4   Theories of world society and war

Luhmann and the alternatives

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Introduction

Since World War II, organized mass violence has been noteworthy, in particular, by its absence in Western Europe and in North America. Since 1945, large-scale violence in Western countries is remembered and narrated rather than experienced, and it is not much different with other forms of physical violence. Thus, war is discussed in Western countries mostly as something absent, something to be avoided at almost any cost. This also holds true for most of the period of the Cold War in which the threat of nuclear warfare was virulent. Yet, surprisingly, the study of organized violence, of war as an empirical phenomenon, was neglected by many social theories of that period. Modern systems theory, which started to develop in the 1970s and 80s, is not alone in this regard. Also, modern systems theory tends to understand modernity as a historical stage in which violence no longer plays any significant role. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the writings on war, systems theory hardly plays a role (see Imbusch 1999).

While violence has only a marginal place in modern systems theory, for war, the situation is even worse. Apart from some remarks in Niklas Luhmann's major writings, modern systems theory has not dealt with the issue. The programme still has to be written; research has just begun (Stichweh 2001). Probably due to the world historical timing of its origin, the historical ubiquity of violent politics was not that visible for this theoretical stream.

At the same time, however, there has been a growing amount of empirical research on war and organized violence from other theoretical and empirical perspectives. Two larger non-scientific developments account for this trend. Partly, it stems from the demands of state actors, which want to build up systemic knowledge on a phenomenon constantly threatening established political order. But research activities are also, in part, connected to another political ambition. This is the field of 'peace research', established in the West on the basis of the fundamental belief that the accumulation of scientific knowledge on this subject could help to overcome organized violence. In this context, scholars from different academic disciplines entered the study of war. Prominent among them are, *inter alia*, those scholars who set up the

so-called 'empirical record' of warfare.[1] Despite numerous differences in operational definitions and in methods of establishing data, research on war has resulted in a couple of shared observations that will be used as a starting point for this chapter. The intention of this chapter is not, however, to discuss empirical questions related to the study of war. Instead, it tries to sketch out the theoretical challenges that any theory of war faces. This allows an assessment of the scope and the limits of a theoretical approach, such as modern systems theory, that is based on an overarching theoretical framework, when dealing with war and violence in international relations.

The second section of this chapter then develops some hypotheses about further needs and lacunae in the theoretical debate on organized violence. The third section then compares modern systems theory and its concept of organized violence with a research programme which was developed at the University of Hamburg since the beginning of the 1990s and which can be characterized as a structural/historical version of modernization theory. It draws mainly on authors of classical sociology and is, therefore, a legitimate candidate for such a comparison, as modern systems theory claims to surpass and replace these older theoretical approaches.

This chapter argues that both approaches share some important similarities. Firstly, both are systemic, comprehensive social theories and secondly, they both put the concept of world society at the centre of their respective analyses, although they define this concept in a rather different way. Thus, they differ fundamentally when it comes to the theoretical location of violence in both theories. This chapter argues that the major challenge for modern systems theory is to find a coherent explanation for the historical distribution of warfare – something which, so far, it has not yet done.

Observations on war in world society

The differentiation of social sciences has led to a multitude of approaches and schools in the study of war. Sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, legal scholars and political scientists have been investigating organized violence and within each discipline there are countless attempts at coming to terms with the diversity of empirical phenomena and theoretical challenges posed by this subject. In that context, studies that cross the boundaries between the established disciplines are seldom and mutual deafness is the eternal complaint when scholars from different disciplines studying war meet in conferences.

Despite this lack of inter-disciplinary research and communication, each discipline has developed valuable insights into the study of war. For example, in the discipline of IR there is general consensus on the main empirical developments in warfare after 1945 (see Holsti 1996; Henderson and Singer 2000; Wallensteen and Sollenberg 2000; Pfetsch and Rohloff 2000; Gantzel and Schwinghammer 2000). Five major hypotheses could probably be drawn from a comparative reading of these various studies.

1. *A growing number of wars.* The number of wars fought per year has grown significantly since the end of World War II and reached a peak in the early 1990s. Since 1993, the number of wars has oscillated on a somewhat lower level, i.e. between 35 and 40 wars fought per year on average. Operational definitions vary between different studies and so does the actual number of wars counted per year. However, there is a general acknowledgment that this growth is largely due to the fact that wars tend to last ever longer. Violent conflicts such as those in Colombia, Angola or Chad lasted for several decades and in other instances, warfare is only interrupted by short periods of less violent politics which, however, are unworthy of the name 'peace'.

