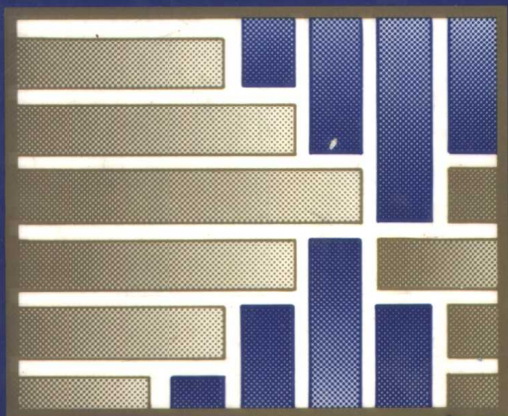

MACROSOCIOLOGY



A N
INTRODUCTION
TO HUMAN
SOCIETIES

STEPHEN K. SANDERSON

Macrosociology

An Introduction to Human Societies

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Macrosociology

For Ruth, Derek, and Sarah

***No description can even begin to lead to
a valid explanation if it
does not effectively encompass the whole world.***

Fernand Braudel

Preface

In an increasingly interconnected world it is critically important for students to understand society, both their own and others. This book is an introduction to the study of society from a macrosociological perspective. **Macrosociology studies the broadest features of human society using a comparative and historical approach.** It examines the whole range of human societies, both industrial and preindustrial, and draws extensively on anthropology and history in its efforts to understand society. Happily, it has been suggested that “sociology and anthropology are really the same discipline, and . . . all of human history and all types of societies come into the purview of a science of society” (Collins, 1981: 130).

There are many advantages to the comparative and historical approach used in *Macrosociology*. The approach forces us to focus on societies other than our own, making it a powerful antidote to ethnocentrism. By studying industrial societies and the whole range of preindustrial societies, past and present, we become more intensely aware of the broader nature of human experience. This helps release us from the prison of our own limited experiences and understandings.

The comparative and historical approach

used in *Macrosociology* also permits a more truly scientific approach to the analysis of social life. Focus on one human society makes broad theoretical generalizations—the aim of science—literally impossible. But consideration of many societies permits more valid generalizations.

Finally, the comparative and historical perspective helps us understand social change. Such a perspective is extremely useful because it allows us actually to observe many different kinds of changes taking place.

Another distinctive feature of *Macrosociology* is the importance given to the materialist evolutionary approach. Instead of assuming that there is a strict developmental sequence through which all (or most) societies move, this perspective assumes only that there are some general patterns of change that have characterized most societies. It finds the basic causes of social organization and change primarily in the material conditions of human existence. Of course, other perspectives are frequently presented both to enhance understanding and stimulate the debate and controversy that are vital to intellectual growth.

The global emphasis of macrosociology, with its unique ability to counter ethnocentrism, will

help students better understand today's society and function in tomorrow's world. The book is organized thematically, but instructors who prefer a chronological organization can reorder the presentation of the chapters approximately as follows:

- I. Conceptual and theoretical foundations: Chapters 1, 2, and 3.
- II. Preindustrial and precapitalist societies: Chapters 4, 5, 6, 11, and 16, and appropriate parts of 15, 18, 19, and 20.
- III. The capitalist world-economy and industrial capitalist and socialist societies: Chapters 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 17, and appropriate parts of 15, 18, 19, and 20.
- IV. The Third World: Chapter 9 and appropriate parts of 12, 15, and 18.
- V. The future: Chapter 21.

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Stephen K. Sanderson

Macrosociology

Contents

Preface xvii

CHAPTER 1

Sociology and the Scientific Study of Human Societies 1

The Nature of Sociology 2
 Microsociology Versus Macrosociology 2
 The Role of Science in the Study of Social Life 3

The Major Theoretical Strategies in Contemporary Macrosociology 4
 Materialist Versus Idealist Theoretical Strategies 4
 Functionalism 7
 The Conflict Theoretical Strategy 8
 Evolutionary Theoretical Strategies 10
 Eclecticism 13

