4 Evolutionary trajectories in world politics

The following illustrations of evolutionary trajectories in world politics are deliberately cast wide in the sense that they are decidedly *not* based on a fixed definition of what world politics 'is'. On the contrary. Social evolution is always about something being in the process of becoming and transforming – although there are certainly zones where things fizzle out in terms of being meaningful thus marking the, historically contingent, boundaries of a realm. This means that analysing something in terms of social evolution necessarily requires ontological openness. It is not about the evolution of something that somehow is, or was at some point, there in a fixed state, but something that is always evolving in terms of what it is, although that does include the distinct possibility of its being in historical zones marked by comparatively lower or higher levels of perturbation.

4.1 Forms of organizing political authority in the emergence and transformation of a modern system of world politics

It is possible to reconstruct the emergence and transformation of a modern system of world politics in terms of social evolution along the analytically distinct, yet factually inextricably linked dimensions of autonomization, hierarchical complexity and coevolution (the latter operating both internally, between different parts or subsystems of the system of world politics, and externally, particularly in its relation to the legal system). While such a reconstruction would not necessarily fix a completely exclusive and narrow understanding

of what such a 'system' of world politics is, it would proceed on the basis of two central observations. Firstly, world politics (or, for that matter: 'international relations') is not something that evolved out of the interaction of 'units' that somehow existed previously and independently of it, at some point 'emancipating' itself from these units in the form of an emergent 'system' level with its own logic (structure, 'polarity', etc.). Secondly, for world politics to form a distinguishable social system it requires differentiation from other forms of politics (or/and from politics as an encompassing part of the social world distinct from the economy, religion, etc.). The latter means that, considering details of system definitions and the historical expression of processes of social differentiation, a system of world politics will not have emerged over night. Neither, quite certainly, will it have emerged completely 'out of time' and disentangled from accompanying processes of the functional differentiation of society, nor without an accompanying – if not necessarily simultaneously appearing – semantics for describing itself as 'world politics'. Nothing in this means that a system of world politics would have appeared out of nowhere. Quite the contrary. It built on the long evolutionary trajectories of the emergence (and also the disappearance) of structural as well as semantic elements and their associated symbolic codes (e.g. diplomacy, see 4.3 below), as well as on a contemporary practice of observation of self and others (in this case through the scientific practice of IR) that ensured the system's (relatively) 'smooth running' by relieving it from always having to consider its contingent past (either by its erasure or by constructing historical continuities).

This section will first take a look at this distinction between world politics as a system and its 'forerunners'. It will then briefly argue that some of the underlying evolutionary logic can also be found in some central contributions to IR, even in some rather unsuspected cases (here notably the 'structural realism' introduced by Kenneth Waltz). After that, it will discuss auto-nomization in terms of the evolution of particular system characteristics that centrally rely on the observational scheme of the balance of power; hierarchical complexity as the way in which this observational scheme manages to include a variety of forms of organizing political authority within

itself; and coevolution particularly with the system of law, that, on the one hand, introduced complexity into the system by inserting normative restraints, while, on the other, hedging the hierarchical complexity mentioned by privileging one form of organizing political authority (the sovereign territorial state) over others (most notably 'formal' empires, but also, city-states, private authorities, emergent forms of world statehood, etc.).

It is certainly possible, and in many cases legitimate, to see world politics as only a somewhat loosely circumscribed realm whose existence can be traced back quite far in history, and then describe various trajectories of social evolution within such a realm (see Neumann and Glørstad 2022; and section 4.3 below on the proto-diplomatic practices that extend as far as prehistoric times). However, and in addition to individual evolutionary trajectories within such a realm, it is possible to trace the emergence of a distinct social system of world politics itself as an evolutionary outcome. These two things are closely related to each other, but they are not the same. They might be said to relate to each other in the way that, for example, the evolution of building practices relates to the evolution of cities. Building practices evolved well before, and continued to evolve further after, the invention of cities, and the latter had a decisive impact on what kind of buildings emerged thereafter and on ideas about, and the very practice of, architecture. However, a city as an identifiable socio-spatial form can never be reduced to a mere assemblage of buildings (or other forms of dwellings), however complex. In order to become such a distinct form, it needs to differentiate itself from its environment on the basis not only of some kind of physical marker, but also of distinct codes and practices of organization.

