrating the autopoietic nature of social systems that sustain their structures through self-referential processes. The way the political system managed this incident and sustained its operations is grounded in its self-referentiality and operational cohesion. Moreover, this episode portrays the capacity of political authority to be deployed in conjunction with cultural norms and emotional cues for the purpose of reinforcing established social structures.

In the early months of 2024, a study that examined the economic aspects of migration in Germany received considerable attention (Raffelhüschén, Seuffert, and Wimmesberger 2024). The authors of the study suggested that migration was not beneficial for Germany, particularly in consideration of its fiscal effects. The authors proposed that the country could be in a more favorable financial position in the absence of migration. However, this conclusion is primarily based on an analysis of the direct economic effects and thus fails to take into account other important aspects. For instance, the study does not sufficiently consider the fact that a purely fiscal analysis is unable to account for the full range of social, cultural, and societal contributions made by “migrants.” Despite the far-reaching implications of the study, a nuanced examination of its methodology and the constraints of its perspective was largely absent in the majority of media outlets. This resulted in a simplistic representation of the issue that did not accurately reflect the multifaceted nature of

migration and its varied impact on society. The suggestion of a loss of prosperity can be understood in the context of cultural coding and emotional labeling as a trigger that evokes feelings of threat and insecurity, thereby fueling fears within the population. The roots of this insecurity are frequently attributed by such studies to places and people who are perceived in this context as exploited. From this perspective, however, this appears to be a form of rhetorical sleight of hand, a strategy designed to deflect attention away from the actual causes and responsibilities and instead create scapegoats. This approach not only serves to perpetuate existing prejudices and misunderstandings, thereby perpetuating the status quo that serves to justify the system, but it also prevents a constructive discussion of the actual socio-economic challenges. It is noteworthy that numerous other studies offer more profound and multi-layered insights into the issue of migration yet have not received a comparable response. The selective use and interpretation of study results by different systems represents a form of complexity reduction, which enables the complexity of information processing and dissemination in society to be managed. The inclination to prioritize certain narratives over others not only exemplifies the interconnectivity between systems but also invites scrutiny of the criteria governing the visibility and relevance of scientific findings in public discourse.

Another noteworthy development within this context is the response of German politics to the growing number of refugees in 2022/23, which was partially attributable to the conflict in Ukraine. In their statements, prominent politicians, including the Federal Chancellor, articulated the imperative of preventing a recurrence of the events of 2015. They advocated for the implementation of rigorous migration control measures and the intensification of deportation policies. One aspect of these discourses that is frequently overlooked is that deporting a smaller number of rejected asylum seekers would have no impact on Germany's underlying social and economic challenges. The majority of rejected asylum seekers are unable to be deported to conflict zones due to a lack of the necessary documentation. It appears that the primary objective of these political maneuvers is to assuage conditioned fears and convey a sense of security, rather than to address the actual problems effectively. By Fall 2024, as a result of the growing influence of far-right groups and parties, a consensus was rapidly reached among Germany's major political parties in September to suspend the Schengen and Dublin Agreements, reintroduce border controls, and exacerbate concerns about the potential influx of migrants. This represents a short-term strategy aimed at gaining popularity, but without any medium- or long-term plans. As such, it is a measure taken at the expense of the most vulnerable members of the social system, offering no real solutions to the structural issues at hand.

The targeted emotional labeling evident in these examples, when considered alongside the selective perception and interpretation of information as a means of reducing complexity, serves to reinforce the empirically proven tendency that

individuals who perceive immigration as a threat tend to espouse more restrictive immigration policies and are opposed to granting rights to immigrants (Heizmann 2016). By invoking deeply entrenched fears that are intrinsic to our evolutionary psychological and neurobiological makeup (see Chapters 3 and 5), these mechanisms address a vast array of fears prevalent in post-democratic societies, including the fear of poverty, social decline, isolation, and a disregard for one's personal values (Foroutan 2021, 17). This strategy employs targeted emotional markers to transform complex social phenomena into simple narratives that reinforce existing fears and insecurities. By eliciting particular emotional reactions, they facilitate the acceptance of limiting policies and diminish the strength of support for immigrants' rights. In order to achieve this, they mobilize a wide range of social concerns and exploit them for political gain.

8.1.2.3 Selection of Significant Features

A fundamental element in comprehending the nuances of cultural coding is the process of identifying and prioritizing significant features. These may be defined as salient key features that differentiate and inform social systems. This selection is of great consequence to the processes of social differentiation and identity construction. These features encompass both visual markers and abstract concepts that function as pivotal indicators of social differentiation and belonging within and between social groups. They illustrate the complex interplay of cultural, psychological, and social dynamics at both the individual and collective levels. The deliberate focus on these traits as core values of a group is evident in various cultural practices, including styles of dress, specific pieces of jewelry, and other significant symbols. These features are closely associated with specific emotions and behavioral patterns that are shaped and reinforced by a number of factors, including cultural traditions, educational influences, and media exposure. This targeted emphasis serves not only to reinforce group cohesion but also to accentuate differences from other groups, thereby contributing to the formation of "us versus them" dichotomies. The transformation of neutral signifiers into culturally charged identity symbols illustrates the impact of cultural coding and symbolic orders on the formation of social realities. The meanings ascribed to objects and practices frequently extend well beyond their material or functional significance. These processes of meaning assignment are not neutral or natural; rather, they are the outcomes of social and political negotiations that reflect and potentially reinforce existing power structures. To illustrate, initially neutral signifiers such as the headscarf, the kippa, or national flags can rapidly become culturally charged symbols. In social systems, linguistic markers such as accents and languages serve as salient indicators of group membership. The manner of pronunciation of a word can, therefore, act as a significant indicator of social identity, frequently associated with stereotypes and societal expectations. Similarly, names are imbued with meanings that extend beyond their function as

mere identifiers. The selection of a name for a child frequently reflects deeply entrenched cultural preferences and encapsulates the values and aspirations that parents wish to impart to their offspring. Consequently, names operate as cultural signifiers that reveal insights into ethnic origin, social status, or religious affiliation. Culinary traditions and dietary practices, which are deeply entrenched in cultural heritage, serve as markers of group identity. The acceptability of a food item may vary significantly between cultures, with certain items considered delicacies in one culture being regarded as taboo in another due to religious or cultural norms. These discrepancies in culinary traditions not only indicate a sense of belonging but also differentiate one group from another, potentially complicating the process of integration into new cultural environments. The selection of significant features—such as physical attributes, behaviors, languages, styles of dress, or other recognizable signs—plays a crucial role in human differentiation practices. These features are central mechanisms through which cultural codes and schemas operate, influencing the way individuals categorize and define themselves within a social context. These features, when considered meaningful within a cultural context, facilitate the categorization of the world, the definition of identities, and the signaling of membership in social groups. These features are crucial indicators for the assignment and perception of roles, status, and group identities, thereby facilitating navigation within social structures. By selectively emphasizing certain traits as significant, cultural codes and schemas facilitate the formation of social orders through the development of lines of distinction. These characteristics are imbued with specific meanings and values that are not only culturally transmitted and interpreted but are also emotionally and motivationally internalized. The conscious and unconscious recognition of these characteristics exerts a substantial influence on social interaction, the formation of group identities, and the dynamics of social differentiation. Therefore, these significant characteristics become symbols of social identification that are culturally coded in various ways, a topic that will be discussed in greater detail later in the discussion.

8.1.2.4 Cultural Coding Through Empty Signifiers

The concept of “empty signifiers,” derived from post-structuralist theory, pertains to widely utilized terms or symbols that have become so versatile that their precise meanings are obscured. This enables them to act as placeholders for a multiplicity of meanings and contexts (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). These signifiers are regarded as “empty” due to their lack of fixed meaning, which renders them as projection surfaces for a range of ideas and ideologies. This fluidity presents a challenge to their identity, prompting efforts to anchor them within coherent conceptual frameworks of unity. In this sense, the term “empty signifiers” can be understood as a concept or symbol that evinces meanings that are open-ended or ambiguous within the domain of social communication. Such concepts frequently emerge in political and so-

cial discourses, where they can encapsulate a spectrum of meanings and function as catch-alls for a range of ideas, beliefs, and values. The concept elucidates the manner in which such terms or symbols operate to unify or identify disparate groups or individuals within a society, despite the lack of a clearly defined and specific meaning. In complex societies, *empty signifiers play a pivotal role in facilitating the identification of different groups and individuals with shared concerns or identities*, even in the absence of explicitly defined content and goals. They function as mediators in discourses, unifying and representing a multiplicity of interests, demands, and worldviews without being confined to a single, narrow meaning.

The investigation of the concept of “empty signifiers” draws upon and synthesizes insights from a multitude of theoretical frameworks, with particular emphasis on their relevance in the context of contemporary discourse analysis.¹ When examining the ways in which humans differentiate themselves from one another, it is not always feasible to explore the full scope of theoretical perspectives. In lieu of this, the analysis focuses on Laclau’s conceptualization of empty signifiers. Laclau postulates that empty signifiers represent junctions within discursive structures, amalgamating disparate concerns, ideas, or social elements despite lacking a definitive meaning (Laclau 2007, 63). These signifiers provide a forum for the negotiation and reshaping of diverse interpretations of identity. Frequently associated with expansive yet ambiguous concepts such as freedom, justice, or equality, these malleable symbols facilitate social identification and cohesion despite their potential ambiguity or controversial foundations (ibid., 69). The subject under discussion is the function of symbols associated with broad yet frequently undefined concepts such as freedom, justice, or equality. These symbols are inherently flexible and open to a multitude of interpretations, enabling them to assume varied meanings for different people or

1 In particular, Lacan’s concept of the master signifier, introduced as an alternative metaphor to the “point de capiton,” aligns with the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe, who treat “points de capiton” and master signifiers as synonymous (Zicman de Barros 2023, 2). The master signifier imbues the entire chain of signifiers with meaning, ensuring the coherence and comprehensibility of discourse. Without this anchoring element, signifiers remain in a “floating” state, leading to a discourse that is incoherent, chaotic, or even psychotic. This phenomenon highlights the role of discursive flexibility through the substitution of a master signifier, which halts the unrestrained movement of signifiers and anchors meaning by referring back to itself.

From a political perspective, the master signifier functions as the ultimate reference point for meaning—an ineffable “full” meaning that cannot be directly articulated in words but instead establishes its own foundations and legitimacy. Zicman de Barros further notes that this notion of an ultimate reference point for structuring discourse has been extensively explored by philosophers and political theorists. Among these are Karl Marx, with his concept of the “Point d’Honneur”; Claude Lefort, who examines the “repères de certitude” in the dissolution of modernity; Richard Rorty’s “final vocabulary”; Derrida’s transcendental signifier; and Spivak’s masterwords.

groups depending on their cultural, social, or personal perspectives. Notwithstanding the ambiguity or controversy surrounding their precise meanings and foundations, these symbols facilitate social identification and enhance group cohesion. The capacity of symbols associated with concepts such as freedom and justice to unify remains significant despite the lack of universal acceptance of the concepts themselves or the ambiguity surrounding their precise meanings and underpinnings. They facilitate the formation of collective identities and the unification of individuals and groups around shared values or goals, even as the specific interpretations of these values may vary significantly. These symbols thus function as catalysts for social bonding and solidarity, facilitating a wide range of identification and engagement through their multi-layered interpretability. In the process of subjectivation, empty signifiers serve as instruments through which individuals interpret and negotiate their identities and social positions. They influence how individuals perceive themselves and others within a complex network of social categories. By uniting disparate, often antithetical concepts under a seemingly unified banner, they facilitate the coexistence and negotiation of various identities and groups.

The significance of empty signifiers cannot be understated, as they operate as important elements in the process of human differentiation, influencing the way distinctions are established, apprehended, and experienced. They facilitate the legitimization of social hierarchies and justify mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion by conveying vague yet impactful notions of “normality” or “otherness.” Consequently, empty signifiers are efficacious instruments for the formation of identities and the exertion of influence. They offer the possibility of encapsulating multifaceted social, political, and cultural issues under a concept that presents an illusion of coherence while fostering broad identification and mobilization among diverse individuals. Concurrently, they obfuscate the ambiguity and arbitrariness inherent to social categories and identities. Consequently, empty signifiers are characterized by their indeterminacy and openness, offering no definitive explanation or justification (Castoriadis 1997, 240).

The significance of empty signifiers lies in their capacity to function as a foundation for the formation of collective identities, facilitating the transcendence and realization of diverse meanings. Examples of this phenomenon can be observed in the case of universal concepts such as God or the notions of justice that are embodied in human rights. These universalistic codes influence the formation of group self-images and facilitate engagement with their diverse interpretations. The utilization of empty signifiers in political and social discourses enables dominant groups to impose their norms of normality and legitimacy, thereby contributing to the stabilization of social order and the perpetuation of existing power structures. In this context, the role of affective bonds through emotional markers is of crucial importance. The emotional responses of affiliation, pride, and rejection contribute to embedding the selected significant characteristics within the individual and collective psyche,

thereby enhancing the psychosocial impact of group identity. Affective bonds ensure that social categorizations and the resulting identity constructions are not only cognitively processed but also emotionally experienced. They promote cohesion within the group and differentiation from others, but they can also escalate social tensions and conflicts. A crucial element of the discourse on empty signifiers, as examined by Chantal Mouffe, is the confrontation between diverse and frequently contradictory empty signifiers, which are shaped by intricate “us-versus-them” dichotomies. For the purposes of this analysis, it is crucial to consider the paradox created by competing forms of group identification. This is evidenced by the provision of disparate avenues for identification within an imagined collective, such as a nation. This antinomy is particularly evident in the discordance between two pivotal empty signifiers within liberal democracies: equality and freedom (Mouffe 2010, 66). This seemingly contradictory phenomenon is in fact a continuous effort to achieve democratic equality. This struggle manifests in two distinct forms: firstly, as civil rights within a state, and secondly, as human rights with claims to universal validity. The challenge is to achieve a balance between individual freedom and collective equality, while acknowledging and addressing the inherent tensions within the democratic framework. Mouffe posits that freedom and equality represent central yet potentially conflicting values in democratic societies. The pursuit of maximum freedom for all individuals may conflict with the achievement of equality, as unrestrained freedom can result in social and economic disparities that undermine equality. As a concept that is not bound by a singular, fixed definition, the term “society” is capable of encompassing a multitude of meanings and values. The use of the term “society” in this manner encapsulates the paradox between freedom and equality, providing a framework for negotiating these potentially opposing values. “Society,” as a general term encompassing a multitude of disparate concepts pertaining to social order, encapsulates the persistent tension and effort to reconcile freedom and equality. In this way, the concept of “society” emerges as a dynamic forum for negotiating the meanings and priorities of these foundational values. As an empty signifier, the term “society” allows different groups within society to imbue it with their own, often conflicting, interpretations, thereby articulating their specific notions of normality, legitimacy, and belonging. This flexible utilization is a consequence of the complexity of social realities and the ongoing debate surrounding the core values of democratic societies. In terms of the factual dimension, the fluidity of the term “society” adeptly navigates the simultaneity of difference, both concealing and revealing the complex, multi-layered nature of social realities (Nassehi 2021, 220). The term serves as a repository for the diverse, overlapping, and often conflicting narratives and identities that collectively constitute the social fabric. As Nassehi notes, the concept of “society” exemplifies the dynamic interplay between diverse social narratives and identities (*ibid.*). It simultaneously conceals and reveals the intricate and multifaceted nature of these realities. As a repository of varied, often conflicting

narratives and identities, this concept reflects the fundamental, continually evolving nature of identity formation. Identity is inextricably linked with the dynamic interplay of differences and the practices of marking them. It is a construct that is in a state of constant evolution and is never definitively fixed. It is subject to a multitude of influences and is continually overdetermined, as postulated by Althusser. These reflections contribute to our understanding of identity as a construct that is not merely demarcated from a “constitutive outside” (Laclau 1990, 10), but also engaged with in relation to social fluidity and inherent differences. The necessity of an “outside,” which is crucial for defining the boundaries of one’s identity and culture (Mouffe 2010, 130), is inextricably linked with the fluidity and openness of the concept of “society.” This interaction between society as a whole and the formation of individual and collective identities exhibits the interdependence of the processes of identity construction and navigation within society. Both processes are distinguished by a continuous dynamic and a negotiation of meanings that are deeply embedded in social structures and discourses. The generation of alterity, or the creation of difference, emerges as a fundamental process within social group structures, whereby a collective is distinguished from those designated as “constitutive outsiders.” Concurrently, specific meanings must be defined and established at the internal or ideological level. A significant element of collective formation through cultural coding is the continuous (re)production of an empty signifier. Identities are thus indispensable to the functioning of any society, as the notion of unity cannot be sustained without them. Indeed, in the absence of this conceptual cohesion, the society in question would cease to exist. Therefore, a definitive resolution is unattainable (Marchart 2013) because any fixation of identity is inherently provisional, incomplete, and contingent upon the prevailing hegemonic-discursive structures that shape it (Hall 2018b, 185). Every form of collective identity necessitates an act of collective narration that discursively constructs and maintains the exclusion of “others” deemed marginal in the sense of the constitutive outside.

In accordance with systems theory, communication represents the foundational mechanism that both constitutes and maintains social systems (see Chapter 2.2.4). The creation of alterity and the demarcation from a “constitutive outside” occur through communicative processes that delineate identities and differences within and between social groups. These processes are not static; rather, they are dynamic and recursive. This implies that identities and their associated demarcations are continuously renegotiated and constructed. This lends further support to the systems theory perspective that social systems and their boundaries are defined by communication, rather than by fixed properties or substances. The continuous reproduction of empty signifiers and the practice of so-called second-order observation are inextricably linked and play a central role in the reflexive construction of social realities. Social systems use second-order observation to examine the ways in which identities and social orders are constructed and continually renegotiated

through discursive mechanisms. This level of meta-observation enables systems to undertake a critical assessment of their foundational assumptions and processes of identity formation. This demonstrates that any apparent coherence and unity within social orders are, in fact, the result of ongoing discursive negotiations. These negotiations are shaped and influenced by the relentless rearticulation of empty signifiers, which provide a framework for understanding the interactions and relational dynamics among various social categories. A key aspect of these renegotiations of meaning is the intersectional concept of articulation, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.1. The concept of articulation examines the ways in which identities are subject to dynamic transformation as a result of interactions with a multiplicity of social forces, including economic interests, political ideologies, and cultural norms. These forces are interconnected through a network of differential relations that are culturally encoded and communicated, thereby continually transforming the possibilities for identification and the meanings associated with social categories. These transformations also impact human differentiation, influencing the articulation of binary and hierarchical evaluations. These include the dichotomous distinctions between beautiful/ugly, domestic/foreign, and rich/poor, among others. It is important to understand these binary-coded differentiations in the context of BCAS (see Chapter 6.4). Concurrently, the concept of empty signifiers in hegemony theory serves as a mechanism for the temporary stabilization of meanings within a fluid and contested discursive field. These signifiers act as nodes where diverse identity claims and ideological currents temporarily align under a seemingly coherent yet inherently flexible banner. This dynamic is fundamental to the tenets of intersectional theory, which posits that identities are shaped by a multitude of social forces. The strategic use of empty signifiers enables the formation and renegotiation of collective identities, facilitating ongoing identity re-articulation and the definition of identities in opposition to others. This mechanism is of great consequence for the continuous negotiation and adaptation of meanings, playing a pivotal role in the organization and mobilization of the diversity addressed by intersectionality. The ongoing dynamics of social categorization and the resulting collective identities necessitate constant redefinition, which in turn gives rise to discontinuities and disputes over the definition of group identities. The conventional terms used to describe social associations, such as “groups,” “nations,” “ethnicities,” and “cultures,” often prove to be reductionist when considered in the context of the actual heterogeneity and complexity that exists within the assumed unity. Recognizing this leads to the need for a nuanced understanding of social identities that accommodates the fluid and contested nature of these categories, acknowledging the diverse and dynamic interactions that shape them (Brubaker 2022). Cognitively and emotionally formed affiliations do not necessarily coincide with physically manifested collectives. These identity constructions are diverse and should be seen as a continuum of identification possibilities. Herein lies a paradox:

despite the actual and potential constraints that collective identities can impose in present-day contexts, there is an enduring appeal to them. This attraction lies at the heart of the complexity and deep embeddedness of collective identity constructions in social reality.

Particularly in times of uncertainty or crisis, political actors strategically exploit this tendency to form collective identities to advance their agendas and reinforce existing power structures (Arditi 2007). In liberal democracies, identities—especially those reinforced by the rise of populist movements—lead to increased polarization and the consolidation of stereotypes, significantly undermining efforts at integration. These populist movements, often right-wing, have proven inadequate to address the challenges posed by neoliberal policies. These policies contribute to post-democratic tendencies (W. Brown 2016), where democratic ideals are eroded by market-driven logic and political disenfranchisement, thereby complicating the social and political landscape (Crouch 2020; A. Allen et al. 2022). The prevalence of populist, simplistic political communication is a long-standing phenomenon that is deeply intertwined with the fact that collective identities are shaped by cultural and affective construction processes. These identities are anchored in a variety of ideas that are constantly reinforced by symbolic and cultural artifacts and their meanings. The affects and emotions associated with these ideas are also culturally constructed, based primarily on symbolic representations. Codes that employ both empty signifiers and primordial or neoliberal content are central to the construction of social realities and identities. All of the approaches discussed play a critical role in articulating and negotiating meanings within social and political discourses, shaping collective identities, setting political agendas, and defining the parameters of inclusion and exclusion. What they have in common is that they function as discursive mechanisms that actively shape social meanings and structure the arena for social negotiation processes that are central to social meaning-making and identity formation. It is through these processes that groups and individuals define their relationships and interactions. However, different codings offer different approaches to shaping lines of difference and meaning within social and political discourses. Empty signifiers such as “society” facilitate multiple interpretations, aiding in the negotiation of power and identity while reflecting the complexity of social realities. Primordial encodings root identity in seemingly immutable, “natural” characteristics, while neoliberal encodings frame individuals as economic actors within an ideology that purports to bridge all differences and be universally inclusive. These coding strategies vary in their flexibility and the range of interpretations they allow, each uniquely influencing how social inclusion, exclusion, and the distribution of power are negotiated.

8.2 Autopoiesis and Minimization of Entropy (B)

Part (B)

Cultural codes function as autopoietic elements within social systems, ensuring their self-preservation and self-reproduction by reducing entropy. Analyzing their structural coupling with the environment points out their pivotal role in actively shaping and sustaining social orders.

The second dimension of our definition is comprised of two distinct aspects. The first is the autopoietic character of cultural codes, and the second is their function as entropy minimizers. The concept of structural coupling (Chapter 2.2.7) elucidates the function of cultural codes not only in their internal structuring but also in their dynamic interactions with the environment. This situates them at the core of social construction, and as a result, they manifest as outcomes of the social orders they facilitate. Cultural codes are shown to enhance the stability and predictability of social orders through their adaptability and capacity for reinterpretation, which minimizes entropy while promoting effective communication and meaning-making within social systems. The autopoietic nature of cultural codes is corroborated by their demonstrated capacity for self-organization, self-reproduction, and adaptability. These systems are not merely static sets of rules; rather, they are dynamic, self-sustaining entities that actively respond to change and continually renew themselves. Such systems evolve over time, adapting to new social, economic, and political conditions. The generation of independent structures demonstrates the manner in which cultural orders emerge and organize themselves in the absence of centralized control. Their autopoietic nature enables the emergence of novel patterns that drive cultural innovation and creativity, thereby enhancing the resilience of social systems. This autopoietic perspective shifts the focus to the active role of cultural codes in influencing social dynamics and their capacity to manage stability and change.

Information, as understood in relation to the construction of messages (Eco 2002, 57), constitutes a fundamental component of autopoietic systems. It endows the system with the capacity to select from a multitude of potential states and interactions with the environment, thereby ensuring its structural and functional integrity. The reduction of equal probability states represents a fundamental process in the preservation of order and organization within a system, as evidenced by the minimization of entropy. In this context, the term “entropy” is employed to describe a *reduction in disorder* or randomness (Trinn 2015, 186). Entropy, a concept derived from thermodynamics, is employed to quantify the level of disorder or randomness within a system. Nevertheless, the concept of entropy has been applied in metaphorical contexts in a number of fields beyond its original scientific context,

including information theory and the social sciences. In these disciplines, entropy is frequently employed as a synonym for unpredictability or the absence of structured order within a system. A state of high entropy is defined as a situation in which numerous states are equally probable and lack discernible patterns or structures (Eco 2002, 58). In autopoietic systems, the term is employed to describe the intrinsic unpredictability of the system's states. As a measure of disorder or informational loss, entropy provides insight into the difficulties of maintaining order and facilitating efficient meaning transmission within cultural encodings. These encodings serve as interfaces in the structural coupling between diverse social systems or between social systems and their environments. They provide a common "language" or repertoire of symbols through which information is conveyed and meanings are co-constructed. In light of this framework, it becomes evident that the development of mechanisms capable of counteracting the intrinsic tendency of systems to devolve into disarray and ambiguity is of paramount importance. It is imperative that such mechanisms be designed in a way that ensures the clarity, stability, and predictability of meanings conveyed through cultural encodings. In light of this perspective, it is clear that cultural encodings must be designed and sustained in a manner that ensures their continued efficacy as conduits for communication and meaning-making within and across systems. Moreover, the concept of entropy provides a link between information theory and social phenomena, offering insight into the informational content of messages and the uncertainties inherent in such content (Trinn 2015, 137). In the context of cultural coding as structural coupling, it draws attention to the intricate and information-rich nature of cultural messages and their impact on the comprehensibility and interpretability of social systems.

In contrast to entropy, complexity is contingent upon the number of components comprising the system and the nature of their interactions. A complex system is defined by a dense network of components and interactions, which often gives rise to emergent properties—that is, properties that are not evident at the level of the individual components but emerge when the system as a whole is considered. Complexity implies an inherent structure or order, which, despite potential difficulties in analysis or prediction, maintains discernible regularity or pattern formation. In contrast, the term "entropy" is used to describe the degree of disorder or randomness within a system. It indicates a lack of structured order and unpredictability. This distinction is of great importance for the comprehension of how cultural codes effectively reduce entropy by selecting and defining meanings that enhance communication and comprehension within social systems (Trinn 2015, 138). In discussions pertaining to the maintenance of order and organizational structure in autopoietic systems, entropy provides a precise framework for addressing the challenges of minimizing disorder and enhancing predictability. The delineation between complexity and entropy is an important one, as it signifies *two interconnected perspectives of a system*. While the complexity of a system can be managed through the imple-

mentation of suitable strategies and models to promote emergence and adaptability, entropy necessitates active reduction to prevent information loss and ensure efficient, goal-oriented processes. The strategic application of the entropy concept enables the development of targeted methodologies for the management of disorder and the promotion of order and stability within complex systems. Although the distinction between complexity and entropy may initially seem complex, its importance becomes more apparent when viewed through the lens of structural coupling. Complexity can be defined as the richness and diversity of connections and interactions within a system, which foster new possibilities and potentials. In contrast, the concept of entropy highlights the difficulties associated with maintaining clarity and purpose in these interactions, particularly in light of the inherent tendency towards disorder and information loss. By focusing on entropy in the context of meaning transmission and cultural encoding, facilitated by structural coupling, it becomes imperative to devise mechanisms and strategies that mitigate the natural drift of systems toward disorder and ambiguity. It is of the utmost importance to preserve the clarity, stability, and predictability of communicated meanings in order to ensure the effectiveness of communication and interactions among systems. Therefore, the distinction between complexity and entropy is not merely an academic exercise; it is a crucial element in the effective management of autopoietic systems. This approach allows for the harnessing and promotion of complexity where it offers adaptive potential, while also minimizing entropy to maintain the clarity and functionality of the system. In the context of social systems, the concepts of complexity and complexity reduction are more prevalent. Social systems are continuously confronted with an influx of information that threatens to exceed their processing capabilities. The reduction of complexity is beneficial to these systems, enabling them to maintain their focus and functionality. This prevents the systems from descending into chaos or paralysis. The centrality of complexity reduction in social systems theory is linked to the intrinsic ability of these systems to generate and process meaning. The capacity to discern meaning is a fundamental tenet of the selection process. It enables systems to identify and prioritize relevant information from a plethora of possibilities while disregarding the rest. This selective process is crucial for ensuring the continued operational effectiveness and resilience of social systems.