2. *Predominance of intra-state wars.* The huge majority of wars after 1945 were intra-state wars. In comparison to what is known about the global distribution of war in earlier periods, the share of inter-state warfare has decreased dramatically. Roughly two-thirds of wars after 1945 have been purely intra-state in character, while the share of inter-state warfare has decreased steadily. The year 1993 was the first year after 1945 in which no inter-state war occurred (ibid.).

3. *War occurs in the periphery.* According to quantitative data, after World War II more than 90 per cent of wars have taken place in the regions of the so-called Third World. North America, large parts of Europe and, since 1960 also East Asia, have not experienced warfare. This observation can be further disaggregated into several specific historical phenomena that account for this distribution. Among them ranks the observation that wars of decolonization figure prominently, as do regional war systems which link several countries (see contribution by Stetter in this volume). The wars in Indo-China and Southern Africa were such complexes of war in which different conflicts were closely interrelated and sustained each other (ibid.).

4. *Wars last longer.* Apparently linked to the predominance of intra-state wars is the observation that the average duration of wars has steadily grown since 1945. One further crucial empirical observation in this context is that intra-state wars are also less likely to end by peaceful means, for example by mediation. The UN and regional organizations have been much more successful in mediating inter-state conflicts when compared to their involvement in armed conflicts within states. More than 50 per cent of intra-state wars ended with a military victory of one warring faction, whereas only 20 per cent could be ended by third party mediation. The figures for inter-state wars tell the opposite story. More than 50 per cent were ended with third party intervention and only slightly more than 20 per cent were decided militarily (ibid.). The tendency of prolonged intra-state conflict is obviously related to the absence of institutions designed to deal with conflicts within state boundaries, whereas the state system and its international institutionalization offer many more mechanisms for the negotiated settlement of organized violence between states.

5. *Decrease of major warring states.* The distribution of war participation among states is very uneven. Whereas some states were not involved in warfare in a single instance since 1945, others figure prominently on the list. The US, France, the Soviet Union/Russia and Great Britain head the list, just in front of regional powers like Iraq, India, China, South Africa and Israel (ibid.).

This short summary is by no means exhaustive as it only mentions a few observations from one academic discipline, namely IR. It might be concluded, though, that the development of war after 1945 has been dominated by intra-state wars taking place in those areas that are part of the so-called 'Third World', including parts of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. The kind of organized violence that still structures the popular conception of war in the West, inter-state war, has lost much of its importance.

This brief summary of empirical findings also shows that there is not only a problem of how to describe war appropriately and with an adequate conceptual language, there is also a problem of the empirical fit of any theory. In this context, the theoretical task is thus not only about construction. We already have some knowledge on when and where wars have been fought and who was involved. While these empirical findings are often crude they cannot be neglected by any theoretical discussion on this subject matter. In any case, they call for an explanation, and this is the first challenge for any theory of war. There are, however, more requirements for a good theory of war and these shall be discussed briefly in the following section.

Requirements for a theory of war

In order to compare different theoretical approaches, one requires a common measure, a *tertium comparationis.* As always, there are different ways to establish such a yardstick. It becomes all the more necessary, the larger the number of relevant theories and approaches becomes. In the field of war and violence studies, it has already become a huge task to establish a complete overview of all those approaches. Theories that try to link the history of violence to the history of states are for example prominent in sociology and history, as the work by Hintze, Weber and Elias indicates. Cultural anthropologists and historians try to link the occurrence of war and political violence either to the human drive for aggression (Gay 1993) or to the historical development of forms of rituals and revenge in society (Girard 1972). Other authors, particularly in contemporary German sociology, prefer a phenomenological approach that does not aim at building an overarching theory on the historical development of warfare but delivers insights into the micro-effects and underpinnings in the exertion of different forms of violence (Trotha 1999). On the other extreme, some studies discuss the enigma of war on the basis of sophisticated quantitative and formal methods applied to all forms of codified data (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Fearon 1995). Given this current situation of 'competition' in the field of

social research and the state of 'knowledge' in the field of war studies, at least four main requirements seem necessary in the formulation of any convincing theory of war.