Though operating on a very different timescale from the invention of cities, one could say that a system of world politics is to individual world political practices – however complex and historically deep these might be – what cities are to buildings. As will be discussed further below, there has been a long evolution of diplomatic practices in an overall generalized context of power competition. There have been diplomatic exchanges, conflicts, and other forms of interaction between what, for the sake of simplicity, can be summarized under the term 'polities' going on over millen-

nia, that bear some formal if not substantive resemblance to what in contemporary times is usually summarized as 'international relations' between territorial (nation-)states (cf. Buzan and Little 2000, Buzan 2023). However, none of the historical 'precursors' to 'modern' international relations evolved into a system of world or international politics – at least, not if an at least moderately strict understanding of a system as requiring a clear distinction between the system and its environment is applied.[1] Many evolutionary paths can be identified, but they have not yet led to the emergence of a semantics of either 'international politics'/'international relations', or 'world' politics (the former emerging slowly from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the latter only as a latecomer in the context of other 'world' composite terms – world sport, world literature, world time, etc. – late in that century), *nor* to a distinct social system clearly differentiated from its environment. Interactions between polities, that were very often also organized as intra- or inter-familial/dynastic relations (cf. Haldén 2020; also Montefiore 2023) took place all the time, but they became 'world politics' (or, but only with the increasing merger of the ideas of territorial statehood and national belonging into the idea of nation-statehood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *international* relations) only through the differentiation and autonomization of a system of world politics. Autonomization in this sense means that world political communication can be easily identified as such and distinguished from other kinds of communication – operatively speaking, world political communication then takes place exclusively within,

1 Most theories of and in IR are not systems theories in any narrow sense of the term. As a rule, they also do not, or only loosely, refer to systems theories. If used, the term 'system' frequently remains little (or not) specified, is defined as a 'level' of social reality (or analysis), and, often closely linked to the latter point, defined as something emerging out of the interaction of 'units'. The most notable exception to this basic, if possibly somewhat caricatured, understanding of 'systems' in IR were uses and adaptations of cybernetic systems theory for analysing world politics, notably in, and following the work of, Karl Deutsch (see, for example, Deutsch 1966; Baecker 2021 for an overview of systems theories).

and constitutes, such a system of world politics. The system of world politics, in other words, also expresses the internal functional differentiation of the political system (into a range of political fields, ranging from health to education, expressed organizationally in the functional differentiation of government bureaucracies).[2] It also marks the point where evolutionary trajectories with far longer histories, such as diplomacy, all of a sudden find themselves included in a social system that they constitute.

Before elaborating further on what it means to talk about the evolution of a system of world politics, which probably led to systemic differentiation/emergence only around the beginning of the nineteenth century (the Congress of Vienna), it is worth noting that such an evolutionary account of the emergence of a 'system' of modern international/world politics can also be found in places that could not be further removed from explicitly referring to theories of social evolution. Nonetheless, it is perfectly possible to say that at least an implicit social evolutionary understanding is part of IR's most established canon of theorizing about its realm, in this case the struc-

2 World politics for quite a while appeared as 'exceptional' in relation to other functionally differentiated subsystems of the political system, as, in addition to a specific symbolically generalized medium of communication (i.e. power observed through the figure of balance), it also operates with a combined 'internal/external' coding and a narrative of structural 'levels' built on that coding: all policy fields are 'internal', everything else is classified under 'external' relations that, taken together, constitute a different 'level' of international politics/an 'international system'. It is only against the powerful semantic structuring effect of that narrative that it can then appear to be a 'novelty' to discover that at some point 'foreign affairs' are no longer the sole prerogative of foreign ministries, but that, for example, ministries of health or education can have 'foreign relations' as well. In fact, it seems that such discoveries actually reproduce the underlying foundational myth that functional differentiation at first happens *within* the segments of a segmented political system (i.e. states), when in fact the functional differentiation of the political system into various realms goes hand in hand with segmentation becoming an important internal differentiation of functionally differentiated subsystems of the political system of world society.

tural realism most notably established through the works of Kenneth Waltz.