Therefore, every act of sense-making—whether an interpretation, an understanding, or an assignment of meaning—represents a selective process whereby specific information, actions, or interactions are deemed relevant in the context of the vast array of stimuli present in the external environment, while others are excluded. Therefore, meaning is not only a foundational element in the process of making selections; it is also a product of selective processes that filter certain aspects of reality. This selection is of great consequence for the maintenance of the system's internal order and its capacity to adapt to its environment. Complexity reduction is an ongoing process that enables social systems to maintain their identity while

responding to change in a dynamic manner. The selection process within the context of meaning production and processing in social systems is closely intertwined with the binary-coded affective meaning attribution within schemata, which is referred to as BCAS (a detailed discussion of which can be found in Chapter 6.4). This model proposes that understanding and cognition are fundamentally reliant on the transformation of differences, with information and meaning emerging through the differentiation of these differences. This differentiation process is inherently selective, as the identification and interpretation of differences entail a deliberate selection from a range of possible perceptions and interpretations. Both concepts—selection as conceptualized in social systems theory and BCAS—are centered on the reduction of complexity and the generation of meaning. This is accomplished by filtering pertinent information from a multitude of potential sources. While the BCAS framework identifies the importance of differentiating between elements in the generation of information and meaning, social systems theory emphasises the role of selective processes in rendering the complexity of the environment manageable and providing guidance for social systems. This intertwining of selective meaning-making processes and mechanisms of complexity reduction is inextricably linked with the adaptive capacities of social systems, enabling them to navigate and flourish within fluctuating and often chaotic environments. The interconnection between these perspectives can be elucidated by recognizing that both the differentiation of differences and the selection of meaning act as mechanisms through which systems reduce complexity. This reduction is achieved through the filtering out of certain environmental elements as significant, while others are disregarded. The selection of information is contingent upon the identification of differences that are deemed significant, which subsequently form the foundation for the formation of meaning and significance within social systems. The concept of difference transformation, as postulated by Gregory Bateson, elucidates the manner in which selections transcend mere randomness or arbitrariness. Instead, they function as informed processes that generate information and meaning by distinguishing pertinent differences.

While entropy is a relevant concept in specific contexts, such as information transmission and encoding, where it signifies the risks of disorder and information loss, complexity reduction is a broader process that relates to the selection and sense-making involved in the operation and evolution of social systems. The discussion of entropy and complexity reduction in the context of cultural coding brings to the fore the various aspects of a single underlying process: the manner in which social systems navigate the challenge of establishing and sustaining order and predictability in the face of a vast array of potential outcomes (Trinn 2015, 144). This dual focus allows us to comprehend not only how systems maintain coherence and functionality in the face of potential chaos but also how they harness and interpret informa-

tion to encourage continual adaptation and growth. This framework is predicated on the notion that a dynamic interplay between maintaining stability and embracing change is essential for the resilience and vitality of social systems. The perspective of cultural codes as instruments for complexity reduction elucidates their function in differentiating pertinent from irrelevant information, stabilizing meanings, and thus constructing a coherent meaning system that guides actions. Concurrently, the issue of entropy requires the implementation of measures to counteract the proclivity towards disorder and meaning loss, which are essential for the maintenance of the integrity and functionality of the meaning system. As previously stated, an equal probability distribution indicates a state where each element of a system has an equal likelihood of occurring. This results in maximum entropy, making it impossible to make linear predictions, as no states are preferentially established. Therefore, reducing entropy is crucial for maintaining order and organization within the system, as it increases the likelihood of specific states occurring and establishes a recognizable pattern. In autopoietic systems, the reduction of entropy through the implementation of established rules or codes facilitates the development and preservation of organized structures, which are crucial for the sustenance of vital processes. These codes restrict the range of possible actions, direct the flow of information and interactions along specific pathways, and thus contribute to the management of complexity, the maintenance of orderly dynamics, and the preservation of functional coherence within the system. Codes delineate relevant content and its processing, thereby facilitating autopoiesis. In consequence, they operate not only as conduits for the transfer of information, but also as indispensable elements in the regulation of the system's self-organization and self-regulation. They determine the system's responses to environmental alterations, instigate internal procedures to maintain its structural integrity, and regulate the distribution of resources. As a result, these codes reflect the system's preferences by determining which actions and interactions are prioritized to ensure its survival and development. This comprehensive role of cultural codes illustrates the significance of their impact on the shaping and sustenance of the operational and developmental trajectories of social systems.

8.3 Subjectivation—Conditioning—System Justification (C)

Part (C)

Cultural codes create specific meanings that not only stabilize but also legitimize the social system by integrating these meanings into the system's structures through processes of subjectivation. These processes facilitate the internalization of codes by individuals, thus promoting the continual self-reproduction of these codes within the system.

In examining the third dimension of cultural codes, post-structuralist perspectives on subjectivation are integrated with system-theoretical approaches and the theory of system justification. This integration is intended to conceptualize subjectivation as the conditioning of members within a social system. Such conditioning establishes normative orders that are continuously reconstituted through cultural coding, thereby normalizing existing social structures. This analysis of the internalization of normative meanings through cultural codes calls into question the conventional dichotomy often assumed between social order and disorder. This dichotomy frequently emerges from a linear cause-and-effect logic. In contrast, this perspective suggests that novel structures may emerge from circumstances perceived as fragile or chaotic, facilitated by cultural coding. The *inevitability of exclusions* within social systems, the *tendency to deny them*, and the *semantics associated* with them (see chapter 2.2.9) form the foundation for the subsequent examination of the subjectifying and conditioning properties of cultural codes. In the context of intricate social systems, these unavoidable exclusions and their proclivity for denial inevitably give rise to internal tensions and contradictions. The failure to acknowledge or suppress exclusions can result in the emergence of latent conflicts with the potential to destabilize the system and generate chaotic dynamics. The subjectifying and conditioning properties of cultural codes exacerbate these processes by influencing individual perceptions and actions in specific directions, thus affecting the feedback loops within social systems. As a consequence of these non-linear interactions, minor disturbances have the potential to be amplified, leading to unpredictable developments and chaotic patterns in the social fabric. The intrinsic property of complex social systems to operate at the threshold of chaos enables the generation of emergence. The concept of emergence refers to the capacity of a complex social system to generate novel and unpredictable structures that cannot be fully derived from existing structures (see Chapter 2). This process is significantly influenced by affectivity, which demonstrates the dynamic and transformative power of cultural codes in the formation of social realities. The mutual influence of individuals and social structures gives rise to non-linear dynamics, wherein minor triggers can have a substantial im-

pact. Consequently, affective reactions and cultural impulses in complex social systems can precipitate phase transitions, whereby novel patterns and orders emerge.

8.3.1 Subjectivation and Conditioning

Culturally and socially constructed notions of human diversity function as instruments of power, molding thoughts, emotions, and behaviors through their distinctive codification. The interplay of these conceptions with power structures facilitates the formation and preservation of social orders, which are sustained by the continuous reiteration of hegemonic relationships. These heterogeneous power structures are perpetually recreated through media and discourse, thereby fostering the construction of “normality” and the establishment of normative knowledge and behavioral norms. This transformative process subjects individuals to a process of subjectivation, as described by thinkers such as Foucault (Foucault 1994; J. Butler 1997). The term “subjectification” is defined as the process through which individuals become representative subjects of a social order, subjected to the prevailing norms and expectations of that social order. Normative requirements encompass the expectations, rules, and standards that are recognized within a society or group and are benchmarks for appropriate, desirable, or obligatory behavior. These norms encompass a spectrum of explicit rules and laws, as well as unwritten conventions and behaviors that are socially accepted. By delineating what is considered normal, morally correct, efficient, or socially acceptable, these requirements regulate social life, influencing individual and collective behaviors and reinforcing social order through the promotion of conformity and the sanctioning of deviations. This dual process of subjugation and conscious self-formation is, in turn, grounded in the inherent ambiguity surrounding the concept of the subject. The term “subject” refers to both a subjugated individual and a self-aware agent within the complex interplay of autonomy and control in the shaping of human identities. The construction of “normality” that results from these processes legitimizes discrimination by categorizing identities according to the specific requirements of the social system. These codes are deeply embedded within historical and social contexts and exert a profound influence on our perception and interpretation of the world. The complex interrelationship between cultural codes and the dynamics of subjectivation will be examined in greater detail in subsequent sections. The process of subjectivation is a comprehensive one, whereby individuals are shaped and standardized through their subjugation to social norms. This process should not be viewed as mere passive compliance with external standards; rather, it entails the active appropriation and internalization of these norms by individuals. This dual dynamic enables individuals to define and position themselves within their social milieu, thereby exemplifying the reciprocal interaction between individuals and their social environment. In this interac-

tion, cultural codes and normative demands are not only externally imposed but are also actively processed and enacted by the individual.

Therefore, the “subject” is not merely shaped by social norms and values; rather, it actively self-forms within the ongoing interplay with and the constraints imposed by these factors. Moreover, consideration is being given to the complex interplay between autonomy and control, whereby the formation of individual identities is shaped by both external influences and personal agency. The discursive power inherent to subjectivation exerts influence through the construction and enforcement of notions of “normality” through the use of social sanctions and rewards. The term “subject” encapsulates two pivotal dimensions. Firstly, it denotes individuals as objects of subjugation within prevailing power structures. Secondly, it simultaneously denotes these same individuals as subjects who, through engagement with these power dynamics and through reflective self-awareness, forge their identities, shaped by these very subjugations (Reckwitz 2021, 32). Subjectivation processes invariably emerge from power-laden dynamics, unfolding within binary and hierarchically structured “orders of difference” (Dirim and Mecheril 2018, 18). The legitimization of specific orders of difference, along with the associated self-conceptions and perceptions of others, contributes to the establishment of a sense of naturalness surrounding hegemonic patterns of order when they are widely recognized. The internalization of these normative orders requires the continuous replication of the associated structures of belonging and hierarchy, which in turn leads to the uncritical perception of significant distinctions between individuals and constructed groups as “normal.” These mechanisms amplify critical differentiation processes across a range of societal levels. The schemas they disseminate exert an influence on individuals and groups alike, establishing hierarchies and classes that are systematically disparate in terms of access to crucial resources. They regulate and shape experiences, interpretations, and behaviors by maintaining the perception of social conditions as normal or natural, thereby embedding these distinctions deeply within societal consciousness. All forms of discrimination are legitimized through the ascription and distribution of identities based on the needs of one’s own group. To disseminate such distinctive forms and configurations of “naturalness” across broader groups and collectives, the content must be communicated through specific cultural codings. In this process of influence, meanings are situated within the context of both historical processes and social frameworks (Giesen and Lüter 2000, 26). Cultural codings operate not only to establish and maintain distinctions and boundaries between the in-group and the external world, encompassing other groups and their members, but also to create and define intricate classification systems within the established groups themselves. The process of becoming a subject is an ongoing and never fully completed one, reflecting the dynamics and development of the individual over time. This indicates that subjects are not static entities; rather, they undergo continuous evolution and development

as a result of sustained interactions with their social and material environments (Färber 2022, 233). This process is propelled by a series of practices that encompass both physical actions and cognitive-affective processes. The approach proposed here places significant emphasis on the role of feelings, thoughts, and reflection in the process of becoming a conscious subject. It acknowledges the importance of mental activities in shaping the self. This perspective is of great consequence to the ongoing discourse on human differentiation, as it portrays schemata as cognitive-affective-bodily frameworks (see Chapter 6) that mirror this process of internalization and continual processing in humans. The concept of becoming a subject is an appropriate means of describing the process through which an individual evolves into a subject over the course of their development. However, the terms “conditioning” and “normalization,” though less commonly used in this context, also encapsulate the essence of the phenomenon, particularly in regard to human differentiation. These terms are intricately connected to the concepts of affective-cognitive-bodily schemata, which illustrate, at a deeper level, what subjectivation entails in a cultural and sociological sense. This entails the conditioning, through incessant repetition, of what is deemed “normal” or deviant within a specific cultural context. The conceptualization of subjectivation as conditioning enhances our understanding of social systems by elucidating the specific mechanisms that influence individuals. This approach incorporates concepts from behavioral psychology, such as learning through reinforcement, emphasizing the proactive role of social systems in shaping identity and behavior through the use of rewards, punishments, and recurrent interactions. The concept of conditioning elucidates the processes through which social norms are internalized and individual behaviors are molded, thereby providing deeper insights into how individuals adapt to their social environment.

8.3.2 Critical Junctures in Social Complexity: The Role of Bifurcation Points

A more detailed examination reveals that the purported “normality” of established social orders and the associated notion of social stability are, in fact, a dynamic process of negotiation, with a focus on critical turning points. As stated at the outset, the social order is exceedingly fragile and, as a result, cannot be considered to be genuinely stable. Indeed, social systems frequently exhibit characteristics that are more accurately described as chaotic. In systems theory discourses, this phenomenon is often referred to as “complexity” (Stäheli 2018, 120). The notion of social complexity implies that the constituent elements of a system are linked in non-linear patterns, rendering the traditional methods of deduction and prediction inapplicable. Complex systems are invariably situated at so-called *bifurcation points*, at which the future trajectory of the system is contingent upon a decision regarding the direction of its continued development (Urry 2005, 5). In such pivotal moments, even minor

changes or fluctuations can produce extensive impacts on the system as a whole, thereby disclosing the inherent uncertainty and unpredictability of social dynamics. The moment at which systems reach a critical point and possible states are decided is closely linked to the process of subjectivation and the internalization of specific meanings through cultural coding. Such turning points mark phases in the system where minor changes or fluctuations can have significant effects on the system dynamics, which are reinforced by feedback loops. At points of bifurcation, social systems are confronted with the challenge of selecting one of several potential states. The selection processes in question are not solely determined by logical or normative considerations; they are also influenced by a spectrum of emotional states. Bifurcation points demarcate phases of heightened openness and uncertainty within a system where the future trajectory remains undetermined. The concept of *structural coupling*, which refers to the interconnection and mutual influence between systems or components within a system (see Chapter 2), is of paramount importance during these phases. This process is mediated by *cultural codes* (see Chapter 8) and *affective-cognitive-bodily schemata* (see Chapter 6), which are activated at such critical moments and facilitate the reproduction of specific patterns within the system. These codes and schemata provide a framework for understanding the environment and the potential courses of action available to actors, thereby influencing decision-making processes. In the context of subjectivation and the internalization of meanings, these critical points represent moments in which the acceptance or rejection of cultural codes, norms, and values by individuals and groups is determined. Such decisions may be reinforced by social feedback loops that either stabilize the prevailing cultural norms and values or lead to significant changes in the social order. To illustrate, an augmented perception of social inequality may precipitate a bifurcation point at which society elects to enhance social cohesion through inclusion or to exacerbate inequality through exclusion. Subsequently, this decision is influenced by social dynamics and feedback loops, including public discourse, media coverage, and individual behavior, which either reinforce or weaken it. The formation of collective identities is inextricably linked with critical turning points in social systems. In such pivotal moments, decision-making is influenced not only by the existing cultural codes but also by the way individuals and groups redefine or reaffirm their collective identity. This frequently occurs in response to social crises or significant occurrences that necessitate a renegotiation of values and norms. Furthermore, the advent of digitalization and the pervasiveness of social media have markedly accelerated the dissemination, examination, and alteration of cultural codes and norms. The advent of advanced technologies has enabled the accelerated dissemination of information and ideas, which in turn has amplified the dynamics at critical bifurcation points, leading to a more rapid and extensive societal resonance. From this perspective, critical turning points—moments of bifurcation—play a pivotal role in the development and transformation of social systems. They represent critical junc-

tures at which the potential for the emergence of novel social structures and orders is unleashed. These novel formations are shaped by the affective, cognitive, and bodily mediation of schemata and their internalization through specific cultural codings. The approach presented here is fundamentally opposed to the use of reductionist concepts that attempt to grasp powerful processes of subjectivation exclusively from a discursive, emotional, or cognitive perspective. In contrast, this approach prioritizes the multidimensional interweaving of these aspects and their synergistic effect in the constitution of social realities. A comprehensive analysis of social systems requires an understanding of the complex processes of subjectivation and social structuring that occur at multiple levels. It illuminates the dynamic interplay between individual actions, collective practices, and cultural norms, which invariably operate within a field of tension between stability and change. In conclusion, social orders are shaped by the internalization of cultural codes and the active participation of individuals in social dynamics. The permeable boundaries between the individual and the collective, as well as between order and chaos, are of paramount importance in the cultural coding of human differentiation.

8.3.3 Collective Identities

The examination of bifurcation points in social systems—those critical junctures where the trajectory of system development is decided, and new structures emerge—provides insights into the non-linear dynamics of social (dis)orders. At these points, it becomes evident that there are possibilities for change and transformation of social structures, as well as the mechanisms through which collective identities are formed and reconfigured. Driven by affective-cognitive processes and interactions with cultural codes, moments of bifurcation present opportunities for either redefinition or reinforcement of group identities. These pivotal moments call attention to the fact that collective identities are not static; rather, they are in a state of constant flux, shaped by the interplay between individual and social contexts, as well as ongoing negotiation and adaptation to new social, political, and cultural conditions. In essence, we may conclude that the formation of social order and differentiation is largely contingent upon the processes of subjectivation and the internalization of meanings that are culturally mediated. These meanings are subject to continuous renegotiation as a result of the sustained interaction between individuals and the collective. In the context of previous discussions, collective identifications and affiliations emerge as relational and interwoven phenomena. These constructs are shown to be in a state of constant evolution and, as a result, should not be viewed as fixed entities. Instead, they are understood to be subject to a continuous process of (re)emergence and reconstruction (Delitz 2018, 33). This understanding illuminates the almost obsessive compulsion to develop and maintain fears of the “other,” regardless of the specific context in which this strategy

is employed and the associated negative stereotyping, as previously discussed in relation to epistemic violence (section 8.1.2.2). Furthermore, it clarifies the relentless fascination with discussing collective identities and the issues associated with them, ultimately conceptualizing them as homogeneous entities. The use of categorization rubrics by collectives is often driven by a desire to achieve stability, even in the absence of any divisive intent. The importance of establishing collective identities through the creation of historical unity and continuity is evident when considering the symbolic power of cultural artifacts such as flags, symbols, or significant architectural structures. These elements are not merely visual representations; they also serve to forge identity through their affective resonance and integration into cultural narratives, thereby helping to form and solidify collective memories. Consequently, these affective connections and narratives necessitate continuous confirmation and reorientation to maintain their stabilizing function. There is a mutual influence and symbiotic relationship between the individual and the collective. The emotional attachment to nations is inextricably linked with the depth of cultural codes within social systems. These codes not only transcend physical borders but also manifest in communities without a fixed territory, such as the Roma or Kurds. This exemplifies the concept of nations as “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006).

The transformation of individual ideals into collective ones, frequently exemplified by charismatic leaders, depicts the convergence of individual and collective identities and idealizations (Mentzos 2002, 127). However, this does not apply universally across all individuals within a collective. Some individuals may resist the adoption of these collective ideals, maintaining their personal aspirations and values while simultaneously maintaining a critical distance from dominant collective narratives. Nevertheless, the process contributes to the homogenization of identities and strengthens social cohesion. Cultural codes function as mediators that shape both individual and collective identities and delineate and reinforce the boundaries between “us” and “the others.” The adoption of collective ideals by some individuals facilitates their integration into the social fabric, simultaneously driving processes of differentiation within and between societies. Once more, the function of cultural coding in influencing and guiding human perceptions and behavior unconsciously becomes evident. Emotional markers (see Chapter 8.1.2) play a crucial role in fostering affective attachments to collective symbols and narratives, thereby facilitating the construction and maintenance of collective identities. This perspective is further reinforced by the assertion that communication and mutual observation play a constitutive role in the formation and evolution of social systems and collective identities. As previously stated, communication is of paramount importance in the formation of social systems that differentiate themselves through the mutual observation of their members. The formation of collective identities is not merely a consequence of individual feelings of belonging; rather, it is an

emergent phenomenon that arises from communicative networking within the community. Such systems and the associated identities are to be understood as continually evolving constructs, characterized by a dynamic tension between stability and change, as well as order and chaos. By managing their own complexity through the selection and processing of information (i.e., meaning), social structures establish an internal order that aids in orienting and asserting themselves within a contradictory environment, thereby minimizing entropy and ensuring systemic stability. Collective identities help streamline social complexity by delineating clear boundaries and affiliations in a rapidly changing and uncertain world. Such identities provide orientation, security, and a stable self-image, which explains why they are continually emphasized and reconstructed. From the perspective of systems theory, these identities function as stabilizers of social systems, fostering a common basis for communication and interaction, thereby strengthening social cohesion and solidarity and aiding in the management of systemic complexity. The formation of collective identities is an ongoing process that is shaped by the actions of individual members and the broader cultural and social structures. It is therefore crucial to understand human differentiation as a consequence of intricate interactions between cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural factors, all situated within the dynamic processes of social systems. These interactions demonstrate that collective identities and social orders are emergent properties of these processes, continuously (re)constructed through the structural coupling between the mental systems of individuals and the social systems in which they interact.

8.4 Culture

In light of the aforementioned discussion regarding the characteristics of cultural codes, their disparate logics, and the mechanisms of influence, it becomes evident that a more precise designation would be to refer to “cultures” in the plural. Cultures manifest as complex autopoietic networks that evolve through a process of co-evolution. These networks are constituted by content produced by schemas and are structurally coupled with social systems through codes, thereby facilitating dynamic interactions between the resultant meanings and the operational logics of these systems. This structural coupling gives rise to mutual influence and co-evolution, whereby cultural patterns and social structures reciprocally inform and transform one another. Cultures are conceptualized as autopoietic networks that utilize cultural codes to delineate the boundaries between systems and their environments with specific meanings, thereby influencing social realities and facilitating identity formation processes. These codes act as self-referential mechanisms that ensure the continuity and self-regeneration of social systems by establishing distinct meanings and distinctions. Their capacity to minimize entropy and initiate self-preservation

is a significant factor in the sustenance and evolution of social orders. The structural coupling of these codes with social systems, integrated into processes of subjectivation and conditioning, functions as a mechanism for enhancing the legitimization and stabilization of social structures. The internalization of these codes by individuals facilitate the perpetual renewal and dynamism of the cultural network. Cultural codes delineate the boundaries between systems and their environments through the assignment of specific meanings, thereby influencing the formation of social realities and facilitating the processes of identification. This perspective acknowledges that cultures are not static entities; rather, they are engaged in a continuous process of self-organization, self-referentiality, and adaptation, which gives rise to a vast array of expressions and meanings through the schemas and codings that underpin them. These elements result in behaviors that are directly correlated with the underlying schemata. In the course of these processes, artifacts and social institutions emerge, develop, and are shared within social groups, and are transmitted to subsequent generations via social learning. While the cultural matrix has its origins in a particular locale and thus has spatial constraints, it is not confined by these boundaries and transcends specific territorial boundaries. The intricate framework is inextricably linked to emotions and human desires, which are deeply embedded in our biological and evolutionary psychological makeup. Emotions operate as motivational forces that initiate, direct, and regulate both individual and collective behaviors, playing a key role in cultural creation practices. They significantly impact social interactions and group dynamics, for example, by fostering cohesion and cooperation or by delineating ally-adversary relationships. Human desire, which is characterized by attractions and aversions, the pursuit of rewards, and the avoidance of punishments, is essential for the development, dissemination, and transformation of cultural contents and practices. The role of human desire in these processes cannot be overstated. It is fundamentally rooted in bodily reward mechanisms that are governed by hormones and neurotransmitters (for further details, please refer to Chapter 5). These mechanisms, though susceptible to conscious intervention, naturally reinforce and persist through autopoietic resonance and recursion dynamics. The outcomes of reward and punishment are also expressed through emotions and emotional markers such as shame and disgrace, which have a profound impact on social interactions and cultural imprinting. Recursion, defined as a process where actions and developments within a cultural system reflect its historical states and provide a foundation for new iterations, allows the system to self-organize and self-regulate. This dynamic attests to the critical role of emotional responses and markers in autopoietic self-organization and cultural evolution.

The autopoietic dimension of schemas is evident through the dynamic, self-organizing structures that have been extensively documented across multiple disciplines. These structures are of vital importance for the sustenance and evolution of cultural networks, and they are continually transformed by the interplay between in-

dividual experiences and collective beliefs and practices. Such structures are shaped and reshaped by internal dynamics and interactions with the external environment. The phenomenon of recursion within cultural schemas illustrates how past experiences influence future perceptions and actions within a culture, thereby substantiating the recursive nature of cultural evolution and self-regulation. Each novel experience is interpreted through the lens of preexisting cultural schemata, which may be conceptualized as collective cognitive, affective, and bodily structures. The resulting perceptions or actions are integrated into these schemas, thereby modifying them and setting the stage for future events. This ongoing cycle of experience, interpretation, and adaptation exemplify recursive processes in both biocultural and social evolution. These recursive processes are of great importance for the comprehension of the genesis of cultural identification processes. They elucidate the manner in which historical and cultural contexts shape contemporary social dynamics and distinctions. The continuous application and adaptation of cultural schemata in response to new experiences within specific cultural or historical contexts gives rise to individual and collective identification processes and the corresponding social structures, which then evolve. These processes facilitate cultural adaptation to changing conditions while maintaining the integrity of the core identity, integrating new elements, and reinterpreting existing ones. In this sense, cultural schemas, along with the emotions and desires they channel, are essential components that perpetually cycle through and reshape the autopoietic network of culture, thereby contributing to the co-evolution and dynamic adaptability of cultures. The self-referential and autopoietic traits of this cultural concept do not imply absolute self-sufficiency or a propensity for cultural isolation. Instead, the intrinsic dynamics and the impact of differentiation regimes, mediated by cultural coding and, on occasion, coercion, demonstrate the intricate intricacy of cultural dynamics, which are actively engaged with external influences. From this historical perspective, it is erroneous to view culture as a self-contained, monolithic entity. Rather, culture functions as a network, characterized by dynamic interactions and vibrant exchanges between different cultures and their environments. This perspective directs attention to the human capacity to develop and sustain cultural networks as a means of navigating increasingly complex social structures. An acknowledgment of the network-like nature of cultures and their interactions with the environment allows for a transcendence of a purely introspective understanding of culture. This enables an exploration of the diverse ways in which cultures are shaped, adapted, and reinterpreted over time in order to meet the challenges of a complex world. The matrix-like composition of cultures, which includes both immaterial aspects like ideas and meanings, as well as material elements such as artifacts and ritual practices, represents an integral aspect of its inherent complexity. This composition also encompasses the integration of both these elements through cognitive, affective, and bodily schemas. This approach renders evident that the distinction between “inside”

and “outside,” which may have been viable tens of thousands of years ago in smaller, more manageable group sizes, is no longer applicable in the present context. This insight is derived directly from the preceding discussion of schemata and the matrix-like nature of cultures. Cultures are constituted by a complex network of immaterial and material aspects. The former includes ideas and meanings, while the latter encompasses artifacts and rituals. These components are not only present in the external world but are also experienced and processed internally through cognitive-affective-bodily schemata. The integration of both material and immaterial aspects into individual and collective perception demonstrates that cultures are not isolated entities with a clearly delineated inner life separate from the external world. Conversely, cultures, despite their systemic boundedness and the inescapable dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (see Chapter 2.2.9), are distinguished by a considerable degree of permeability, whereby external influences are persistently absorbed, processed, and integrated into one’s own cultural matrix. Concurrently, cultural practices and meanings extend outward, affecting other cultures and social contexts. The permeability and interconnectedness of cultural boundaries make it untenable to view cultures as isolated entities where a distinct “inside” can be distinguished from an “outside.” Accordingly, this approach recognizes that cultures are not only shaped by power structures but also by mutual influences, whereby dynamic adaptation to and interaction with the environment is of paramount importance. This perspective allows for a more nuanced analysis of power relations and demonstrates how cultural norms and values are influenced and reshaped by social, economic, and political forces. By elucidating the dynamics of exchange relationships and the permeability of cultural boundaries, this approach helps address the risks associated with overestimated self-sufficiency and the insufficient acknowledgment of power structures and inequalities. This means that cultures are neither isolated, autonomous systems nor untouched by internal hierarchies, but are instead embedded in dynamic power relations and intercultural interactions. Concurrently, it challenges the assumption that cultures can be reduced to single, simple concepts. Instead, it emphasizes the complexity, ambiguity and contradictory nature of cultural phenomena. By acknowledging the necessity for empirical verifiability of its assumptions, it paves the way for research into the dynamic interactions between cultures and their social, economic and political contexts.