1. *A need for theoretical compatibility.* Any theory of war must be linked to an established body of social theory. As fruitful as mere phenomenological studies are for the development of single ideas, they cannot replace the general function of theory, i.e. to shape the understanding of the world and to conceive conceptions. Theoretical contributions that allow a combination of new insights on a specific topic with insights and general assertions about other subjects are to be preferred to single-issue theories built around limited subjects. A theory, for example, that only covers the relation of state-building to war in the European experience is a valuable contribution (see Tilly 1990). An attempt to include this theory into a larger time span in order to explain state-building in other parts of the world is even better (Holsti 1996).

2. *A need for integration of knowledge.* War studies – including ethnographic/anthropological, sociological and political science research – have produced amazing insights and empirical findings over the last thirty years. This body of knowledge cannot be ignored by any new attempt to theorize about causation, structuration and consequences of war. Any theory of war must be able to integrate – or to render plausible – major insights from these previous findings. This applies not only to the major quantitative findings presented above, but also to countless other studies that go into much more detail about single wars and the role of single actors. They range from historical accounts to anthropological contributions – and they must be taken seriously.

3. *A need for conceptual adaptability.* Contexts of war differ as much as do actors, single events and the degree of organized violence. It is, therefore, hard to imagine how a formal – for example, biological or micro-economic – theory could come up with more than banalities when dealing with the historical record of war. One also has to admit that there is, so far, no form of synthesis of macro-developments and huge variation. Hence, the value of theoretical contributions must be judged on the basis of the ability of each approach to take this diversity into account and represent it in its conceptual language. The task of any theory of war is, thus, to come to terms with historical differences, with the variety of motives and subjects around which – according to the actors' view – wars were fought.

4. *A need for operationability.* Any theory that cannot draw on an already established body of knowledge – as is the case when a theory, such as modern systems theory, wants to rely on its own specific vocabulary that is not easily convertible into 'mainstream' social science language – must at least offer alleys to operational research. The phrase 'wars are complex social phenomena' is perhaps the most often printed phrase in books on this subject. But strangely, it has not yet led to any bigger debate about how research should deal with this complexity, how wars should be investigated

or which methods would be appropriate for what purposes or precise subjects. Appropriate theories must offer reflections and advice on these crucial questions.

These requirements might be contested since meta-theoretical orientations always determine the standards for judging the quality of theories. Some might prefer formal logical stringency. Others might stress aesthetics in construction and language. Thus, the selection of criteria presented here is, necessarily, a personal choice and open to debate. The following section shows how these requirements for a major theory of war have been addressed in 'the Hamburg approach' to the study of war. It then discusses the challenges which modern systems theory faces in order to come to terms with the subject of war. As will be argued, both approaches, 'the Hamburg approach' with its roots in classical sociology and modern systems theory share a number of axiomatic orientations. Differences, however, exist as well and these will be duly discussed further below.

Theories of world society and war

War is a global and a historical phenomenon. As this is commonly acknowledged among the community of war scholars, one should expect that both characteristics would have entered most theories of war, if not all. Surprisingly, this is not the case. Most theories of war focus either on the 'psychological thesis' – such as the frustration-aggression nexus – on cycles of power theorems or on other theses that aim to explain why war occurs.

World society or the world system has rarely been the starting point for theories of organized violence. Apart from some recent attempts in modern systems theory, there is only one major research project in which a world societal focus has been used as the conceptual starting point, namely the so-called 'Hamburg approach', developed throughout the 1990s.[2] In order to assess the possibilities and also possible obstacles for the study on war from the perspective of modern systems theory, 'the Hamburg approach', which has a somewhat different understanding of what constitutes world society, might be worth looking at. Moreover, both approaches also tend to differ – as will be shown – with regard to the status of organized violence in both theories.

The concept of world society

Both the Hamburg approach and modern systems theory distance themselves from a normative conception of 'societies' structured by states as this dominates much of social sciences and IR. Instead, they stress the idea that there is only one society, i.e. world society and that this world society is not necessarily a normatively integrated unity.[3] But how can world society be conceived of and which terminology can be used in order to describe the way in which this global entity works? Here, the answers of both approaches differ – and do so in more than just a mere terminological sense.

For modern systems theory, world society is constituted by communication. Its main divisions are not those between states or regions but between different functional systems that obey different codes. Hence, functional differentiation, which is the key characteristic of modern society, is also the main feature of world society. From this perspective, there can be no doubt that communication cannot be stopped at the border of any state and that, therefore, communication is by definition global (Luhmann 2000a: 220) – thus, there is only one world society.