Although it does not appear as such on first sight, it is possible to interpret part of Waltz's (1979) celebrated work *Theory of International Politics* as an implicitly evolutionary account, namely his structural-functionalist reading of how the modern states system emerged (see Goddard and Nexon 2005). From contestations between different forms of polity (in terms of social evolution: variations in communications ascribing actorhood to different polities and learning from innovative models), the sovereign state emerged victorious (selection of communications that rationalize the actorhood of states), and on the basis of this selection a system emerged – an 'international system' in Waltz's terms, but also operating under various names, or being included in more general concepts, such as 'international relations', 'international society' or the 'Westphalian system'. In other words: an international system emerged as a social realm in which the restabilization of communications on and by states became the taken-for-granted hegemonic belief. Waltz conceptualizes this analytically as a generative process, where a basic layer produces the next. The basic layer consists of a binary variation of structural form: hierarchical or anarchic, with anarchic being understood as there being no polity that formally rules over the others. The second layer is generated by the condition of anarchy; anarchy means self-help, and self-help means that polities will cope with one another in order to cope with anarchy. The result is that they all end up as sovereign states. This particular form of polity has thus been selected, and others (most notably formal empires and most city-states) have largely been selected out (to survive only in marginalized form as 'city-nation' states, on what still constitutes quite a large spectrum between, for example, Singapore and San Marino). The third layer then models coexistence between these units, which are 'like' (meaning: 'basically similar to') units in constitution, but 'unlike' units in capabilities. The resulting state system is a self-help system where the only difference that counts is the difference in capabilities.

Judged by functional criteria, this construct of Waltz's is an elegantly parsimonious piece of analysis. While attempts at intrinsic

critique abound (probably the most elaborate being Buzan, Little and Jones 1993), it seems that there is one line of extrinsic critique that has stuck. This line was inaugurated by Ruggie (1986) and has been expanded and given explicit evolutionary form by Spruyt (1994). Set in the present context, its key point is probably that Waltz's model lies too close to widespread (yet unwarranted) natural evolutionary thinking, and too far away from social evolutionary reasoning. As Spruyt (1994: 5) puts it, the world may be an anarchic place, but it does not follow that units 'operate in a structureless vacuum'. Empirically, in medieval Europe, social relations – differences in trade patterns and class relations – initially spawned not just one, but at least four types of unit: empires, states, city-leagues and city-states. The sovereign state – or more precisely the hegemonic belief in discourses about the centrality of the sovereign state – won out because its standardization programme was more efficient than what the other kinds of unit could deliver (and because the territorial state benefitted from advances in military technology and organization more than the city did).

Autonomization

As mentioned, there is social evolutionary thought, at least of some kind, even in someone who might look like an unusual suspect, namely Kenneth Waltz. It remains largely implicit, but it essentially underpins a story of how something like an 'international system' emerged as a distinct, identifiable and self-identifying social realm. In contrast to structural realism, a 'full' evolutionary account would need to look at the particular selections that led to the emergence of such a system, and especially at the specific ways in which it is distinguished from its environment – here also adopting an understanding of a system that takes it to be constituted by a distinction between system and environment and nothing else (rather than, for example, by 'interacting units'). In this sense, a social evolutionary account will also always be a historical account of the emergence of world politics as a distinct 'system' out of the many structural and semantic traits that will have existed before system evolution ('closure') – without, on the one hand, falling for a 'big bang' historical

account (most notably present in the notion of a 'Westphalian system') or, on the other, projecting systemic characteristics backwards onto structurally antecedent forms, thereby constructing historical regularities or even laws that govern how 'international systems' operate throughout history.