9 Two Regimes of Orders of Difference

Following an examination of the fundamental theoretical approaches to human differentiation and their interrelationships, this chapter presents an analysis of the two principal regimes of orders of difference from an intersectional perspective. The conceptualization of regimes of orders of difference that operate simultaneously, based on different codings and historical contexts, allows for a deeper understanding of discrimination. This analysis sheds light on the various inter-related dimensions of the social order and its power dynamics. Although these dimensions operate concurrently, they have their origins in disparate historical and politico-economic backgrounds and logics. The ability to distinguish between these concepts allows for the precise identification and treatment of the specific mechanisms and causes of discrimination and marginalization. This is achieved by revealing the complex yet interconnected ways in which social worlds are shaped. The elements of human differentiation discussed under the heading of “regime of orders of difference” represent the central focus of our historical-anthropological analysis. The primary events that have shaped our contemporary reality and lifeworlds, and thus also influenced the structuring and orientation of historical-anthropological human differentiations, have their roots in the atrocities of the Second World War and the systematic extermination of countless people across various regions worldwide. The Porrajmos and the Holocaust represent the tragic culmination of imperial endeavors on European soil over the last few centuries. The systematic crimes that resulted in the loss of millions of lives, including those of Roma, Jews, people with disabilities, political prisoners, homosexuals, and Jehovah's Witnesses, demonstrate the catastrophic consequences of an ideology that categorizes and dehumanizes people based on characteristics that are perceived to be immutable and essential. It would be a grave omission not to contextualize these mass murders within the historical backdrop in which practices such as concentration camps, internment, and forced labor were already established in colonial contexts and deeply intertwined with the practice of human differentiation. It is noteworthy to mention the transatlantic slave trade, which resulted in the deaths of over 12 million people. Furthermore, millions more perished during the arduous journey to the Western Hemisphere or as a consequence of enslavement upon

reaching their destination. These figures demonstrate the enduring prevalence of inhumane practices throughout human history. The mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization perfected during the Holocaust should not be regarded as isolated incidents; rather, they should be viewed as continuations and culminations of historically established patterns of violence. These patterns, deeply embedded in the structures of global power and colonial exploitation, reached an unprecedentedly intense level with the systematic extermination actions of the Nazis on European soil. Similar methods were employed by the Spanish during the Ten-Year War in Cuba (1868–1878), as were used by the Germans on the Shark Islands off the coast of Lüderitz Bay (1905–1907), and by the British during the Second Boer War (1899–1902) in South Africa. Furthermore, historical documentation reveals that the French employed concentration camp techniques during their colonial governance, notably in Moramanga, Madagascar, during the 1947 Malagasy uprising and in the Con Dao camp in Vietnam. These initial instances of internment camps and forced labor are characterized by a disturbing degree of systematicity and brutality, which subsequently gave rise to medical experiments and the enslavement of prisoners. These practices were not solely aimed at oppressing and controlling colonized populations; they also facilitated scientific research that perpetrated grave violations of human dignity and ethical principles under the pretext of progress and civilization. The experiences and techniques developed in these colonial contexts later formed the foundation for the systematic and industrialized methods employed by the Nazi regime. The “Madagascar Plan,” devised at the end of the 19th century with the intention of deporting Jews, “vagabonds,” and individuals deemed to be “work-shy” to German colonies in East Africa, stands as a clear precursor to the policies and legislation enacted by the Nazi regime. This connection highlights the manner in which colonial ideologies and practices influenced global imperial politics prior to the Nazi era, thereby foreshadowing the dehumanizing aspects of the Nazi agenda. The deliberate removal of unwanted population groups from the European context and their subsequent deportation to African colonies exemplifies the perilous convergence of colonialism and racist ideology, which reached its zenith in the Holocaust. From the perspective of the regions and populations subjected to exploitation, enslavement, mass murder, and rape, the atrocities that led to the establishment of the Nazi Reich appear as a grim yet unsurprising continuation of a pattern of behavior. This is why portraying the Porrajmos and the Holocaust as a “singular breach with civilization” (Diner and Benhabib 1988; Diner 2010) risks being seen as reductionist and misleading. Nevertheless, any attempt to relativize these atrocities or to disassociate them from their inhuman, anti-Romani, and anti-Semitic motives would be a grave error. The debate surrounding the singularity of these crimes does not seek to diminish their distinctiveness; rather, it aims to identify and examine the specific characteristics that differentiate them from other forms of criminality. Indeed, the systematic attempts to exterminate the Roma,

Sinti, and Jews represent unparalleled instances of mass murder *on European soil*. These exterminations were carried out with a clear genocidal intent, which was far beyond mere geostrategic calculations. They reflect a profound human abyss and a form of hatred of rare intensity in human history. The act of relativizing the Porrajmos and the Holocaust is particularly problematic as it risks equating current forms of hegemonic and power politics with these historical crimes. This can result in the inadvertent “Hitlerization” and subsequently diminishing of the gravity of Nazi atrocities. Those who hold such misconceptions fail to grasp the full extent of colonialism and imperialism that paved the way for the Nazi regime. From a systemic-anthropological perspective, this view is rejected, along with the singularity thesis, in light of the historical precursors and prototypes of enslavement, internment, and mass murder. The Porrajmos and the Holocaust thus represent the most extreme manifestations of imperial ambitions and conflicts, exemplifying the profound impacts of primordial coding. The endeavor to quantify and categorize the extent of human suffering in the context of these crimes reveals a certain ignorance as well as an ideologically motivated inclination to impose an ethnically coded ranking on suffering and misery. This approach undermines the credibility of those who do not adhere to it and offers no new analytical insights. It is imperative that the recognition of the genocidal mass murders of the Holocaust not be misused to justify current and future forms of abuse of power and policies of annihilation. In media and political discourses, the Holocaust is often invoked as a historical reference point, which erroneously fuels the expectation that any criticism of current political measures is invalid or flawed from the outset. This often pertains to decisions in areas such as national security, migration, or geopolitical conflicts, where the Holocaust is invoked as a moral argument to delegitimize opposing positions. This one-dimensional view carries the risk of suppressing necessary critical discussions about ongoing abuses of power and injustices, and of preventing a comprehensive examination of these issues.

The perception of wars and conflicts whose actors are associated with the “primal trauma of Germany” is often characterized by a one-sidedness that is difficult to comprehend. An isolated consideration of these phenomena is insufficient, as they must always be interpreted in the context of the historical background and the regimes of the order of difference that emerged in the Great Power Game. These regimes are distinguished by autopoietic dynamics that preclude an abrupt reinterpretation within the context of larger social systems. It is therefore essential to reflect on and refer to the regimes of the order of difference conceptualized in this chapter from a logic-theoretical perspective, as they facilitate the contextualization of current schemata and practices of human differentiation in a more substantiated manner, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding. These regimes function according to specific internal logics, which seek to consolidate and reproduce existing power relations and social hierarchies. In order to fully comprehend

the intricate dynamics of contemporary mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, it is essential to examine the structural and ideological foundations of these orders of difference. These logics are not arbitrary; rather, they are systemically anchored patterns that stabilize social realities and exert a significant influence on the construction of identities and social categories. The selective one-sidedness that manifests itself in the emphasis on the suffering of one's own context and the marginalization of the suffering of others illustrates an essential mechanism of human differentiation practices, which is subjected to detailed examination in this book. One's own suffering is given precedence, while the suffering of other groups, perceived as alien, is either overlooked or relativized. This tendency, which manifests as selective empathy and specific moral evaluations, is deeply rooted in social and cultural structures. From a systemic-anthropological perspective, such hierarchizations are regarded as unavoidable human tendencies that nevertheless require critical reflection and deconstruction. Selective empathy and the attribution of emotions, as evidenced, for example, in media coverage of wars, must always be viewed in the context of the self-reproduction and self-legitimization of social systems. As previously discussed, there is no sudden alteration to culturally coded patterns of meaning with the intention of fundamentally questioning or revising established narratives. In the preceding chapters, the interaction of human differentiation schemes at the levels of systems theory, biology, evolutionary psychology, and the process of cultural coding was examined. The following section of the study introduces the role of geopolitical and historical factors in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape and influence the aforementioned schemes. The proposed concept of two regimes of difference after World War II enables a more nuanced comprehension of the intricate processes of social, economic, and political differentiation by elucidating and interconnecting the pivotal dimensions of human differentiation. The regimes presented here offer insight into how the structures and power relations that emerged in the post-war period continue to influence global interactions and internal dynamics within states to this day. Furthermore, it provides an explanation for why certain social groups, as well as their narratives and identities, are systematically marginalized, while others remain privileged.

In the aforementioned atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis, a totalitarian regime employed primordial semantics in a calculated manner to construct ideological justifications for the systematic annihilation of individuals deemed "inferior" or "enemies" of the propagated social order. This exploitation of deeply ingrained societal codes allowed for a pernicious rationalization of atrocities under the guise of maintaining or restoring a perceived natural hierarchy. The deportations to concentration camps and other crimes were possible only with the knowledge and often the consent of many people, even if this was often suppressed or denied in post-war Germany until the 1990s in a spirit of defending guilt. The decisive factor is that

the schemata based on primordial coding did not dissolve immediately after 1945. On the contrary, they persist, as the resurgence of radical right-wing groups and parties—not only in Germany—impressively demonstrates. The transformation of political systems since the Second World War, particularly from the 1970s onwards, has led to a pronounced shift from primordially coded regimes to neoliberal coded regimes across the global political landscape. Primordial codings are grounded in seemingly immutable characteristics such as deep-seated affiliations and identities, while neoliberal codings champion a meritocratic order that paradoxically introduces new mechanisms of exclusion and inequality. Both coding systems profoundly shape societal structures and present complex challenges. Despite the global shift in governance models, the persistence of primordially coded regimes is unmistakable. In many regions, ethnic, religious, and cultural identities continue to be central to social and political organization, underscoring their enduring significance. This is especially pivotal in contexts where national or ethnic identities bolster political legitimacy and authority or play critical roles in conflict dynamics. These themes will be further dissected in subsequent chapters to elucidate the dynamic interplays and their consequential social and political ramifications. The historical changes in the different coding practices and logics illuminate the complexity and persistence of differentiation processes. They show how profound historical events influence and modify cultural coding mechanisms without completely eliminating them. This perspective enables an examination of the complex overlaps and interactions between different structures of normative orders. Despite their differing coding logics and the resulting normative structures, there is often a significant overlap in practices of differentiation, hierarchy, and control. As previously mentioned, *these regimes are based on entirely different logics of coding specific content*, which generate confirmatory feedback loops within their respective social systems. These dynamics contribute to the maintenance and legitimization of the systems but exist in a tense relationship with increasing diversification and plurality. Intersectionality ultimately represents the intertwining of power relations, identification processes, and social categories, simultaneously reflecting the blind spots and the damaging effects of anti-democratic and anti-heterogeneous discourses in liberal democracies. It becomes evident that the amalgamation of specific affects and attitudes characterizing broad sections of the population necessitates a critical understanding of the functioning and impacts of these orders of difference.

9.1 Intersectional Analysis within the Framework of Regimes of Orders of Difference

The conceptualization of regimes of orders of difference, particularly the distinction between primordial and neoliberal coded systems, establishes a comprehensive an-

analytical framework for examining practices of human differentiation. This approach augments existing intersectional theories, which already elucidate the multi-layered and interacting nature of social inequalities, by incorporating systemic and anthropological dimensions discussed in previous chapters of this book. For the analytical framework of regimes of orders of difference, it is crucial to recognize that social categories of difference stand in a non-linear relationship to each other and therefore *articulate* and *co-form*, as discussed below. This non-linearity is evident in how change is influenced by a variety of factors that interact in complex and often unpredictable patterns. Specifically, non-linearity implies that axes of social differentiation never operate additively or independently of each other. Therefore, the metaphor of the intersection, which is often portrayed as the junction of social category axes, is misleading, as it suggests precisely this additive and static-spatial logic of social power relations (Yuval-Davis 2013, 206). The systemic understanding of orders of difference, which regards *cultural codings as structural coupling of semantics and recognizes the specific inclusions and exclusions of social systems associated with these semantics as unavoidable* (see chapters 2 and 8), allows us to overcome terminological pitfalls that imply linearity and additivity. It is of paramount importance to recognize the inevitability of inclusions and exclusions in order to consider intersectional orders of difference in a non-linear manner. The acknowledgment of the inevitability of differentiation processes gives rise to the understanding that these do not operate in isolation or in a simple additive manner, but rather interact in intricate, networked patterns. The inclusions and exclusions in one social system simultaneously influence other orders of differentiation, which can result in non-linear effects and mutual reinforcement. This approach allows for a more appropriate grasp of the complexity of social processes. The analytical framework of “regimes of difference” within intersectional reflection emphasizes how different categories of identity and power relations not only interact, but actually mutually constitute and *co-form* (Collins 2019, 241) each other. This perspective recognizes that social categories interact with each other, forming complex new social identities. These identities are not merely the sum of their individual parts but emergent properties that result from the specific configuration and interaction of the categories involved. *Co-formation* can therefore be understood as a dynamic process in which categories of difference and corresponding power structures continuously shape one another. This process entails an inseparable linkage and interdependence of these categories, indicating that the relationship between them is always reciprocal and context-dependent, with each category influencing the interpretation and effect of the other. The concept of co-formation manifests within the framework of the order of difference, suggesting that this reciprocal influence leads to traditional power structures being continuously renegotiated and redefined depending on historical and regional contexts. The flexibility of these relationships is particularly evident in their adaptability to different social and cultural contexts, necessitating a context-sensi-

tive analysis. Today's increasingly differentiated social formations and the resulting diversity of functional systems amplify the complexity of the relationships between these social categories and the resulting individual and collective identities. These developments complicate the definition of identity through individual social roles or affiliations and present individuals with the challenge of locating themselves within an increasingly complex world (Nassehi 2021, 12).

In response to the blurred social positioning within today's highly differentiated social structures, *strategic essentialization* is employed as an analytical tool. This method entails a deliberate partitioning of the order of difference into distinct coding logics and categories. It is not intended to establish inflexible concepts of identity; rather, it is designed to serve as an analytical instrument for elucidating the intricate dynamics of social systems that facilitate identifications and elicit particular affects. By focusing on particular coding logics, this approach examines the evocation of affects such as threat, resentment, and disgust, and their role in narratives of human differentiation. In certain social systems, these evoked affects play a pivotal role in simplifying complex situations by triggering feedback loops that either reinforce or challenge the legitimacy of existing structures. The term "articulation" is used to describe the way meanings are constructed and renegotiated through the connection and interaction of different social categories. An examination of the reciprocal construction of dominating categories of difference facilitates a more profound comprehension of their articulation and elucidates the concept of structural coupling. The concept of structural coupling refers to the specific ways in which social systems and identity categories are interconnected and mutually influential. Cultural coding manifests as a process of meaning attribution, whereby it facilitates the elicitation of emotional responses within social systems. This process entails the mechanisms through which social systems and their structural elements shape and project particular emotional dynamics. The concept of articulation describes the manner in which specific categories of difference and power relations are connected within the framework of structural coupling and expressed in a given context. This allows for the coexistence and interaction of different categories in various configurations without requiring their merger into a single, homogeneous entity. This process enhances flexibility and openness in the structuring of social realities and contributes to the continuous redefinition of relationships between different social elements, reflecting the core function of structural coupling in the dynamic interplay of social systems. Cultural codes function as vehicles of articulation, facilitating the construction and communication of social and cultural realities concerning differences. This concept diverges from the original formulation proposed by Stuart Hall, which emphasized the interpretive frameworks influencing how individuals comprehend and negotiate their social realities (Hall 2018a). Further developed by Collins, who focuses primarily on race, class, nation, and gender (Collins 2019, 232), the present approach expands upon these bases by integrating *sociocyber-*

netic and anthropological dimensions. This integration enables an in-depth analysis of the structures of identity formation and power relations, which are structurally connected by cultural codes. The respective coding logics are autopoietic in nature and function as catalysts for affective-cognitive-bodily schemata, which are in a recursive relationship with the processes of conditioning and internalization. This integration not only enhances our comprehension of identity and power but also contextualizes it within a broader interdisciplinary framework that permits a comprehensive examination of the intricate interrelationships between individual experiences and social structures. In contrast to established systems theory approaches, this framework recognizes the role of individual agency, albeit within the context of constraints that necessitate significant effort to disrupt established recursive dynamics and initiate new coupling loops within social systems. In this sense, co-formation and articulation are mechanisms through which social systems and identity categories are not only interconnected but also continuously reconfigured through cultural codes. In practice, this understanding of regimes of ordering difference allows for the development of more precise and comprehensive strategies to address social inequalities. By acknowledging and addressing the intricate nuances of individual experiences, this approach enables a more profound and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of human diversity. The integration of all these dimensions, along with the *hegemonic-geopolitical matrix* (see Chapter 10), is of paramount importance. An exclusive focus on cultural aspects, without sufficient attention to other dimensions, can result in an essentialization of cultural identities as fixed and unchanging. This approach may overlook the fluidity of human experiences. Such culturalizing approaches may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and legitimize discrimination by perceiving cultural differences as natural, thereby contributing to the homogenization and normalization of social groups (McCall 2005, 1777). Such views fail to take into account the strategic essentialization that is crucial in this context. It is of the utmost importance to subject these essentializations to rigorous scrutiny and to critically examine their role in perpetuating social inequalities. The prevalence of reductionist methodologies that concentrate on cultural and identity-based examinations frequently results in the formation of moralizing attitudes that oversimplify intricate social issues into individual behaviors, thereby disregarding the structural foundations of social inequalities (for further details, please refer to Chapter 11). This simplification tends to accentuate personal culpability and individual accountability while neglecting the necessity for structural reforms and collective solutions. Such a focus can lead discussions about social justice to focus on personal virtue, which detracts from necessary structural reforms and maintains the status quo. Therefore, it is significant to adopt a balanced approach that integrates individual and collective dimensions of social realities, without reducing complex structural challenges to matters of individual character. In discussions about social categories, culture is often conceptualized in a way that homog-

enizes groups and views cultures as static and deterministic, which is akin to the concept of “races” (Balibar 2018). People are depicted as mere products of their culture, while cultures are elevated to quasi-natural entities (Leiprecht 2001, 31). This can result in a moralizing approach that employs totalizing concepts of social categories. Such perspectives tend to limit the scope of understanding regarding the multifaceted dimensions of difference. Furthermore, they often portray discriminatory relations as unidirectional (linear) problems, ascribing specific attributes to the category of the white majority or men in a manner that is exclusive and reductionist. Consequently, moralizing attitudes, which are particularly prevalent in academic contexts, often treat “anti-ideologies” (such as anti-racism, anti-sexism, etc.) as prematurely legitimate without thorough examination, thereby elevating them to a normative status. This frequently leads to an overemphasis on political correctness, which can obscure the complexity of social issues and impede a more nuanced understanding and effective addressing of discrimination (Hall 1996). It is ironic that this results in the avoidance of crucial discourse on actual discrimination. This becomes evident in the tendency to circumvent behaviors, practices, issues, terminology, and phrases that may or may not be discriminatory. Apart from satisfying an image-centric desire to feel morally superior, moralizing attitudes of political correctness offer no tangible emancipatory or social benefit. Moralizing obscures the fact that genuine social transformation necessitates profound changes that extend well beyond the mere adaptation of language and superficial gestures of inclusivity. Such tactics are, in fact, ultimately counterproductive, resulting in a stalemate where neither side gains. They impede open and honest discourse, leading to a flattening of the debate on social inequality. Those who identify as humanists and proponents of human rights often prioritize moralizing, functioning as autopoietic elements within social systems that prioritize self-reproduction (see Chapter 10.4). It is observed that these ideologies can, on occasion, albeit not universally, unwittingly facilitate the obfuscation of geopolitical power structures and resource exploitation, without conferring substantial emancipatory benefits.

9.2 Primordially Coded Regimes of Orders of Difference

The analytical framework of primordially coded regimes of orders of difference allows for an examination of the schemata and practices of human differentiation in Western social systems that are characterized by high educational standards, significant technological advancements, wealth, and democratic values, particularly within the context of Germany. In these societies, techniques of human differentiation, firmly embedded in primordial coding, are clearly discernible. The analysis of practices of human differentiation is conducted through the lens of a spectrum of theoretical perspectives, as discussed in earlier chapters. These per-

spectives include systems-theoretical and anthropological considerations (Chapter 2), evolutionary-psychological approaches (Chapter 3), social-psychological and systems-justification perspectives (Chapter 4), neurobiological findings (Chapter 5), schema-related theories (Chapter 6), macrosocial-anthropological perspectives (Chapter 7), and cultural-theoretical dimensions (Chapter 8). The aforementioned theoretical approaches demonstrate that orders of difference, whether primordially or neoliberally coded, do not function in isolation but rather engage in a dynamic and intricate interplay.

9.2.1 Primordialism and Essentialism

Primordialism postulates that specific social categories—such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, or religion—are regarded as “natural” or intrinsic attributes of individuals or groups. These characteristics are deemed to be the immutable foundations of social identity and belonging, exerting a considerable influence on social bonding and group cohesion. The traits that are considered to be primordial within schemata and practices of human differentiation include:

- Sex/Gender
- Age
- Physical characteristics and appearance
- Skin color
- Ethnicity
- Culture
- Nationality
- Language and dialects
- Religion
- Social status (e.g., castes and classes)
- Educational background
- Profession and working environment
- Sexual orientation and behaviors
- Clothing styles
- Eating habits
- Place of birth
- Family lineage
- Consanguinity
- Personality traits
- Cognitive abilities
- Emotional intelligence
- Place of residence and geographical origin
- Physical and mental health conditions

These characteristics, which are embedded in the concept of an unchanging “essence,” are fundamental to the normative structures within social systems and significantly influence interpersonal relationships. In consideration of the role these characteristics play in the formation of power relations and the shaping of social justice, this perspective offers insights into the mechanisms of intersectional discrimination from a novel systemic-anthropological perspective. The primordial order of difference not only captures the essence of core individual and collective identification and affiliation processes but also elucidates the way social hierarchies and inequalities are sustained and validated through the ascription of these characteristics. Primordial identities are based on the concept of an unchanging “essence,” which gives rise to a profound and often unquestioning sense of belonging. However, this approach fails to take into account the intricate social realities. The concept of primordialism, which is rooted in beliefs that originated during the colonial era and interprets cultural and social differences as manifestations of a “natural order,” remains a deeply entrenched aspect of Western democracies. This is evidenced by the tendency to categorize in binary terms, with colonial and biologicistic assumptions informing the positioning of the white, Western, heterosexual male at the apex of the social hierarchy, with whiteness regarded as the dominant attribute. In this framework, narratives that justify exploitation and sustain social structures are of paramount importance. Such narratives glorify the notion of a sacralized and immutable natural order, which is presumed to serve as the ideal for social order. In this context, the concept of purity is not limited to its physical dimensions but also encompasses social and cultural integrity, which is manifested and pursued through societal relationships. The imperative for society to actualize itself within the confines of what is deemed a natural order is a pervasive phenomenon that can be observed across a range of social contexts. This leads to the formation of communities based on these “natural” orders and boundaries, which are further reinforced by the concept of purity.

9.2.2 Fallacious Causality and Reduction of Complexity

As previously stated, the concept of primordial codings is predicated on the assumption that specific characteristics are immutable and “original.” The preceding discussion provides a comprehensive illustration of this premise. The rationale behind these codings is based on flawed logic that stems from an artificially constructed and critically indefensible conception of nature and physicality. The logical-theoretical fallacy inherent in this coding is the essentialization of characteristics such as gender, skin color, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation as unchangeable and central to individual and/or collective identity. However, these primordial characteristics of an individual are not directly related to social or psychological attributes. In contrast, negative behaviors are the consequence of a complex interplay between social, eco-

nostic, and personal factors. The establishment of a direct correlation between socio-psychological behavioral patterns and primordial characteristics in the absence of valid evidence or cogent reasoning represents a logical fallacy. This error of false causality occurs when a cause-and-effect relationship between two elements (e.g., negative behaviors and membership in a specific group) is erroneously assumed in the absence of logical or evidence-based support. Moreover, the fallacy of overgeneralization may occur when broad characteristics of a group are hastily deduced from a limited number of specific instances, leading to distorted and unjustified stereotypes. From this perspective, the tendency to persistently repeat specific cognitive missteps can be understood through the lenses of complexity reduction and the self-referential nature inherent to social systems. Social systems, which encompass the perception and assessment of social groups, must simplify the immense complexity of their environment in order to remain manageable. Stereotypes and hasty categorizations act as mechanisms for reducing complex phenomena to a simplified, albeit distorted, representation of reality. The concept of *self-referentiality*, which plays a pivotal role in social systems (for further details, please refer to Chapter 2.2.3), signifies that these systems function in accordance with their intrinsic structures and historical actions. In the context of social perception, this signifies that individuals apply preexisting beliefs and stereotypes as a filter and interpretative lens to information. This self-referential process amplifies existing biases and stereotypes, whereby new information is interpreted in a manner that aligns with and justifies these preconceptions (for further details, please refer to Chapter 4.5). Furthermore, the dynamic interplay between social systems and their surrounding environments upholds these cognitive errors. In functionally differentiated societies, individuals are engaged in constant interaction across a range of social systems, each of which is characterized by a distinct logic and rationality. This differentiation frequently results in individuals adopting simplistic explanatory models to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of their social environments. Furthermore, contemporary media and communicative structures, particularly in the digital age, facilitate the dissemination and reinforcement of stereotypes and simplistic portrayals of social groups. The accelerated dissemination of information through social media and other digital platforms can result in the pervasive acceptance of inadequate substantiation or simplistic portrayals of social realities as factual, particularly given the ease with which such information can be conveyed without the necessary corroboration.