The Theoretical Strategy of this Book 14

Summary 15

Special Topic: Why Americans Prefer Beef 15

For Further Reading 17

CHAPTER 2

Human Evolution and the Emergence of Human Society and Culture 19

The Basic Principles of Biological Evolution 19

The Development of Evolutionary Biology 19

Heredity and Genetic Variability 20

Adaptation, Natural Selection, and Survival of the Fit 21

Human Evolution 23

The Australopithecines 23

Homo erectus 24

The Neandertals and Modern Human Beings 25

The Major Developments in Human Evolution 25

The Evolutionary Uniqueness of Humans 26

Symbolic Communication and Human Language 26

The Origin of Language 27

The Functional Significance of Language 28

Is Symbolic Communication Uniquely Human? 29

Society, Culture, and Human Adaptation 29

The Societal Mode of Organization 29

Culture and Human Adaptation 30

Is Culture Uniquely Human? 32

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism 33

*Culture, Subculture, and
Counterculture 35*

Summary 35

Special Topic: The Sociobiology
Controversy 36

For Further Reading 40

CHAPTER 3

Sociocultural Systems and the Nature of Sociocultural Evolution 41

The Basic Components of Sociocultural
Systems 41

Material Infrastructure 41

Social Structure 42

Ideological Superstructure 43

The Nature of Sociocultural Evolution 44

What Is Sociocultural Evolution? 44

*Parallel, Convergent, and Divergent
Evolution 45*

*Continuity, Devolution, and
Extinction 46*

The Materialist Approach to Sociocultural
Structure and Evolution 48

*General Nature of the Materialist
Approach 48*

The Logical Priority of Infrastructure 49

The Major Principles of the Materialist
Evolutionary Theoretical Strategy 50

*The Principle of Sociocultural
Adaptation 51*

The Conflict Principle 51

*The Principle of Infrastructural
Determinism 52*

*The Principle of Sociocultural
Integration 52*

Summary 52

Special Topic: Sacred Cows and Abominable
Pigs 53

For Further Reading 57

CHAPTER 4

Preindustrial Modes of Subsistence Technology 58

Hunting and Gathering Societies 58

The Original Affluent Society 60

The !Kung Bushmen 61

Simple Horticultural Societies 62

The Neolithic Revolution 62

*Contemporary Simple
Horticulturalists 63*

The Yanomamo 64

Intensive Horticultural Societies 65

Aboriginal Tahiti 66

Agrarian Societies 67

Medieval England 68

Pastoral Societies 70

The Basseri 70

The Causes of the Evolution of Preindustrial
Technologies 71

Summary 73

Special Topic: Agricultural Origins and the
Declining Standard of Living 74

For Further Reading 76

CHAPTER 5

Precapitalist Economic Systems 77

Production-for-Use Versus

Production-for-Exchange 77

Modes of Ownership in Precapitalist
Societies 78

Primitive Communism 79

Lineage Ownership 79

Chiefly Ownership 80

Seigneurial Ownership 80

Ownership Versus Control 81

Modes of Distribution in Precapitalist
Societies 81

Reciprocity 81

Pure Redistribution 84

Partial Redistribution 86

The Potlatch 87

*Surplus Expropriation and
Exploitation 89*

The Emergence of Economic Markets 91

Societies in Relation to the Market 91

*Aspects of the Market in Precapitalist
Societies 92*

- Summary 95
- Special Topic: The Substantivism-Formalism Controversy 96
- For Further Reading 99

CHAPTER 6

The Origin and Evolution of Social Stratification 100

- The Nature of Social Stratification 100
- Social Stratification in Evolutionary Perspective 101
 - Inequality Without Stratification: Hunting and Gathering Societies* 101
 - Inequality Without Stratification: Simple Horticultural Societies* 103
 - Intensive Horticultural Societies and the Emergence of Social Stratification* 104
 - Social Stratification in Agrarian Societies* 107
- Theories of the Origin of Social Stratification 111
 - The Functionalist Evolutionary Theory* 111
 - Lenski's Surplus Theory* 111
 - The Scarcity Theory* 113
- Summary 114
- Special Topic: A New Perspective on the Caste System 115
- For Further Reading 117