Nevertheless, there are borders in world society. Its main divisions are not those between regions or states but between different functional systems obeying different codes. Functional differentiation is the key characteristic feature of modern society and it is also the main feature of world society. World society has a political system, an economic system and so forth. These systems are then internally structured as well. The state system, in this interpretation, is nothing other than a segmentary differentiation of the global political system (ibid.: 222).

'The Hamburg approach' has a different starting point and draws mainly from the writings by Marx, Weber and Elias. For 'the Hamburg approach', the term 'world society' designates primarily a historical process and, secondly, is used as a systemic category to denote the global unity of social reproduction. The big historical movement that brought this unity about is the development of modern capitalism and its global spread as a result of the European expansion. The emergence of world society is, thus, identical with the history of capitalism, of which Marx's theory of value is the most abstract theoretical formulation.

Notwithstanding the differences between these two theoretical approaches, they both emphasize the role of radical historical change in social organization. However, one might ask whether systems theory could be more precise about the historical process that created this great transformation in the first place. This lacuna is linked to another one. Thus, until today, modern systems theory is not historically differentiated. Apart from the rather rough distinction between segmentary, stratified and functionally differentiated societies (Luhmann 1983) there is no solution in modern systems theory for the problems of systematizing historical epochs or phases. Only very recently, Harste (2004) has suggested an avenue for such a historical reconstruction. Following Luhmann's method of detecting historical change in the change of semantics in social and political language, Gorm Harste tries to follow the change of warfare by observing the change in the binary code of war/peace.

In contrast, 'the Hamburg approach' explicitly stresses such a historical differentiation by linking the history of warfare to the history of capitalism. In this regard, 'the Hamburg approach' follows very closer the ideas that have been developed by Marxist historians in their attempts to develop a structural history of capitalism (see Hobsbawm 1975; P. Anderson 1975). The history of value – from simple forms of exchange to the complex

changes of the self-valorization of value – is the most abstract formulation of this. Wars in European history are always linked to the respective stage of the development of rationalities and social formations in this structural context. Trade colonialism was a different story from late imperialism and so were the wars led in these respective eras (see Siegelberg 1994).

But the challenge goes much further. There is probably still a long way to go until any social theory can deliver a comprehensive explanation of the historical record of war. Traditional warfare or wars in ancient Greece differ from present day wars, and wars of the European expansion obey different logics than the Great Power wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Who is waging war? What kind of political imaginaries guide actions? And what are the structural outcomes of organized violence? All these are legitimate questions that call for theoretical consequences that have not yet been drawn.

It might be a highly interesting theoretical question to ask to what extent modern systems theory has developed out of the tradition of 'conceptual history' (*Begriffsgeschichte*) which is more abstract than the Marxist vein of differentiating historical stages into different stages in the evolution of value. For the purpose of this chapter it is, however, more important to identify a crucial issue of convergence between both approaches. Thus, in contrast to most theoretical approaches of war in IR, both modern systems theory and 'the Hamburg approach' stress that there is a historical process and that the meaning of action – or communication – changes during the course of this process. The history of warfare in world society is, thus, not just a change of power distributions as most theories of IR would argue.

Thus, both conceptions of world society share the basic understanding that there is a major historical process that fundamentally alters the functioning of society. It is against this background that Stefan Breuer compares Marx's historical genesis of capitalism with Luhmann's notion of autopoiesis.

> The tendency of restless self-valorization [in Marx] is oriented towards the creation of an autonomous system of pure 'societalization' (*Verge-sellschaftung*) that is only based upon itself and which changes all other pre-systemic elements into results of its own reproduction, creating by itself the conditions of this process. It is exactly this movement which Luhmann is sketching with his theory of autopoiesis.
>
> (Breuer 1992: 79)

The theoretical location of violence

Violence has always been a huge challenge for any social theory. So far, there is neither one single approach nor any generally acknowledged contribution on the sociology of violence that would satisfy the needs of the diverse strands of scholars working on this subject. But in a theory of war,

violence needs to have a theoretical location. There are, of course, different ways of solving this theoretical problem.

