

# **‘Functional differentiation and sectors: between Sociology and International Relations’**

**Mathias Albert and Barry Buzan**

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Contacts: [mathias.albert@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:mathias.albert@uni-bielefeld.de); [b.g.buzan@lse.ac.uk](mailto:b.g.buzan@lse.ac.uk)

## **1. Introduction**

Within the international system of states, functional differentiation does not seem to exist: in fact, the lack of functional differentiation between states as ‘like units’ is one of the main characteristics Kenneth Waltz employs to describe the international system in his Theory of International Politics (Waltz, 1979: 97). However, it is noteworthy that Waltz describes the international system not only through the properties it has (such as an anarchical structure), but also through a property it lacks (i.e. the functional differentiation between its units). The prominence which Waltz accords to pointing out that there is no functional differentiation in the international system of states only seems to make sense against a background assumption that the international system forms an exception to other kinds of social systems in which functional differentiation would be expected as a rule. This assumption should not come as a surprise given that Waltz developed his theory in an intellectual environment strongly influenced by a resurgence of the theory of functional differentiation in the North American social sciences in the 1960s, most notably in and through the works of Talcott Parsons (who claimed that his description of society as a functionally differentiated social system of action would generally apply to all social systems, but did not spell it out for the international system).

In readings of Waltz’ work the possibility of some kind of functional differentiation between the units of the interstate system has repeatedly been raised (see, for example, Ruggie, 1983; Buzan/Jones/Little, 1993: 238-40; Sørensen, 2000). However, it is noteworthy that most conceptualizations which challenge the idea that international relations could adequately be described in terms of an anarchically structured system of states have tended to neglect the issue of functional differentiation when it comes to describing the basic characteristics of international or world society. Instead, they

propose to interpret the international system as either a distinct realm or a logic of action (Albert/Brock, 2006) which exists in addition and next to those of international society, or as an international or world society (Buzan, 2004). Even Wendt (1999: 256, 356), one of the leading sociological critics of the neorealist's anarchy assumption, makes only passing reference to FD. This is all the more surprising as functional differentiation continues to serve as one of the main leading concepts employed by classic as well as contemporary sociological theory in order to describe modern society(ies).

However, although upon first impression the concept of functional differentiation is not treated explicitly, let alone systematically, in analyses of international society and world society (with the exception of IR readings of the Luhmannian concept of world society; see Albert/Hilkermeier, 2004), it is implicit as a theme in that it is common practice in IR to try to simplify the study of the discipline's subject by approaching it in terms of sectors defined along broadly functional lines. While conceptual discussions of the notion of 'sectors' in IR are still relatively rare (but see below), sectoral analysis marks a wide-spread practice in IR which refers to approaching the international system in terms of the types of activities, units, interactions and structures within it. The use of terms such as 'the international economic system' or 'the international political system' indicate thinking in terms of sectoral divisions of the subject as does the term international society itself. Realists from Morgenthau to Waltz talk firmly in terms of political theory, assuming that dividing the subject into sectors is a necessary condition for effective theory-building. Michael Mann (1986: ch. 1) thinks about power in terms of sector-like distinctions amongst ideology, economic, military and political power. Despite the prevalence of thinking about the social world in terms of sectors, exactly what this means has received much less discussion in the IR theory literature than levels of analysis (Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993: 30-33; Buzan and Little, 2000: 68-77).

The present paper starts from this observation that although quite a range of IR theories think broadly in terms of a functional differentiation into sectors, this sectoral differentiation is mostly employed as a heuristic device, whereas the full theoretical background and analytical potential of the concept of functional differentiation in IR remain little understood. It seeks to provide a reading of some basic tenets of sociological theories of functional differentiation in order to assess whether and to what degree these can be employed in order to refine our understanding of how international system, international society, and world society are differentiated into sectors. In the process, one has to bear in mind that the division between international system, international society, and world society in itself partly reflects some kind of functional differentiation, thus forcing open the question, central to the debates in Sociology, of what 'whole' it is that is thus differentiated (more on Sociology's 'unity of difference' later). In so doing, however, the aim is not simply to 'import' a sociological concept into IR, but also to assess the limits of its applicability to a field

on which Sociology itself has by and large either avoided discussion, or at times even dabbled in amateurishly without engaging with IR literature (Parsons, 1961). With the notable exception of some historical sociologists (Mann, Wallerstein, Tilly, Hobson, Reus-Smit), and more arguably Luhmann (on which more below) Sociology as a discipline has been largely driven by two assumptions: 1) that societies are composed of individual human beings; and 2) that societies can be understood using organic metaphors from biology. Both of these assumptions have worked to block sociologists from thinking about international societies. The assumption that societies must be composed of individuals precludes thinking about a society of states, where the units are collective entities. The organic metaphor presupposes that societies are cohesive entities and opens the fruitful path into analyzing their development in terms of functional differentiation (with complex organisms/societies being more functionally differentiated than primitive ones). The organic metaphor also opens up the idea that the coherence or unity of society is based on how its functionally differentiated subsystems relate to each other. For these reasons, and rather like political theory, most of mainstream Sociology is more concerned about what goes on within collective entities than between them. We thus end up with a division of labour ridiculous even by academic standards in which sociologists have become interested in the state, and international politics people have taken up the study of international society.

The argument will proceed in six steps. In the next section we outline some basic ideas of functional differentiation from the sociological literature. Rather than provide a full introduction to what constitutes one of the main themes of classical and modern sociological thought, we focus on those aspects of functional differentiation which seem to be relevant for the analysis of social relations beyond the realm of the nation-state. In section 3 we inspect the conceptualization of functional differentiation and sectors in the IR literature. We show how Waltz's narrowing of the term functional differentiation blocked off a proper discussion of the concept in IR. Sectors in IR are closer to functional differentiation, but there is still a significant gap between an increasingly wide-spread application of sectoral analysis in IR and the relative brevity of explicit conceptual discussions on the subject matter. In section 4 we start to draw together the discussion of functional differentiation from Sociology and sectors from IR by examining three underlying questions: What is the 'whole' that is disaggregated into functions or sectors? Do the things that result from this disaggregation have ontological or analytical status? And how do levels of analysis fit into thinking in terms of functional differentiation. [This paper only covers the first two questions and not the third]

Section 5 [not yet written] will apply the more unified sense of functional differentiation and sectors to clarifying the various uses of the notions of 'system' and 'society' afloat in Sociology and International Relations.

Section 6 [not yet written] will explore whether structural transformations in international/world society could, on a systems level, be adequately described in terms

of a competition between/transformation of forms of primary and secondary differentiation.

Section 7 [not yet written] will reflect on what the relationship between Sociology and IR should be: competitors or (somewhat strange) bedfellows?

## 2. Functional Differentiation in Sociological Theory

Functionalism, and in this context ideas about the functional differentiation (hereafter FD) in and of society, form one of the big ‘meta-narratives’ of sociological theory, next to concepts such as modernization or rationalization (see Thomas, forthcoming). The origins of functionalist thought can be traced back to the works of Herbert Spencer (1966), who in fact formulated elements of a theory of social evolution well before Darwin did so for the natural world. Spencer not only formulated the basis, but actually preceded many later modern theories of differentiation in that he shifted the imagery from the question of how some kind of (incoherent) homogeneity in the social world is established and preserved, to the question of how society functions and evolves as a (coherent) heterogeneity:

The advance of organization which thus follows the advance of aggregation, alike in individual organisms and in social organisms, conforms in both cases to the same general law: differentiations proceed from the more general to the more special. First broad and simple contrasts of parts; then within each of the parts primarily contrasted, changes which make unlike divisions of them; then within each of these unlike divisions, minor unlikelinesses; and so on continually (Spencer, 1966: §230).

While the general idea that society is to be conceived of as some kind of ‘organic whole’ lies at the basis of sociological thought, it should be noted that this analogy was partly due to the efforts of the early sociologists to establish sociology as a ‘respected’ science in relation to the natural sciences (see Turner/Maryanski, 1979: 5). However, it firmly establishes the problem of the unity of the social at the heart of sociological theory: what legitimizes thinking of ‘society’ as something ‘hanging together’ in any meaningful sense? And what legitimizes upholding an assumption of even a minimal unity if a high degree of diversity and differentiation of society is acknowledged (the ‘unity-in-diversity’/unitas multiplex-problematique)? This question becomes particularly pertinent if one of the most obvious answers accounting for the unity of society, the idea that society essentially forms a national society, is relinquished.