CHAPTER 7

The Origins of Modern Capitalism 119

- The Feudal Mode of Production 119
- The Rise of the Capitalist Mode of Production 120
 - The Nature of Capitalism* 120
 - The Early Capitalism of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* 122
 - The Seventeenth Century and Mercantilism* 123
 - Capitalism As a World-System* 125
 - The Capitalist World-Economy from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* 127

- Explaining the Transition to Capitalism 129
 - Demographic Theories* 129
 - Marxist Theories* 129
 - Weber's Contributions* 130
 - A Theoretical Assessment* 132

- Summary 133
- Special Topic: Industry Before the Industrial Revolution 134
- For Further Reading 136

CHAPTER 8

Capitalism and Socialism Since the Industrial Revolution 138

- The Industrial Revolution and the Emergence of Industrial Capitalism 138
 - The Industrial Revolution and Its Causes* 138
 - Some Social Consequences of Industrialization* 141
- Industrial Capitalism Since the Late Nineteenth Century 143
- The Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism 145
 - Marx's Theory of Human Nature and Alienation* 145
 - Work in Preindustrial Societies* 146
 - Alienation and Modern Capitalism* 147
- The Emergence of State Socialist Economies 148
 - The Origin and Nature of State Socialism* 148
 - State Socialism and the Capitalist World-Economy* 149
 - Does Alienated Labor Exist Under State Socialism?* 151
 - The Democratic Socialism of Scandinavia* 152
- Summary 153
- Special Topic: The Building of a Consumer Culture 153
- Appendix: Marx's Theory of Capitalist Exploitation 156
- For Further Reading 157

CHAPTER 9**Capitalism and Economic Underdevelopment 159**

- The Nature of Underdevelopment 159
- The Modernization Approach to Underdevelopment 167
 - The General Nature of Modernization Theory* 167
 - Rostow's Evolutionary Interpretation* 169
 - The Failures of Modernization Theory* 170
- The Dependency Approach to Underdevelopment 171
 - The General Nature of the Dependency Approach* 171
 - Types and Varieties of Economic Dependency* 173
 - Recent Empirical Explorations of Dependency Theory* 174
- Historical Case Studies of Underdevelopment 175
 - China and Japan* 176
 - The Americas* 178
- The Future of the Underdeveloped World 180
- Summary 182
- Special Topic: The Deepening Debt Problems of the Third World 183
- For Further Reading 184

CHAPTER 10**Social Stratification in Industrial Societies 186**

- The Transition to Industrial Society: A Reduction of Stratification? 186
- Social Stratification in Industrial Capitalist Societies 187
 - The Distribution of Income and Wealth: The United States and Britain* 187
 - The Class Structure of Industrial Capitalist Societies* 191
 - Social Mobility Within Modern Capitalism* 195

- Patterns of Stratified Social Life in State Socialist Societies 197
 - Basic Class Structure and Inequalities of Privilege* 197
 - Class Structuration Under State Socialism* 199
- Social Stratification in Industrial Societies: A Comparative Assessment 200
- Theories of Industrial Stratification Systems 202
 - The Functionalist Theory* 202
 - The Marxist Approach* 203
 - The Weberian Alternative to Marxism* 205
- The Future of Social Stratification 208
- Summary 208
- Special Topic: The Social Democratic Experiment 209
- For Further Reading 212

CHAPTER 11**Political Evolution and the Origin of the State 213**

- The Nature of Political Organization 213
- The General Pattern of Political Evolution 214
 - The Band Level of Political Evolution* 215
 - The Tribal Level of Political Evolution* 216
 - Law and Order in Band and Tribal Societies* 217
 - The Chiefdom Level of Political Evolution* 218
 - The State Level of Political Evolution* 219
- The Origin of the State 221
 - Pristine Versus Secondary States* 221
 - The Emergence of Pristine States* 222
 - Theories of the Origin of the State* 224
 - Secondary State Formation* 227
- Summary 228
- Special Topic: Feudalism and Oriental Despotism 229
- For Further Reading 232