As already argued above, in modern systems theory violence apparently has not attracted that much attention. For example, Fuchs (2004) characterizes violence as a symbiotic mechanism. These mechanisms, which exist in all functional systems, primarily serve the function of securing existing boundaries and hierarchies. They allow systems to decide about the relation between its media of generalized communication and relevant parts of physical life. Their characteristic is that they relate organic – or biological aspects – to the media of generalized communication. What sexuality is for love or needs is for money, physical violence is for power.[4] While this conceptualization might be plausible for the description of the communicative aspect of violence, it does not enable modern systems theory to account for the historical variety of forms and practices of violence. There is another prominent location where violence is dealt with explicitly in modern systems theory. These are Luhmann's writings on modern states and their tendency to suppress violence that is not considered 'legitimate' state violence (Luhmann 2000a: 192). Violence is here primarily a 'means of power' and the superiority of violence over other forms of power is used to lay the groundwork for a modern political system by 'disarming the nobility' (ibid.: 49). Warfare in the early modern era then became the monopoly of the state and the linkage of warfare and fiscal means became part of the process of the differentiation of a political system (ibid.:383–418).

When Luhmann addresses the issue of violence in the context of modern state semantics, the theoretical location of violence in modern systems theory does not differ much from Weber's, Elias's or, earlier, Hintze's work on the monopolization of violence by the modern state. It also comes very close to Pierre Bourdieu's (1997) version of the change of political forms in which he develops ideal types of different political forms, such as the patriarchal household, the kings' castle or the government mansion.

In modern states, according to systems theory, violence is typically absent. 'A power holder does not need to practise violence himself. It only needs to be plausible that he could use others for practising it (servants, the police, the military)' (Luhmann 2000a: 55). Differentiated power, therefore, needs an ally. Law is, thus, acquiring the function of processing those kinds of contradictions that could otherwise have developed violently (Luhmann 1984).

In the tradition of classical sociology, which underlies 'the Hamburg approach', physical violence is – in contrast to modern systems theory – first and foremost a form of action. Building upon Weber's scattered remarks on violence, Popitz (1986) sees violence as a form of action with its main quality being its immediateness. Exerted physical violence, but also the threat to use it, shrinks time horizons. There is not much more to be said about violence, as its use and its meaning depends on social circumstances. Forms of violence are socially and historically specific.

This position however creates a problem – for what can be said generally about 'war' if violence is specific and thus historically contingent? For the Hamburg approach, some major distinctions help to sort out this infinite diversity of organized violence in history. The occurrence of war is explained on the basis of three structural lines that are constituted by the *Leitdifferenz* (guiding difference) of tradition and modernity. Firstly, there are those conflicts that are handed down from traditional forms of social life. Still today there are violent conflicts that are not closely related to state rule and that are not in any major regard different from traditional warfare of earlier ages. The highly systemized violent clashes between nomads in Kenya, Uganda or Somalia are a case in point (Bollig 1996). But also in modern Europe, traditional ideas about personal honour or organic ideas of social order still play a role for the representation of violence, even in the context of very modern circumstances.

Secondly, and more important for the contemporary world, are those conflicts that result from the confrontation of modern and traditional forms of *Vergesellschaftung* (society-building). In the social sciences these conflicts are normally referred to as 'problems of modernization' and, indeed, the monetarization of societal ties, the individualization of reproduction and other features of transition are indicators of this secular and highly conflictive process that is spreading to all parts of the world.

Thirdly, there are those conflicts that emerge as inner contradictions of modern capitalism itself. From a traditional Marxist view, the contradiction between labour and capital ranks first among these, but other structural changes in developed capitalist regions might be added. In modern society these conflicts are normally processed by non-violent means even if the modern state always has, somewhere, an apparatus that remains a competent violent actor – a fact that every political actor is aware of.

Empirically, none of these conflicts can be observed in pure form. Even traditional warriors nowadays use AK 47 automatic weapons and modern statesmen have not yet freed themselves from ancient ideas of personal honour and religious missions. Contrary to mainstream Marxism, 'the Hamburg approach' concedes that modern capitalism also has the ability to pacify social relations – capitalism thus also has a civilizing effect. But the absence of war in the relations between modern states is a late result of modernization. The flipside of the coin is that the capitalization of societies, the basic process of the modern era, is a conflictive and often violent process. The dissolution of older forms of social integration through the advancement of the world market, or through the imposition of modern statehood, is the major source of violent conflict in the modern era.