At the heart of classical sociological thought, starting with Spencer and Comte, and

particularly developed further by Durkheim and Weber, lies the thought that society as some kind of a 'whole' is differentiated. While different forms of differentiation may coexist and vary over time - the main forms to be identified in history being stratificatory, segmentary, and FD - modern industrial society is particularly characterized by the form of FD. Using an over-simplifying image, FD expresses an ongoing 'division of labor' (Durkheim), i.e. the idea that specialized parts of society, e.g. politics, law, the economy etc., fulfill functions for society and thus allow for a more efficient reproduction of society than would be possible without functional specialization. While by and large the diagnosis that society is characterized by FD is unchallenged (although not the degree to which this is the case nor the relation between functional and other forms of differentiation), the answers as to what it is that holds society together despite the centrifugal tendency of an ongoing differentiation vary widely. Most refer to some kind of common value system or, more abstractly, some kind of 'community' necessarily underlying a society.

It seems fair to say that this relatively simple idea of a somehow preexisting social whole named 'society', permanently being torn apart by the tendencies of an ever-increasing specialization/FD yet held together by an underlying community, forms the background of classical sociological thought. Much of functionalist thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been dealing with two basic problems inherent in this simple model: first, the idea of FD leaves open whether what is at stake is primarily a process, describing the evolution of society, or whether in fact it primarily describes the way society is structured. Second, and intimately related to this problem is the relation between functional and causal analysis. Although identified as separate by Durkheim, yet difficult to separate in practice, functional analyses over time are full of a conflation between these two questions. Yet: 'Causal analysis asks: Why does the structure in question exist and reveal certain properties? Functional analysis asks: What need of the larger systems does the structure meet? To confuse the two questions is to invite an illegitimate teleology where consequences cause the events producing them' (Turner/Maryanski, 1979: 17-8). From these two basic problems follows a third, which will become of particular importance when we later turn to the issue of societies other than nation-state societies, relating to the question of whether to speak of FD primarily refers to a FD in society, or a FD of society. The difference is more than a minor semantic issue as it addresses the question of whether society can indeed be seen as some historically pre-existing whole in which at some point processes of FD take off. Or whether it is actually processes of FD, i.e. the emergence of recognizably different spheres of politics, law, economics, religion etc. which account for the existence of society as a 'social whole' in the first place (see Nassehi, 2004).

While the aforementioned problems represent basic challenges to theories of FD, they have been dealt with in innovative ways by a number of functionalist thinkers (although they arguably still lie at the heart of much functionalist thought when it is applied to a global level, a point to which we will return below). The most comprehensive reformulation and further development of early functionalist thought,

which also offers innovative solutions to at least the first two of the three problems mentioned, was provided in the work of Talcott Parsons. . A few elements of Parsons' work stand out in the present context because they provide a necessary bridge to understanding the later, more radical reformulation of the theory of FD by Niklas Luhmann. Simplifying to the extreme, Parsons arrived at his version of functional analysis primarily through his analysis of the Structure of Social Action (1961b) and the leading question of why social structures representing regular, institutionalized patterns of interaction persist. His (and Smelser's; see Parsons/Smelser, 1956) answer lead him to develop the famous 'AGIL'-scheme, according to which adaptation (A), goal attainment (G), integration (I) and latency (L) are basic problems which a social system has continuously to address and solve in order to reproduce itself (i.e. to survive). This leads Parsons to analyze social structure in functional terms regarding how they manage to address these requirements (which are requirements every social system must address, i.e. also every subsystem of a larger system for which it might address only one of these problems). In his analysis of how social systems operate and how they are related to each other, Parsons then sees that a main characteristic of modern society is that the social systems serving different functions increasingly operate independently from each other. This is neither a causal, nor an ontological statement, but purely a statement on the operation of social systems, a statement which can only be understood on the basis of a highly consequential theoretical innovation in the later work of Parsons: in the end, Parsons claims that the relation between interaction systems is purely informational in the sense that it is expressed in symbolically generalized media of exchange such as money or power. Returning to the three basic problems mentioned above, Parsons' at least implicit answer to the first two is quite clear. On the one hand, he combines structural and processual analysis: functional realms of society and the structures which they entail are constantly reproduced by addressing the problems of 'AGIL'. On the other hand, while social systems can be analyzed and usefully described by functional analysis, FD is in the end caused by social interaction which, by definition, can fail to solve the problems of AGIL; functional analysis is thus not conflated with causal analysis.

However, Parsons is much less clear on the third problem mentioned above, i.e. the problem of FD in vs. a FD of society, as in the end he remains ambiguous as to what the society/social system is which he addresses. This ambiguity stems from two sources: on the one hand, the answer which Parsons gives to the question of what holds society together in spite of an ongoing process of FD is quite clear: a 'societal community' with underlying shared worldviews and values is required to constitute society as an integrated whole despite a high degree of inherent heterogeneity. On the other hand, Parsons – as probably the first sociological theorist of FD – claims that his analysis applies to all social systems and thus can at least in some part be applied to the international system which he sees as a social system (see Parsons, 1999). However, he neither conducts an analysis of the international system himself, nor does he provide an answer as to what could serve as the necessary equivalent to the societal

community (i.e. in most cases the idea of a ‘nation’) in the international system, thus concluding that while his theory of social systems is universally applicable, the international system remains but a social system, not a society. **[further elaboration of Parsons goes here]** This situation changes with the further development of the theory of FD and its merger with a theory of social systems by Niklas Luhmann. In one important respect, Luhmann’s work represents a further development and a radicalization of Parsonian thought: building on Parson’s idea that social interaction is expressed through symbolically generalized media of exchange, Luhmann argues that because what is accessible to the observer are not minds but only communication, society itself is based on – and only based on – communication (and people appear only as ‘persons’, i.e. addresses of communication). Already from this basic conceptual move follows one far-reaching consequence: if society is constituted by communication (and all communication is by definition then part of society; there can be no ‘non-social’ communication), then ‘society’, at least since the full discovery of the globe, can only be thought of as world society, since, at least in principle, all potential communication is in reach of all other communication. World society in this sense is thus the highest-order social system conceivable. **[further elaboration of Luhmann goes here]**

Luhmann argues that world society is primarily differentiated functionally – and, following from what has been said so far, only ‘exists’ on the basis of this FD because this form is the one through which social systems primarily observe their difference from other social systems. This does of course not preclude other forms of differentiation serving as forms of self-observation of social systems. Thus, Luhmann (2000a: 189ff) argues, the function system of politics primarily observes itself as being internally differentiated in a segmentary fashion (i.e. into formally equal sovereign states). In addition, this figure of thought allows him to identify the relation between and the changing relevance of different forms of differentiation as one of the most interesting questions for analyzing macro-historical change on a global level. Although we will turn on the question on how this translates into IR thought further below, it should be noted here already that seeing society as a world society which is differentiated functionally, with other forms of differentiation having a secondary character or being the main forms of differentiation within individual function systems means that the entire logic of this kind of theorizing barely leaves any space for the traditional notion of ‘levels’ commonly employed in IR theory. The argument here is exactly not that territoriality (i.e. segmentary differentiation) would provide the most powerful and constraining environment of all social systems, but that this is only the case for the international differentiation of some function systems (most notably the political system, partly the legal system). Of course, within function systems different levels of structure formation do exist, but these are mostly conceptualized in terms of inclusive rather than in terms of exclusive hierarchies. (Communicative) operations within the political systems thus understood are in this sense not operations on either the nation-state, or the local, or the international etc. level, but at least in principle

could operate at all levels at the same time. ‘Levels’ in this sense are forms through which a system observes and through semantic figures describes itself.