In such a reading the systemic quality of world politics is established once a specific type of political communication can clearly be identified as world (or international) politics – and not anything else (or, more precisely, anything else with the same name at the same time). This is an evolutionary process of social differentiation that takes place *within* a political system that includes all political communication, although historically it coevolved with an ongoing functional differentiation of society in which the political system became more clearly differentiated from, for example, an economic system, a system of religion, etc. What is important to note in this respect is that, as a subsystem (or 'part') of the political system, the system of world politics utilizes the same symbolically generalized medium of communication specific to, and constitutive of, the political system, namely power.[3] What makes the system of world politics special and distinct from other functionally differentiated

3 This section contains a concise re-presentation and slight further development of the argument put forward in Albert 2016. That argument, like the one presented in this book, is admittedly quite counterintuitive to what could be termed the underlying 'standard' methodologically nationalist view of IR where world/international politics is something that emerges on a level 'above' the political system that is attached firmly to the territorial state. From a world society perspective however, it works exactly the other way around: as functional differentiation becomes more important for, and indeed constitutes, a world society 'level', territorial statehood increasingly functions as one expression among many (see the subsection on hierarchical complexity below) of the *internal* differentiation of a political system of world society – in this case a social differentiation in the form of *segmentation*. On the heuristic usefulness of the concept of symbolically generalized media of communication (originally taken from Parsons and developed much further in the context of a theory of social systems by Luhmann) in IR, see, recently, Peña and Davies 2022.

subsystems of the political system is its use of a specific 'program' for observing and processing that symbolically generalized medium of communication, namely the figure of the 'balance of power'. 'Balance of power' becomes the basic scheme through which world politics is observed: this does not mean that balance of power politics covers everything, or that a Newtonian balancing of forces within a system would constitute some kind of 'natural' law. Quite the contrary. 'Balance of power', as an observational scheme, often operates in the background. This is not akin to claiming that all world politics would be balance of power politics, or that 'interest defined as power' (Morgenthau) would always take precedence over norms-based policies in the context of a balance of power system. It is, however, to highlight why a 'realist' worldview of this kind possesses so much intuitive appeal, since it claims that the most relevant political practices are those that are most similar in form to that observational scheme (see also Müller and Albert 2021). To put it differently: there is little doubt that the balance of power(s) is not a recent invention of 'modern' world politics. With its Western ideational roots most strongly anchored in the Investiture Controversy, and its modern epistemological and ontological expression most visible in a Newtonian worldview, it can be said with virtual certainty that the heyday of explicit balancing politics, rooted in and accompanied by a vast balance of power literature, lay in the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century. What happened at the turn of that century, however, crystallizing in the Congress of Vienna, was a formalization of the balance of power principle that, in an important sense, relieved individual powers of always having to construct a 'balancing world' of their own, so to speak. 'Balance of power' turned from a principle that required constant individual actualization to an observational scheme characteristic of, and thereby also constitutively underlying the formation of, a distinct system, which, as a result of that scheme, differentiated itself from its environment. By analogy with the modern world of computing, from being a multiplicity of programs/applications balance of power turned into an operating system: all programs run on it, though this also means that not everything runs directly at the operating system level.

This autonomization of a system of world politics highlights the fact that autonomization and (hierarchical) complexity are deeply interwoven: social evolutionary analysis does not stop at the variation and selection of communications about hegemonic forms of organizing political authority (as nation-state, city-state, etc.) within a given social realm. It also highlights the historical formation of the resulting realm itself as a distinct level of social reality. In this sense, the formation of modern world politics is not only characterized by evolutionary experiments with fundamentally different forms of organizing political authority, such as empires vs nation-states or the plurality of different communities of practice. Rather, there are also important evolutionary advances, which make world politics distinguishable as a distinct level of social reality by giving it its specific medium and form, in this case the 'balance of power'. The Congress of Vienna in this sense could be described as an evolutionary tipping point underpinning the establishment of the 'balance of power' as the main discursive formation through which world politics describes and observes itself. It was preceded by a long history of experimenting with different discursive attempts at solving the problem of how sovereigns, that by definition (and particularly if sovereignty is seen to derive from God) are above everyone and everything else, can relate to one another on equal terms and thereby constitute the realm of the 'international' in social practice (Kuntz 2018). After the selection of discursive formations converging around notions of the balance of power as a formal organizing principle after the Napoleonic wars, restabilization – and the forms of vertical power legitimized on that basis – became evident by the consolidation of a range of important systemic innovations that thereafter facilitated communications in world politics, most importantly the formalization and routinization of diplomatic protocol through the Congress System.