The remainder is a state affair. The historical record of political violence shows very impressively that state agencies are the most important actors in the monopolization of violence in the twentieth century. Even if not all states have really achieved this monopolization of the legitimate use of violence states do have, from a global perspective, the largest arsenals, not

only of arms but, also, of skilled personnel. Furthermore, it is part of the social role of statesmen and military staff that they, as state actors, are the 'masters of violence' and, as such, are entitled to use violence if deemed necessary. The entire history of inter-state warfare witnesses the global spread of this relation to the use of violence, connected in all state theories with the idea of sovereignty.

How and why states wage wars also differs with historical context. The logic of wars between absolutist states in early modern history is not the same as the logic of humanitarian intervention. But what both share is a reference to the idea of 'sovereignty' and the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence.[5] Even in the case of humanitarian intervention this norm is not breached. Those intervening are states and the aim of action, at least according to the intentions of the interveners, is to restore a sovereign state that can again monopolize violence.

To summarize, as far as the theoretical location of violence in both theories is concerned, differences seem to reside rather in terminology than in substance. Violence in history is largely seen as a correlate of the emergence of modern systems. Once established, modern society shows remarkable capacities to marginalize violence in the 'outskirts' of world society. Modern systems theory develops a formal approach in order to define violence, whilst 'the Hamburg approach' prefers to historicize violence as much as possible. Neither of the two approaches builds a theory around a concept of violence but rather prefers to embed its own take on violence into larger concepts of society or history.

Yet, a couple of questions remain. How do both approaches explain the persistence of war in contemporary world society when this is conceived as predominantly modern? Moreover, how should we investigate events or chains of events that are considered to be wars?

Operationalizing theory

Up until now, there is no method or operationalized version of how the study of organized violence could look like from a systems theoretical perspective. Generally speaking, there are two problems that system theoretical approaches face when operationalizing their language for the study of concrete empirical events. Firstly, structures are not directly observable. They have to be inferred from many observations and these observations, from whatever source, are normally not formulated in the language of the respective theoretical approach. Secondly, structures and the intentions of actors do not coincide. This lack of congruence is at the heart of the much debated problem of how to bridge the alleged gap between structure and action. An operational theory of war with a systemic background has to say something about how structural givens and the intentions and beliefs of actors relate to each other.

In order to solve this problem, the Hamburg approach has developed a four-stage analytical model, called the 'grammar of war'. This 'grammar'

allows researchers to model causal relations as processes (see Siegelberg 1994: 179–93). The idea of the 'grammar of war' is not to offer a universal model of processes of escalation. Instead, it aims to enable researchers to disentangle the myriads of information which appear when studying a war story. In this regard, it will help to think about the social surrounding and the social 'content' of violent conflicts in a manner that leaves room for contradictions, deadlocks and dynamics.

The first step of this model is to address contradictions. Contradictions are understood as to those differences that can be found at different levels of social contexts, be it centre/periphery relations, differences in social structures or the simultaneous existence of different modes of social reproduction. This understanding of the term contradiction differs from a classical dialectic understanding of contradiction[6] and it differs of course from what is meant by the term in modern systems theory, which does not consider the expression of 'objective contradictions' a meaningful term. For 'the Hamburg approach' all kinds of structural differences can potentially kick off a social conflict. It might be the differences in wealth and economic development between regions of a given country or the contradiction between the modern, rational form of a state and its less modern, rather traditionally structured societal content.

The second step, crisis, refers to the perceptions of those contradictions by the actors themselves. The symbolic forms in which social actors perceive their environment and the values that enable them to decide about alternatives are engrained in their social roles, which is, following Bourdieu, a supra-individual category. The reconstruction of this filter is analytically decisive, in order to include the actors' observations into an explanation, as these observations and their logic shape the course and dynamics of a conflict. Social change is almost always perceived through notions of 'yesterday', rationalizations of past experiences are used in order to explain current affairs. This is the reason why so many social conflicts are fought out in constellations that do not mirror the constellation of interests. An ethnic militia never serves the majority of its members, but the store of ideas and beliefs does not allow for a more adequate form of organization.