9.2.3 Self-Referentiality and the Preservation of “Natural Orders”

The recurrent association of social and psychological behaviors with primordial traits, a pervasive cognitive bias, can be further illuminated through the lens of schemata (for further elaboration, see Chapter 6). Affective-cognitive-bodily

schemata are deeply embedded in the self-referential processes of social systems, fostering a tendency to filter and interpret information in a manner that confirms pre-existing assumptions. The continued prevalence of these cognitive errors can be attributed to the stabilizing function of schemas for the identity of the social system and its members. By offering a recognizable and consistent interpretation of social phenomena, schemas facilitate the processing of complex information and foster a sense of security and coherence. The demand for consistency and predictability in social perception means that once established, schemas are retained, even when new information or experiences challenge them. The recurrence of cognitive errors and the difficulty in rectifying them can thus be explained by the deep integration of schemata within the cognitive and communicative structures of social systems. The alteration of such schemata necessitates a comprehensive examination of one's own assumptions and an acknowledgment of the complexity and multifaceted nature of social identities. This significant challenge must be addressed not only at the individual level but also at the collective level, as transforming schemata necessitates alterations in the communicative practices and social structures that sustain and propagate these schemas. Primordially coded lines of difference can be traced back to the so-called "natural orders," which are characterized by culturally coded memes that function as naturalistic reductions of complex social realities. Such memes, when reinforced by various ideologies, frequently connect with fantasies and ideals of purity that evoke an imagined essence, depreciating the spectrum that exists between the typically dichotomous poles of categories. This process enhances the self-referentiality of the system, thus stabilizing its internal structures and justifying the legitimacy of the prevailing order. The pursuit of maintaining the "purity" of these constructed social orders frames any deviation or change as a threat, thereby fostering resistance to social change and perpetuating existing power dynamics. The naturalization of social relations results in the perception of social issues as immutable, excluding them from the domain of social negotiation and influence. From a primordial perspective, for example, an assumed "innate stupidity" would not be mitigated by improvements in the education system. This underlying assumption is also evident in discourses that posit Germany will experience demographic decline due to the "inappropriate" reproduction of certain demographic groups. This argument finds resonance in historical justifications for eugenics and slavery that were predicated on biological determinism. It was long held that slaves were biologically predisposed to forced labor, thus rendering the distinction between free and enslaved a natural phenomenon. This perspective, which links intelligence to ethnic origin and posits genetic determinism, was notably presented in *The Bell Curve* (1994), a book by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. The authors advanced the thesis that intelligence is largely genetically determined and demonstrated significant disparities in IQ scores among different ethnic groups in the United States, including white Americans, African Americans,

and others. Notwithstanding the substantial criticism it has received, the inclination towards primordial coding persists, albeit in more subtle and concealed forms. The reinforcement of social inequalities and prejudices is masked by the pretense of scientific legitimacy. The cultural coding of such identities helps delineate the boundaries between the social “inside” and “outside,” creating a clear distinction between those who are perceived as belonging to a particular privileged group and those who are not. Furthermore, it functions as a means to uphold the existence of subtle hierarchies and class distinctions within communities. These schemata of establishing structural orders through class and class-specific differentiations are not universally applicable. However, they are nevertheless pervasive and act as a fundamental basis for maintaining and institutionalizing power structures.

9.2.4 Gender as a Primordially Coded Principle of Order of Difference

A major area of such communicated codes encompasses topics, ideas, and practices pertaining to the characteristic of sex or gender. In this context, the term “gender” is defined as a complex structure of social relations that is primarily organized around the reproductive sphere. This structure is constituted through the translation of biological differences into social contexts, which are in turn shaped by a range of social practices (Connell 2013, 29–30). In the specific context of this study, the concept of *gender is understood to refer to the schemata and practices through which physical bodies and reproductive functions are integrated into cultural and political structures at the level of the social system as a whole*; as a result of this integration, there are far-reaching implications for both individual and collective existences. In the context of primordial orders of difference, gender is not only socially constructed but also deeply embedded in the normative and ideological structures of society. This coding is based on traditional and erroneous assumptions about biological and social roles. These assumptions are shaped and propagated by historically established power relations and cultural norms. The binary gender concept solidifies heteronormative foundational assumptions and corresponding role distributions, which are frequently the subject of criticism. Such approaches serve to entrench gender inequalities and reinforce discriminatory practices by reducing the diversity of human experiences and marginalizing alternative constructions of identity. These deeply embedded codings of gender, which are increasingly being challenged in academic discourse, reflect the persistence of and resistance to the transformation of social structures. They represent a significant challenge for emancipatory gender policies. In primordial semantics, gender is not merely an isolated or exclusively biologically constructed and determined category; rather, it is a fundamental organizing principle (Connell 2013, 101) that permeates and structures social systems. From a systemic anthropological viewpoint, primordially coded semantics concerning gender roles and norms are embedded in the autopoietic self-production and maintenance of social systems.

These systems reproduce and legitimize gender differences by assigning specific roles and expectations to individuals, which contribute to the stability and continuity of the respective social systems. Gender differences thus also operate as mechanisms for reducing complexity by pre-structuring and limiting the diversity of possible social interactions and identities. In this manner, existing gender relations are not only reproduced within the system but are also presented as legitimate and natural. This occurs through the continuous communication and dissemination of norms and values that justify and reinforce gender-specific inequalities. Such justification mechanisms are crucial for maintaining power asymmetries within social systems and contribute to the persistent marginalization and discrimination of certain groups. The systematic establishment of the principle of organization and categorization regarding gender illustrates the *conditioning and subjectivizing* qualities of primordially coded regimes of the order of difference. The concept of “invocation,” as developed by Louis Althusser in his theoretical approach to interpellation, explicitly addresses individuals. This normative attribution bestows upon individuals their social existence within the respective social system’s hierarchy. This circular phenomenon, which is referred to in post-structuralist theory as the discursive production of subjectivity, is discussed in detail in Chapter 8. The crucial point is that this production of identity and difference occurs across society as a whole and structurally integrates both individual and social systems. These attributions, which are often violent in nature, manifest not only in individual perception but also serve to anchor structural elements within society. The process of structural coupling binds individuals and their social systems to existing power structures and social orders, exerting a profound and long-lasting influence on their social existence and interactions. Those seeking to achieve gender equality often rely on a binary conception of gender to reinforce existing social hierarchies. Feminist approaches that espouse egalitarianism and challenge traditional gender roles encounter significant obstacles when operating within a white-dominated, patriarchal structure that is deeply entrenched in social and political systems. A significant shortcoming of these approaches is the insufficient consideration of intersectionality, which is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of women. Such approaches frequently assume a universal female experience, thereby failing to take into account the realities and needs of women who do not belong to the dominant social group. Another significant shortcoming is the neglect of non-binary and other gender identities that do not conform to the traditional binary gender schema. These diverse and complex gender positions are frequently disregarded in approaches that prioritize gender equality between men and women. This results in the failure to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by individuals within these categories. This illustrates the constraints of a perspective that is firmly anchored in the outmoded categories of gender binarity and that fails to consider the reality of gender diversity. From the perspective of systems theory,

the reduction of social reality to a simplistic level results in the trivialization of social dynamics and the processes of individual identity formation. Social systems are inherently complex and self-referential, exhibiting internal dynamics and a constant renegotiation of meanings and relationships. The findings of biological and anthropological studies on human differentiation demonstrate that biological differences extend far beyond the traditional binary gender model, uncovering considerable diversity. However, this diversity is seldom integrated into traditional egalitarian feminist approaches, which results in distortions in the perception and treatment of gender issues. Furthermore, rigid heteronormativity represents a fundamental tenet of familist ideology, which reached its apogee during the Victorian era and was subsequently reinforced by fascist and Nazi regimes. In these contexts, the reproduction of male offspring, perceived as potential military personnel, is particularly encouraged. This objective is instrumental in bolstering the social system of a war economy by primarily designating women with domestic and reproductive roles, which nurture those who align with the system. This proclivity towards unification and external determination of gender relations and identities is frequently a strategic manipulation by political orders to consolidate existing power structures. The familist ideology, which is deeply embedded in primordially coded principles of human differentiation in the context of gender, developed across various Western contexts. This ideology is largely derived from the historical perspective that, until the early 20th century and in some regions even until the end of the 20th century, women were considered to have no rights. In order to effect a transformation of patriarchally structured societies, women were compelled to engage in a struggle for the attainment of fundamental rights, including the right to vote (Notz 2015, 88). The inflexible gender order and the associated forms of life, especially the nuclear family, have since been promoted primarily by the Church and the state. In the context of post-war Germany, conservative governments advanced the nuclear family as the archetypal familial structure, while other forms of family, such as those headed by single mothers, were marginalized and deemed “semi-families.” These categorizations reflected and reinforced the prevailing social norms, thereby contributing to the marginalization of alternative lifestyles (Notz 2015, 89). In this context, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge the significant correlation between patriarchal gender role assignments and the Western model of the welfare state. The majority of welfare programs in Germany and other Western countries are based on the male breadwinner model, which historically has required women to assume primary responsibility for childcare and caregiving. This gender-specific role distribution is deeply entrenched in the structures of social systems, perpetuating patriarchal norms that restrict women's professional opportunities and reinforce their socio-economic dependency. The orientation of infrastructural and legal frameworks exclusively towards the “normal family” has resulted in the rigid enforcement of processes of differentiation and stratification, which bear resemblance to those ob-

served in a regime. Although there are differences in the specific forms of welfare states that exist in the West, they all ultimately rely on the nuclear family norm and assume that individuals will engage in unspoken forms of “voluntary work” related to household and caregiving duties (Esping-Andersen 1999, 35). Schemata and practices of differentiation in the context of gender serve a number of significant functions. They vary depending on the context, including wartime and welfare-state contexts, as well as between neoliberal and socialist regimes. These gender-specific role models and task distributions contribute to the stabilization and maintenance of existing social orders by cementing the unequal distribution of rights and duties and limiting the opportunities for women to assume equal roles in society. From a socio-cybernetic standpoint, familism may be regarded as a social function that mitigates the complexity of social systems by conferring upon individuals clearly delineated roles and expectations. These operate to stabilize social structures by maintaining order and predictability in interactions between individuals. The associated practices of differentiation facilitate autopoiesis, or self-preservation, by ensuring the fulfillment of fundamental social tasks, such as the care and education of the next generation, in an efficient manner. However, these structures are also susceptible to rigidity, which can impede the system’s capacity to adapt to changing environmental conditions. This is achieved by marginalizing alternative ways of life and identities, thereby limiting the potential for development within the system.

Primordially coded differences establish tangible hierarchical structures and power relations in everyday life by linking constructed models with persuasive power that suggests naturalness and self-evidence. The binary gender order is deeply entrenched in a heteronormative matrix of heterosexual desire, which is continuously reproduced in schools and other institutions. Similarly, these mechanisms naturalize gender-related relationships in a manner analogous to the coding of other socially constructed categories, such as skin color, religion, and ethnicity. The act of questioning these deeply rooted structures is often perceived as a threat to social order and personal identity, as it challenges the foundations of individual and collective self-image. The exaggerated and sometimes infantile reactions of conservative and right-wing groups to gender-related emancipation efforts are integral manifestations of this underlying insecurity. Such reactions indicate a fear of losing control, which is triggered by progressive changes in gender politics. Such reactions manifest as vehemently defensive responses that are less indicative of strength than of an inability to adapt to a changing social reality. Integrating evolutionary anthropological and psychological perspectives into the discourse on gender, with a particular emphasis on the view of gender as a primordial, culturally encoded principle of social differentiation, illuminates the profound historical roots of gender-specific roles and behaviors. The evolutionary adaptations that provided survival advantages in prehistoric societies are evident in the present-day manifestation of deeply entrenched gender norms. These norms are reinforced within groups by

collective intentionality, which can be defined as the ability to share and act on common intentions and beliefs (for further details, please refer to Chapter 3.5). These deeply entrenched beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next through cultural mechanisms, thereby establishing a persistent system of gender roles that is often perceived as natural or taken for granted. Such gender expectations are reinforced by group dynamics, wherein conformity to norms is socially rewarded and deviation is punished. This results in a considerable degree of behavioral regulation within the group, which contributes to the maintenance of a rigid gender order (for further details, please refer to Chapters 3, 4, and 5). The tenacious and often fervid defense of the two-gender model and heteronormative structure by conservative and right-wing groups can be attributed, in part, to the insecurity that arises in the face of challenges directed at these deeply embedded, perceived natural orders. The challenge to these established norms posed by progressive gender discourses and emancipatory aspirations is often perceived as an assault on the bedrock of social and individual identity, inciting vehement defensive reactions. The cognitive dissonance that arises from the confrontation with alternative gender models and the fear of losing control and influence within socially prescribed structures result in a strengthening of the defensive attitude, which manifests in disproportionate reactions. This profound apprehension and subsequent opposition to alterations in gender politics exemplify the significant challenge of dismantling conventional gender roles and identities. From the perspective of systems theory, which examines the intrinsic complexity and self-referential nature of social systems, it is evident that these systems possess their own momentum, resisting simplistic top-down control and categorical assignments. The growing recognition of the diversity of biological and social gender realities, and the subsequent necessity of rethinking rigid binary models, is increasingly viewed as a logical and necessary next step in the context of functionally differentiated contemporary societies. It is similarly crucial to refrain from simplistic, externally influenced, and frequently ideologically motivated or moralizing reinterpretations of this order, as outlined in Chapter 11. In this context, “ideological” refers to inflexible belief sets or ideas that influence perspectives, typically by oversimplifying social realities and reducing complexity excessively. In the case of gender complexities, such approaches are frequently driven by emotional accusations, blame, and guilt. To foster a nuanced understanding and treatment of these issues, it is crucial to avoid these ideological frameworks, which can narrow the scope of interpretation and prevent meaningful engagement with the diverse and intricate dimensions of gender.

9.2.5 Racialization of Sexism and Criminality

Another area of significant primordial coding is the violent imposition of identities and the *racialization of sexism and criminality*. In Germany, individuals with darker

skin tones who conform to the stereotype of a “Muslim refugee” are frequently ascribed a primordial identity code. The identities and cultures thus targeted are reduced to static and unchangeable categories. Primordial coding effectively delineates lines of difference, wherein expectations of desirable and undesirable behaviors are reinforced through subjectification or conditioning (see Chapter 8.3). For example, individuals of non-white ethnicities are frequently associated with security risks which systematically racializes violence and sexism while activating scapegoat mechanisms. This phenomenon is also evident in penal populism (see Chapter 9.4.1), whereby the dominant white majority consolidates its status by ascribing criminal acts and culpability to marginalized groups. This dynamic is particularly evident in the racialization of sexual or violent assaults. A notable example of the challenges associated with addressing crimes related to sexual harassment and their cultural interpretations can be observed in the context of the New Year’s Eve celebrations in Cologne in 2015/16. A considerable number of women have made allegations that they were sexually assaulted and robbed by groups of individuals in and around Cologne’s main train station. The perpetrators were reportedly groups of men whose appearance was described in media reports as being of North African or Middle Eastern descent. In the aftermath of the incidents, the Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany made an erroneous classification, labeling them as “*taharrush jama’i*.” The term “*taharrush jama’i*,” which originates from Arabic, is used to describe a form of collective sexual assault that has been reported in some Arab countries, particularly in large crowds (Kulaçatan 2016, 112). However, this classification was erroneous and problematic in that it falsely implied that such assaults were predominantly a cultural phenomenon, specifically associated with men of Arab origin. This misclassification contributed to a decontextualized understanding of the events, whereby sexual harassment and criminal behavior were perceived as imported by immigrants, rather than as part of a broader societal issue. Such interpretations distort the reality of sexual violence as a global issue that transcends cultural boundaries and fail to consider the complex socio-political factors that contribute to such crimes. The designation of the attacks in Cologne as “*taharrush jama’i*” not only stigmatized a specific group but also diverted attention from the necessity of implementing comprehensive measures to address public safety and integration challenges (ibid.). The phenomenon of racialization of crime and sexism, whereby criminal or sexist behavior is attributed to ethnic origins, exemplifies the dynamics of primordial coding and in-group favoritism. In Germany, as in numerous other liberal democracies within the Western context, individuals with a migration background are frequently and expeditiously designated as perpetrators of criminal acts (Wa Baile et al. 2019; Espín Grau and Klaus 2022; Textor 2023; Atali-Timmer, Fereidooni, and Schroth 2022). It is frequently observed that social phenomena of significance are initially encoded in a manner that is conducive to the perpetuation of certain stereotypes. This phenomenon can be observed in the portrayal of young people from

the Middle East and Africa as inherently frustrated and prone to criminality within the dominant discourse. The interconnection of disparate content elements gives rise to the perception that the group in question is inherently predisposed to engage in sexist and criminal conduct. Such associations permit the attribution of deviant behaviors to these “others,” thereby reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating a biased narrative that influences societal perceptions and interactions (Haarhoff 2020). These aspects are discussed in more detail below in connection with penal populism and racial profiling.

The presence of *multicultural concepts* within a white hegemonic structure serves to exacerbate the issue. Despite ostensibly promoting diversity and cultural diversity, they effectively entrench existing power relations and inequalities. These concepts frequently manifest at a mere superficial level of cultural representation, failing to address the more profound structures of racism, discrimination, and social inequality. By situating themselves within a white hegemonic framework, they are able to project an image of tolerance and openness while continuing to perpetuate mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization. The concept of hegemonic domination is further facilitated through an epistemological conflation of “nature” and “culture.” This conflation presents politically constructed differences as “natural,” a point previously discussed. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the concept of “racism without races” emerged as a prominent phenomenon. The logic of a “racial hierarchy” has persisted in various forms, often presented as a cultural phenomenon. This has resulted in the continuation of primordialized divisions and exclusions, which are now often justified by reference to culturalist differentiations. The apparent naturalness of the mental-affective association and the activation of specific schemata (see Chapter 6) create the impression that cultural differences are insurmountable and unchangeable through so-called chains of equivalence. As is the case with culture, the term “ethnicity” is frequently utilized by right-wing extremist and conservative groups to disseminate ideas of “purity” as part of their primordial ideology. These groups prioritize the preservation of what they perceive to be “German” culture, while concurrently advocating against external influences, such as Islamization. Identitarian, “ethnopluralist,” and similar movements adhere to a “völkisch” ideology, which is predicated on a primordial program of differentiation. The term “völkisch” has its etymological roots in the German word “Volk,” which signifies “people” or “nation.” However, it has acquired a more ethnically charged connotation. Historically, “völkisch” ideologies have placed emphasis on racial purity and the superiority of the German people, which has frequently resulted in the implementation of xenophobic and exclusionary policies. The contemporary right-wing groups which espouse “völkisch” sentiments promote a sense of ethnic homogeneity and cultural purity. Such groups stoke feelings of threat against external influences and promote the preservation of a culture that is perceived as originally and exclusively belonging to the ethnic group.

By advocating the preservation of these cultural codes, which are perceived as fixed and immutable, these groups often promote a narrative of existential threat from those they define as “the other.” This narrative is often accompanied by a rhetoric of exclusion and aggression directed towards those who are perceived as threatening the cultural identity of the group. This narrative is frequently accompanied by rhetoric that excludes and is aggressive towards those who are perceived as threatening the cultural identity of the group. This narrative act to justify the exclusionary and often aggressive stance of these groups. Such a narrative is not only misleading but also a source of considerable danger, as it provides the foundation for many of the divisive tactics employed by these groups to garner support and to legitimate their agendas. In this context, ostensibly positive terms such as “ethnopluralism” and “multiculturalism” prove to be deceptive camouflage for primordial regimes of differentiation. These groups categorize and differentiate individuals based on perceived ethnic, cultural, and national characteristics, which they regard as unchangeable. Such groups typically assert the superiority of their own “culture,” which is often synonymous with an equally coded in-group. Consequently, the underlying issues of injustice and inequality are rendered normalized and consequently perpetuated, rather than being subjected to challenge and transformation. It is a verifiable scientific fact that 99.9 percent of all genes are shared by all humans (L.L. Cavalli-Sforza 2001; L.L. Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza 1995; L.L. Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza 1994). However, this does not preclude the persistence of primordial codings and ideologies. In light of these observations, it becomes evident that the concept of Whiteness confers distinctive advantages, whereas the categorization of individuals as “brown” or “black” often results in their exclusion from the mainstream societal structures and the marginalization of their positions within the dominant normative orders and power structures. This phenomenon leads to the entrenchment of social exclusion, which in turn restricts opportunities for participation based on racial lines and serves to reproduce the deep-seated inequalities inherent within the societal framework (Tißberger 2017, 28). The phenomenon of primordial coding can be observed across a wide range of cultural and historical contexts. Indeed, a considerable number of prehistoric identities were subjected to primordial coding (Geertz and Darnton 1973). Nevertheless, even during these initial stages, they were consistently shaped and sustained through the operation of positive feedback loops (Giesen and Lüter 2000, 33). The mechanisms of positive feedback loops facilitate the consolidation of established primary codings, thereby ensuring their reproduction in a self-reinforcing manner. Once embedded in the cultural, social or political fabric of a society, such identity attributions develop a dynamic that is maintained through continuous affirmation within various social spheres, such as educational systems, the media and legal structures. The reinforcement of these codings through positive feedback loops results in them becoming firmly established in social consciousness and perceived

as unquestionable truths. Cultural norms and social practices that reflect and disseminate these codings not only reinforce their legitimacy but also exert a formative influence on the social fabric. It is frequently overlooked that the Western concept of kinship is also fundamentally encoded, yet not inherently innate; rather, it is socially constructed. The nuclear family, comprising a man, a woman, and their children, represents an example of a primordial kinship system. Furthermore, educational programs and interventions, along with the theoretical assumptions that ground them, are also implicitly based on these codes (Röttger-Rössler 2022). The primary coding of family structures represents a form of complexity reduction, enabling individuals and societies to organize and understand social relationships and affiliations in a seemingly simple and natural manner. Nevertheless, these codes exert a profound influence on social expectations, norms, and practices. They shape the distribution and perception of roles and responsibilities within families and beyond in society. Concurrently, this gives rise to alternative family models and kinship relationships that diverge from this primordial coding and are marginalized or even regarded as deviant.

9.3 Neoliberal Regimes of Orders of Difference

The concept of a neoliberal regime of orders of difference provides an analytical lens through which to examine differentiation practices that are influenced by neoliberal agendas and intersect with various social dimensions. This analytical framework is designed to elucidate the ways in which neoliberal policies and ideologies shape social practices of differentiation, impacting individual spaces and possibilities for identification. This analytical framework allows for the examination of the intricate ways in which economic and political doctrines shape personal and collective identities, as well as the subtle ways in which neoliberalism influences societal norms and values. This, in turn, contributes to the formation of schemata and practices of human differentiation through a distinct logic that both diverges from and intersects with many aspects of primordial orders of difference.

9.3.1 Neoliberalism

This book conceptualizes neoliberalism as a specific form of social governance, delineated by distinctive ideological tenets and political practices. It functions as a superior system, distinguished by a pronounced emphasis on capital accumulation, the privatization of critical infrastructures, and the weakening of state institutions. These elements collectively reshape the foundations of social interactions and institutional structures. By influencing the preferences, decisions, and actions of individuals and institutions as a political-economic paradigm, it directs

social processes towards market-oriented logics. The context for neoliberalism is set against the backdrop of European imperialist ambitions, which ultimately gave rise to fascism, the Holocaust, and World War II, as well as the unrelenting East-West conflict during the Cold War. In the context of a historical moment when the dominance of financial and economic practices was subjected to rigorous contestation, the question of whether neoliberalism can be morally evaluated as a positive or negative force does not arise. Instead, as a meta-program for controlling complex social systems, it superimposes existing functionally differentiated systems, thereby dominating their self-organization, communication processes, and interactions with their environments. The deliberate implementation of neoliberal policies was a pivotal strategy in winning the Cold War and averting greater threats. The confrontation with Russia and the emergence of China as a geopolitical rival exemplify the assertion that the promotion of neoliberal strategies is driven by the core motive of “great power competition” (Ibrahimov 2020). Therefore, these strategies must be viewed as part of a comprehensive geopolitical strategy that extends beyond mere economic considerations and reflects the complex dynamics of global power configurations. The diverse manifestations of neoliberalism are the result of ideologically shaped outcomes of historical power conflicts. A critical examination of neoliberal conditions and their classification systems resists simplistic categorization within the political spectrum as “left” or “right” and defies straightforward moral evaluation. Therefore, domination and control are neither inherently positive nor negative; rather, they are inherent to the competition between hegemonies. They are a macro-social and anthropological constant throughout human history (see Chapter 7). This systemic-anthropological approach, which explores systems theory and the group-based processes of thinking, feeling, and identification since the origins of *Homo sapiens*, lends support to this perspective. Inequalities and social stratification are enduring phenomena in human societies. What sets the neoliberal regime of the order of difference apart is its establishment of an extensive system that acknowledges ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, and other differences. The distinctive quality of the neoliberal regime of the order of difference lies in its establishment of a comprehensive system that not only recognizes ethnic, religious, cultural, and gender differences (see the characteristics of primordial coding in Chapter 9.2), but also accentuates them within the rhetoric of democratic freedom and equality in order to exploit the benefits of cultural mixing. This method of categorizing individuals is characterized by a pragmatic brutality that erodes the distinctions between “outside” and “inside” as long as there is potential for profit within the “market liberal logic.” In this system, individuals can be organized and controlled according to a hierarchical structure. In this context, a strategy of variable inclusion is employed, contingent upon the potential profit margins involved. The formerly inflexible boundaries of the primordial regime are now adaptable and responsive. In this process, the neoliberal regime of difference employs the

language of human rights and democracy to disguise its true intentions. The constant reiteration of terms associated with democracy creates an illusion of “power neutrality” (Hardt and Negri 2001, 207).

The term neoliberalism encompasses a range of approaches and ideas found across various theories, originating from principles articulated during the Mont Pèlerin Society conference in 1947, led by Friedrich August von Hayek and Wilhelm Röpke. Both were also participants at the Lippmann Colloquium in Paris in 1938. This meeting was significantly shaped by the experience of the failure of classical liberalism against the backdrop of the rise and fall of the Nazi regime, totalitarian Stalinism, and the onset of the Cold War (Cahill and Konings 2017, 25). The common thread among these disparate approaches and ideas regarding neoliberalism is the emphasis on a state apparatus that ensures the viability of a free market economy and social competition. This ensures that every socio-economic entity and every institution—including the state—is managed according to the criteria of efficiency. The primary measures for maximizing profit include the strategic elimination of tariffs and taxes on specific property and income, supply-side monetarist strategies, and the elimination of subsidies and social services (Saidel 2023, 7). Contrary to its own proclamations, the conception of humanity within classic neoliberalism actually deviates from the principles of human rights and posits that human behavior is primarily driven by the search for personal (economic) advantages (*homo oeconomicus*). This perspective necessitates a reorganization of society towards a competitive market platform, aiming to transform the myriad impulses of self-interest into a stable equilibrium (Binkley 2011, 389). It even postulates the need to shift away from humanistic and progressive values towards an emphasis on competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and the maximization of individual capital (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 10). In the neoliberal framework, human rights and equality are primarily interpreted as the freedom to participate in competition. However, this interpretation does not encompass creating a level playing field or ensuring entitlements to certain quality of life standards, such as health or education (Leyva 2020, 7). Competition is presented as a neutral decision-making situation, which is purported to be a fairer method of distributing social goods compared to direct state intervention. This view favors a market logic that prioritizes individual responsibility over collective welfare and social justice, emphasizing the principles of self-interest and market dominance. In the second half of the 20th century, neoliberal perspectives were entrenched in major scientific theories, including public choice theory, rational choice theory, and game theory. Based on the underlying conception of human nature, it was argued that human behavior is primarily driven by perceived self-interest (Cahill and Konings 2017, 32). To successfully disseminate neoliberal views globally and over the long term, numerous position papers were produced on a broad array of topics, including welfare and education reform, environmental standards, and labor practices. These papers explicitly positioned

themselves against welfare state ideologies and feminist approaches, favoring solutions that were touted as market-friendly. The research findings were presented as scientifically objective and free from ideology, which helped them gain a high level of prestige and influence in disciplines such as sociology, political science, international relations, and especially economics (Leyva 2020, 8). In addition, academic centers at prestigious institutions like the London School of Economics and the University of Chicago were established with the support and funding of influential business lobby and policy groups, including the US Chamber of Commerce and the Trilateral Commission. Numerous national and international think tanks were also created, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Heritage Foundation, and the Fraser Institute (*ibid.*). These think tanks, although not entirely homogeneous, largely share a common policy approach focused on accelerating economic growth and enhancing market competitiveness. Among other objectives, they advocate for maximizing comparative advantages, achieving fiscal solvency, and attracting foreign direct investment through the implementation of appropriate policies.