This overview of some basic tenets of the evolution of ideas on the FD of society does not claim to provide a comprehensive picture of numerous different theories of FD. But it has elaborated and highlighted a number of basic argumentative threads which can usefully be employed for further discussions as to the applicability of theories of FD beyond the realm of the nation-state:

First, FD describes an important aspect of modern society(ies). Modern society is characterized by the emergence and the evolution of functionally differentiated realms. It is however an open question and in part depends on the choice of the specific version of a theory of FD as to which functionally differentiated realms can in fact be identified. Politics, law, economics would seem to be largely undisputed candidates here. What is identified as a distinct function system depends on whether it evolves a ‘basal code’ (e.g. powerful/non-powerful in the political system; legal/illegal in the legal system) according to which all communication is processed and a symbolically generalized medium of communication (e.g. power in the political system, money in the economic system) which allows this processing to proceed in a highly abstract fashion. Luhmann himself identifies and analyses a number of function systems in monographic works (the politics, the education, the economy, the art, and the law of society), and quite some energy of contemporary Luhmann-followers is spent on debates of whether other realms, such as the military or war qualify for distinct, operatively closed function systems (see, for example, Harste, 2004). Anticipating our discussion in the next section it seems worthwhile to note, however, that the notion of a ‘societal’ function system would make no sense in the context of Luhmann’s theory, as society is the unity which is achieved through the FD of systems and cannot thus be regarded as a function system itself (it would also seem to be difficult to identify the basal code upon which a societal function system would process meaning; MA: but this is certainly a point we need to return to; maybe even not raise it here and only later when the idea of a ‘societal sector’ has been introduced?). [BB to MA – I strongly agree we should delete the underlined text from here. I disagree that it is difficult to identify the basal code for society: surely it is ‘us/them’. Where does L put that code if he wants to reserve society for the whole?]

Second, although FD is the prime form of the differentiation of modern society, it neither supersedes nor fully displaces other forms of differentiation (e.g. segmentary, stratificatory etc.). However, the question as to what role different forms of differentiation play in relation to each other and how this relation changes over time is an essentially empirical one. Different answers need to be given here for (world) society as a whole and for specific functionally differentiated realms.

Third, although sometimes difficult to separate in practice and therefore sometimes conflated, most theorists of FD would not claim that functional analysis represents a form of causal analysis as well. Theories of FD which are functional analyses in a

narrower sense ask about the function which specific subsets of society serve for society as a whole. Particularly in Luhmann's theory even this assumption that function systems serve a function for a 'whole' of society is abandoned as there is no (world) society as a 'whole' apart from it being functionally differentiated.

Fourth, and immediately following from the last remark, theories of FD force open the question of what the unity of the observed subject, i.e. a society, is. While early sociologists treated society as some kind of organism, the focus quickly changed on why such a heterogeneous thing as a society, characterized by an increasing FD/specialization could legitimately be treated as one. Most answers to this puzzle refer to some kind of normative integration holding together the functionally differentiated parts (whereas again Luhmann also parts with this solution).

From what has been said so far it should be clear that in relation to theories of FD, Luhmann's contribution marks a turning point in many respects as he relinquishes and in fact replaces many of the basic theoretical underpinnings of (functionalist) social theorizing. Yet it is of course neither the aim of this contribution to discuss the basic merits of different sociological versions of theories of FD, nor to provide a fully-fledged introduction to its more complex versions. What we have sought to accomplish is to establish an overview of some basic tenets of theories of FD in order to assess the possible ways in which they can enrich the study of international relations. This implies that we will not opt for one or another version of a theory of FD, but will use the array of such theories as a toolbox, the main selection criterion being the helpfulness in seeing international relations from a different perspective rather than theoretical stringency. This 'toolbox' view also implies that although we will in the following explore the value added by applying theories of FD to the study of IR, this is not to suggest that (functional) differentiation would represent the only and possibly not even the most important 'mega-trend' in the evolution of (world) society: 'Obviously, not all social change is differentiation' (Alexander, 1990: 1). We basically view FD as one trend and analytical figure which we assess regarding its uses in IR. We do so conscious of the fact that with the concept of FD we do not address a mere fad of contemporary sociological thought which could somehow be 'applied to' IR, but a central idea in modern sociology's analysis of society which, at first impression, has been all but ignored in IR's use of the notion of 'society'. The next section will further prepare the ground and evaluate whether and to what degree this analytical figure – contrary to the first impression of wholesale neglect – is already contained or at least partially reflected in explicit or implicit uses of sectoral analyses.

### **3. Functional Differentiation and Sectors in IR Theory**

What is clear from the discussion so far is that, excluding Luhmann, sociologists have developed a sophisticated view of differentiation in general, and FD in particular, within social entities that already possess a substantial degree of cohesion. The

existence of social cohesion is the central issue for all forms of society. Even simple segmentary societies are understood as societies because they share beliefs and sentiments, in Durkheim's concept, a *collective conscience* (Larkins, 1994: 242-3; Jones, 2000: 211-12). Because this debate has until recently been rooted in the domestic, unit level, it has been possible to marginalise the issue of territoriality, which effectively becomes a given at the unit level. Territoriality is largely handled in historical terms, being characterised as the most primitive form of differentiation (*segmentary*) where all the units are internally alike (Luhmann, 1990: 423-5). This position looks almost identical to Waltz's presentation, itself derived from Durkheim's distinction between *mechanical* and *organic* societies, of like units under anarchy with the difference that sociologists, from Durkheim to Luhmann, still see the whole as a form of society, while Waltz sees it only as a system. Few sociologists have attempted to push beyond the unit level into the international one, and those that do necessarily carry with them the idea that the international whole is still some sort of society, albeit a thinner one in which primitive segmentary differentiation remains prominent. Luhmann is something of an exception here, with the communicative subsystems of his world society largely operating globally, and thereby eliminating territoriality top down rather than bottom up. Certainly Durkheim, with his strong commitment to the idea of 'social facts', saw this differentiation in ontological terms (Larkins, 1994: 244; Jones, 2000: 208-9). This picture becomes more blurred with later sociologists, with some, such as Parsons, shifting to a more analytical perspective (see Goddard and Nexon, 2005: 15, 17, 22-4), although this shift is not as clear-cut as it may appear at first sight (see the discussion in section 4 below). In a nutshell, and to the extent that mainstream sociologists have bothered with the international domain at all, they have proceeded by scaling up their analysis of differentiation from the domestic level and projecting it onto the international level as a weaker, less coherent type of society. Although writers in the tradition of 'historical sociology', e.g. Michael Mann (1986) and Charles Tilly (1990), form a notable exception to this relative neglect of the international domain, their work is also characterized as atypical for sociological theory in that they do *not* take up the issue of FD in order to explain the evolution of international social orders, their work in fact being closer to a realist type of state-centric IPE system analysis. What is particularly noteworthy in this respect is that historical sociologists, and especially Michael Mann, have argued that 'society' does not form an integrated 'totality' of any sort, but does in fact gain its totality and integrity from referring to other concepts, such as the state or a nation.

It is not stretching the truth too far to say that this whole sociological approach is almost the opposite of that taken in mainstream Anglo-Saxon IR theory, though the two do touch at a number of interesting points. The nature of this oppositeness might be captured as follows:

- Sociology starts from in an 'inside' perspective, looking at the structure of something already given as qualifying to be a society, while IRT mainly starts from a concern with the 'outside', thinking of this mainly in terms of system, with some

debate about whether some or all of such systems can or should be thought of as societies.

- For sociologists, societies are always composed of people (or for Luhmann communication which conceives persons as ‘addresses of communication’). In IR, those who want to talk about society at all divide into those most interested in the society of states (second order societies, in which states are the units of *international society*) and those focusing on various versions of *world society*, which may be understood as being either composed of all the individuals comprising humankind, or as being a mix of individuals, non-state actors and states.
- Sociology has largely marginalised the territorial factor, whereas IRT has made it the central factor.
- Closely related to territoriality is that while Sociology has taken a holistic view of society embracing the full spectrum of human activities, IRT has focused mainly on politics (being sometimes known on this account as ‘International Politics’ rather than IR).
- As a consequence of giving primacy to politics, such explicit discussion of FD as exists in IRT is almost entirely confined within the political sector, rather than, as in Sociology, where the political sector itself would be seen as but one among many types resulting from FD. This narrowing to the military-political sphere, explains why IRT of this type (with the exception of the English school, and more recently of constructivists) has been more attracted to the mechanistic concept of *system* rather than the sociological one of *society*.
- Sociology, with the possible exception of the radically constructivist theory of Luhmann and although quite often not dealing with the issue explicitly, has mainly worked by giving functionally differentiated subsystems ontological status (see also section 4 below). The position in IR is considerably less clear cut, but we will argue that the dominant approach there has been to treat this type of functional distinction as mainly analytical rather than ontological.
- Because of its holistic perspective, and despite its *de facto* weddedness to the unit level, Sociology is relatively insensitive to, and disinterested in, levels of analysis, preferring to deploy FD as a unifying framework for analysis. IRT, by contrast, springs mainly from a concern about levels, and has either explicitly excluded FD (Waltz), or hardly thought about it in a wider sense. This difference is perhaps explainable by the concern with territoriality (which easily leads to thinking about levels) in IRT, and the disinterest in this in Sociology.