At this stage, conflicts have already reached the third step. It consists of reconstructions at the organizational level. Even if many warring factions cannot be described appropriately on the basis of theories of modern organizations, they need to solve certain problems such as mobilization, identifying opponents and finding addressees – and they need to legitimize violence. The bulk of literature on conflicts and wars looks at this organizational level. Focusing on events and on processes of escalations, mainstream research normally does not include what might be beyond the obvious, namely structures and structural change. This can be illustrated by two examples. That anti-Semitism's roots lie not in the beliefs of its proponents is, meanwhile, generally acknowledged. That the wars in former Yugoslavia were not about 'ethnic hatred' is much less so. As a whole range of authors

studying the Yugoslav wars has pointed out, it was rather the severe economical decline of a rapidly modernizing society that was the structural background of violent secessions. Ethnic stereotypes and collective memories of earlier experiences of violence were then the communicational frames for the subjective rationalizations of what was happening (see Allcock 2000; Woodward 1995; Höpken 2000).

The fourth step, war, is a question of degree. Some conflicts develop in intensity and length to a degree that most observers would call them a war. Yet, other conflicts do not. There might emerge an institutional solution for the processing of the conflictive behaviour or one of the involved parties might prove to be unable to match the contradictory requirements for organizing violence.

But what is remarkable and needs investigation is that many violent conflicts gain their own momentum. Their *dynamique propre* is only marginally researched (see Genschel and Schlichte 1999) and most writings about it are rather metaphorical. What is interesting, is that, apparently, violence can become the motor of war – it perpetuates itself and may become systemic in character.[7]

The 'grammar of war' that has been presented in this section, is not a rough recipe but rather offers a useful and sufficiently complex model to account for conflicts. Together with other elements of 'the Hamburg approach', it has led to a number of insights both on single empirical issues and on broader theoretical hypotheses (see Jung, Schlichte and Siegelberg 2003). Among them is the observation that differences in warfare do not follow the lines that the organization of science has established. The fact that there is political science, IR, cultural studies and economics leads many observers to reason about 'political', 'cultural' and 'economic' causes of conflict and war, whereas the social phenomenon of political violence obeys a completely different logic.

Conclusion

Modern systems theory certainly has something to offer for the study and theory of war in world society. It seems promising, not only for defining and specifying systems and logics of political formations, such as absolutism (see Kunisch 1987), but also for accounting for military/security as a system in world society (see Kirsch 1998). Moreover, 'observing observers' is a good technique for discerning the specific causalities that are at work in different historical contexts (see Luhmann 1995d).

Systems theory also has the merit that it has a built-in programme of distrust towards everyday-life explanations. How things actually work almost always differs from the explanations given by actors involved. With regard to the study of any empirical subject, however, this insight must lead to operational consequences. How to talk about something, what to look at, what questions to ask, what material to consult, what to compare – these are the questions any empirical investigation has to face.

The two approaches considered here share a number of theoretical orientations in this regard. The usage of the term world society, it seems, is already indicative of a perspective that is opposed to the reductionism of formal logic and rational-choice theories based on utilitarian models and methodological individualism.

Moreover, both approaches share the idea that history – or evolution – cannot be read as a story of progress or of self-conscious social change. Both approaches look at this secular process from a non-normative perspective. Whether one conceives history as evolution, as modern systems theory does or as *Naturgeschichte* (natural history), as modern Marxism would have it, is basically a question of terminology.

There are, however, also differences between both approaches. For a historical-sociological understanding that is based on the classical sociological theory of Marx, Weber and Elias, there is basically only one system, namely modern capitalism. And, despite its cooptation of symbolic theories, it has kept a materialist orientation in so far as the abstract world market is considered 'the true subject of world society' (Diner 1985: 328). This system can be studied in its historical development or on the basis of its different inner-functional modes of operation and contradictions. Any further usage of the term 'system' is restricted to a usage in an 'as-if' sense. One can investigate politics in the Ivory Coast 'as if' politics in the Ivory Coast had a boundary distinguishing its political realm from politics in its neighbouring countries or, say, France. But in fact, it would not make sense to do so, as the linkages crossing boundaries are often more important than the ones within these 'systems'.

For modern systems theory, it seems, the applicability of its terminology goes much further, with respective epistemological consequences and underpinnings. Within the system of world society there is a multitude of systems; there are functional ones, but also many others, like organizational or interaction systems. In this theoretical strand, there is no hierarchy and no centre among these systems.

Furthermore, it might be dangerous to assume that the norms of sovereignty and territoriality as a modern form of politicized space are sufficient core categories for the understanding of political dynamics and political violence in world society. A closer look at non-Western parts of the world reveals that what proponents of modern systems theory seem to assume is not the case, namely that within the state-system 'any element enjoys the very same form of legitimacy' (Stichweh 2001). It might be true for the relations between states, but it is certainly not within states (for an alternative view see Krasner 1999).