Hierarchical complexity

As Spruyt reminds us, this evolution of modern world politics did not take place in a social vacuum. Politics coevolves with other systems such as the legal one, though not in perfect synchronicity (Brunkhorst 2014). More generally, modern (world) society sets

boundary conditions for what can be selected, and what cannot, in distinct (sub)systems or social realms, and supports restabilizations in such contexts. To put it directly, in a situation where the French Revolution symbolized the demise of an order of society that was primarily characterized by stratification and possessed a clear order of social classes, it was highly improbable that classical empires, which epitomized stratification on a global scale, could survive in the long run. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the classical empire became increasingly contested and was ultimately deselected as a form of organizing political authority in world politics (leaving behind 'informal empires' such as the USSR or the US). We do not aim at this stage to embark further on the evolution of the modern (nation-)state system. The point here is not to focus on the immense variety of variations, selections, and restabilizations in this system within and between different communities of practice (as in the debates on a post-Westphalian or post-colonial order, the rise of international organizations, different security imperatives etc.). From our point of view, it is clear that the evolution of world politics never comes to a standstill as long as system-internal communications and contestations – the carriers of evolution – endure and link up to one another by being observed, within this social realm, as decisive for the distribution ('balance') of power. Contra Tang (2013), world politics is built on change, not stasis, and this includes change on the level of its basic operating principles and its constitutive forms of actorhood. It definitely includes more dimensions than 'anarchy' or 'empire' and is about much more than a movement between statist notions of offensive vs defensive realism, as Tang holds. It always experiments with variations and, through endless chains of communications, (un)selects different forms of organizing political authority, including the actors (among them, communities of practice) that embody these forms.

It is at this point that the evolution *of* the system ties up with evolution *within* the system. Reconstructing the trajectory of social evolution from a contemporary perspective, the sovereign territorial nation-state becomes the primary dominant form of organizing political authority in the system of world politics. However, and particularly also aided by the normative stabilization of the system of in-

ternational law (see below), this primacy *never* completely displaces other forms, but arranges them in a hierarchical complexity with the nation-state at the 'top', so to speak. While, most notably, formal empires become delegitimized, imperiality as a form of organizing political authority persists (Schlichte and Stetter 2023).[4] Both mainly state-based global governance arrangements and forms of 'private' authority are incorporated into an overall system of world politics. It is important to note that, while, of course, there is competition between different forms of organizing political authority – including potential challenges for the 'top place' in the system – there is no zero-sum game involved here. Just as, historically, imperial-colonial and nation-state-building projects competed with, but also mutually reinforced, one another, so forms of 'public' and 'private' authority both compete with and reinforce each other too.[5] The system of world politics evolves as an ever-changing agglomeration of forms of organizing political authority in a relation of hierarchical complexity. That specific forms completely disappear or completely new ones appear seems to be the exception; rearrangements under the condition of hierarchical complexity seems to be the rule.

The restabilization of world politics and its coevolution with (international) law

The evolution of even the, relatively speaking, most autonomous social systems does not take place in a social vacuum. Social systems coevolve, often being more strongly linked to some social systems rather than others. Law and politics, with their emergent internal differentiation and the formation of systems of international law and world politics, are, arguably, the two most closely coupled systems.[6]

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4 See Mackenzie 2016 for what is probably the best definition of empire across the variety of forms of empire in world history.

5 In the parlance of the so-called 'English School' of International Relations (ES), this hints at the mutual constitution and reinforcement of 'world society' and 'international society' (in the ES understanding of the terms); see e.g. Bucher and Eckl 2021.

6 See again Brunkhorst 2014 for a comprehensive account in terms of social evolution; Albert 2002 for an account in non-evolutionary terms.

It should be noted in this respect, however, that a close linkage to each other is not an argument against the diagnosis of systemic autonomy as a result of functional differentiation. Quite the contrary. It is only as a result of functional differentiation that different systems can be observed and described as distinct from one another, which, in turn, allows strong links to emerge (although these links themselves need not appear out of the blue, but can continue previous historical pathways of evolution). The legal system sets normative conditions for the likelihood of selections in the political system (and vice versa), although it does not strictly condition them.