If one looks for analogues of Sociology’s FD in IR theory, three loosely related elements stand out:

1. Waltz’s direct importation of FD from Durkheim, and his specifically political interpretation of it, and the literature which developed from that (Ruggie, 1983,

1993; Cerny, 1993; Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993; Buzan and Little, 1994, 1996; Larkins, 1994; Barkdull, 1995; Buzan and Little, 2000; Goddard and Nexon, 2005).

2. The persistent, but rather poorly focused, awareness that because IRT is dominated by a perspective from international politics (and military), there must also be room for other disciplinary approaches to ‘the international (system)’ through economics, sociology, law, history, and increasingly environmental studies.
3. The discussion of what has been labelled *sectors*, which began as a response to the moves to widen the agenda of International Security Studies beyond military concerns, and gravitated to a more general application to IR theory.

In this section we will consider the first and third of these, leaving the second until section x.

### *The debate on Waltz’s functional differentiation*

Waltz is as ever a useful reference point because he is extremely clear about where he stands. His theory is entirely one of ‘international politics’. Using Durkheim as a foil, and levels of analysis as a weapon, Waltz first confines FD to the functions of government (essentially therefore about sovereignty) (Buzan and Little, 2000: 87-8). He then adopts a definition that relegates FD to hierarchic systems, and banishes it from anarchic ones (Waltz, 1979: 104, 115, 197; 1986: 323-30; 2004: 98-9). This move privileges territoriality along the lines of segmentary societies in Sociology, but at the same time removes the social element, reducing the status of the whole to a mere system (Larkins, 1994, 249-53; Barkdull, 1995: 674-6). In this sense, Waltz’s theory is fairly compatible with Sociology at the domestic level, but excludes it from the international level. It could of course be argued that at least implicitly Waltz is fully compatible with the notion of a functionally differentiated world society in that he argues for an analysis of the operations of a functionally differentiated ‘subsystem’ of politics. Thus understood, a theory of international politics only makes sense if in the first place international politics can be identified as a realm which can be analyzed independently of, for example, the economy, religion, law, or science. In this sense, Waltz’s theory rests on the assumption that at some point in history FD occurred.

Not taking this meta-level view, the implications of which we will return to further below, but operating *within* Waltz’s narrow political understanding of FD, Ruggie famously argued for reinserting FD into the international anarchic realm on the grounds that Waltz had misread ‘differentiation’ to mean difference, whereas it should mean ‘the principles on the basis of which the constituent units are separated’ (Ruggie, 1983: 274; Barkdull, 1995: 672-4). Ruggie then showed how this interpretation could be applied to the transition from mediaeval to modern, and thus be used to distinguish between different types of international anarchy. This idea was then taken forward by

Barkdull (1995), and Buzan and Little (1996; 2000), who applied it to the whole canvas of world history to identify and classify various types of anarchy.

Waltz and Ruggie also contested over the role of another Durkheim concept, *dynamic density* (what Buzan later called ‘interaction capacity’: Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993: 66-80) and the role of increasing social interaction in generating structural change in society. Although somewhat distinct from the debate about FD, dynamic density does tie into FD inasmuch as rising levels of dynamic density become a, possibly the, driving force pushing societies from segmentary to functionally differentiated form (Barkdull, 1994: 669-74). Although Larkins (1994: 249) dismisses dynamic density as a weak concept, it is clearly central to Durkheim’s scheme. As Jones (2000: 212) argues, Durkheim claimed it as a ‘law of human societies’ that ‘the division of labour varies in direct ratio to the dynamic and moral density of society, which is itself an effect of both material density and social volume’. This is an essentially materialist theory claiming that as contact and interaction increase, and the numbers of people in the society increases, the social structure moves from simple and segmentary to a more complex division of labour. As Ruggie, Barkdull, and Buzan and Little all see it, by importing Durkheim’s model Waltz necessarily brought with it a logic that must inevitably drive society from mechanical/segmentary/simple (like units) to organic/functionally differentiated/complex. Doing so undermines one of the key elements in Waltz’s theory: that anarchy (i.e. a mechanical/segmentary/simple social structure) is a stable and self-reproducing form. Durkheim’s theory of dynamic density opens Waltz’s scheme to the arguments of interdependence theorists and globalisationists that the rapid increase in material density and social volume is the defining feature of the contemporary international system. That logic points to the instability of anarchic structure, opening the door to those such as Milner (1991) and Cerny (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) who want to argue that the international system is indeed transforming from a simple anarchy with no FD into at least the beginnings of a division of labour in which FD in both Waltz’s narrow sense, and the wider one of Sociology, is becoming more conspicuous. This threatens not only the stability of Waltz’s anarchy, but also his confinement of FD to the political sphere. As Barkdull (1995: 672-4) notes, Waltz attempts to escape from this dilemma by pushing dynamic density back to the unit level. This trick, of course, reveals already that Waltz has transposed Durkheim’s scheme from the domestic level of Sociology to the international one of IR. And Barkdull is also right that the trick is not convincing. Buzan, and Buzan and Little (Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993: 66-80; Buzan and Little, 2000) have demonstrated at length that interaction capacity is a system property as well as a unit level one.

Although this IRT debate had its roots in Sociology, with Waltz and Ruggie both arguing from Durkheim, there seems to have been no consideration at all of whether the transposition of Durkheim’s structural logic from Sociology (and therefore the unit level) to IR (and therefore the system level) might itself be problematic. Ruggie (1983: 262) did note that Waltz was using Durkheim’s structuralism ‘in the

study of a social domain never contemplated by Durkheim', but then says no more on the subject. Waltz (2004: 99) retrospectively acknowledges that Durkheim was not writing about international politics, but slides away from pursuing the point by simply accepting the analogy as valid. Both those who followed Waltz in excluding FD from international anarchies, and those who followed Ruggie in including it, subsequently accepted both Waltz's transposition and his narrow political interpretation of what FD was about in the context of international anarchic structures. The Sociological, and unit level, origins of all this were forgotten as IR proceeded with its own form of debate about political FD. In retrospect, this act of forgetting may have been a mistake, or at least a lost opportunity, and it is worth picking up Ruggie's point by looking more closely at the legitimacy of the transposition.

Waltz (2004: 99) simply takes Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic societies and transposes it directly, saying that mechanical ones (with like units each fulfilling all political functions and therefore no FD) represent 'the anarchic order of international politics' and organic ones (with unlike units operating in a division of labour) 'the hierarchic order of domestic politics' (Barkdull, 1995: 674-6). Waltz (2004: 99) also follows Durkheim's analysis that structural transformation from mechanical to organic is a conflict-laden process which establishes forms of stratification in addition to FD. Here the stronger units in the mechanical society impose a division of labour (i.e. subordination) on the weaker ones thus imposing both hierarchy and FD. To gain some perspective on this transposition it is useful to step back from Durkheim and locate his mechanical/organic dyad in the broader stream of sociological debate about differentiation. As noted in section 2, there are three principal modes of differentiation in the sociological debates:

1. *segmentary*, in which every social subsystem is the equal of, and functionally similar to every other social subsystem (e.g. families, bands, clans, tribes); a segmentary form of differentiation is the one most prone to be organized in terms of territorial delimitations, although this is not necessarily so;
2. *stratificatory*, in which some social subsystems raise themselves above others, creating a rank-ordered hierarchical social order (e.g. in feudal or caste or aristocratic or military social orders); or
3. *functional*, in which the subsystems are defined by the coherence of particular types of activity and their differentiation from other types of activity, and these differences do not stem simply from rank (e.g. a division of labour among legal, political, military, economic, etc.) (see Luhmann, 1990: 423-5)..