World society is not thoroughly modern and, therefore, statehood does not mean the same constellation of relations throughout the world. For modern systems theory this is a problem. How can a theory of modern systems deal with a world that is not entirely modern?

'The Hamburg approach' has tried to solve this puzzle by acknowledging the overlapping of historical epochs, a decision that is not driven by theoretical

considerations but by empirical observations. The logic of wars in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa, for example, resembles in some regards wars in early modern Europe or in contemporary India, rather than wars in contemporary Maghreb or violence in South Africa. The logic of war is not a logic of regions but, rather, a logic of historical trajectories and non-contemporaneity.

This general structure of dis-simultaneity is another striking feature of many, if not all, wars after 1945. Following an expression coined by Ernst Bloch (see Dietschy 1988), it is labelled in 'the Hamburg approach' *Ungleichzeitigkeit* – the recurring observation that in social roles, as well as in forms of organization, 'modern' and 'traditional' forms are simultaneously present and at work. Global *Vergesellschaftung* did not start in the era of functionally differentiated societies but it has to be understood as the result of a historical process that is still ongoing. World society is not yet thoroughly modern and, thus, the focus on processes of functional differentiation might be deceiving. It might hide dynamics in contexts that are not thoroughly modern. Still today, *Ungleichzeitigkeit* is the *signum* of world society. It is perhaps this observation that creates the biggest challenge for modern systems theory in coming to terms with organized violence in world society.[8]

These and other questions challenge any social theory of war. It has to specify its language in order to attain some 'fit' with the numerous observations that the study of war in different social sciences has already produced. The major challenge for modern systems theory will consist not only in developing an analytically applicable language, but also, in doing so in a manner that produces a surplus vis-à-vis other theories. If modern systems theory is not able to say more than has already been said in classical sociological vocabulary, the endeavour would be futile. The jury is still out on whether this is the case or not.

Notes

1 These attempts date back to the early twentieth century. In the period after 1945 the Hungarian scholar Istvan Kende was probably the first to build up what was not yet called a database on warfare of the postwar world. In the 1960s, David Singer at the University of Michigan began a larger quantitative research program called 'the correlates of war project'. Klaus Jürgen Gantzel undertook a similar endeavour in the early 1980s by using the data and definitions of Istvan Kende. Later on other research teams joined the field, for example, at the University of Uppsala, at Stanford and at the University of Heidelberg.

2 Theoretical groundwork of this school was done by Siegelberg (1994). The quantitative side of the project is published by Gantzel and Schwinghammer (2000). Qualitative studies have been published by Jung (1995), Schlichte (1996) and Jung, Schlichte and Siegelberg (2003). See also the annual reports on ongoing wars (http://www.akuf.de) and the more general work on world society in Jung (2001) and Schlichte (2005a, 2005b).

3 As Stephan Stetter argues in the introduction to this volume, there seems to be a decisive difference of opinion whether the concept of society is built on an

understanding of normative integration or whether it explicitly foresees conflicts even within societies, and has an understanding of historical processes and evolution. The differences between these two strands of social theory reappear in the debate on different concepts of world society.

4 Perhaps it should be stressed here, in relation to claims made in the introduction, that it is not only that the theory of social systems conceives conflict, and also, at times, violence, as functional. In the sociology of Georg Simmel or Lewis Coser this has been a recurrent and fundamental insight, not to mention Hegel and dialectics in his aftermath.

5 Humanitarian interventions look like a breach of that idea at first sight, but on a second glance they are not. The entire idea of humanitarian interventions is to create such a monopoly anew. Whether the practice of humanitarian intervention is in fact resulting in an institutional order that resembles the idea of modern statehood is, of course, a different story.

6 For Hegel, contradictions are always *gleichursprünglich*, stemming from identical origins. In the language of the Hamburg approach, the term contradiction includes what is in Hegel's language merely opposition (*Gegensatz*) or difference (*Unterschied*).

7 This *Eigendynamik* is underlying the entire debate on 'new' wars, on war economies or 'cultures' of violence, see Elwert 1997 and Riekenberg 1999.

8 What is meant with the term *Ungleichzeitigkeit* could perhaps be reformulated as the simultaneity of two – or more – forms of causality (see Luhmann 1995d).