CHAPTER 12**The State Since the Evolution of Capitalism 233**

The Early Modern State 233

The Emergence of Modern States 235

The Origin of Western Parliamentary Democracies 236

Power, Politics, and the State in Modern Industrial Democracies 237

The Liberal Theory of the State 238*Power Elite and Marxist Views of Modern Democracy* 238*The Weberian View of the State* 241

The State in the Context of the Capitalist World-System 243

Historical Sources of Totalitarian Dictatorships 244

The Modern Totalitarian State 245

Conclusion: Liberty, the State, and Human Servitude 247

Summary 247

Special Topic: The Politics of the Welfare State 248

For Further Reading 251

CHAPTER 13**Slavery and Racial Paternalism in the New World 252**

The Concepts of Race and Ethnicity 253

Two Types of Race and Ethnic Relations 253

Systems of Plantation Slavery in the New World 256

The Capitalist World-Economy and the Origins of New World Slavery 256*Slavery in the U.S. South* 258*Slavery in Brazil* 261*Slavery in the West Indies and Cuba* 263*Slavery in Latin and Anglo-America: A Comparative Assessment* 265*Recapitulation: Slavery and the Capitalist World-Economy* 266

Summary 267

Special Topic: The Black Slaveholders of America 268

For Further Reading 269

CHAPTER 14**Contemporary Patterns of Racial and Ethnic Stratification 270**

Industrial Capitalism and the Development of Competitive Race and Ethnic Relations 270

The Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery 270*The Development of Competitive Race Relations in the United States* 272*The Development of Competitive Race Relations in Brazil* 273*Racial and Ethnic Stratification in South Africa* 275*Theories of Competitive Race Relations* 277

The Origin and Evolution of Racism 280

Types and Varieties of Minority Groups 283

Colonized and Immigrant Minorities 284*Middleman Minorities* 284*Consociational Democracy* 285

Ethnicity in Evolutionary Perspective 287

Summary 288

Special Topic: The Declining Significance of Race? 290

For Further Reading 292

CHAPTER 15**The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality 294**

The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality: The Overall Pattern 295

The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality in Evolutionary Perspective 297

The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality in Hunting and Gathering Societies 297*The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality in Horticultural Societies* 298*The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual Inequality in Agrarian Societies* 300

*The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual
Inequality in Industrial Societies* 301
*The Sexual Division of Labor and Sexual
Inequality in the Third World* 304