The neoliberal paradigm advocates for corporate governance largely free from state interference; it calls for the minimization of regulations such as health and safety standards, environmental protections, and minimum wage laws, arguing that these only lead to excessive bureaucracy. The underlying logic is that the market mechanism will naturally sanction companies that act unethically or provide inferior products and services (Leyva 2020, 10). In addition, the implementation of uniform customs tariffs and the deregulation of markets aim to enable freer economic trade at both national and international levels—the buzzword here is “liberalization of markets.” “Deregulation” refers to the reduction or abolition of state regulations to give companies more freedom in their business operations. This includes a variety of sectors such as finance, retail, production, and telecommunications; the goal is purportedly to make the market freer and to stimulate economic activity. The rationale behind this approach is that reducing government intervention and regulations, which are perceived as hindering profitability, will allow companies to operate more efficiently and competitively. However, not all regulation is rejected. Instead, selective application is favored: regulations that enhance business profits—for example, stricter copyright regulations—are supported.

A key component of the neoliberal agenda is the privatization of natural resources and public services, including education, healthcare, law enforcement, and transportation. The prevailing thesis is that the private sector is also more efficient at managing these areas than public institutions. However, it would be reductive to characterize the neoliberal model merely as a risky venture with potentially detrimental consequences; rather, it operates as a mechanism for the expropriation of structures essential to society. The privatization of railroads, roads, internet and fiber optic infrastructure, state-owned industries, and the facilitation of the exploitation of natural resources exemplify processes of primordial accumulation

that focus primarily on the redistribution of wealth, rather than its creation (Hardt and Negri 2018, 208). The neoliberal agenda also proposes reducing state social security institutions in favor of private charities (Crouch 2023, 384). Similarly, it advocates a comprehensive reduction or abolition of taxes, including those on income, corporate earnings, and capital gains. The transformation of the welfare state into a neoliberal state is particularly relevant to this study on human differentiation. Key measures include the disciplining of public budgets, the control of inflation, and the protection of legal contracts. Additionally, the opening of internal and international markets is crucial, which may be enforced by military intervention if necessary. These measures are vital because, from a macro-social anthropological perspective, the effective control and protection of resources is the fundamental strategy for maintaining power within hegemonies. The restructuring of public institutions according to neoliberal principles aims to enhance the efficiency of public services. Furthermore, key decisions in economic policy are to be left to technocratic elites who operate outside traditional democratic processes, thereby facilitating business operations and maximizing profits.

The ideological and political strategies of neoliberalism aim to extend the logic and practices of the market and entrepreneurial thinking to all levels of governance, civic engagement, public sector operations, and even private life. As such, neoliberalism impacts all dimensions of human decision-making and organizational structures. It unfolds as a complex construct that involves more than just the deregulation of markets and the privatization of state services and system-critical infrastructures; it represents a fundamental transformation process reshaping political and economic systems globally. This process is characterized by the growing dominance of the financial economy, which is increasingly distancing itself from democratic oversight bodies and instead, taking political systems hostage. The fragmentation of formerly centralized structures and the promotion of networks at both the state and private sector levels are reconfiguring global power relations. These changes subject democratic institutions and populations to market mechanisms. The restructuring of political systems and their integration into global networks lead to unstable power structures and dependencies. Additionally, the precarization of working conditions and monetary violence emerge, facilitating the domination of individuals and communities. These dynamics accentuate the profound impacts of neoliberalism on the fabric of society and its governance structures. Overall, neoliberalism represents a profound shift in the manner in which political and economic power is exercised, deconstructing traditional structures and replacing them with a network of market-oriented logics that undermine the foundations of democratic governance and social cohesion. The diverse practices and agendas encapsulated by the term neoliberalism have forged a regime that deeply stratifies and classifies individuals, appropriating their potential under the guise of democratic principles, human rights, and freedoms. This heterogeneous, territorially unbound

regime ironically reinforces practices of differentiation and hierarchization based on a seemingly overarching consensus, thus differing significantly from the primordially coded regime of the order of difference shaped by colonialism, patriarchy, and racism. This understanding of neoliberalism does not gloss over the significant discrepancy between the often-propagated democratic values—so-called “Western values”—and the reality of a market-oriented appropriation of the institutions and populations of liberal democracies.

9.3.2 Historical Foundations of Neoliberal Coded Differences in Germany

Germany's social order underwent a significant realignment after 1945 as part of a profound transformation of traditional power structures (Geissler 2014, 60), within a regime encoded by neoliberal principles. This transformation was closely linked to the role of US hegemony, which initiated a gradual shift in global strategies concerning resource security and financial-economic dominance. These developments are crucial for understanding the orders of difference in the German context. The transition from the Bretton Woods system, characterized by nation-states and their sovereign regulatory and supervisory powers (for more details, see Section 10.2 below), to the post-Bretton Woods era, which began in the early 1970s when the US dollar was decoupled from the gold standard, marked a significant upheaval (Willke 2014a, 13; Graeber 2012, 380). This period of unrestrained demarcation laid the foundation for our post-democratic era, in which market and policy failures catalyzed the emergence of neoliberally coded social orders of difference (Willke, Becker, and Rostásy 2013). This development led to a system of demarcations in which the traditional boundaries between states, markets, and social spheres became increasingly blurred. At the heart of this process was neoliberalization, which promoted a reorganization of social and power relations according to the principles of the market economy and the logic of the free market (see Chapter 9.3.1). The consequences of these shifts are profound and have permanently altered the way in which social differentiations and stratifications are constructed and experienced. Previously, traditional structures were based on firmly anchored hierarchical and often primordially coded differentiations, which were conditioned and maintained by direct power relations and physical violence. In the German context, the period before the Second World War was characterized by a blend of primordial coding and the beginnings of functional differentiation, similar to other parts of Europe (Wiede 2015, 33). Germany had a complex social structure influenced by both traditional and modernizing forces (Geissler 2014, 22). The Weimar Republic (1918–1933) was a time of political and social upheaval, during which democratic principles and the concept of functional differentiation were bolstered by the new republican constitution (Kluge 2006, 293). However, strong primordial ties, such as nationalism and regional identities, persisted. The situation changed dramatically when the National Socialists

came to power in 1933. Nazi ideology heavily emphasized racist and ethnocentric primordial codes, particularly focusing on race and the national community, which became the foundation of its social order. National Socialist rule marked a radical return to these primordial codes, enforced with extreme violence.

After the Second World War and the defeat of the Nazi regime, Germany was tasked with establishing a new social order. In the West, this led to the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which strongly emphasized democratic principles, a market economy, and integration into the international community. This shift meant a departure from primordial codes toward functional differentiation and neoliberal principles. In contrast, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East adopted socialist and communist ideologies, pursuing a different form of functional differentiation, yet also moving away from the primordial codes of National Socialism. However, the cultural codes of the GDR, shaped by socialist ideals such as equality, solidarity, and centralized control of society, did not align with the inherent complexity and self-organization of social systems. Attempts to create a homogeneous social order through centralized planning and strict control contradicted the self-referential nature and operational closedness of social systems. In light of these phenomena, a central question arises: To what extent do the two cultural coding practices—neoliberal and primordial logics—intersect, overlap, or even assume novel forms in contemporary Germany? Following the country's reunification, it became clear that "old" collective identities and resentments—such as regional affiliations, ethnic prejudices, and nostalgic attachments—were far from entirely displaced by the dynamics of a market-driven and globalized society. Instead, a tension emerged in which neoliberal principles—competition, individualization, and the logic of economic competitiveness—increasingly shaped societal consensus. At the same time, a resurgence of primordial codings became evident in right-wing populist and neo-nationalist movements. The simultaneity and interaction of these coding logics are pivotal to understanding the current lines of social differentiation and conflict in Germany. These two strands do not simply coexist; rather, they engage in complex and reciprocal interplay. Neoliberal deregulation often exacerbates societal insecurity and economic precariousness, fostering a retreat into identitarian or separatist movements. Conversely, market-oriented actors frequently invoke traditional or national discourses to legitimize their actions, such as framing the protection of so-called domestic resources as a matter of national interest. A crucial aspect of these cultural codings is their inherent complexity, which renders them difficult to empirically isolate. This very intricacy lends significant weight to the argument that these cultural codings are central to the "regimes of difference orders" thesis. The practices and discourses tied to these codings do not function in isolation; instead, they operate through dynamic interactions with existing social structures, continually adapting to and evolving in response to shifting geopolitical and economic contexts.

9.3.3 Corruption as a *Modus Operandi*

In critiques of capitalism, it is a commonly held view that money exacerbates social inequalities. This perspective is prevalent among numerous theorists and critics of capitalism. Given this context, this study will not attempt a comprehensive analysis or critique of the role of money *per se*. From a systemic anthropological perspective, money is regarded as a control medium that significantly impacts differentiation practices and sorting processes in neoliberally coded regimes. Money not only sustains inequalities but also shapes social relations, value systems, and identities within these frameworks. Additionally, it reveals how practices of corruption are systematically embedded as essential components of the neoliberal agenda, profoundly reshaping patterns of communication and interaction within social systems. Neoliberally coded orders of difference rely on economic logics that are fundamentally dependent on the medium of money and facilitate a far-reaching restructuring of social interactions. Instead of relying on rigid governance mechanisms supported by physical force, economic conditioning enables more flexible and efficient coordination based on market dynamics and the lure of potential benefits (Willke 2014b, 161). In neoliberally coded contexts, money initially serves as a powerful tool for controlling individual and collective behavior. By establishing incentives and sanctions tied to monetary conditions, social and economic systems can direct individuals and groups toward specific behaviors. This monetary power (Vogl 2021, 29 f.) is evident in policies that frame unemployment, poverty, and social inequality as individual failures and advocate for solutions based on individual responsibility and market-compliant adaptation. The shift toward money-based governance mechanisms, which themselves constitute a fundamental form of power, leads to a profound redefinition of social systems, fundamentally altering the principles of human differentiation and the structures of social inequality.

Thus, money functions not only as a universal medium of exchange but also as an instrument of power that shapes the conditions and possibilities of social participation as well as the distribution of resources and opportunities. Neoliberalism, characterized by the social dimension of the control medium of money, leads to a shift in traditional orders towards a state of fluctuating indifference (Willke 2014b, 160), in which money plays a seemingly characterless, criterion-less, and differentiation-less role in relation to historical differentiation criteria. This development is described as a de-differentiation of choice opportunities, which, contrary to initial assumptions, generates new forms of differentiation and hierarchy. These choice opportunities refer to the possibilities now available to individuals and groups within social, economic, and political structures to make decisions that influence their lives and societal positions. This trend towards fluctuating indifference, where money appears neutral and historical, cultural, or social differentiation criteria become less significant, is identified as the de-differentiation of choice. Georg Simmel described

money as “indifference itself” (Simmel 1987, 485) and brought forth its capacity to bring order to the dynamic fluctuations of social relationships. Although this de-differentiation seems to undermine traditional hierarchies, the increasing relevance of networks and social capital paradoxically points out the reinforcement of social inequalities. Against this backdrop, the idea that money not only functions as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, but also induces profound transformations in social relations, becomes prominent. Through the mobilization of contingencies, money alters the foundations upon which social interactions and bonds are formed, thus contributing to a redefinition of belonging and exclusion. As networks and social capital gain prominence, the mechanisms through which social classes are reproduced and reinforced are increasingly determined by economic resources and the capacity to accumulate capital.

A critical examination of these dynamics reveals an essential ambivalence: while on one hand, money appears to neutralize historically significant differentiations, on the other, it reinforces inequalities by introducing new criteria for differentiation primarily based on economic power. This evolution calls into question the purported neutrality of money and elucidates how it, functioning as a medium of control, actively perpetuates and intensifies profound social divisions. Money has now become a pivotal factor regulating access to social goods, services, and positions. It favors specific forms of consumption as well as access to education and healthcare, thus contributing to the establishment and reinforcement of social hierarchies. Individuals or groups with sufficient financial resources secure advantages and enhance their social positions, while those with fewer resources are marginalized or excluded. Individuals from privileged backgrounds often have access to influential networks and accumulate extensive social capital that helps secure and enhance their social and economic situations. These advantages are frequently passed down through generations, cementing existing class structures. The phenomenon of classism is deeply interwoven with the dynamics of networks and social capital, as both uphold social inequalities. This development harbors an ambivalent, potentially anti-democratic tendency: individual success increasingly depends on personal relationships and access to informal networks, undermining formal qualifications and the principle of meritocracy. Such a social order, in which membership in certain networks determines social and economic advancement, can undermine democratic values such as equality, justice, and equal opportunities and lead to a hardening of power structures that are difficult to dismantle. The role of money as a dominant factor in the creation and reinforcement of social hierarchies and inequalities, particularly through privileged access to social goods and networks, substantiates the issue of corruption as a *modus operandi* in contemporary society (Hardt and Negri 2001, 213; Crouch 2023). The power structures shaped by financial resources and the increasing influence of informal networks indicate a more comprehensive system where corruption is not merely an exceptional occur-

rence but a fundamental mechanism of system maintenance and control. Since the 1990s, the issue of corruption has garnered growing international attention, recognized as a cross-border problem that necessitates global responses. The discourse on corruption reached an institutional milestone between 1994 and 1997, during which time it was formally integrated into the programs of regional organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the European Union (EU). As a result, corruption is recognized as a systemic issue, integral to understanding power dynamics and governance on a global scale (Katzarova 2019, 3). This phase marked the beginning of a critical engagement in academic research that identified a crisis of legitimacy in anti-corruption initiatives. This led to a shift in focus from merely studying corruption to analyzing anti-corruption efforts within fields such as political science, sociology, and social anthropology. This broader academic inquiry helped to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms and impacts of corruption, as well as the effectiveness and challenges of measures aimed at combating it (Perumal 2023; Terry 2009; E. Brown and Cloke 2011; Holmes 2006; Reinsberg, Kentikelenis, and Stubbs 2021; B. Davis 2016). This development triggered a reassessment of the definition, scope, and strategies to combat corruption at the international level. Paradoxically, it brought back issues that had been intensively debated before being institutionally anchored in international organizations (Cuadrado-Ballesteros and García Sánchez 2017; Kaufmann and Vicente 2011; Campos and Giovannoni 2007; B. Davis 2016). The cyclical return to foundational discussions stems from the extensive stakeholding and lobbying practices that effectively normalize corruption as the status quo. The current form of neoliberalism significantly deviates from the theoretical ideal of market-compliant liberalism, which postulates a clear division between the political and economic spheres. In practice, however, these spheres are becoming increasingly intertwined through close links between corporations and state decision-makers who directly influence policy-making. These interdependencies, often described as lobbying, result in privileges for small groups of influential economic players, contradicting the theoretical principles of a “free market economy.” The practice of leaders frequently transitioning between business and politics, known as the “revolving door effect,” undermines the integrity of both spheres and promotes a conflation of interests that challenges democratic principles. This blending of the corporate and political worlds not only blurs the lines intended to keep these domains separate but also raises questions about accountability and the equitable distribution of power within a society (Crouch 2023, 385). The boundaries and notions of “soft,” benevolent, or malign influence within public policy naturally vary widely and encompass a broad range of channels and methods of influence (Perumal 2023; Kusiak 2019; Dincer and Johnston 2020). Legal lobbying and corruption represent different facets and terminologies of the same phenomenon, which Hardt and Negri succinctly describe as the *modus operandi* of hegemonic neoliberalism (Hardt and Negri 2001, 213).

From a systemic-anthropological perspective, corruption should not be interpreted and evaluated morally but rather seen as an indicator of processes of decomposition and change. Consequently, there is no real escape from corruption, as many anti-corruption campaigns might suggest. Instead, there are only more subtle and clever methods of “soft” influence. The use of the term “corruption” in this context merely indicates the structural and procedural characteristics inherent in social systems. Understood as a fundamental mechanism of a neoliberal society, corruption illustrates how systemic crises and the continuous decomposition of social structures are not only inevitable but also constitutive elements of the imperial condition. In functionally differentiated societies, various social subsystems are defined by unique functions and communication codes. In this context, corruption can be understood as a form of communication that transcends the clearly defined boundaries between these subsystems, thereby impairing their functional autonomy. It enables both individual and collective actors to circumvent sharp system boundaries to direct influence, power, and resources according to their own interests. The self-referentiality of systems—their ability to reflect on themselves and control operations using their own codes and programs—can also facilitate the consolidation of corrupt mechanisms. Thus, corrupt practices are not seen as an external problem but as an integral part of the system’s internal functional logic. This leads to the normalization of corruption, which is particularly challenging to dismantle as systems are primarily geared towards their own self-preservation. The challenge lies in viewing corruption not exclusively as deviant behavior within a system but as a phenomenon that is enabled and maintained by the structures and processes of the system itself. This perspective necessitates a profound reflection on the actual nature and interaction of systems to develop effective, non-trivial strategies against corruption. These strategies should go beyond symptomatic solutions and address the fundamental structural conditions. The role of shadow banks, characterized by their lack of transparency and regulatory oversight, also merits attention in this context (Wullweber 2021). They provide a fertile terrain for corrupt behavior or “soft influence operations” ranging from money laundering to tax evasion by enabling actors to hide assets and income from state control authorities. These practices, although not always explicitly illegal, contribute to the erosion of the rule of law and the reinforcement of financial inequalities by giving disproportionate advantages to the wealthy and powerful segments of society.

9.3.4 Neoliberally Coded Orders of Difference

The normalization of the neoliberal agenda is central to this investigation, particularly in light of the thesis that currently two dominant regimes of orders of difference—and thus of human differentiation—classify, hierarchize, and control people. Special attention is paid to the subjectivizing power of neoliberal characteristics and

their cultural codings. The notion that neoliberal currents subjectivize and condition individuals through their dominant principles has been explored from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Significant contributions have been made by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean Baudrillard, Immanuel Wallerstein, Étienne Balibar, Joseph Vogl, Achille Mbembe, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, among others. These and other critical approaches to capitalism illuminate the profound influence of neoliberal ideologies on the construction of subjectivities. The global spread of the neoliberal agenda is increasingly influencing the cultural coding of everyday life in the West according to neoliberal standards. This influence manifests as national governments adhere to the principles of this regime, thereby imposing neoliberal ideas and practices upon their societies. In subsequent sections, the complex entanglements between neoliberal policies, military conflicts, and the mechanisms of state control such as the police and judicial systems will be discussed in greater detail. However, the initial focus is on the consequences of this ideological penetration for ideas of norms and values, which are increasingly shaped by corporate logic.

9.3.4.1 The Deceptive Rhetoric of Universal Inclusion

The economic evaluation of social categories and identities leads to a re-evaluation of social differences, with individuals and groups being differentiated according to economic performance and their “market value.” This transforms social differentiation processes under the influence of the neoliberal agenda. Neoliberal ideologies that present a variety of social categories such as ethnic, cultural, gender, and religious as neutral and promise universal inclusion reveal an uncomfortable truth about the practice of human differentiation—but only on the condition that the individuals concerned conform to the norms set by financial regimes (Hardt and Negri 2001, 210). This ostensible openness and tolerance are deeply embedded in the debt economy, which defines the true conditions for social participation and recognition. The refusal to recognize this reality and the tendency to repress it are rooted in the tacit agreement that has underpinned the West’s extraordinary prosperity since the Second World War. This dynamic is not solely rooted in historical exploitation but is sustained by an implicit social contract known as “Europe’s concession.” The latter entails Europe’s acquiescence to the neoliberal agenda and US military hegemony in exchange for ongoing financial benefits (see Chapter 10.2). The consequences of this agreement between Europe and the USA, and the resulting comprehensive structures of control, hierarchization, and command to which people are subjected whose governments have joined the prevailing financial regime, are of great relevance in order to understand the subjugation to financial norms. The entire system of hegemonic power and domination should be understood as a neoliberal regime of orders of difference, characterized by a multi-layered network. It combines military and technological dominance with the exploitation of resources and labor under the

deceptive banner of human rights and democracy; it exploits the illusion of diversity and pluralism by reducing them to economic standards, thus subordinating the profound social and cultural dimensions of human differentiation to a logic of exploitation. Individuals and groups are defined primarily by their ability to operate within a debt system, i.e., as human capital in terms of borrowing and consumption. It can be stated that the neoliberal regime profits through the externalization of costs (Lessenich 2018, 61) onto “others”, whereby these “others” are no longer categorized according to primordial criteria. This marks a significant departure from the imperial regimes of inequality of past eras and contexts. However, even with this transition to a seemingly more neutral system of social differentiation under the neoliberal regime, the practice of externalizing costs onto *others* remains a profoundly racist endeavor. The old divisions of the world, shaped by racist structures, continue to manifest themselves in economic realities: migrants and refugees find themselves disproportionately in the low-wage sector, and the costs of neoliberal economic practices are often passed on to those least able to resist, frequently in parts of the world that were historically under colonial rule. These practices reflect a continuation of racist differentiation, even if the underlying criteria differ from the explicitly imperial regimes of the past. This makes it clear that the supposed blindness to differences is not based on a genuine recognition of diversity, but on an instrumentalization of this diversity for economic purposes. Neoliberal doctrine promotes a world in which cultural, ethnic, and religious identities become secondary as long as they are subordinated to the overarching goals of the debt economy. This has led to a paradigm shift away from the logic of colonial dominance towards the recognition and pragmatic integration of diversity and plurality.

9.3.4.2 Socio-Technical Differentiation and Control Mechanisms: The Debt Economy

The shift from external disciplinary measures to the internalization of market principles marks a significant change in the mechanisms of exercising power and control within neoliberal agendas (Deleuze 2014, 349). This transition leads to the shaping of an image of humanity that views the individual primarily as a market participant and a *subject of debt*—a condition that some refer to as “second nature” (Bauman 2010, 104). This perspective fundamentally alters how individuals perceive themselves and their roles within society. It emphasizes economic activity and financial obligations as core elements of human identity under neoliberalism. The implementation of these mechanisms is designed to achieve flexibility and increased efficiency, but it adapts methods from earlier forms of governance and aligns them with market logic. In this context, a variety of socio-technical practices emerge, which are shaped by the neoliberal regime and significantly influence the lives of entire populations. A key aspect of this socio-technical practice is the principle of the debt economy, which not only enables new forms of exploitation,

control, and subjugation but also prefigures and implements them. These practices reflect how the neoliberal regime shapes and imposes cultural codes of life on respective governments (Lazzarato 2012, 35). The financialization of recent decades has significantly contributed to the transformation of subjectivity in favor of a neoliberal hegemony, utilizing culturally coded socio-techniques, as Deleuze stated early on with the sharp distinction between the “enclosed human being” and the “indebted human being” (Deleuze 2014, 350). Deleuze draws attention to the precarious situation in which a large part of humanity finds itself—too numerous for physical confinement and too impoverished to “live” within a debt regime. The expansion of the debt economy through mechanisms such as mortgages, consumer credit, microcredit, and public debt has facilitated broader inclusion in the logic of debt, promoting an entrepreneurial subjective norm. This norm is rooted in the asymmetry of power relations and prescribes modes of future exploitation, thus reshaping individual and collective identities through financial obligations (Macho 2014, 388). Michel Foucault also turned his attention to the transformations within social power relations during the increasingly dominant global neoliberal agenda of the 1970s. He identified a shift towards forms of power in which consumption emerges as the dominant way of life, and consumer credit becomes the central economic instrument (Foucault 2014, 367). Foucault presents a compelling argument that new forms of subjectivation and techniques of governance are founded upon a comprehensive theoretical discourse (Foucault 2001, 2014). The advent of neoliberal tenets such as human capital, the pervasive market, and the necessity of flexibility has given rise to sophisticated modes of exercising power. These concepts are fundamental to an examination of the relationships between time regimes, subjectivation processes, and economic behaviors. In contrast to the disciplinary society, the corporate society—as Foucault refers to it—is based on a handling of time characterized by flexibility and constant adaptation, with the aim of promoting individual initiative. While neoliberal time regimes build upon the tradition of the productivity-oriented disciplinary society, they significantly intensify the pressure on individuals to comply with the expectations placed upon them (Foucault 2014, 308). In his analysis of the characteristics of contemporary corporate society, Foucault identifies a management of time that is characterized by flexibility and constant adaptation, as well as the promotion of individual initiative. This transition entails a shift away from inflexible structures and toward greater autonomy and individual accountability. Conversely, although the neoliberal time regimes within the corporate society are rooted in the tradition of the productivity-oriented disciplinary society, thus demonstrating historical continuity, they paradoxically result in a notable increase in pressure on the subjective willingness to perform. This represents the inherent contradiction: while the disciplinary society is characterized by external control mechanisms and fixed time structures, the corporate society promotes the idea of self-regulation and self-optimization, which results in

an internal pressure that is often perceived as more intense. This internal pressure arises from the constant demand for flexibility, adaptability, and an increase in individual performance, which essentially means an intensification of requirements. However, despite the apparent freedom and self-determination afforded by the framework conditions, the reality is that they are, in fact, more controlling and restrictive than they initially appear. The relationship between the neoliberal time regime and the debt economy can be defined as follows: the demands for constant flexibility, adaptability, and enhanced performance in the corporate society increasingly drive individuals into dependencies, which often manifest as financial obligations. The debt economy fosters a system in which access to resources, education, and social advancement is often achieved through the incurring of debt, thereby placing individuals in a state of perpetual economic obligation. The debt economy is predicated on the concept of "bought time." By continually issuing new loans that must be repaid in the future, current distributional conflicts are defused amidst escalating inequalities, effectively acting as potential leverage (Szewsz 2022, 213). In the context of debt-economic time regimes, money is regarded as a medium that buttresses the distribution and exercise of power through its capacity to span temporal boundaries, thus creating avenues for action over extended periods. This capacity of money enables individuals and institutions to exert influence and make strategic decisions that can have long-term impacts on economic and social structures. The function of money in extending influence over time demonstrates its indispensable role in shaping and maintaining the dynamics within these regimes (Foucault 2005, 197). Money facilitates the operation of productive power across temporal boundaries, whereby it expands and structures the space of future action. This, in turn, exerts an influence upon social and economic relations within society. The temporal aspect of productive power is frequently disregarded, as it is typically examined in the context of immediate occurrences and interpersonal dynamics. However, Foucault's perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which power operates, not only by controlling or influencing present action but also by shaping the future (*ibid.*, 198). This notion of power as a force that shapes future landscapes of action broadens our comprehension of social governance, demonstrating how social orders reproduce and transform themselves by establishing the conditions for future action. This insight is crucial for an understanding of neoliberal regimes of difference for a number of reasons. Firstly, money is regarded not merely as a medium of exchange or a store of value, but also as a key instrument for influencing future economic and social realities. Moreover, in a debt economy, money and debt act as instruments of preventive power that shape the future actions of individuals and entire societies. Debts are contingent upon future payments, thereby defining predetermined courses of action. They establish the actions that individuals or states are permitted or required to take in the future in order to fulfill their financial obligations. If these insights, which resonate with

Nietzsche's reflections on the indebted man, are considered, it becomes evident that debt functions as both an economic mechanism and a broad societal strategy for governing behavior and ensuring compliance with specific economic and ideological norms. This dual function of debt constitutes a key element in neoliberal economic systems, as Nietzsche already indicated, where financial obligations not only influence immediate economic conditions but also shape long-term social and political landscapes (Sigridur and Helmut 2016). The principle of debt enables the acquisition of resources in the present, with the subsequent deferment of payment to a future date. This financial strategy not only facilitates the acquisition of resources but also structures future actions and lifestyles, in many instances, in advance. In a neoliberal context, where access to credit and the capacity to service debt are increasingly regarded as indicators of economic and social competence, an individual's capacity to act in the future becomes inextricably linked to their financial assessments and creditworthiness. These financial evaluations and the associated credit ratings operate as crucial indicators, delineating individual possibilities for action and driving the restructuring of state control and governance in alignment with principles of neoliberal debt management.