It is in this sense that it is possible to say that, while the social evolution of stratified societies was characterized by an ongoing systemic (functional) differentiation of law and politics, operating together the two formed one single complex of social integration, both likewise in close conjunction with religious worldviews. This social complex was closely related to the restabilization of the societal structure of socially differentiated classes and politically centralized empires. The tremendous growth of communicative negations and, thereby, the potential variation triggered by the intellectual (e.g. by prophets, scribes, teachers and philosophers) and administrative uses of scripture was, however, neutralized by the socially selective integration of all preadaptive advances. This happened through the academic organization of philosophical discourses, the clerical organization of religious transcendence, as well as the cosmopolitan multiculturalism and legal universalism that developed ever new means of restabilizing the existing structure of political class-rule. Thus, autonomization slowly emerged not only within the political but also within the religious and legal spheres. However, preadaptive advances in normative universalism and functional differentiation that have been observed since the eleventh century ultimately paved the way for a coevolution of religious-legal rationalism and autonomous political power. This process also triggered a dialectic between a (real) polis and an (imagined) cosmopolis in this coevolution of law and politics. In particular, this dialectic was functionally needed for imperial coordination (through Roman Civil Law) and the ideological justification (through theories of the sovereign) of class-rule. Yet, it also articulated the normative tension between religious

promises of egalitarian justice and salvation, on the one hand, and the undeserved suffering, exploitation and enslavement of the lower social strata of society, on the other – thus unintentionally giving rise to previously inconceivable discursive negations that gave rise in turn to religious (e.g. the Reformation) and political (e.g. the French Revolution) upheavals.

For the coevolution of law and politics (as two autonomous spheres) – as well as of a (primarily) politically defined particularism and a (primarily) legally and religiously defined cosmopolitanism – the Papal Legal Revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the tipping point (Berman 1985; Brunkhorst 2014). In Western Europe, it triggered the functional differentiation of law, and, as a result, that of religion and (higher) education too. It (unintentionally) separated the sacred and profane spheres of value. It translated into the differentiation between city-states, city leagues, monarchies, the Holy Roman Empire and the cosmopolitan Church state. This coevolution of law and politics and, in conjunction, the ideas of universal and particular statehood then turned into something like a guiding paradigm for the Western legal tradition. In particular, it led to several preadaptive advances in modern constitutional law, that is, early forms of structural coupling between law and politics, on the one hand, and of the dialectic between universal and particular rights and legal principles (i.e. normative constraints), on the other.

One key element here was the replacement in all diplomatic affairs of cousins, uncles, brothers and all other kins- and tribesmen by professional lawyers after the Peace of Westphalia and, in particular, from the Congress of Vienna on. This was the first great step in realizing an autonomous sphere of trans-urban, trans-monarchical, trans-imperial and, ultimately, international relations (Fried 1974). Since the great legal revolution of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, diplomacy thus gradually became a privilege of lawyers. The juridification of war set in. And the alternative between waging war and searching for judicial dispute settlement was established (ibid.; see also the illustrative case of global peacebuilding discussed below). Moreover, the dialectic of the national and the cosmopolitan legal/political order was restabilized again and again after every great revolution. The paradigm of the national state is thus under

pressure from two historical ends. Contemporary world society is not shaped merely by the effects of global problems. These problems are now widely perceived and defined as the common problems of mankind, and this is possible only because world society is already, at least partly, a normatively integrated society. Taking both ends of the history of the modern state together, one could argue for a paradigm shift in the theory of the modern state and state-based international relations. The national state is a borderline case of statehood, a very specific historical case that is not at all the perfect form of *the* state or the telos and essence of 3,000 years of state evolution.

On the global level there exists today a *res publica* constituted by public law and public affairs, which affects all world citizens and is widely recognized (von Bogdandy 2012). This modern legal/political order is in this respect not unlike the old Roman order or the medieval Church State – it is a republic without a (territorial/national) state. But this global republic, consisting of networks of inter-, trans- and supranational organizations, realizes a kind of statehood because it increasingly not only supplements state functions but substitutes for them (Albert 2005: 229). To say that some form of world statehood actually does exist may sound quite strange: however, it only does so if world statehood is equated with the idea of exclusive statehood associated with the doctrine of sovereign territorial statehood. Embedded in a systemic environment characterized by hierarchical complexity, it is only one form of organizing political authority next to, and in addition to, others (see Albert et al. 2008).