According to Luhmann (1990: 425), and as is explicit in Durkheim's theory discussed above, these three tiers form a sequence in that the higher tiers depend for their existence on having developed out of, and overcoming, the one that came before. The sequence is thus both historical (from primitive to modern and postmodern) and qualitative (from simple to complex) - although it should be noted that the sequencing is not necessarily linear and exclusive: social orders can be characterized by the co-presence of different forms of differentiation. This co-presence is clearly illustrated by

those IR discussions already mentioned above (Cerny, 1993; Milner, 1991; Buzan and Little, 2000) that see the contemporary international system as containing segmentary and functional differentiations, not to mention the many IR works that combine segmentary (anarchic) and stratificatory elements (great power privilege, hegemonic stability, American 'empire'). Two things to keep in mind are: first that the whole sociological apparatus is about societies which are presupposed to have some measure of social cohesion (i.e. they are models of the 'domestic' level; both the assumption of social cohesion as a necessary condition for keeping society 'together' despite their differentiation as well as the limitation to the domestic level are abandoned explicitly only in Luhmann's theory); and second that it is about FD across the whole spectrum of human activities, not just within the political sphere as in the Waltzian part of the IR debates.

Durkheim's dyad of mechanical/organic is but one waystation within this broader sociological picture. His mechanical society transposes pretty neatly onto segmentary, but his organic one is either effectively a jump to FD (given Durkheim's interest in the division of labour), or a conflation of stratificatory and FD. Either way, the difference between Durkheim's dyad and Sociology's triad matters when it comes to Waltz's transposition. Because Waltz has narrowed the meaning of FD down into the purely political (functions of government, sovereignty), his reading of Durkheim can only go from segmentary (sovereign like units in an anarchic structure) to stratificatory (a rank-ordered political hierarchy). Being purely political, Waltz's 'FD' is not, and cannot be, FD in the sociological meaning. It can only be stratificatory differentiation. In this sense Waltz's political understanding of 'FD' leads exactly to the political differentiation within anarchy that Ruggie (1983, 1993) developed in his thinking about the mediaeval system and the EU, Watson (1990, 1992) developed in his pendulum theory of international order, and Buzan and Little (1996; 2000) developed about political differentiation in world history from empires, city-states and barbarians to the centre-periphery structure of European colonialism. Stratificatory differentiation opens up precisely the blurring of anarchy and hierarchy that Waltz was so keen to avoid. It turns out that there is no need to argue about, or choose between, Waltz's understanding of differentiation as difference, and Ruggie's understanding of it as the principles of separation. Both are right. Whether in a stratificatory or a functional differentiation, the constituent units will be both different from each other, and ordered by a principle of separation (e.g. suzerains and vassals, metropolises and colonies). Beyond the segmentary/mechanical model, it is almost impossible to imagine circumstances in which the existence of principles of separation would not require units to be functionally different, and vice versa.

Although it opens up some interesting insights, this repositioning of Waltz still leaves unanswered the legitimacy of the whole transposition of Durkheim to the international system in the first place. The near silence on this point is deeply ironic given that it is fundamentally a question about levels of analysis, an issue on which IRT is well primed, and about which Waltz is the undisputed king. Yet in this instance

Waltz simply assumes that the basic structural idea will apply regardless of level. How tenable is this assumption? The obvious difficulty with it is that the segmentary/mechanical form is lifted from a sociological context in which it is understood as a type of *society*, and moved to an IR one in which it is understood as a mere *system*, operating mechanically as a struggle for power/survival, and effectively without any integrating social content amongst its constituent units. As Larkins (1994: 252) argues, in Durkheim's thinking, mechanical societies come with a collective conscience that defines their coherence and status as societies. Durkheim's label of *mechanical* facilitates Waltz's move, but as Ruggie's comment suggests, and as the more neutral label *segmentary* helps to underline, the segmentary/mechanical form is still understood in Sociology as a type of society. That is to say it possesses social cohesion and some sense of being a whole even if these are thin and simple/primitive in comparison with stratificatory and functionally differentiated forms. It should be noted here that Durkheim's model, linking mechanical solidarity with repressive sanctions, did not suggest that this social element was thin in mechanical societies (Jones, 2000: 211-12). If one does assume that the social cohesion in mechanical/segmentary societies is thin then the fit between segmentary societies and international anarchy is in many ways quite good. It potentially allows for the difference of interest in territoriality between Sociology (generally low) and IR (generally high), and it poses no problems about taking collective subunits (rather than individuals) as the basis for analysis. One might even argue that the distinction between a thin society and a system is mere nuance, and not worth worrying about. If this is the case, then Waltz's transposition looks reasonable even though it ends up giving IR only the primitive and simple end of Sociology's spectrum to play with.

But the nature of debate within IR suggests strongly that the distinction between even a thin society and a system is a step-level change and not just a nuance. Realism generally, and Neorealism in particular, are hostile to the idea of international society, denying it systemic status and seeing it, if acknowledging it at all, as an epiphenomenon of great powers projecting their own interests into the system as a means of facilitating their exercise of power (E.H. Carr, 1946: 80-81). Neoliberalism largely accepts this view, constructing international cooperation as rational choices by egoistic actors on specific issues, and not as reflective of any wider society. The classical English school, which was largely responsible for putting the idea of international society onto the map in IR, also contains a strong distinction between *international system* (Hobbes, realism) and *international society* (Grotius, rationalism) (Buzan, 2004: 6-10). All of this suggests that for many in mainstream IR the distinction between society and system cannot be ignored, and certainly not by neorealists such as Waltz who have legitimised their positions on sociological foundations.

If the shift from international system to international society is important, whether as an evolutionary step, or as a basic conceptualisation, or both, then Waltz's transposition across levels from the domestic society to the international system is in

trouble. Durkheim's mechanical/segmentary logic presupposes a social context, whereas Waltz's anarchic system one precisely does not. This problem, as Barkdull (1995: 674) argues, largely stems from Waltz' confusion of 'the relationship between anarchy and hierarchy on the one hand and mechanical and organic solidarity on the other'. It could thus be argued that reading Durkheim in an international context would actually support the idea that the international system, even under the 'weak' condition of mechanical solidarity, is always already a social context, i.e. an *international society*, and not a 'non-social' international system. Barkdull (1995: 677) rightly in our view, goes so far as to say that Waltz must accept international society if he wants to continue to claim Durkheim's authority for his theory.

By transposing from Durkheim, Waltz thus offers two rich gifts to his intellectual enemies. The first is that if the segmentary analogy is carried across from the domestic to the international level, then the holistic element of society must be carried with it as well. Via Durkheim, Waltz opens the door to both international and world society, validating the foundations not just of the English school but also of many constructivists. Larkins (1994: 241, 253-7) begins to explore what the Durkheimian concept of collective conscience means for the English school, pointing out that it raises serious difficulties for their volitional view of the shared norms and institutions that constitute international society. An even bigger question is whether and how ideas about society can be transposed from the essentially domestic realm of Sociology to the international realm of IR. In Sociology, it is mostly individuals which are the constitutive elements of society, and even in segmentary societies it is individuals that carry the collective conscience. Although some of IRT is reductionist in this way, much of it is based on methodological collectivism, in which states and other collective entities are treated at least as actors (e.g. neorealism), and possibly also as the members of international (or interstate) society (e.g. English school, constructivism). It is far from clear whether concepts like Durkheim's can be carried across from first order societies (individuals as members) to second order ones (collective actors as members). Thus while Durkheim's collective conscience is clearly applicable to cosmopolitan ideas about *world society*, it is not so clear that Larkins is right to assume that they apply also to interstate society, where the states themselves are the actors. In segmentary societies, the element of society is carried by the individuals sharing a common identity even though they may be members of separate, undifferentiated (like) units. That equates to cosmopolitan images of world society. But interstate society does not work that way. It is the like units of the society (states) that share identity (sovereign equality), not the individual human beings within them. This distinctive quality of the English school's international society does not as far as we can see, have any clear analogues in sociological theory at all. Rather oddly, Sociology has not developed a way of thinking about second order societies, and that is perhaps the biggest gulf between it and IR.

The second gift, as already hinted above, is that Waltz cannot really get away with squeezing everything out of Durkheim's model except politics. For better or

worse, the sociological model brings the whole spectrum of human activity with it, not just politics, but economics, law, identity and all. Though neither uses the language of FD, this validates both English school solidarists, who deal with human rights and economic issues, and globalisationists, whose mode of analysis is sufficiently multi-faceted that it begins to close the gap between how networks of complex interdependence work in the international system, and FD as understood by sociologists. By using Durkheim Waltz undermines his own narrowing to the political, and opens the way for those wanting to take a much wider view of what comprises an international system, and therefore of what IR is actually about.