The shift from a welfare-oriented to a debt-oriented state model systematically privileges the wealthy, a transition supported by governmental practices of utilizing tax revenues to service debts to major creditors rather than for funding public welfare. This prioritization benefits creditors who frequently invest their capital in tax havens, further burdening wage earners by reducing the fiscal space available for social service (Saidel 2023, 29). Concurrently, state structures are undergoing a transformation towards an entrepreneurial logic, as evidenced by alterations to the governance rules. These regulations promote the transfer of decision-making authority to decentralized and horizontally structured consultative bodies. The solutions proposed by these bodies—which are often dominated by technocrats—are therefore accorded greater legitimacy than those that arise from democratically elected representatives and their staff. This shift represents a significant transformation in the dynamics of state decision-making. This represents a shift towards governance models that prioritize efficiency and expertise over traditional democratic processes. Such a shift has the potential to alter the relationship between citizens and their government, with technocratic insights becoming more highly valued than popular will. This reconfiguration of authority challenges the foundational principles of democratic governance and reshapes the processes of policy formulation and implementation (Dardot and Laval 2019, 219). However, the processes of financialization do not lead to a reduction in government activities or administrative practices. Instead, there is an erosion of state structures characterized by a reorientation of government objectives, principles, and procedures that increasingly diverge from the traditional foundations of representative democracy

(Vogl 2021, 27). In this context, socio-technical differentiation and control measures assume a pivotal role, as they not only facilitate the implementation of these novel governance models but also enable the monitoring and control of the population in accordance with neoliberal debt management principles. These developments represent a significant departure from the foundational principles of representative democracy and human rights-oriented legislative institutions. These developments exemplify the profound impact of neoliberal logic on state governance and its associated control mechanisms. Neoliberalism has effectively prioritized financial logics over democratic processes and human rights considerations, reshaping the very nature of state governance.

In light of the enduring financial crises that have emerged since 2008, it is imperative to extend the scope of discourse beyond Foucault to conduct a comprehensive crisis-theoretical analysis of neoliberal social structures. The collapse of Lehman Brothers Bank in September 2008 marked the onset of one of the most severe global economic crises since the Second World War. This was further exacerbated by subsequent crises and the advent of the global pandemic, which collectively posed significant additional challenges on a global scale. In the United States, the inability of many individuals to meet their mortgage payments resulted in significant losses of income, while the lack of sufficient health insurance led to an increase in debt due to unexpected medical expenses. In Europe, the financial crisis evolved into a sovereign debt crisis as government funds were redirected towards the bailout of private banks. In lieu of providing assistance to those affected, Western countries provided support to financial institutions and implemented austerity policies that favored creditors, which led to the coining of the term “punitive neoliberalism.” This term reflects a shift in policy orientation that not only fails to protect the vulnerable but actively imposes further hardships. This demonstrates a stark alignment with neoliberal priorities that emphasize fiscal austerity over social welfare (Davies 2017; A. Gupta 2018; Wacquant, Steinmetz, and Wacquant 2009). In this phase, neoliberal governance does not seek to gain legitimacy through consensus; rather, it punishes those who are already suffering as a result of social cuts, privatization, the dismantling of healthcare and education systems, and rising unemployment. Rather than subjecting the policies that precipitated these crises to rigorous scrutiny, the general population is often held culpable for excessive spending, a portrayal that is misleadingly disseminated by financial institutions as a rationale for the implementation of austerity measures. This shift in narrative serves to deflect responsibility from policy failures and places the burden of economic downturns on the very individuals most affected by them. This strategy not only undermines the accountability of financial and governmental bodies but also exacerbates the vulnerabilities of those least equipped to bear them, thereby deepening social and economic disparities (Lazzarato 2015, 122).

The integration of these considerations into the principles of modern systems theory requires a reflection on their crucial role in governing societies and managing social complexity. It is imperative to prioritize the principle of non-linearity. Complex social systems are distinguished by their dynamic, multi-layered interactions, which transcend the boundaries of conventional cause-and-effect relationships. In the context of the debt economy, it is not merely quantitative variables such as the amounts of money that are of consequence; social and temporal dimensions also exert an influence on future possibilities for action and the distribution of social inequalities. As the complexity and dynamics of the world increase, the probability of stable social structures becomes increasingly improbable. This scenario thus requires the implementation of enhanced and targeted control measures to ensure social order and to counteract the effects of entropy. The tendency of neoliberalism to dissolve established structures renders this task even more pressing. The neoliberal agenda deliberately exploits the increasing entropy, or instability, in social and economic systems to consolidate power relations. Instead of minimizing entropy, the debt economy exacerbates systemic dependencies by rendering states and individuals who find themselves in a debt trap increasingly reliant on the conditions of financially robust actors. The resulting destabilization of social and economic structures creates an environment conducive to the continuous realignment of influential actors' positions, enabling them to exploit the weakness and instability of others for profit. In this context, the concept of entropy is not reduced but rather utilized as a means of control. The resulting volatility and the constant need for adjustment and reorganization form the foundation for the maintenance and exacerbation of power relations. The deliberate design of financial markets and economic incentives within the context of neoliberal coded regimes illustrates that human action markedly increases the complexity of social systems. This effect cannot be attributed to natural evolutionary processes. In contrast to evolutionary processes, which are characterized by long-term, gradual adaptations, deliberate interventions in social and economic structures result in rapid and often unpredictable changes. Such a situation thus requires careful management and regulation. It is evident that the endeavor to simplify or trivialize intricate social systems by exerting control through external mechanisms is a flawed approach. This approach fails to take into account the intrinsic dynamics of social systems, which are defined by internal processes, historical developments, and diverse interactions. The endeavor to reduce these systems in terms of their complexity and to make their reactions predictable can, paradoxically, result in increased complexity and unpredictability. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge the intrinsic complexities of social systems and to be mindful of the potential consequences of external intervention on their intrinsic dynamics. Such actions may result in unforeseen outcomes. Rather than denying the complexity of social systems, it would be more prudent to encourage their acceptance. Subsequently, control approaches should be developed that are able to react flexibly and

adaptively to the multitude of influencing factors. Socio-technical practices of debt economics divide society into those deemed creditworthy, who thus have access to certain resources and privileges, and those who are marginalized and excluded by debt. The sociocybernetic perspective—and thus a second-order observation—reveals that this division is not merely a reaction to individual financial decisions but a form of social order formation that is actively produced by the financial system and its interlocking socio-technical practices. This formation of order is autopoietic: it reproduces itself through the constant application of its own distinctions, whereby individuals are repeatedly inscribed into the system and repositioned according to its rules. The socio-technical practices of financialization are therefore not neutral or merely functional; rather, they are deeply involved in the construction of power relations and the production of social human differentiation. In light of the economic and social turmoil caused by financial crises, these practices also offer a means of reshaping and consolidating power relations. They achieve this by introducing new forms of control and surveillance made possible by the digitalization and automation of financial services.

Viewing punitive neoliberalism through the lens of recent and complex systems theory reveals paradoxes that emphasize the system-stabilizing consequences of punitive mechanisms, even if this might be perceived as cynical given the real suffering and despair of countless people. These measures, which at first glance appear destructive or at least counterproductive, actually contribute to maintaining and strengthening the system as a whole on several levels. They promote systemic resilience by creating adaptive control and social homogeneity that facilitate the enforcement of neoliberal policies. Selective punishment further strengthens the system by maintaining a meritocratic illusion that emphasizes individual responsibility for economic success or failure. This helps legitimize the existing social order and reduces the pressure for reform. Fear and insecurity operate as additional cohesive forces that promote conformity to neoliberal norms and establish a culture of self-monitoring. The illusion of choice conveyed by the system reinforces the ideology of individual freedom while obscuring the actual extent of real scope for action. Finally, the punitive neoliberalism approach enables effective crisis management, further reinforcing the neoliberal logic by managing crises through austerity policies and demonstrating the adaptability of the system. This development reinforces the asymmetrical power relations between lenders and borrowers and consolidates the position of financial institutions as central actors within the neoliberal order. Through the use of credit scores, the tracking of financial transactions, and automated decision-making, individuals are locked into a web of surveillance and evaluation that shapes their social and economic opportunities. These practices constitute subtle forms of social control that deepen and reinforce the neoliberal logic of self-responsibility and entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Resistance to punitive, neoliberally coded socio-techniques is understood from the perspective adopted here as an expression of systemic dynamics and mechanisms essential for understanding the interaction between different social systems and their environments. These resistances reflect not only the limits of system integration and stability but also the potential for transformation and change within complex social structures. Through organized protest movements, strikes, civil disobedience, and the creation of alternative economic structures based on solidarity, resistance takes many forms that challenge the homogeneity and conformity sought through mechanisms of punishment. This was particularly evident worldwide during and after the COVID pandemic. Such resistance demonstrates the limits of the system's adaptability and often leads to increased solidarity among the marginalized as well as a broader recognition and denunciation of structural injustices. This compels the system to reconsider its own strategies, revealing that social homogeneity and conformity are not readily enforceable. In the context of autopoiesis and self-organization, resistance to punitive socio-techniques reflects the ability of social systems to reproduce and organize themselves independently. The diverse forms of resistance illustrate how individual and collective actors develop their own structures and communication channels within their systems to respond to perceived injustices and dysfunctions. This self-initiative and self-organization in resistance can lead to the emergence of new social movements and networks that promote alternative models of social order and economic practices. Resistance can also be understood as irritations that generate resonance within a social system, thus initiating processes of change. The articulation of dissatisfaction and the demand for change through resistance movements represent irritations that cannot be ignored, prompting self-reflection and potentially leading to an adaptation of system operations when a critical threshold is crossed. These processes are crucial for the evolution of social systems, as they identify where adjustments are necessary to maintain system integration and ensure the acceptance of systemic logic within society. However, resistance is not only intrinsic to the system in the sense described but also acts as a catalyst for social change by emphasizing the need for structural reforms and presenting alternative visions of a fairer society. These dynamics challenge the legitimacy of the social system and promote critical reflection on neoliberal policies. Furthermore, resistance compels the system to confront its own contradictions, potentially generating new discourses and practices and possibly leading to an opening towards more inclusive policies. This interplay of the dynamic and responsive nature of social systems encompasses resistance not merely as opposition, but as a crucial force that propels systemic evolution.

9.4 Intersecting Codes of Differentiation

This subchapter examines the integration of two distinct patterns of differentiation: the primordial and the neoliberally coded orders, along with their associated control and selection mechanisms that contribute to the reinforcement and expansion of hegemonic power structures. To further illustrate the hybridity of these orders of difference, punitive socio-techniques and penal populism are explored in detail. These aspects of human differentiation vividly demonstrate how the interplay between primordial and neoliberal logics not only shapes social orders and individual identities but also manifests itself in the realms of social control, legal regulation, and media communication. This blending reveals the complex ways in which historical and contemporary forms of governance intertwine and evolve to maintain and extend their influence in society.

9.4.1 Punitive Socio-Techniques: Criminalization of Poverty

Neoliberally coded socio-techniques for the punishment and criminalization of poverty serve functions that extend beyond those discussed in the previous section, thus representing a highly effective set of tools for systemic maintenance. These punitive policies are characterized by a *systematic conflation of criminality, poverty, and immigration*, marked by the confusion—reproduced and constantly reinforced in the media—between actual insecurity and the suggested “feeling of insecurity” (Wacquant, Steinmetz, and Wacquant 2009, 3). The expansion of punitive socio-techniques now permeates the entire societies of liberal democracies and has been the subject of research across various disciplines since the 2000s. The broad implementation of these techniques not only enforces specific norms but also shapes societal perceptions and interactions, merging socio-economic challenges with security threats. This fusion facilitates the justification of stringent control measures in the name of public safety (Garland 2010, 2008; Schuilenburg, Hall, and Garland 2015; Garland 1990; Fassin 2017).

Particularly striking is the broad, cross-party political consensus and the widespread approval from various social classes, achieved through the same populist maneuvers. This can be seen as a *skillful instrumentalization of schemas* that initially overwhelm people without their conscious reflection. In these schemas, specific emotional evocation practices are linked to narratives without any direct causal relationship—an aspect already discussed (e.g., in Chapter 5 or 9.2). Alongside neurobiological and purely physiological mechanisms that trigger a chain of biochemical processes beyond conscious control, the *exploitation of existential fears* (see Chapter 4) is employed. This deliberate construction of confusion aims to redirect diffuse fears—sparked by the increasing complexity of social changes such as the disintegration of wage labor, the crisis of patriarchally structured families,

and the erosion of traditional authority relationships—specifically toward the figure of the non-white delinquent. The appropriation of time from people who are marginalized and stigmatized on various levels, including many young people experiencing racialization in suburban areas or homeless refugees, is not aimed at converting their time into productive activities or work. Instead, it supports broader strategies of control and exclusion, reinforcing existing social hierarchies and power imbalances (V.E. Thompson 2020, 65). Instead, the control of their time reflects a systematic devaluation of these individuals, perceived as expendable and worthless within the economic system. The control over one's own time is stripped away from those affected through lengthy, often meaningless or degrading processes. These include bureaucratic obstacles, waiting for asylum decisions, and coercive measures. Such circumstances result in a state of powerlessness that prevents active participation in society and the improvement of individual living conditions. The expropriation of time further marginalizes those affected and functions as a tool for maintaining social inequality. According to Davis (M. Davis 2004, 11), these people have become “waste,” redundant to the mechanisms of global capital accumulation or entrepreneurial systems. This “waste” exists outside the regular boundaries of labor exploitation, and its positioning varies along intersectional lines, where primordial and neoliberal codings intermingle. This blend not only enhances the effectiveness of punitive socio-techniques as instruments of systemic maintenance but also embeds them more deeply within the social and cultural matrix of society. The confiscation of time, particularly evident among marginalized and stigmatized groups, manifests in an unequal and often coercive allocation of their time by external conditions that severely restrict their autonomy over how they spend their time (Behnam Shad 2021, 181). Marginalized groups, including many refugees, spend a disproportionate amount of time navigating bureaucratic processes, whether it's asylum procedures, social welfare, or searching for accommodation. This time could be utilized more productively, but instead, it is consumed by systems that offer little benefit to those affected. The ongoing uncertainty and prolonged waits for decisions monopolize the time of these individuals, often hindering their ability to improve their situations independently. Furthermore, these marginalized groups frequently have limited access to education and the labor market, which compels them to engage in less productive or precarious activities that contribute minimally to their personal development or to the improvement of their living conditions (*ibid.*, 247). Spatial isolation from social and economic centers, common in peri-urban areas, results in lengthy commutes and further alienates these groups from opportunities for participation. This systemic allocation of time not only perpetuates their marginalization but also reinforces the socio-economic barriers that keep them isolated from mainstream society (*ibid.*). In this context, the supposed “superfluousness” of these individuals is not only made visible by the socio-techniques described but actively brought into being.

Practices aimed at the appropriation of time and energy vividly illustrate how the system labels those affected as expendable and cements their ongoing exclusion. Ironically, it is precisely the majority of these people who are actively seeking work and striving to find regular employment. The systematic use and control of their time effectively declares these individuals as the “superfluous” of the system, whose exclusion and supposed worthlessness are continually dramatized and reinforced by such approaches. This paradoxical situation, where those most eager to participate in society are hindered by structural barriers and labeled as expendable, embodies the deep-rooted injustice and the paradox of “inclusion.” These dynamics reveal a harsh reality where the rhetoric of inclusion and opportunities contrasts sharply with the systemic mechanisms that perpetuate exclusion and marginalization. This contradiction lays bare the critical flaws in societal structures that claim to promote integration and equality while systematically disenfranchising certain groups, further entrenching social and economic divides (Behnam Shad 2021, 262). Access to language and education has been evidenced to be the most sustainable method for ensuring the long-term integration of marginalized individuals and groups (Cerna, Brussino, and Mezzanotte 2021; Antoninis et al. 2020; Pablo López 2014). This approach does not necessitate the implementation of intricate measures; rather, it hinges on the political will to pursue this course of action in a consistent and unwavering manner.

A comparative analysis of the development of punitive practices in Western countries over recent decades reveals a close link between the rise of neoliberalism, which prescribes submission to the “free market” in all areas, and the introduction of punitive and proactive law enforcement policies. This correlation suggests that as neoliberal policies have increasingly dictated economic and social frameworks, there has been a parallel increase in the use of punitive measures as a means of social control. Neoliberalism’s emphasis on individual responsibility and market governance has extended into the realm of social behavior and law enforcement, promoting policies that are more aggressive and less tolerant of deviation from societal norms (Wacquant, Steinmetz, and Wacquant 2009, 1). These policies are directed not only against street crime but also against individuals affected by socio-technical measures of differentiation and control, who now find themselves within a new matrix of normative order that intertwines both social and criminal policy in both fact and rhetoric. Regardless of national characteristics and institutional variations, these policies exhibit common features that, with the rise of neoliberalism, indicate a shift in the state’s focus from welfare provisions to criminal justice measures. This shift has been particularly noticeable in the USA and the United Kingdom for decades but is also becoming increasingly apparent in France, Germany, and other European countries. In Germany, the prevailing self-image of legitimately acquired prosperity is increasingly leading to suspicion and defamation of immi-

grants who seek to partake in this prosperity through work and social security contributions. The bourgeois establishment is accompanied by fears of losing much, reflected in populist-racist rhetoric. The competition for prosperity (see Chapter 4.2) and the public devaluation of migrants characterize the social debate on migration: immigrants and refugees are portrayed as economic and cultural threats. This combination of economic concern and cultural demarcation leads to the articulation of derogatory stereotypes, evident in populist movements against refugee homes, mosque constructions, and the entry of Sinti and Roma from southeastern Europe. Patterns of poverty defamation and anti-Roma differentiation are becoming more recognizable. While support from the welfare state is decreasing, criminal policy is intensifying, and the criminalization of immigration and poverty is on the rise. Even left-liberal parties are increasingly veering towards this populist entanglement and are advocating more restrictive socio-techniques toward the most vulnerable in society. These include noticeably harsher deportation policies and social policy measures, such as the introduction of payment cards for refugees, accompanied by simultaneous emphasis on and demands for their “integration.” Such measures illustrate how major political parties align themselves with the rhetoric and demands of far-right groups. This intricate interplay of socio-economic pressures, cultural fears, and policy responses underpins the broader dynamics influencing public attitudes and governmental strategies toward marginalized groups, vividly illustrating the profound impact of human differentiation in shaping contemporary societal norms and practices.

9.4.2 Penal Populism

In many Western nations, there has been a marked shift in criminal policy towards a retribution-oriented approach in recent decades (Alexander 2012; Sykes and Western 2021; J. Simon 2007; Jennings et al. 2017; Pratt and Clark 2005; Pratt 2023). This shift manifests in a majority-based collective identity that increasingly emphasizes retribution and punishment rather than rehabilitation and resocialization (Garland 2016, 358). This paradigm shift reflects a deeper identification with what is considered the primordially coded “ingroup”, accompanied by an intensification of the associated *prosocial* collective affects (see Chapter 4). Concurrently, there is a merging with neoliberally coded differentiation strategies. Central to this development are escalated demands for harsher punitive measures, motivated by a growing desire for revenge and retribution. This alignment reflects a societal shift towards viewing punishment as a primary mechanism of control, merging established norms with contemporary neoliberal governance to shape responses to crime and social behavior (Reitz 2018). Once dominated by expert opinions and professional standards, the *affects of revenge and the desire to punish* have now become central themes in political and public discourse on the criminal justice system (Sykes and Western 2021; Re-

itz 2018). Criminal justice decisions are increasingly influenced by populist tendencies and public opinion, leading to the marginalization of professional expertise and scientific knowledge. This trend reflects a significant shift in the dynamics of legal systems, where emotional and reactionary responses are prioritized over measured, evidence-based approaches (Nixon and Atkinson 2020). Political measures in criminal justice are increasingly geared towards election campaign themes and bold slogans such as “prison works” or “zero tolerance,” signaling a shift from well-founded analyses to popular opinions (Western 2006; J. Simon 2007). Today’s criminal policy is dominated by populist voices that leverage the “suffering people” and their fears to garner votes in a populist manner. This shift demonstrates how research and criminological knowledge are becoming less important, while subjective experience and “common sense” are increasingly preferred (Garland 2016). The empirically observable focus on retribution and punishment (see cited studies in this section), alongside the simultaneous neglect of rehabilitation and resocialization, reflects an increased identification with a culture constructed as an in-group and the associated collective affects. Criminal justice measures are increasingly viewed not as means of social improvement but as expressions of “penal populism” (Pratt 2023), characterized by an emphasis on collective outrage and a desire for retribution. Penal populism gains momentum from a collectively formed identity centered on retribution and punishment, reinforced by the ongoing invocation of narratives and values that favor punitive measures over rehabilitative approaches. The clamor for harsher punishments stems from a deeply ingrained logic justified by constructed group membership and collective emotional drives, such as the desire for revenge. The repetition and dissemination of content shaped by specific, culturally coded semantics (see Chapters 2 and 8) serve to affirm and reinforce the constructed collective identity and its associated values. This shift marks a significant change in public perception regarding crime and punishment, where punishment and imprisonment are increasingly viewed as direct and suitable responses to perceived threats and criminal acts. The prioritization of emotionally charged rhetoric over empirical evidence not only molds public perceptions but also sways policy-making, frequently at the expense of informed decision-making and effective crime prevention strategies. This broader societal shift toward a more punitive approach is driven by emotional and populist currents, rather than by evidence-based criminal justice practices (Jennings et al. 2017).

In this way, complex social problems are reduced to emotional, simplified reaction patterns, which has far-reaching consequences for the design of criminal policy and the way society addresses delinquency. The term “penal populism” encompasses more than just a superficial tendency among politicians to support popular punitive measures. It concerns the structural embedding and comprehensive transformation of power within the penal system of neoliberal social orders, extending beyond

the actions of individual politicians. The sociological dimension of populism is essential for identifying the specific characteristics of penal populism and for thoroughly examining its far-reaching implications (Pratt 2023, 8). Understanding these dynamics is crucial to grasp the mechanisms of human differentiation and the role of subjectivation processes in contemporary society. The historical evolution of the criminal justice system, particularly in the German context, reflects a profound shift from a phase of rigid and public punishment, as described by Michel Foucault for the 18th century (Foucault 1977, 9), to more modern forms of punishment. These contemporary approaches favor fines and resocialization measures and align with Norbert Elias' theory of the civilizing process, which posits the suppression of aggressive punitive effects and the need for revenge as characteristics of a civilized penal system. This evolution suggests a move toward more nuanced and rehabilitative approaches, although the rise of penal populism presents a counter-trend that emphasizes punitive measures, often in response to public emotions rather than empirical evidence. This tension between historical trends toward civilization and contemporary populist movements reflects the ongoing complexities and challenges within the criminal justice system (Garland 2008, 103). More recently, however, there has been a noticeable return to a harsher penal system, particularly evident in the treatment of drug offenses. This trend is bolstered by neoliberal and neoconservative movements. The "decline of the rehabilitative ideal," described by Francis Allen in 1981 (F.A. Allen 1981), signifies a shift away from the welfare state and correctionalist principles that have historically guided criminal justice interventions. Currently, retribution, harm reduction, and risk management are prioritized over resocialization goals. This pivot away from resocialization as the core objective of criminal justice represents a fundamental paradigm shift. The once-central ideal of resocialization is now regarded as unattainable, illusory, and even politically dangerous, seen as a source of counterproductive outcomes. This erosion of faith in the rehabilitative potential of the penal system marks the end of a long-established system founded on a set of assumptions, values, and practices that underpinned the modern penal framework, reflecting a significant transformation in societal and political attitudes towards punishment and rehabilitation. Penal populism is influenced by both regimes of the order of difference—the primordial and the neoliberally coded. The combination of neoliberal individualization with primordial exclusion fosters an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, intensifying calls for harsher punitive measures. In this context, criminal law becomes an instrument of social control that solidifies existing power structures and upholds social order by sanctioning deviant behavior and further marginalizing excluded groups. While the deluge of information and the pace of social change can overwhelm individuals, the simplistic narratives offered by the codes of penal populism provide seemingly straightforward solutions and scapegoats for complex problems.

Penal populism is largely driven by affects and emotions such as threat, anger, alienation, and disappointment towards the criminal justice system. It advocates for increased protection and security for law-abiding citizens and calls for more rigorous punishment of criminals. Evolutionary intuitions are pivotal in this context (see Chapters 3 and 5), and their strategic utilization through discursive means and media channels acts as a powerful mechanism of emotional evocation. This dynamic is instrumental in shaping public perception and behavior, mirroring broader trends seen in populist movements. Such emotional evocation leverages deep-seated intuitive responses to craft narratives that resonate on a fundamental psychological level, thereby influencing collective attitudes and actions. The automated processes of cognitive-affective-bodily schemata, fueled by primordially coded references in penal populism, mobilize emotions, thoughts, and the desire for retaliatory politics and stricter punitive measures. Primordial codes invoke notions of an ethno-nationally coded identity and belonging, promoting simplified and regressive concepts of security and order. These ideas resonate deeply with the targeted individuals and groups, who, driven by a desire for simplicity and clarity, expunge ambiguity from their consciousness. This cyclical self-reinforcement illustrates the autopoietic nature of penal populism: through continuous resonance and reproduction of its own structures and content, it sustains and regenerates itself repeatedly.

A central element in the primordial coding of penal populism is the appeal to the basic human need for security. Both individuals and groups possess a strong interest in protecting their own identity against all forms of threat. This affective reaction pattern falls into the realm of the homeostatic impulse, which operates automatically and unconsciously (Chapters 3 and 6.3.3). Similar to other basic human needs and functions, such as breathing and heartbeat, these impulses are not readily questioned or consciously controlled. One of the most critical protective mechanisms against attacks on the integrity of identity or the ability to identify with one's respective self-image is the *identification and establishment of suitable targets for externalization*. These targets often manifest in constructed groups, countries, institutions, or sometimes even individual enemies, serving as focal points for societal anxieties and fears (Shafir 2013; Köhler 2019; M.J. Butler 2019; Evrigenis 2007).

