Summary

How do conflicts escalate? This is one of the major and overarching questions in conflict research. The present study offers further answers to this question. Therefore, it has a tripartite agenda: First, it develops an empirical research strategy including a constructivist methodology for the study of conflict escalation. This strategy is embedded in a Luhmannian systems theoretical world society perspective; argues that conflicts can be understood as social systems in their own right; looks at the process of conflict escalation by analysing communication; follows a reconstructive approach informed by grounded theory and the documentary method. Second, to probe the plausibility of the approach, this study analyses two processes of conflict escalation prior to violent conflict within the framework of two systematic case studies (Maidan protests/Ukraine 2013–2014; Mali's crisis/2010-2012). Third, on the basis of the case study insights gained and the experiences made with the empirical research strategy developed here, the present work gives some impulses and ideas on how this kind of systems theoretical research can be beneficial for Peace and Conflict Studies and conflict analysis in general.

The present dissertation is written in English. It follows spelling, grammar and punctuation rules that are referred to as *British English*. Nota bene: Since the use of quotation marks in British and American English is different but, at the same time, evolving, their usage within the framework of this dissertation is determined as follows: Double quotation marks (" ") are used with direct quotes, including block quotations. Single quotation marks (' ') are used to highlight certain words or expressions. They are not used with direct quotes. In all direct quotes, *italics* are used to highlight the most important parts. Apart from quotations, italics are used to emphasise the importance of a central term in a larger context.