We can see, therefore, that both Waltz and much of the debate around him, constitute a wrong turn in relation to the discussion of FD in IR. By reducing FD to something within politics only, Waltz and those who followed his lead basically ended up using the terminology of FD to talk about what in sociological terms would be the difference between segmentary and stratificatory societies. This wrong turn, while not quite a dead-end, has perhaps pre-empted a proper discussion of FD in IR by stealing its concepts. As we have shown, however, the gifts that Waltz gives to his opponents by rooting his argument in a transposition from Durkheim's, mean that this wrong turn does not stand in the way of IR now taking up the question of FD in its full sociological meaning. The idea that Waltz's use of Durkheim might open the door not only to international society, but also to the wider reaches of globalisation, points the way to the second analogue of FD in IR: sectors.

### *Sectors*

The concept of sectors arose in the sub-field of International Security Studies (ISS) during the last two decades of the Cold War. From the 1970s onwards, there was increasing debate about widening the agenda of international security beyond the military-political focus of the superpower rivalry to take on board a range of non-military issues. Buzan (1983) coined the term sectors to label these moves, using a set of subdivisions empirically derived from the International Security Studies (ISS) and policy debates, and close in form and meaning to the disciplinary divisions: military, political, economic, societal, environmental. Not until the early 1990s (Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993: 30-34) was a serious attempt made to think about sectors other than empirically as a simple descriptive division, a development that was carried forward both in the context of works within ISS (especially Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998: 5-8; and Wæver, Buzan and de Wilde, 2008), and IR more generally (Buzan and Little, 2000: 68-77). Sectors have now become a standard way of organizing ISS texts (Hough, 2005; Sheehan, 2005; Collins, 2006).

Although starting out just as a dumb descriptor reflecting a *de facto* FD parallel to that of social science disciplines, and with no theoretical content, sectors have now become quite explicitly theorized. The two key moves were:

1. to stage sectors as an equal complement to levels as a necessary but under-acknowledged component of IRT; and
2. using the metaphor of physical lenses, to conceptualise sectors explicitly as analytical views of the complex social whole rather than as ontological statements about it.

Despite the obvious parallel between sectors and FD, neither of these moves was at all consciously derived from Sociological debates, of which Buzan was at the time unaware. And, at first glance, they appear to take sectors in a quite contradictory direction from FD in Sociology.

The first move, reflecting the generally much stronger role of levels in IRT, stages sectors as a complement to levels and not as the dominant way in which subsystems are defined. When push came to shove in the Copenhagen school work (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998), sectors tended to get subordinated to levels. Although the processes of securitization could be analyzed by sectors, the process of securitization and policy-making by states and other actors tended to reaggregate the logics (ch. 8). And although some consideration was given to the possibility of *homogeneous* (i.e. sector specific) regional security complexes, again the logic of aggregation across sectors in defining most regional security complexes was favoured (16-18). Sectors fared somewhat better in the application to IRT more generally (Buzan and Little, 2000) where they featured as the main way of thinking about international systems.

The second move – seeing sectors as analytical – took them in a different direction from FD in Sociology, which often leans towards giving functional subsystems ontological standing. This position is made explicit by Wæver, Buzan, and de Wilde (2008):

The use of sectors/lenses, whether singly or in combination, has the advantage of highlighting, and therefore making easier to see, certain qualities of whatever is being observed. It is a way of unpacking the complexity of human social life, and is therefore a very appealing device when one is faced with such a vast and many-faceted whole as an international system. Sectors serve to disaggregate a whole for purposes of analysis by highlighting distinctive patterns of interaction and the actors associated with them. But neither the sectors themselves, nor the things identified within them, have the quality of independent existence. Relations of coercion seldom exist apart from relations of exchange, authority, identity or environment. Sectors identify distinctive patterns, but except in very particular circumstances they usually remain inseparable parts of complex wholes. The purpose of selecting them is to reduce complexity in order to facilitate analysis. The use of sectors both confines the scope of enquiry to more manageable proportions by reducing the number of variables in play, and illuminates important mechanisms and phenomena that remain hidden in an un-sectoralised picture.

In other words, looking through sectoral lenses brings some kinds of actors and interactions into the foreground and screens out or pushes into the background other types of actors and interactions. These five sectors are certainly not a definitive, closed set. In the social world as in the physical one, new kinds of lenses can be constructed as knowledge evolves and priorities change. To be useful, any such lens has to bring into focus a significant and patterned aspect of aggregate human behaviour that is either hidden or substantially distorted when viewed through the other available lenses. There is currently a debate about whether gender and religion are sufficiently distinctive from societal as to warrant using them as separate lenses. This discussion largely proceeds on pragmatic grounds

Summing up the discussion so far, at first glance sectors as used in IR appear to be similar to Sociology's systems/sub-sets of society which result from FD. However, upon closer inspection at least of the explicit conceptual statements of sectoral analysis in IR so far, this similarity seems to be superficial in the sense that sectors are treated as purely analytical devices ('lenses') with no ontological status, whereas functionally differentiated realms of society seem to form ontological sub-sets of a larger whole. It is not clear how other uses of this approach in IR stand in relation to the ontological/analytical question. Cerny (1993) for example, follows Waltz's link to Durkheim in order to critique neorealism. He wants to argue that the international system is moving from simple (segmentary) to complex (functional) differentiation, and to do so he proposes what he calls a 'structural differentiation characteristic of the new world order'(36). This differentiation goes along functional lines and gives him four categories based on 'various types of interaction... identified in the contemporary world' (37): security (understood as military), economic, political, and cultural. This scheme feels very close in form to Buzan's discussion of sectors developing at the same time, though with more resonance with the sociological literature. But whether these 'functional categories' are conceived as ontological or analytical is not clear. They are just taken, like sectors initially were, from empirical observation.

The next section will critically examine whether this is indeed the case. In order to do this, it is necessary to take a step back and first of all ask what it is that sectors are sectors of and what it is that is functionally differentiated. Dealing with this question will require us to think through not only the basic notions of 'system' and 'society' employed in sectoral and FD analysis, but also the relation between forms of sectoral/functional differentiation and the distinction between 'levels' in IR as an established form of analytical as well as ontological differentiation. Only on this basis will it be possible to establish a clearer picture as to how far the assertion that sectors are purely analytical devices and functionally differentiated systems have ontological rather than analytical status can indeed be upheld.

#### **4. Comparing the Views from IR and Sociology**

At first glance, the concepts ‘functional differentiation’ in Sociology and ‘sectors’ in IR appeared to refer to pretty much the same things. Upon closer inspection in the preceding sections of this paper, major, possibly even insurmountable differences seemed to appear and pile up, although what they primarily showed for the time being is the long history of mutual neglect or – as the discussion on Waltz’ use of Durkheim’s reading of FD demonstrated – highly selective and possibly even distorted uses of the other discipline’s concepts and theories. It is interesting to note how Waltz’s purely political construction of FD, and the acceptance of that in most of the IR debate that followed, actually led in IR to there being no linkage made between the discussions of FD and those of sectors. Thus what began as a possible link between IR and Sociology around FD became instead a roadblock. As a result, in trying to work out the prospects for a useful dialogue between IR and Sociology, we have to start from the beginning. Trying to find out whether the concepts of ‘functional differentiation’ and ‘sectors’ do in fact speak to each other quickly leads down the path of having to deal with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks in which both concepts are embedded, and thus subsequently to the task of ascertaining whether and to what degree these frameworks can be related to each other.

This is of course not the place to try to engage in a wholesale comparison of different theories and conceptual frameworks from two disciplines. The aim here can only be to relate the concepts of ‘FD’ and ‘sectors’ to each other against the background of the specific theories in both disciplines which actually employ them as key concepts. On the Sociology side, this means theories of society from Spencer and Comte to Luhmann which centrally rely on the idea that society is differentiated functionally. And on the IR side it means concepts from the so-called ‘English school’ of International Relations in conjunction with ‘Copenhagen’-style security studies, plus some individual contributions from the IRT debate mainly emanating from Waltz’s use of the term ‘functional differentiation’.

The way in which we can approach this narrowed-down, yet still thematically quite comprehensive comparison has been indicated by our discussion of the use of the concepts of FD and sectors through which a number of themes have emerged on which the relation between the two concepts does not seem to be entirely clear so far - or in the worst case to be so disjunctive that it would seem to make no sense at all to even remotely envisage relating them to each other analytically. The themes which have emerged so far and which to us seem to be in need of further clarification regarding their respective uses in Sociology and IR and along which a comparison could proceed are:

- The main point of reference: what is (if there is any) the ‘whole’ which is functionally differentiated? What are sectors sectors of?
- Are sectors or functionally differentiated realms mainly analytical devices or/and do they have an ontological quality?
- What is the relation between FD and the analysis of sectors on the one hand and

the idea of ‘levels’ (or levels-of-analysis) common in IR on the other?