The principle of the necessity for existential security, as discussed in the context of group-based identification dynamics, terror management theory, and death awareness in Chapter 4, pertains to the fundamental desire for the protection of life and identity. This need is not exclusive to the context of war; it also manifests in the domain of penal populism. The deep-seated desire for existential security, along with the desire for simplicity and the excessive demands of ambiguity, is used as a rationale for the legitimization of retribution-oriented policies. This instrumentalization is particularly effective when narratives focus on crime, regardless of whether the associated associations with foreign groups are statistically significant or whether a causal link is even permissible. Instead, some particularly egregious

cases are deliberately brought to the forefront of public attention, leveraging the fallacy of false causality or post-hoc fallacy to strengthen the call for harsher punishments and stricter law enforcement measures. This approach amplifies public fears while simultaneously solidifying the socio-political agenda that favors punitive measures over rehabilitative or preventive strategies. The phenomenon of crime evokes profound anxieties pertaining to transience and vulnerability, underscoring perceived threats to personal security. The direct exposure to violent acts, such as murder and manslaughter, reminds us of the finite nature of life and dramatically heightens societal and individual awareness of mortality. In accordance with Terror Management Theory, cultural worldviews function as a means of mitigating the debilitating fear of death, offering a semblance of immortality through the continuation of enduring social structures and norms. However, when crime challenges these protective worldviews, it has the effect of undermining the very foundations of security and order, thus intensifying death-related anxieties. In the context of penal populism, the insecurity induced by crime has a greater impact than simply evoking fear; it also disrupts the typical coping mechanisms that help individuals manage their awareness of mortality. This disruption gives rise to an intensified search for safety and order, which frequently manifests in public support for stringent criminal laws, robust law enforcement, and other public safety measures designed to mitigate the perceived threat of crime. This dynamic is conveyed through a reductionist friend-foe schema, whereby harsher punishments are presented as the solution to eliminate crime and neutralize threats. This schema comprises a complex interplay of psychological needs for security and identity preservation, entwined with *realpolitik*, which is the study of the practical aspects of politics rather than moral or ideological considerations. In this context, basic human needs are not merely acknowledged; they are actively exploited in accordance with the strategies and interests of *realpolitik*. As a result, criminal populism frequently gives rise to societal fragmentation and conflict, rather than consensus-building, as it exploits and intensifies public anxieties to consolidate support for more punitive measures. This approach is ineffective in addressing the underlying causes of crime and, furthermore, helps exacerbate societal divisions and hinder the potential for rehabilitative justice. This leads to a discernible discrepancy between the expectations of the general public and the actual policies and practices of the criminal justice authorities. Of particular interest here are the “unfulfilled promises” of the nation-state (Jörke and Selk 2017, 95), which are also manifest in the context of criminal populism. One of the central promises of nation-states was to dismantle established hierarchical social orders. These promises entailed a transition to fairer and more egalitarian social structures, in which the distribution of power, privilege, and access to resources would not be predetermined by factors such as birth, social class, or membership in certain elites. Nevertheless, within the context of the debate surrounding the logics of differentiation, a tension emerges whereby the perspectives represented by

primordial coding shed light on post-democratic conditions, such as the rise in precarious working conditions and the escalating cost of living. These conditions are informed by archaic behavioral patterns shaped by evolutionary developments, such as the proclivity for revenge and a pronounced tendency to punish. This proclivity is frequently linked to discriminatory attitudes towards ethno-nationally defined “others,” particularly individuals with darker skin tones. An illustrative example of this phenomenon is the media focus on criminal asylum seekers, which frequently portrays them as a monolithic entity, representative of all refugees. Such portrayals not only intensify societal divisions but also indicate a failure of the criminal justice system to adapt to the evolving social landscape.

The police statistics published by the German police in 2024 (PKS 2024) indicate an increase in the crime rate, particularly among foreigners. This raises questions about the interpretation and analysis of social developments, particularly in regard to the methodology employed in the compilation of the statistics. Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis reveals several problematic aspects of this presentation. Firstly, it should be noted that the statistics in question are based on reports, which do not necessarily result in convictions. Furthermore, the Police Crime Statistics (PKS) serve primarily as a report on police activity, recording all suspicious situations that typically come to the attention of the police through private reports. Consequently, these figures primarily reflect the cases that the police have chosen to record and see, indicating an increase in the number of cases processed, possibly due to an increased willingness to report crime. It is imperative to examine which incidents are reported to the police and which are not. Research indicates that individuals who are perceived as not belonging to the in-group are more likely to be reported (see Chapter 4). A notable proportion of the documented cases pertain to collective accommodations where social and official control is more rigorous. It is frequently not the residents who contact the police, but rather the caretakers or facility managers. This heightened level of control is markedly different from that observed in ordinary residential homes. Such portrayals function as mechanisms to uphold a simplistic and negative image of “foreign people” that fails to accurately reflect reality. The tendency to emphasize ethnic origin in media reports on crime in Germany hinders rather than facilitates clarification, engendering unsuitable generalizations and stigmatization.

Furthermore, the media’s response, which frequently reiterates sentiments such as “Those who do not adhere to established norms must be removed” (Welt 2024), solidifies this stereotypical view and legitimize a simplistic and exclusionary attitude towards individuals with a migrant background. This, in turn, contributes to the exacerbation of social divisions. The primordial origin of an individual has no causal link to criminal behavior; rather, crime is the result of a complex interplay of social, economic, and personal factors. The post hoc fallacy, also known as the *false fallacy of false causality*, occurs when causal links are drawn between crime and groups

constructed as foreign without a statistically significant or factually justified basis. *This logical fallacy occurs when a correlation between two variables* (in this case, criminality and membership in a primordial group, constructed as a “foreign ethnic group”) *is erroneously interpreted as a causal relationship without sufficient evidence to support such a conclusion*. Furthermore, there is the potential for the cognitive error of overgeneralization, which involves drawing inadmissible conclusions about entire groups based on individual cases that are particularly conspicuous and may not be representative of the group as a whole. This can result in the formation of distorted and unjustified stereotypes. In this context, the concept of overgeneralization suggests that even a supposed correlation between an individual’s primordially coded origin and criminal behavior is not necessarily present. A focus on primordially coded origin obscures the complexity of criminal behaviors and to cement prejudice by falsely suggesting that criminal behavior is inherent to or more prevalent among certain ethnic or national groups. This approach is inconsistent with the principles of equality before the law and individual justice, as it prejudges individuals based on primordially coded affiliation, thereby promoting discrimination and fostering social division. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a more sophisticated comprehension of criminality and its underlying causes. This points to the necessity of addressing the fundamental social and economic issues rather than resorting to punitive measures based on flawed assumptions. In cases of criminal activity perpetrated by nationals—that is to say, individuals who are considered to be part of the in-group—the indication of origin is often absent, and there is a discernible tendency to grant forgiveness. Specific schemas play a pivotal role in this context, as they facilitate mutual preference and loyalty among members of the primordially coded “own groups,” thereby evoking heightened empathy. This dynamic gives rise to a continuous, self-reinforcing feedback process whereby norm violations perpetrated by members outside the in-group are perceived as more serious than those committed by in-group members (Wildschut and Insko 2007; Chester A. Insko et al. 2005; C. A. Insko et al. 2001; Gaertner and Insko 2001, 2000; Böhm, Rothermund, and Kirchkamp 2013). Offences perpetrated by those considered to be part of the same social group are more likely to be excused through the use of rationalizations that attribute the behavior to exceptional circumstances. In contrast, the actions of those perceived to be outside of this social group are more likely to be interpreted as representative of the group as a whole. This differential treatment indicates a significant bias in societal responses to criminal behavior, which is influenced by underlying social and cultural affiliations. The inclination to empathize with and pardon members of the “own” group while harshly condemning and generalizing the actions of those outside the group not only upholds social divisions but also reinforces discriminatory practices within the criminal justice system (ibid.).

9.4.2.1 Racial profiling

Racial profiling is a police practice where individuals are singled out and treated differently based solely on primordially coded characteristics such as skin color, ethnicity, or perceived national origin. This practice involves selecting individuals for surveillance, control, harassment, and repressive measures based on these attributes rather than on evidence of actual wrongdoing. One of the primary criteria for such police selection, especially in the European context, is skin color, resulting in predominantly non-white individuals being disproportionately affected by racial profiling (Plümecke and Wilopo 2019, 151). For this reason, numerous studies on racist police practices specifically focus on discrimination based on skin color. Racial profiling not only imparts to police and security forces the impression that criminality is linked to ethnicity, but it also perpetuates this notion among the wider public. This cyclical reinforcement of biased perceptions creates a feedback loop where discriminatory practices are normalized and justified under the guise of crime prevention (Kollabor.-Forschungsgr.-Racial-Profiling 2019). Focusing solely on primordially coded, or “racialized,” characteristics is insufficient to fully grasp the complex phenomenon of racial profiling. To understand it comprehensively, it is crucial to consider a broader spectrum of factors, including socio-economic conditions, historical contexts, and the institutional frameworks within which these practices are embedded (Plümecke and Wilopo 2019). In recent decades, racial profiling has also adapted to changing conditions in Western societies, particularly with regard to the increasing sensitization of the majority population to issues of discrimination. This growing awareness has led to more public scrutiny and criticism of discriminatory practices, prompting some law enforcement agencies to review and revise their protocols. However, despite these changes, the underlying structures and biases that enable racial profiling often remain deeply embedded within the systems (Jones and Mendieta 2021; Harris 2020; Rutland 2020; Loick and Thompson 2022). Over the last twenty years, racial profiling has become significantly modernized and systematized in the USA, a development closely linked to the so-called “War on Drugs.” Initially launched nationally in 1971 under President Nixon, the War on Drugs quickly escalated into an overwhelming endeavor that surpassed all previous efforts in its scope and intensity (Foster 2023, 110). The “War on Drugs” campaign profoundly impacted law enforcement tactics, notably increasing stop-and-frisk practices, vehicle stops, and other surveillance forms disproportionately targeting minority communities. These measures, justified under the guise of combating drug trafficking and use, significantly affected African American and Hispanic communities, perpetuating racial disparities in the criminal justice system and reinforcing societal stereotypes linking these communities with criminal behavior.

Particularly hard-hit were the African American communities, where this policy led to a massive wave of incarceration. Many individuals, often in economically col-

lapsing inner cities, saw dealing as the only viable source of income (Crandall 2021, 140). The campaign primarily targeted small street dealers and poor consumers, with a significant focus on young men in impoverished inner cities. This approach not only failed to address the root causes of drug abuse and trafficking but also exacerbated the socio-economic challenges these communities faced (Farber 2022, 18). This policy was introduced despite a decline in drug use and primarily targeted areas with high unemployment and limited welfare state protection, where drug trafficking was often seen as one of the few viable sources of income (Foster 2023, 124). Its selective enforcement in socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, particularly in ghettos predominantly inhabited by African Americans, led to a disproportionate incarceration rate among Black individuals. This situation was exacerbated by the high police presence and the residents' powerlessness in these areas (White 2020, 33). The African American community was in a period of consolidation following the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. However, instead of experiencing new freedoms, African American men, in particular, faced a new form of discrimination through increased incarceration rates, fueled largely by the implementation of stricter drug laws. Initiated by the Rockefeller drug laws in the 1970s, this trend had a profound impact on African American communities, particularly through job losses and the resultant involvement in the illegal drug economy. This enforcement approach not only undermined the social fabric of these communities but also perpetuated a cycle of poverty and incarceration that continues to have significant repercussions (White 2020, 72). This policy deeply affected the fabric of African American communities in the United States, particularly in urban centers, through mechanisms of human differentiation that disproportionately impacted these populations. Entire neighborhoods experienced a profound depletion of their male residents, as many either relocated to other cities in search of better opportunities or became entangled in the illicit drug economy. This demographic shift not only altered the social landscape of these communities but also perpetuated cycles of disadvantage and systemic exclusion, reinforcing barriers to social and economic mobility (Bradford et al. 2022, 18). The stark discrepancy in incarceration rates between African Americans and whites for similar drug offenses, despite comparable rates of drug use, vividly demonstrates the racially discriminatory implications of this policy (White 2020, 74). This disparity reveals a deep-seated bias within the enforcement and sentencing practices, where African Americans are disproportionately targeted and penalized more harshly (Farber 2022, 30). The modern "War on Drugs" evolved into a far-reaching phenomenon, surpassing previous measures in both scope and impact. As the illegal drug market expanded across the USA, authorities responded with increased severity, imprisoning a growing number of drug users and dealers. This aggressive enforcement approach not only failed to address the root causes of drug abuse but also led to prison overpopulation and worsened social inequalities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage among marginalized communities. This "war"

escalated into a kind of “second American Civil War” in the 1980s, becoming one of the most destructive conflicts in American history. Millions of drug users and their suppliers, both domestically and internationally, found themselves in opposition to an armed and exceptionally well-funded state power, with effects as devastating as those of any major conflict involving Americans. These developments were driven by a pronounced desire to punish. The US Drug Enforcement Administration played a significant role in the systematization of racial profiling during the 1980s, particularly through the introduction of the “Operation Pipeline” program (Hood 2016). This initiative aimed to train police officers nationwide in a modern and refined form of police profiling. The focus of the profiling was on non-classified characteristics such as vehicles with license plates from other states, rental cars, or behaviors deemed “conspicuous.” This approach not only standardized profiling practices but also inadvertently reinforced discriminatory practices based on subtle cues linked to race and socioeconomic status (Kops 2007). Despite official denials that racial stereotypes played a role in the training, empirical studies clearly show that individuals not classified as white were systematically deemed “conspicuous” (Harris 2020, 11). This trend has significantly contributed to the establishment and proliferation of modern racial profiling practices. The introduction and widespread adoption of ‘pipeline’ tactics in police training and operational strategies have solidified the systematic targeting of Black motorists across the country, reinforcing discriminatory practices that have deepened racial disparities within the criminal justice system (Textor 2023, 24).

In Europe, particularly in Germany, a phenomenon similar to the “War on Drugs” in the USA has emerged in recent decades, albeit with a different demographic focus. Unlike in the USA, where the primary targets are members of the African-American community, in Europe, and Germany especially, individuals from the Middle East and Africa are increasingly subjected to criminal prosecution. The police practice of suspecting and controlling people based on their presumed non-German origin is commonly justified in Central Europe under the pretext of monitoring illegal migration. This approach is often supported by discourses emphasizing efficiency or by marking specific individual cases, thereby rationalizing and normalizing the scrutiny and control of these demographic groups (Golian 2019, 179; Jain 2019, 44). This development can be partly attributed to the increase in migration movements from these regions, driven by wars, political instability, and economic crises. Consequently, individuals who are not perceived as white often face heightened police scrutiny and more stringent law enforcement measures. Racial profiling can be viewed as an expression of social systems that establish and perpetuate distinctions through communication and observation. The notion that criminality is an inherent trait of certain ethnic groups illustrates how the legal system and its enforcement agencies, such as the police, select and process information. Linking presumed origin with criminal propensities simplifies social

reality by categorizing individuals based on ethnicity and attributing specific behaviors to them. These attributions form part of the structural coupling between the legal system and other societal domains, such as politics and media, which amplify and legitimize racist narratives and stereotypes. Police controls function not solely to enforce the law but also function as mechanisms to reproduce and reinforce social disparities. As a core component of the legal framework, policing relies on state-sanctioned criteria that construct “otherness” as a threat. This perception permeates various systemic levels—migration, criminal law, and public order—and is manifested in the physical surveillance and regulation of public spaces. Within this framework, the police operate as a social system characterized by its distinct processes and communication methods, predicated on differentiating between primordially coded conformity and deviance. In this context, racial profiling emerges as a form of communication by which the system simplifies complexity. It identifies certain primordial characteristics as markers of potential non-conformity or threat.

The state-sanctioned portrayal of a threatening “otherness,” coupled with the subsequent surveillance and purported “liberation” (Wa Baile et al. 2019, 9) of public spaces constitutes essential elements of racial profiling. These practices contribute to the creation of social distinctions and the segregation of spaces, embedding systemic inequalities deeply within urban and communal landscapes. They reinforce existing social inequalities and actively shape the social perception and organization of space by delineating who is considered part of the “we” and who is marked as “other,” threatening, and excluded. This dynamic reveals that racial profiling plays a crucial role in the complex interplay of social differentiation and spatial organization, deeply rooted in the systemic operations and communications of the police. Furthermore, this practice initiates a process of meaning production through selection, whereby the police’s practice of categorization and differentiation significantly contributes to the construction of social realities. By systematically labeling certain groups as different, a social meaning is created that defines and reinforces the boundaries between belonging and exclusion. From the perspective of system justification theory, racial profiling can be seen as a form of justification for social inequalities. By criminalizing certain ethnic groups, the existing social order and the entrenched inequalities are presented as necessary and justified. Racist policing not only enforces this inequality but also stabilizes the social hierarchy by portraying the subordinate position of certain groups as a result of their supposed “natural” propensity for criminality. This reinforces the notion that racial profiling is deeply embedded in the structural and operational logics of contemporary societies. It serves as an instrument that contributes to the reproduction and legitimization of existing power relations and social inequalities, based on deeply rooted racist categorizations and differentiations. This situation is exacerbated by socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, social exclusion, and housing short-

ages in neighborhoods with high migrant populations. The marginalization of these groups and the resulting social tensions increase the likelihood of conflicts with the law, further entrenching the cycle of discrimination and inequality.

Racial Profiling manifests as an expression of multi-layered desires and projections, ranging from individual and structural racism to systemic justification. As an organ of state violence, the police use these practices not only to justify their actions but also to reinforce social prejudices and cement the structures that support them. In Europe, as in the US, law enforcement policies are often criticized for disproportionately criminalizing and stigmatizing certain groups. This disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system exacerbates their alienation and isolation, creating a vicious cycle of marginalization and criminalization that hampers social integration and seemingly confirms the assumptions of primordial coding. Moreover, the various manifestations of neoliberally coded elements of penal populism partly relate to the connections between primordial codes and the inappropriate links between fundamental fears and insecurities and primordially coded criminality. However, the emphasis in this context shifts towards narratives of supposed individualism and financial profit. In the neoliberal framework, crime is entirely perceived as a product of individual poor choices, while structural causes and social inequalities are overlooked. This perspective leads to a punitive approach that holds individual actors fully responsible for their actions without addressing the underlying social and economic conditions that contribute to these behaviors. The intersection of primordial and neoliberal codes in penal populism is vividly illustrated by the commercialization of prisons and the “war on drugs,” where the focus on profit and individual accountability overshadows broader social responsibilities and reformative approaches.

By portraying social grievances through the lens of neoliberally coded criminal populism, the media effectively incites emotions such as fear, outrage, and insecurity. This approach follows typical populist strategies, adeptly evoking specific emotional responses to shape public perception and reaction. In Germany, the term “penal populism” aptly describes phenomena observed across political rhetoric, legislation, and media coverage. This approach is marked by simplistic portrayals of crime and the criminal justice system designed to provoke emotional reactions, often with the aim of garnering public support for stricter punitive measures. In the realm of legislation, penal populism manifests in calls for harsher penalties and new laws in response to high-profile criminal cases or perceived public safety needs. These measures are frequently presented as direct solutions to criminal incidents, deliberately placing blame on individual offenders, providing the public with a convenient target for outrage and frustration, and fostering the illusion that harsher punishments will effectively address the root causes of crime. The promises made by politicians and parties to combat crime through the introduction of stricter laws and harsher penalties are strategically designed to be perceived by voters as determined and reli-

able guardians of public safety. Such campaign promises embody a competitive logic characteristic of neoliberal thought: political actors present themselves as efficient “providers” of security and order, competing for the favor of voters in a manner akin to companies in a market. This strategy not only simplifies complex social issues but also perpetuates a cycle of reactionary policy-making that prioritizes immediate responses over sustainable solutions. This scenario typifies the selective processing of information and issues within the political system according to the logic of supply and demand. It simplifies the complexity of social problems and restricts solutions to those that conform to market strategies. The focus on security and order, without addressing the social and structural causes of crime, aligns with the neoliberal logic that tends to individualize problems and move away from collective, societal solutions.

The deployment of penal populism in electoral campaigns, which infuses the political system with competitive and economic efficiencies, distances it from its fundamental role in regulating power distribution and promoting the common good. This blending of logics not only solidifies existing power structures and legitimizes exclusion mechanisms by portraying certain groups as social threats but also exacerbates social hierarchies. Thus, neoliberal principles infiltrate political thought and action, shaping the political landscape and significantly impairing collective intelligence. The excessive focus on competition and efficiency fosters a troubling one-dimensionality, which narrows the range of perspectives and undermines society’s capacity to address complex challenges through innovative and holistic approaches. Additionally, the media play a crucial role in amplifying and reinforcing criminal populism through sensationalist reporting on criminal cases, focusing on the perpetrators and their punishments. By spectacularly stoking fears, they fuel public demand for stringent criminal justice measures. This approach to news consumption as a commodity aligns with neoliberal principles, directing public opinion towards solutions that emphasize market logic and individual responsibility. Furthermore, by selecting information and topics based on its own logic and audience expectations, the media system contributes to the stabilization of specific social structures and the reinforcement of existing power relations, prioritizing certain narratives while excluding others. This not only shapes public perception but also limits the discourse to a narrow view that supports prevailing neoliberal ideologies.

The inclusion of the two regimes of orders of difference—each encompassing diverse aspects and differentiations—broadens the understanding of discrimination, illuminating the various yet interconnected dimensions of the social order and its power dynamics. These dimensions operate simultaneously but are founded on historically and politico-economically divergent roots and logics. This analytical distinction enables a more precise identification and address of the specific mechanisms and causes of discrimination and marginalization. In the discourse on penal

populism, the *factual dimension* concentrates on the thematic and functional contexts within which penal populism manifests. This encompasses the social thematization and justification of crime and punishment but also includes underlying concepts of security, justice, and order. Recognizing this dimension reveals that penal populism is not merely a reaction to criminal behavior but is also grounded in specific narratives and value constructs embedded in both neoliberal and primordially coded orders of difference. For instance, the emphasis on “law and order” and the call for stricter punishments can be seen as expressions of a neoliberal logic that prioritizes individual responsibility over social or structural explanations for crime. Conversely, the primordial logic relies on deep-seated, traditionally anchored beliefs and values that define identity and belonging within a community based on primordial criteria. In the realm of criminal populism, this is evident in the invocation of a seemingly well-defined social order and the emphasis on a group identity encoded accordingly, which portrays outsiders or “others” as threats to social harmony. These entrenched beliefs support an approach that favors immediate solutions like harsher punitive measures to maintain perceived order, neglecting more complex social or structural explanations for criminal behavior. The *social dimension* of penal populism focuses on the relationships and identities that are influenced and targeted by these practices. It explores how certain groups are framed in public perception as either threats or victims of crime and how such representations influence social dynamics and power relations. This analysis reveals how criminal populism not only confirms but also amplifies existing social hierarchies by utilizing primordially coded differentiators such as ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Simultaneously, it bolsters neoliberal ideologies of meritocracy, thereby creating a dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, criminal populism often masks the structural causes of social issues and crime by emphasizing individual responsibility, which naturalizes social and economic inequalities and diminishes the recognition of the need for collective solutions and solidarity-based strategies. Without integrating the intersectional perspectives of the regimes of difference, distinguishing between meaning and factual dimensions might fail to capture the essential interconnectedness of forms of discrimination. Viewing these aspects in isolation risks neglecting the lived realities of individuals at the intersections of multiple axes of oppression and could lead to underappreciating the importance of individual and collective agency. A comprehensive analysis that acknowledges and incorporates intersectional orders of difference is crucial for fully understanding and effectively addressing the complexities of discrimination and inequality. Neither individual responsibility nor the structural and systemic dimensions should be disregarded, as both perspectives provide indispensable contributions to understanding and addressing these challenges. The two regimes utilize distinct schemata for constructing meaning and assigning guilt and responsibility, simplifying the complexity of social reality, and reinforcing existing power structures. The amalgamation of both

regimes results in an overlapping logic where both primordial and neoliberal codes are employed to stigmatize and exclude social groups. This convergence is facilitated by the systemic logic of functional differentiation, which permits the simultaneous application of different communication codes and structures within the social sub-systems, thereby maintaining and solidifying entrenched power relations and social divisions.