Theories of Sexual Inequality 305

Sociobiological Theories 305

Materialist Theories 308

Political Theories 311

Feminist Theories 312

*Theories of Sexual Inequality: Some
Conclusions* 314

Male and Female in the Future 314

Summary 314

Special Topic: The Rise of Modern
Feminism 315

For Further Reading 317

CHAPTER 16

Marriage, Family, and Kinship in Comparative and Evolutionary Perspective 318

The Nature of Kin Groups 319

Systems of Residence and Descent 319

Local Groups and Descent Groups 319

Patrilineal Descent 321

Matrilineal Descent 323

*Unilineal Descent and the Principle of
Complementary Filiation* 324

Bilateral Descent 324

Forms of Residence Under Patriliney 325

Forms of Residence Under Matriliney 325

*Forms of Residence Under Bilateral
Descent* 325

The Causes of Residence and Descent
Systems 325

*The Causes of Patrilocality and
Patriliney* 326

*The Causes of Matrilocality and
Matriliney* 326

The Causes of Bilateral Descent 328

Marriage in Comparative Perspective 329

Incest Avoidance, Exogamy, and
Endogamy 330

The Nature of Incest Avoidance 330

Explanations for Incest Avoidance 331

Exogamy and Marital Exchange 333

Endogamy 334

Bridewealth and Dowry 334

Marriage, Family, and Kinship in
Evolutionary Perspective 336

Summary 337

Special Topic: Solidarity and Political
Economy in Marital Exchange 339

For Further Reading 341

CHAPTER 17

The Development of the Modern Western Family 342

Household Composition in the Preindustrial
West 343

The Evolution of the Modern Family
System 344

The Traditional European Family 344

The Rise of the Modern Family 345

*Victorianism and the Twentieth
Century* 347

*Explaining the Transition to the Modern
Family* 348

Race and Class Contexts of the Modern
American Family 349

*Working-Class Versus Middle-Class
Families* 349

Black and Lower-Class Families 351

The Contemporary Family
Revolution 352

*Recent Changes in Marital
Relationships* 354

*Explaining the Recent Family
Changes* 354

*Recent Changes in Parent-Child
Relations* 355

The Current Crisis of the Family 356

The Future of the Family 357

Summary 358

Special Topic: Extended Kinship in Industrial
Societies 359

For Further Reading 360

CHAPTER 18

Educational Systems in Sociological Perspective 362

- The Nature and Types of Educational Systems 362
 - Education in Comparative and Historical Perspective* 362
 - The Emergence of Modern Educational Systems* 364
- Theoretical Interpretations of the American Educational System 366
 - The Functionalist Theory* 366
 - A Marxian Conflict Theory: Bowles and Gintis* 367
 - A Weberian Conflict Theory: Randall Collins* 369
 - The Marxian and Weberian Theories Compared and Evaluated* 371
- The World Educational Explosion 372
 - World Educational Expansion Since 1950* 372
 - Qualificationism at a World Level* 373
 - Explaining the Worldwide Growth of Qualificationism* 377
- Some Suggestions for Educational Reform 378
- Summary 379
- Special Topic: The Emergence of an Overeducated Society 380
- For Further Reading 382

CHAPTER 19

The Forms and Functions of Religious Belief and Action 383

- The Nature of Religion 384
- The Evolution of Religion 386
 - Bellah's Evolutionary Scheme* 386
 - Wallace's Evolutionary Scheme* 387
 - Studies of the Evolution of Religion* 389
- Religion and Politics 390
 - The Marxian View* 390
 - Weber's Contribution* 391

Evidence in Support of Marx and Weber 392

- Revitalization and Millenarian Movements 393
 - Jewish Military Messianism and the Origins of Christianity* 394
 - Millenarian Movements in Medieval Europe* 396
 - Cargo Cults in Melanesia* 398
 - Revitalization Movements Among North American Indians* 399
 - A Contemporary Millenarian Movement* 399
 - Theoretical Recapitulation* 400
- Types of Religious Organization in Modern Industrial Societies 401
- The Future of Religion 403
- Summary 407
- Special Topic: Religion as the Worship of Society 408
- For Further Reading 409

CHAPTER 20

The Social Foundations of Science 410

- A Brief Historical Sketch of Western Science 411
 - The Scientific Achievements of the Greeks* 411
 - The Scientific Revolution in Western Europe* 413
- Explanations for the Emergence and Growth of Science 416
 - The Merton Thesis: Protestantism and Science* 416
 - Materialist Explanations* 417
 - A World-System Explanation* 418
- Social Influences on the Content of Science 420
 - Some Dubious Proposals* 421
 - Some Reasonable Proposals* 422
- Norms and Interests in the Behavior of Scientists 424
- Summary 425

Special Topic: Rationality and Progress in
Science 427

For Further Reading 430

CHAPTER 21

Whither Humankind? The Future of Sociocultural Evolution 432

The Past 10,000 Years: Cultural
Progress? 432

The Standard of Living 433

*The Quantity and Quality of
Work* 434

Equality 436

Democracy and Freedom 437

The Concept of Progress Revisited 438

A Look at the Future: Perspectives from the
Classical Sociologists 438

Marx and Socialism 439

Durkheim and Individualism 440

Weber and Rationalization 442

A Look at the Future: Two Contemporary
Perspectives 443

A Pessimistic View: Robert Heilbroner 443

A Critique of the Pessimistic View 445

An Optimistic View: L. S. Stavrianos 447

Conclusion: The Future from the Perspective
of a General Theory of History 448

Summary 449

Special Topic: The Rise of a Postindustrial
Society? 450

For Further Reading 452

Glossary 453

Bibliography 465

Illustration Credits 487

Name Index 489

Subject Index 493