These are far-reaching questions which we cannot hope to deal with comprehensively. However, they do provide us with the tools to aim at a conceptual cut through the maze of concepts and theories which emerge once one starts to probe the slippery ground ‘between’ IR and sociological theory.

*‘The whole’: system and society as points of reference*

The difficulty of relating the sociological concept of FD and sectoral thought in IRT to each other in large parts seems to stem not only from differences in the concepts as such, but also from the fact, as has become clear in the discussion of Waltz’s use of FD, that it is not entirely clear whether they actually refer to similar or even comparable (social) entities. While the situation on the sociological side is quite clear, it is far from satisfactory. Most sociological theories of society operate on the basis of the often only implicit assumption that society encompasses all things social within a set boundary. Sociological theories of society exhibit a strong ‘methodological nationalism’ in that this boundary is taken to be congruent with the boundaries of the modern territorial nation-state. This strong, if not constitutive link between the concept of society and the reality of the modern nation-state is however rarely spelled out as such. Rather, it is introduced implicitly through the seeming necessity to provide an account of why society is somehow ‘held together’ despite innumerable differences and centrifugal tendencies. Simplifying somewhat, most conceptualizations of how society is held together draw on ideas of shared norms, values, and a collective identity embodied in some form of ‘community’. Following the famous distinction between ‘*Gesellschaft*’ and ‘*Gemeinschaft*’ established by Tönnies, ‘*Vergesellschaftung*’ (society-formation) and ‘*Vergemeinschaftung*’ (community-formation) are seen as separate, yet inextricably linked processes. Thus, even Parsons, although giving a sophisticated account of society being differentiated into functionally different systems of action (and later symbolically generalized media of communication) insists that society can only be a society because it is held together by a ‘*societal community*’ with underlying shared worldviews and values. In Parsons’ work, it is the presence of a societal community which sets a society apart from a social system – and which thus also underlies his view that although the international system is a specific form of a social system, it is not (or only rudimentarily so) a society. In spite of the many differences and ambiguities regarding the central concept of ‘society’ in sociological thought, it is nonetheless noteworthy that most accounts of FD in sociology seem to require the concept as such as some kind of quasi-logical necessity: to speak of FD obviously requires an account of something which can be differentiated in the first place.

This situation only changes in the theory of Luhmann who radically removes the notion of ‘society’ from the idea of it forming an integrated whole. He identifies

society as the totality of communication. ‘World society’ is the largest social system conceivable as it includes all communication. The boundaries of (world) society as a social system are demarcated by the difference between communication on the one hand, and conscience and natural systems in its environment on the other. Central to this move is also a shift in the basic driving question of theorizing from the question of how society is held together despite centrifugal tendency to the question of how communication can continue. Under such a perspective, it is quite understandable that for Luhmann there can be no society but one world society (which is constituted by all communication) and that FD is not something happening to some pre-existing ‘whole’, but part and parcel of the ‘operation’ of society as such. Luhmann in a sense turns Parsons upside down: whereas for Parsons a ‘social system’ is the more encompassing term, and societies form but a specific form or a bundle of social systems (those integrated by the societal community), for Luhmann (world) society is the more encompassing concept as there can be no social system outside of world society. This move also explains the seeming change in the ontological status which sociological theories over time ascribe to functionally differentiated realms (see next subsection). For the time being it is worth noting, however, that mostly the very concept of FD is wedded to the idea that there is a social ‘whole’ which is differentiated, an idea only relinquished when it is assumed that it is the form of differentiation itself which somehow also co-constitutes this whole. be it only in the very abstract sense of a Luhmannian world society. And in terms of how this ‘whole’ relates to the area traditionally envisaged when thinking about ‘international relations’, it also seems fair to say that in the (extremely rare) cases in which theorists of FD in Sociology thought about the international, they did not apply the concept of FD to the sphere beyond the (nation-state) society – again save Luhmann where international relations are by definition part of world society.

At first look, most classical sociological accounts of the social ‘whole’ seem to be fully compatible with most approaches in IR theory in two important respects. First, they are compatible in that a social ‘system’ is treated as the more basic mode of social organizing, whereas the emergence of a ‘society’ requires the addition of a specific integrating device in order to turn a system into a society. Second, both sociological and at least IR theories in the realist tradition are compatible in that a fully developed, normatively integrated society is only located on the level of the nation-state, one notable exception here being of course the English School which unlike work in the realist tradition operates on the basis of the idea that ‘society’ is not a concept limited to the domestic realm of nation-states. The ES holds a strong concept of society similar to classical sociological notions in that it insists that an international society must rest on shared values. The most pronounced difference between the ES concept of an (international) society and sociological concepts of society seems to reside in the primary form of differentiation seen as characterizing society. Whereas the sociological theories of society alluded to above all stress the primacy of FD, international society starts from the foundational assumption that the constitutive units

members of international society are territorial states and that the territorial (segmentary) character of this society is its dominant feature.

Nonetheless, the picture gets somewhat more complicated if one takes a closer look both at international society itself as well as at its relation to other forms of society. First, it could be argued that international society's primary institutions demonstrate that other forms of differentiation in addition to territorial-segmentary differentiation exert a powerful influence on international society as well. Although it could be (and in the literature is) debated at length what exactly qualifies as a primary institution in this context (see table in Buzan 2004: 174), all proposals on the table describe institutions which are distinguished from each other by serving different functions for the operation and reproduction of international society as a whole: eg market, nationalism, international law, territoriality, sovereignty, diplomacy. One could go as far as to argue that although originally the idea of international society in ES thought rests on international society being constituted by an arrangement of segmentary differentiation, the emergence, persistence, and transformation of primary institutions demonstrates that other forms of differentiation are at work here as well – and there does not seem to be any logical reason which stands in the way of the conclusion that the relative influence of segmentary vs. FD in international society is not a matter of principle, but of historical evolution. On the other hand, the notion of international society in itself, and particularly its relation to various notions of 'world society' does suggest that ES thought has a very strong, although largely implicit, idea about the FD of some unspecified 'social whole' comprising international and world society. What this 'social whole' consists of differs notably between the so-called 'solidarist' and 'pluralist' versions of the English School. The solidarist view is characterized by a concern with a 'great society of humankind' (Bull, 1977) or at least with the idea that in a world society individuals and other non-state actors have intrinsic rights and not only those given to them by the state (see Vincent, 1986). Various differences apart, the solidarist view addresses or at least implies a concept of a social whole which comprises more than the international society of states, but sees them as embedded in a whole comprising other actors, most notably, but not necessarily exclusively, individuals. In contrast, the pluralists understanding of a social whole seems to be more limited to the international society of states as a realm characterized not by a logic of cooperation as in the solidarist view, but by a logic of coexistence, thus in a way 'shielding' this international society from a normatively integrated 'social whole' bigger than international society (this is of course not to say that pluralists would deny the existence of a world society 'beyond' international society, only that they would not claim it to be part of the social whole they are interested in).

Despite these different views as to what constitutes the relevant social whole in different versions of ES thought, both the solidarist as well as the pluralist version could be seen to incorporate at least rudimentary notions of FD within them. For the pluralist version, this is the case in a very general sense as at its core, in distinction to

realist views, is the claim that international society is more than an international political system as it combines the functionally differentiated realms of politics and law on an international level (the reasoning here is somewhat backwards: it is only possible to observe something as commonly having an influence or indeed co-constituting something if it is observed as being – functionally – differentiated in the first place). The notion of FD implicit in the solidarist view is somewhat less abstract (albeit not systematically reflected upon as being about FD) in that different types of members of international society and how they should relate to each other are defined – thus parting with the idea that sovereign equality serves as the basic ordering principle for the relevant social whole addressed. It seems fair to say that irrespective of more solidarist or pluralist leanings ES contributions are at least not at odds with the idea that the relevant social whole they address is functionally differentiated or rests on some form of FD. Yet the solidarist and pluralist versions of ES thought differ markedly in possible overlaps or points of contact with the various sociological theories addressed so far. Solidarists share with approaches up until and including Parsons the idea that a world society as a social whole is something hanging together, being normatively integrated, and thus also quite probably being something existing as a social whole prior to it being functionally differentiated. Pluralists would share none of these ideas, yet seem to be by and large compatible with more recent ideas of a world society and its FD in the Luhmannian fashion – ‘compatible’ here of course not meaning that they would operate on the same level or use the same language, or ascribe the same importance, but only that the idea of FD of a world society not being normatively integrated in an abstract sense can be said to be presupposed in the pluralist view in the way described above.