9.4.3 Regimes of Integration

Against the backdrop of our previous discussions, “integration” emerges as a politically charged construct that shapes social relations of dominance and difference by regulating, restricting, or denying immigrants’ access to economic, social, and symbolic resources (Mecheril et al. 2020) and is further intensified through targeted emotional frameworks (Behnam Shad 2023). Specific laws and regulations systematically exclude certain groups from equal participation in social and health systems. It is crucial to recognize that mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are inherent to every social system. As detailed in Chapter 2.2.9, social exclusions exhibit two characteristics: they are inescapable and are often negated, concealed, or downplayed. These mechanisms are vital for the structure and functioning of social systems, as they delineate who is included within the system and who is marginalized. The tendency to obscure or minimize exclusions typically aims to prevent scrutiny of the social and political structures that engender and sustain these exclusions. Regulatory exclusions generate artificially categorized groups deemed differently disadvantaged, thus reinforcing and institutionalizing social stratification. While some refugee groups are compelled to engage in integration measures to avoid deportation, individuals without a residence permit are viewed with suspicion and often criminalized when they seek similar measures. Moreover, in discussions about foreign individuals, the term “integration” is frequently employed with the implicit assumption that it represents a desirable goal, one that many individuals with a migration background are purportedly unable to achieve. In this narrative, “exceptions” are frequently spotlighted in the media, with the implicit suggestion that these exceptions confirm the rule and that most immigrants cannot attain this ideal. What is systematically obscured at all levels of discourse is how disintegration is actually fostered, both institutionally and within the psyches of those affected. One of the most potent mechanisms of this disintegration machinery is the overall social integration dispositive itself, which frames integration as a unilateral adaptation of “minorities” to “the majority society.” This paradigm engenders linear and dichotomous integration discourses that demand social integration while simultaneously producing disintegration at various levels—for example, through the ongoing problematization and criminalization of people with migration backgrounds (Hinger and Schweitzer 2020). This results in an uncritical integration dispositive that la-

bels immigrants as “subjects in need of integration” (Mezzadra 2015, 208), yet simultaneously obstructs any discussion of the dominance and privileges of the white majority (Karabulut 2020, 2). The ambiguity of integration requirements, the inherent incompleteness of integration measures, and the portrayal of displacement and migration “as a problem” (Mecheril, Melter, and Melter 2008, 68) and people with migration backgrounds as the “cause of the problem” (ibid.) are hallmarks of the hegemonically negotiated integration dispositif. This dispositif suggests the existence of a central societal norm to which individuals on the margins of society are expected to conform if they exert sufficient effort. This notion obscures the reality that integration primarily involves a competitive struggle for the distribution of life opportunities, which is delineated along intersectional lines of difference. In such a misunderstanding, individuals and families are held accountable for their own chances of participation and access to specialized functional systems of society. The competition among immigrants, driven by neoliberal criteria of usefulness and exploitability, overlooks the structurally anchored power asymmetries and dynamics. The integration dispositif often views the “others” to be integrated either as a threat or as a demographic resource to maintain the social status quo and justify the system. Here, primordial and neoliberal codings converge to produce and reinforce lines of difference. In the current system, participation is not explicitly denied based on skin color or nationality. Instead, a complex system of opaque migration laws systematically hierarchizes disadvantages, standing in stark contradiction to the principles of liberal democracy, which advocates for equal rights and justice for all individuals. Exclusions, which are systemically negated and minimized (see Chapter 2.2.9), expose the blind spots of what can be seen as quasi-religious liberal-democratic egalitarianism. In critical moments of integration in Germany, particularly at *bifurcation points within complex social systems* (see Chapter 8.3.2), decisions are made that either reinforce existing inequalities by continuing to conceal exclusions and thus maintain the status quo or initiate transformative changes by recognizing and addressing exclusions. These junctures not only provide opportunities to forge new paths toward inclusion but also to reinforce existing barriers. The direction taken often results from the interplay between cultural codings and the dynamic demands of a changing society. Emotionally charged discourses on migration and integration, especially the constant agitation caused by the marking of the difference of foreigners as non-white, profoundly influence policy-making and public perception. Bifurcation points in legislation, local integration policy, and educational institutions are critical for shaping and promoting integration. These critical junctures determine whether immigrants are actively included in social structures or merely regarded as passive objects of integration efforts. Bifurcation points reveal the deep interconnections between political decisions, social attitudes, and individual experiences, and they have a lasting impact on the structure of integration as well as the possibilities and limits thereof. These interactions influence not only short-term politi-

cal approaches but also long-term social structures and often lay the groundwork for the social inclusion or exclusion of certain groups, frequently without public awareness. For instance, the debate in Germany surrounding the so-called “remigration” of people to their countries of origin—driven primarily by far-right political groups—proves how integration policies can set unrealistic expectations or be based on assumptions that overlook the complex realities of migrant lives. This discussion is particularly poignant given that remigration is often not feasible due to a lack of proper documentation or legal impossibilities. Such a discourse acts as a vivid example of how policies can fail to acknowledge the actual conditions and challenges faced by immigrants. Such policies can lead to further marginalization and alienation if they are formulated without considering the actual circumstances and security concerns of the individuals involved. The pressure to return to a “home country,” which many no longer perceive as such or know only through stories, reveals a profound discrepancy between political ideologies and individual life realities. These measures not only exacerbate insecurity among migrants but also point out the often instrumental use of integration policy, which tends to be more symbolic in nature and designed to serve political agendas rather than addressing the real challenges of migration. From a systemic anthropological perspective, the call for “remigration” by conservative voices illuminates the deep-seated structural and ideological patterns within social systems. These demands exemplify a propensity to distill complex social phenomena into overly simplistic solutions, thereby fostering a narrative construction of the “other” that significantly contributes to the continuation of power structures and the legitimization of social hierarchies. The recurrent emphasis on remigration, which disregards the actual conditions of the individuals concerned, not only functions to politically mobilize specific segments of the electorate but also reflects a deep-seated incapacity to address the global interdependence of life situations and the attendant social obligations (refer to Chapter 10.4). These dynamics illuminate the exclusion mechanisms embedded within systems, which adversely affect the living conditions of migrants and compromise the integrative capacity of social frameworks. By persistently opting for directions at critical bifurcation points that lead to systemic closure, these systems manifest their limitations. Such systemic closure is characterized by the reinforcement of boundaries and barriers that obstruct genuine integration and promote the preservation of a hierarchical order that privileges certain groups while excluding others. The ubiquitous presence of exclusions within social systems, which are inescapable, marks the inherent contradiction of the liberal democratic claim to equality and justice. This persistent quality of exclusions operates as a continuous bifurcation point, compelling social systems to confront and navigate these inevitable exclusions. The confluence of primordial and neoliberal approaches in the integration context is evident in the classification and subsequent treatment of certain groups based on ethnic or national characteristics. This primordial coding, which engenders hierarchical disadvantages and con-

sequent human differentiation, is starkly apparent in the marginalization of individuals perceived and treated as foreign, set against the backdrop of the prevalent white dominance in Central Europe. Minorities in Germany are compelled to continually advocate for their integration. They are frequently labeled as “different” in the media and socio-politically, as observed during various events, such as pandemics or New Year’s celebrations. These primordially coded forms of categorization and discrimination are central to the *autopoietic rituals of public and medial stimulation* through which social groups perpetually reconstruct their perceived distinctiveness. Inextricably linked to this self-perception is a deep-seated *schema of indifference* towards the suffering of others, which is juxtaposed against their own prosperity. This dynamic is explored in greater detail in Chapter 10.4. These classifications are further solidified by neoliberal policies that assess individuals based on their economic utility, thereby privileging or marginalizing them accordingly. For instance, the human right to asylum is increasingly undermined as the economic utility of an individual is evaluated prior to their immigration. Consequently, asylum, migration, and labor laws become conflated, despite being founded on entirely distinct logics and regulations. This conflation deepens social exclusion and cements inequalities within the structural and ideological frameworks of societies. Beyond the critique of *methodological nationalism*¹, integration is not perceived as an autonomous, linear process solely dependent on individual efforts but as a highly regulated “integration regime” (Mezzadra 2015). Both the traditional one-sided perspective (assimilation), which demands that immigrants unilaterally assimilate into the majority society, and the two-sided “intercultural” concept of integration are ultimately linear approaches. The two-sided integration model is criticized as one-dimensional and simplistic, as it portrays integration merely as a reciprocal process between the majority society and immigrant groups, neglecting the complex, multi-layered dynamics and power relations involved. This two-sided model assumes mutual adaptation and overlooks structural barriers, historical contexts, and geopolitical influences that play a significant role in determining the integration process. It also contributes to the division of people with a migration background into constructed and fixed groups, perpetuating outdated, racist, and essentializing attributions. This simplified view fails to acknowledge reality and overlooks the systemic mechanisms of exclusion that are deeply embedded in social and political structures. Such approaches ignore systemic dynamics as well as geopolitical and historical factors of hegemonic

1 Methodological nationalism is the inclination to analyze social phenomena and processes primarily through the lens of the nation-state, which is presumed to be the “natural” and exclusive unit of social organization. This approach often results in the neglect or oversight of transnational, global, and subnational dynamics. Adhering to this perspective can restrict our understanding of social realities, as it fails to capture the complexity and multi-layered nature of contemporary social constellations.

power exertion and present social conditions as “natural”—an understanding that partly emerged in the colonial era and culminated in the Nazi regime. Based on the previous explanations, the inescapability of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the frequent negation of exclusions, must be systematically emphasized. From a systemic-anthropological perspective, integration is viewed not merely as a process of accepting individuals into an existing social structure but as a complex interplay of inclusion and exclusion mechanisms shaped non-linearly by biological, social, cultural, and political dynamics. In the context of neoliberal regimes, which often prioritize rigid targets and economic efficiency over social justice, the integration process manifests not as a genuine dialogue but as a series of exclusions increasingly enforced in the name of *realpolitik*. These systems tend to measure integration using narrowly defined, economically utilitarian parameters, drastically reducing the likelihood of a genuine, equitable exchange between migrants and the host society. Consequently, these approaches prioritize economic exploitability, resulting in migrants being viewed primarily as workers who must adapt without adequate support, while systemic barriers that impede full participation in society remain unaddressed. Such practices reinforce the status quo of existing power structures and further marginalize certain groups, instead of fostering an inclusive framework. The dialogue often touted in integration debates thus proves to be a farce, where “*realpolitik*” subverts the ideals of equality and justice. Even measures that are ostensibly integrative often contain exclusionary elements by sidelining certain cultural practices or identities. Moreover, while the amount of resources allocated to promote inclusion is frequently mentioned, structural barriers and systemic inequalities that exclude specific groups are minimized or overlooked. This oversight masks the power dynamics behind integration processes and contributes to the perpetuation of existing dominance relations. The final analysis of the discussion on integration reveals that it functions as a complex instrument for exerting power and control. Integration is not determined solely by individual efforts but is deeply embedded in political and social regimes that systematically marginalize specific groups through their structures and policies, thereby maintaining existing power structures. Thus, integration extends beyond mere incorporation into a social order and manifests in political frameworks and social expectations that often aim to preserve the status quo. These frameworks promote selective inclusion, favoring certain cultural identities and practices while marginalizing or stigmatizing others. This approach reveals the deep interconnectedness of integration and systemic exclusion with power relations and dynamics, which must be critically examined and addressed in substantive discussions about fair and equal participation in society.

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 struc-

tures. 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 eco-

nomic 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 disadvan-

tages 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 pressing, 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, consolidat-

ing 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 predom-

inantly 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 dy-

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 mean-

ingful 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 West-ern 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 sus-

taining 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 vio-

lence 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 ap-

pear 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 macro-social 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 CO₂ 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.

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.

12 Conclusion

While the specific rationales for the diverse forms of sorting, classifying, dividing, and hierarchizing humanity—or human differentiation—vary across different contexts, a number of universal commonalities emerge when these rationales are examined collectively. These commonalities coalesce around a central theme that emerges from the interconnected nature of human differentiation across multiple dimensions. This pattern characterizes human differentiation as culturally coded forms of domination, which can be categorized into five distinct yet interrelated domains. These are: *domination as a macro-social anthropological constant; affective-cognitive-bodily schemata; cultural coding; the regimes of orders of difference, which are characterized by primordial and neoliberal coding; and indifference as a mode of system justification.*

Domination as a macro-social anthropological constant The phenomenon of domination can be identified as a macro-social anthropological constant, one that is deeply embedded in human societies and serves as a crucial thread woven throughout the tapestry of human history. The characterization of political domination as either inherently good or bad is an oversimplification that fails to acknowledge its multifaceted nature. It is an integral aspect of human civilization, playing a crucial role in the organization, coordination, and survival of social structures. The manifestations of domination and the associated differentiation within humanity exhibit considerable cultural and historical variation. However, the pervasiveness of domination reflects an inherent aspect of human nature and the necessity of social order through hegemonies. In the context of contemporary global hegemonies, the neoliberal agenda—characterized by its persistent crises, corruption, lobbying, and a state of continuous warfare—has developed a sophisticated system for ordering difference that surpasses traditional colonial domination. This form of dominance is predominantly a feature of the power struggles among major global players, with Russia initially losing the Cold War and China emerging as a formidable rival to the USA since the 2000s. Notwithstanding substantial criticism of US hegemony and its selectively anti-democratic, inhumane policies, the “Great Power Competition” must be situated within the context of the rivalry among these major powers. Dominance is a fundamental constant that manifests in various forms

and is shaped by the schemata that influence individual subjectivity. In light of the inevitability and contingency of power struggles, this neuroculturally co-evolved process is of central importance to our understanding of human differentiation. To fully comprehend these dynamics, one must have a profound understanding of the mechanisms that sustain and reshape power structures, as well as a critical examination and analysis of their foundational principles. The examination of domination as a macro-social anthropological constant, particularly since the post-1945 era, indicates that power structures and forms of domination are dynamic elements within human societies, shaped by the post-war order and evolving global political contexts. The ascendance of US hegemony, the proliferation of neoliberal policies, and the increased financialization of the global economy are inextricably linked with the ways in which mechanisms of domination adapt and evolve in response to new geopolitical and economic challenges. Notwithstanding these adaptations, domination remains, in essence, a mechanism for organizing and sustaining specific normative orders. Deeply embedded within the global power structures and economic interests, domination functions as a survival mechanism, influencing affective, cognitive, and behavioral patterns. As previously discussed in the context of orders of difference, these patterns are deeply entrenched in society and upheld by long-standing traditions. Therefore, while systems of domination undergo modifications in response to shifting geopolitical and economic circumstances, their fundamental purpose—the establishment and preservation of particular normative orders—remains constant. This analysis demonstrates that domination functions not only through direct control or oppression but also through the shaping of deeply embedded schemata within social structures and cultural practices in “network hierarchies,” characterized by the principle of *guided self-organization* within complex hegemonies. *Complex hegemony* is seen as an emergent and autopoietic phenomenon within network-like hierarchies, according to the systems and complexity theory understanding of schemata and practices of human differentiation. Hegemonies are emergent because they evolve from the interaction of human and non-human components, developing properties that are greater than the sum of their parts. The forms of American hegemony that shape the present cannot be explained by the direct control or conscious actions of individual actors alone; rather, they result from complex, dynamic interactions within sociopolitical systems. These interactions create an overarching order that can be traced in part to individual actions but also has autonomous properties that transcend the individual. The principle of network hierarchies emphasizes two central properties of complex hegemony: first, its adaptive capacity to simultaneously promote certain processes and limit others; and second, its quasi-intentional nature, which allows it to respond flexibly to social contingencies despite stabilizing factors. Complex hegemony is thus to be understood as a “network hierarchy”, since it is characterized on the one hand by decentralized, network-like power relations (such as neoliberal governance

through money as a value-coding medium), but on the other hand is supported by centralized, hierarchical structures such as governments and state authorities. Self-reinforcing feedback processes stabilize hegemonies by promoting certain forms of social organization and blocking alternative developments. Networks within hegemonies are not static; they are reinforced by interaction with hierarchical structures, leading to a continuous consolidation of power relations in the networks. These feedback processes support selective self-organization: certain behaviors and structures are consolidated, while other potential developments are blocked or not supported by the system. Complex systems of domination in the present are realized in different systems because they represent a relational form of power that is not tied to specific institutions or material structures. However, this study unequivocally refutes the notion of rigid determinism, particularly with regard to the conceptualization of power and domination as macro-social anthropological constants. The argument is not for acquiescence to the status quo as a natural condition. It is therefore essential to develop a deep understanding and recognition of the social structures embedded within the interwoven orders of difference discussed in this book, in order to enable meaningful and lasting transformations. This approach necessitates a critical examination of the prevailing power structures and forms of domination. Rather than perceiving these structures as unchanging, the argument urges us to recognize their contextual nature and malleability within the complex fabric of human society. The objective is to identify potential points of departure for transformative action through a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics that underpin power and domination across various dimensions. Such an analysis requires an intersectional examination of the historical, cultural, biological, and social contexts in which these structures are embedded, as well as an exploration of the interactions between different power relations and their societal impacts. The study prompts a re-evaluation of alternative forms of social organization and coexistence, urging recognition of inherent limitations as well as the possibilities—and indeed the necessity—of transformative change. This perspective suggests that through the implementation of educational initiatives, facilitated dialogue, and the promotion of participatory democracy, pathways can be identified toward establishing a more just and inclusive social order. However, such efforts remain bounded by the complex, interwoven fabric of social, cultural, biological, and geopolitical dynamics that shape patterns of inclusion and exclusion, alongside our conditioning to these entrenched patterns. As these dimensions never act in isolation, they should be taught and understood as an interconnected system of power relations. It is imperative that structures of power and domination be subjected to not only critical examination but also active reformulation in order to foster innovation, equality, and social justice. This view calls for a proactive engagement with social change, based on a nuanced understanding of power and domination. It calls for their reconfiguration on a democratic basis, with the objec-

tive of enhancing collective and sustainable well-being. This vision is aligned with the necessity of transforming entrenched systems of dominance into platforms that support equitable and progressive societal growth.

Affective-cognitive-bodily schemata The concept of schemata assumes a pivotal role in the context of complex hegemonies and their characterization as a macro-social anthropological constant. Schemata integrate a range of approaches, including evolutionary-anthropological, socio-psychological, perceptual-physiological, system-theoretical, and cultural and social scientific, forming a consistent basis for understanding differentiation practices. These are regarded as inherent and inescapable conditions of human sociality, yet they are not perceived as fixed or wholly predetermined. Schemata facilitate a comprehensive examination of the processes that shape social order and differentiation by integrating individual, social, and cultural dynamics within an integrative framework. In this way, they transcend the constraints of a singular focus on individual determinants and instead direct attention toward the emergent interconnections between micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. In this way, they make a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex relationships between individuals, social structures, and cultural contexts. By synthesizing findings from the fields of social cognition and psychological anthropology, the concept of schemata has been reformulated as affective-cognitive-bodily constructs. In particular, the approaches of 4E research (embodied, embedded, enactive, extended) from social cognition were referenced. In this approach, schemata are not regarded as isolated mental structures; rather, they are conceived of as dynamic constructs that are shaped by a number of factors, including embodiment, social and material embeddedness, active interaction with the environment (enactment), and the extension of cognitive processes through external resources. From the perspective of systems theory, schemata function as self-organizing, meaning-generating interfaces between individual and collective processes. They transcend the mere sum of individual perceptions or social influences, emerging from the dynamic interactions within complex social systems. In this capacity, they facilitate the stabilization of these systems' emergent properties while also enabling change and adaptation. This redefinition of schemata as affective-cognitive-bodily is achieved through an interdisciplinary synthesis of systems theory, social cognition, and evolutionary- as well as psychological anthropology. The reconceptualization has been integrated into various discursive fields, particularly in analyses concerning the *schemata of indifference* (Chapter 10.4). The comprehensive theoretical and empirical foundation established here facilitates a nuanced comprehension of the perpetuation of particular cognitive biases and injustices within human differentiation practices. Schemata, as comprehensive frameworks, direct individuals' perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions, firmly embedded in their affective, cognitive, and somatic processes. These

schemata not only influence individual interpretations and reactions to their environment but also form the basis for the internalization and reproduction of social norms and values. In the context of human differentiation, schemata uphold the boundaries between “us” and “them,” justify social hierarchies, and strengthen existing power dynamics. The application of the concept of schemata to indifference demonstrates how these deeply entrenched cognitive frameworks foster apathy towards specific social groups or issues. This application elucidates the reasons why certain social injustices and forms of discrimination persist despite increased awareness and interventions. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to alter individual attitudes or behaviors, but to address and reshape the underlying schemata that mold these attitudes and actions. These deeply entrenched schemata, which operate on a preconscious level, operate as conduits through which hegemonic structures exert influence on individual experiences and shape social realities. They facilitate the internalization of values and practices, whether they are rooted in neoliberal or primordial codes, as if they were given and inevitable, thereby minimizing critical reflection or resistance. As filters through which information and stimuli are evaluated and interpreted, schemata establish the foundation for the reproduction of social orders. In this context, domination is not merely a matter of direct control; rather, it is a dynamic process of influence that manifests through the embedding of particular narratives and values in everyday life. The continuous interplay between these affective-cognitive-bodily schemata and the surrounding cultural codes sets off a self-reinforcing cycle that not only sustains hegemonic relationships but also enhances their adaptability and resilience to change. The schemata discussed function within a system that contributes significantly to the perception of power relations as natural, inevitable, or even desirable. As a result, resistance to these relations is curtailed. To address the role of schemata in human differentiation, a comprehensive and systematic approach is required to tackle the underlying mechanisms of inequities and misperceptions. This effort calls for a multidisciplinary approach that melds insights from social cognition, psychology, the social sciences, and beyond.

Cultural coding Cultural coding operates as a foundational mechanism in the construction and maintenance of social realities, playing a seminal role in the dynamics of human differentiation. It transfers meanings and delineates distinct boundaries that distinguish social systems from their environments. By selectively encoding specific semantics, cultural coding provides the means for cultural identification and shapes corresponding social realities. These practices are instrumental in shaping affiliations and embedding community values, norms, and beliefs, thereby laying the groundwork for social cohesion and enabling clear demarcations. Cultural codes are fundamental to the formation of both individual and collective identity, and they structure social interactions and relationships. Cultural codes are mani-

fested in a number of ways, including languages, modes of speech, memes, symbols, rituals, and norms. They exert a significant influence on how reality is perceived and on interpersonal behaviors. As components of autopoietic networks, cultural codes are essential for the self-sustainability and perpetuation of social systems, reducing entropy and functioning as vital interfaces for structural coupling with the environment. In this context, schemata—preconscious, affective-cognitive-bodily structures—act as the primary guides for how individuals process information and respond to their surroundings, playing a central role in the interpretation and understanding of their environment. The dynamic interaction between individual consciousness and social systems is enabled by the transmission of meanings, which is facilitated by cultural coding. This dynamic interplay between individual consciousness and prevailing cultural codes is shaped by schemas, which are themselves influenced by cultural codes and play a crucial role in internalizing, reinforcing, or contesting these codes. A critical examination of these processes reveals the construction and perpetuation of power relations and social hierarchies, thereby providing insight into potential pathways for social transformation and the dismantling of inequalities. This dynamic enables the system to adapt flexibly to external changes while maintaining its identity. The interpretation and assimilation of new information facilitate the continuous evolution and stabilization of social orders, as shaped by prevailing cultural codes. These processes underpin the exchange and processing of meaning, which are essential for the system's adaptability and coherence. This ensures the system's operational continuity and relevance in a changing environment.

Regimes of orders of difference The conceptualization of regimes of orders of difference, characterized as primordial and/or neoliberal, provides a sophisticated lens through which to examine the formation of social hierarchies and identities. This framework builds upon the intersectional approach by integrating differentiation schemas and sociocybernetics, paving the way for a comprehensive examination of the dynamic interactions between social systems and their surrounding environments. By focusing on the function of differentiation schemes and systemic operations, this approach facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of the formation and maintenance of social orders. It permits a detailed examination of the processes of inclusion and exclusion and provides insight into the ways in which various codings and logics of difference intersect, interact, and influence social structures. The two regimes, which are identified as central to this analysis, are distinct in terms of their historical origins and underlying logics. They are also deeply embedded within the cultural codes of democratic societies that emerged in the period following the Second World War. Their contemporary manifestations reflect historical developments since the late 20th century, marked by a shift towards globalized markets and a heightened focus on individualism and personal accountability. The

conceptualization of regimes of difference, which are characterized as both primordial and neoliberal, emphasizes the inherently intersectional nature of social differentiation. This perspective is based on the understanding that axes of inequality are not isolated phenomena but rather interact and overlap in multifaceted ways. The processes of individual and collective identification, as well as social positioning, are shaped by the interplay of multiple interlinked factors that are rooted in the specific historical contexts and logics of these regimes. An intersectional analysis of these regimes of orders of difference reveals how cultural codings, driven by diverse yet interconnected logics, shape human differentiation and influence the stability or transformation of social orders through the use of socio-technologies. These interfaces either reinforce or alter the operation of the codes, shedding light on the fact that social identities and positioning are not the product of a single axis of differentiation. Rather, they are the result of the dynamic interactions among multiple factors.

Indifference as a mode of system justification The concept of the “schemata of indifference,” as introduced in this book, refers to a psychosocial and psychopolitical mechanism in Western societies that cultivates a disengaged or apathetic attitude toward the global impacts of one’s lifestyle, particularly in relation to consumption, inequality, and environmental degradation. This indifference is not merely a lack of awareness; rather, it is often systematically reinforced by societal structures and media narratives that normalize a certain level of detachment from the consequences of Western affluence.

This indifference allows individuals to disregard the complex consequences of Western geopolitical and economic actions on marginalized regions by circumventing discussions on the ethical implications of their own prosperity. This schema is embedded within cultural codes shaped by regimes of difference, both primordial and neoliberal. It represents a worldview that exalts individual achievement over collective accountability. This fosters selective perceptions and appraisals (selective empathy), thereby legitimizing and perpetuating existing power dynamics by disregarding the adverse impacts of Western lifestyles on other societies and the environment. This stance impedes global solidarity and mutual responsibility, thereby impeding progress toward a just and sustainable global order. A critical evaluation of the “scheme of indifference” is essential for understanding the foundational mechanisms that rationalize human differentiation and is a crucial component in the theoretical exploration of various practices and contexts involved in differentiating and categorizing people. The approach put forth here elucidates the pivotal role of communication and interaction in the formation and perpetuation of dominant structures. The elements of control and systems theories provide a framework that enables the dynamics and structures of human differentiation to be understood not as static, but as processual and emergent. The defining charac-

teristics of systems are not limited to their boundaries, which are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. Rather, systems are comprised of multidimensional constellations of schemata, cultural codes, and regime-like power structures that form the foundation for the continuous reproduction and transformation of contemporary social orders. In this context, the five areas outlined in this concluding chapter function as mechanisms through which social systems organize, reproduce, and transform themselves. These factors influence the circulation of information, power, and resources within the system, as well as the system's response to internal and external disturbances. In particular, the roles of cultural coding and affective-cognitive-bodily schemata demonstrate the profound impact of human perception, evaluation, and action on the shaping of systems. The systemic anthropological approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the intricate and profound foundations of intersectional structures of power and domination. By analyzing and integrating the aforementioned elements from a variety of disciplines, this approach illuminates the interconnectedness of these structures. The affective-cognitive-bodily schemata act not only as transmitters of hegemonic culture but also as reinforcers of the mechanisms that inhibit critical reflection and active engagement with the pressing issues discussed here. The continuation of cultural narratives that espouse ideals of freedom and progress, while simultaneously being intricately interwoven with the exploitation of natural resources, strengthens a culture of indifference and profligacy that is deeply entrenched within the social, economic, and political systems. The identified pattern across five primary domains of human differentiation demonstrates that examining these practices within the context of social inequalities, by integrating diverse perspectives and approaches within a systemic-anthropological framework, enhances the depth and nuance of the analysis of cultural and social dynamics. These reflections make a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on the potential of social integration and recognition. They do so by understanding the boundaries, practices, affects, and the generation of narratives inherent to and supporting these practices. This is not done in order to determine whether these practices are morally good or bad. Rather, it is done as part of a comprehensive anthropological framework. This perspective facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the structural foundations of social inequalities by considering the historical, geopolitical, anthropological, neurobiological, and psychological dimensions of social differentiation, which operate concurrently in a systemic mode of autopoiesis. Furthermore, the systemic-anthropological approach provides novel perspectives for the analysis and shaping of cultural and social dynamics, with a particular emphasis on the complexity and multifaceted nature of human differentiation. This contributes to the development of more nuanced and effective recognition policies and raises awareness of the intricate mechanisms that reproduce social inequalities. It is important to avoid two common mistakes. The first is to succumb to the temptation of labeling so-

cial inequalities as immutable and “normal,” thereby naturalizing practices and regimes of injustice. The second is to culturalize these inequalities by attributing them causally and linearly to a single dimension of difference.

In essence, practices such as the slave trade and the devaluation of certain genders were historically regarded as “normal” and were seldom subjected to critical scrutiny. As will be demonstrated throughout this book, exploitation, particularly within the context of power and hegemonic structures, has consistently been a defining feature of human history. However, the context and perception of these practices have evolved over time. In the present era, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge and critically examine these historically entrenched injustices to gain insight and effect a gradual transformation. However, change occurs gradually, through a series of incremental steps, and with considerable effort, suffering, and hardship. The challenge lies in identifying and critically questioning these deeply rooted schemas and the associated cultural codifications in order to gain a deeper understanding of them and to ultimately transform them. Nevertheless, insight alone does not result in change. The efficacy of the numerous discourses is contingent upon their ability to reach a critical mass within our social systems, thereby enabling transformative processes. It is imperative to recognize that the practices and manifestations of domination within the differentiated subsystems of contemporary society persist in categorizing and differentiating people, despite the idealized narratives and symbols they may espouse. The disparities within society, manifesting as social inequality, economic exploitation, and ecological destruction, can be viewed as side effects of our prevailing lifestyle. This lifestyle has been shaped by the pursuit of prosperity and a concurrent disregard for its costs. The frequent calls for greater justice demand a self-reflective revolution, subtly yet profoundly encapsulated in the term “change,” understood as a reformation of differentiation schemes. As has been shown, this cannot be achieved through ideologizing or moralizing approaches that systematically overlook certain dimensions of human differentiation and disproportionately emphasize others. Furthermore, the governance capabilities and opportunities within neoliberal regimes have also been demonstrated to be, at best, inadequate. In a world comprising functionally differentiated subsystems, the common good is not a prevailing priority. The notion of a global entity that would be willing and able to champion justice issues also appears to be quite unrealistic. The remaining step is the courageous, albeit seemingly banal, one of moving toward a potentially more equitable future.

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