As hinted at with the last remark, the similarities and differences between sociological and IR theories quite often and in large parts are a result of some basic features of how the different theories are constructed. Thus, although quite often remaining silent as to the historical evolution of society, many approaches in classical sociology start from the assumption that there is a whole which becomes increasingly differentiated. This however marks the opposite end of the spectrum from IR/ES, which because it starts from system (which the realists never leave), and assumes (ES) that society is a development from system, necessarily takes a bottom-up view of international society, seeing it as constructed/evolved by the units within it. This bottom-up understanding perhaps has more similarities with Luhmann’s take on society, where the social element in both comes about as interactions get more complex. That said, however, the similarities end with the way in which the theory is constructed in a bottom-up logic. Basic motives behind the very endeavour of theorizing remain markedly different, with a strong normative impetus in ES thought with its orientation towards elaborating on the conditions for (maintaining) order and (achieving) justice in the international realm, and an almost programmatically non-normative orientation in the theory of society in the case of Luhmann. It might actually seem possible to go as far as to describe Luhmann’s theory as a theory of an analytical

kind in its purest form, leaving no trace of reference to ontological givens in or of society. This observation however takes us back to the problem of the relation between the analytical and the ontological status of (parts of) society which has recurrently reappeared when trying to compare the functionally differentiated realms and sectors.

*Functional differentiation and sectors: ontology vs. analysis*

The argument made so far to some extent worked on the basis of the relatively simple observation that at first glance functionally differentiated realms of society seem to be conceptualized as ontologically different areas of society in most theories of FD, whereas sectors in IR theory are of a purely analytical kind in that first of all they serve as ‘lenses’ through which international society is seen according to its military, economic, ecological etc. aspects. It should be noted, however, that while particularly contributions of the so-called ‘Copenhagen School’ are very outspoken about the analytical (and non-ontological) nature of ‘sectors’, this question does not seem to be addressed at length in most theorizing about FD. It is however first of all on the side of sociological theories of FD where the seemingly clear first impression of an ontological status of functionally differentiated realms becomes blurred. The situation is still relatively easy with the classic and traditional theories of FD in which FD is still pictured closely to the simple image of a division of labour in society, expressed in different functional realms of society with specific actors /(organizations), specific rules, and specific types of interaction. On this basis it seems relatively unproblematic to claim that, for example, ‘the economy’ or ‘politics’ are at least implicitly imagined as ontologically ‘real’, observable ‘parts’ of a society differentiated functionally. This claim however becomes more difficult to sustain once, with Parsons, FD is primarily associated with symbolically generalized media of communication. The key issue for identifying functionally differentiated realms of society rests not in rules or actors, but in the form of the symbolically generalized medium of communication used. Thus, for example, a company does not, just by virtue of it being a company, somehow ‘belong to’ or co-constitute the economic system of society; rather the economic system of society is constituted by the use of money as its functionally specific symbolically generalized medium of exchange. This idea of course is radicalized by Luhmann who, qua the introduction of ideas of self-referentiality and autopoiesis, strips the concept of function systems from any remaining notion of some kind of direct communicative ‘exchange’ with other function systems. With Luhmann, it seems to make no remaining sense whatsoever to categorize function systems as having ‘ontological’ status. Yet, and this being a point to which we will return below, this does not automatically mean that for Luhmann the distinction between society’s function systems would be ‘analytical’ as he would explicitly reject the very distinction between an ontological and analytical dimension.

Whereas the picture regarding the ontological vs. the analytical status of functionally

differentiated realms becomes more uncertain along the development of sociological theories of FD, the situation might appear to be clearer on the IR side where the ontological vs. the analytical status of sectors has been addressed explicitly and where thus the very clear opting for their purely analytical status seems to leave almost no room for doubt as to sectors' non-ontological character. The conceptualization of sectors as 'lenses' through which it is possible to analyze different aspects of a specific phenomenon (i.e. security or practices of securitization) would seem to leave very little room for doubt as to the purely analytical character of sectors. The analytical differentiation between different sectors to a large degree seems to have followed the evolution and differentiation of the security discourse since the early 1970s, when initially (and in response to the oil crisis) the focus was on economic security and on environmental security (the rising awareness of threats to the stability of the planetary ecosystem). During the 1990s societal (or identity) security, food security, and human security also became strands within the ISS and public policy debates. It is however exactly at this point of observing a close relation between the evolution of the security discourse in scientific as well as in public policy debates on the one hand and the emerging conceptualization of 'sectors' in Copenhagen-style security studies on the other hand where the suspicion is nurtured that there could be more behind sectors than merely analytical devices. This suspicion arises particularly if one is prepared to follow the Parsonian and later the Luhmannian moves which see the relevant category for describing and analyzing society to lie not in the question of what it is 'made' of, but how it operates. The question would then become whether communication and discourse is indeed structured along sectoral lines (rather than sectors only existing as lenses before the analysts' eye). Put differently: if it could be argued convincingly that the security discourse has indeed differentiated itself along sectoral lines – with institutionalised sub-discourses on environmental, economic etc. security which operate without necessary reference to other sub-discourses -, then it could be argued that sectors actually have some kind of non-analytical, ontological status. However, it is exactly at this point that we cannot spare the reader some deliberations about the limits of the analytical/ontological distinction itself. The argument comparing aspects of theories of FD and the sectoral approach in IR with each other has come to a point where the very distinction seems to be of not much analytical value itself, possibly even impeding a mutual critical engagement between different approaches in Sociology and IR.

As noted above already, the position on the sectoral analysis side seems to be quite clear and outspoken. Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde in *On Security* note that '[o]ne way of looking at sectors is to see them as identifying specific types of interaction' (Buzan et al. 1998: 7; emphasis added). They then go on to demonstrate how, in contrast to earlier uses of the notion of 'sectors', the concept needs to be modified in order to avoid a state-centric bias. However, and quite interestingly without claiming that this would constitute 'another way' of looking at sectors, the argument then proceeds by claiming that sectors 'serve to disaggregate a whole for purposes of

analysis' (ibid.: 8):

'But items identified by sectors lack the quality of independent existence. Relations of coercion do not exist apart from relations of exchange, authority, identity, or environment. Sectors might identify distinctive patterns, but they remain inseparable parts of complex wholes. The purpose of selecting them is simply to reduce complexity to facilitate analysis.' (ibid.).

It is quite noteworthy that while sectors in this interpretation are taken to lack the quality of independent existence (a concept which in other parts of sectoral analysis in ISS is then by and large equated with 'ontological status'), this 'independent existence' seems to be the intrinsic quality of a 'complex whole'. However, the question of actually what constitutes a 'complex whole' is not addressed. Referring back to some of the arguments made above, one could now of course engage in some kind of interpretative exercise of whether this complex whole implied in sectoral analysis is an international society, a world society, a unity of the difference between international system, international society, and world society etc. However, if a quality of 'independent existence' requires that, for example, certain types of interaction *exist* independently from other types of interaction, then arguably even all concepts of a complex *social* whole do not qualify for ontological status as they can hardly be said to *exist* independently from, for example, biological or physical systems. Turning to the sociological accounts of FD with such a perspective then would also seem to reinforce doubts as to whether these accounts indeed ascribe ontological status to functionally differentiated realms if that implies the claim that, for example, the economy would *exist* independently of, for example, law or politics. Yet if that which possesses 'ontological status' by merit of it having independent existence can in the end only be a 'complex whole' of such proportions that it can be no less (and no more) than the 'world' or, indeed, 'God' (with or without the world), then the question arises of how such a rather abstract idea might usefully serve to mark a distinction between 'things' with ontological status and analytical concepts used to view and analyze these things – pushing this line of thought to the extreme it would be hard to find any meaningful notion in language (and possibly language itself) which was not a purely analytical concept.

While such deliberations may at first glance seem to be drifting too far into the terrain of basic philosophical argument, they nonetheless are necessary as they shift the argument to a level at which the at first seemingly intractable differences between notions of 'sectors' on the one hand, and ideas of 'function systems' on the other hand seem to reside.

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