4.2 The restabilization of world politics and peacebuilding

As we outlined in the previous section, a process of autonomization of the realm of world politics and a (relative) hegemony of balance of power as the underpinning organizing 'program' within it characterize world politics in the contemporary era. Its autonomization has two main facets: a differentiation from other social realms, on

the one hand, and internal differentiation, on the other. The former is visible in the evolution of operational logics unique to world politics (and not found in other social realms), first and foremost the organizing principle of balance of power; the latter can be studied by looking at the emergence and consolidation of distinct 'institutional complexes' (defined by specific social structures, practices, actor constellations and semantics) within the system of world politics. This is what we will be looking at in this section, studying the emergence and consolidation of 'peacebuilding' as such an institutional complex. As a reminder, both external and internal differentiation are processes triggered by variations – based, as we have detailed above, on strategic or accidental contestations and the spread of new ideas. Variations are, of course, ubiquitous occurrences in the social world. Only some lead to meaningful selections that take root, thereby becoming consolidated as new social practices. If this happens, these practices can ultimately contribute to a restabilization of a given social realm expressed both in terms of its becoming distinguishable from other realms (the social and non-social environments) and in the form of ongoing internal differentiation. That is why we can talk of autonomization of *and* within a system.

However, differentiation within a system, the topic that we are studying in this section, is not a linear affair. One should not assume ever increasing internal differentiation that would, over time, amount to complete fragmentation. In evolutionary processes some forms of internal differentiation emerge, while others wither away or change fundamentally. Think here of the distinction between civilized and non-civilized peoples based on racial differentiation in world politics – the so-called 'standard of civilization' – which was a guiding normative principle in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, underpinned by a widely shared ideology of 'scientific racism' (Buzan and Lawson 2015; Hobson 2012). Over time, though, the 'standard of civilization' became widely delegitimized in the context of genocides and other grave crimes against humanity committed by Western nations, as well as by the advance of decolonization and the development of the UN system. Thus, while some principles, like the 'standard of civilization', fade away (or at least are fundamentally transformed, see Buzan 2014), new

forms of internal differentiation can emerge. This is what we will look at in this section by studying the emergence of discourses and practices of peacebuilding as one form of internal differentiation in world politics. We refer to peacebuilding in relation to the semantics, practices, actor constellations and structures that are deployed, either globally or in regional theatres, in order to contain violence and, through international rather than unilateral interventions, underpin internationally embedded regimes of peace in designated 'conflict zones'. Peacebuilding is, thus, understood here as a densely institutionalized complex within the system of world politics, a fundamental building block of its constitutional structure (cf. Reus-Smit 1999).

Our argument about 'internal differentiation' thus bears some resemblance to those concepts in IR that study the consolidation of core practice fields and normative ideas in world politics, such as the concept of primary institutions (Buzan 2004), which captures some of the basic ideas of internal differentiation well. Thus, core primary institutions – Buzan, for example, mentions sovereignty, diplomacy, territoriality, great power management, market governance, nationalism, human rights, environmental stewardship and others (ibid.) – are, on the one hand, specific to world politics (i.e. attest to external differentiation), while, on the other, making up this system's complex internal differentiation. Since they go hand in hand with notions of legitimate action, legitimized actorhood (cf. Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Manning 1962) and forms of bureaucratic organization, primary institutions are quite similar to what we referred to above as institutional complexes. However, Buzan omits peacebuilding, at least as a primary institution, only mentioning peacekeeping operations as a so-called secondary institution. Yet, given the rich literature in peace and conflict studies that attests to the extensive organizational and normative anchoring of peacebuilding in world politics, we consider it a far more central building block of world politics, very much in line with what primary institutions are about.

Institutionalized complexes are not static. While some endure, new selections may transform or even replace antecedents. That is why a general trend towards entropy, in other words, a relative growth of different institutionalized complexes within a given sys-

tem can be expected. World politics is no exception here, as the literature on primary institutions underlines, with their number arguably having grown over time. The simultaneity of different institutionalized complexes within a social realm can foster 'contradictions' or seeming paradoxes, for instance when we observe a growing centrality of both sovereignty (e.g. through decolonization and the expansion of international society) and external interventions in erstwhile sacrosanct prerogatives of state sovereignty (e.g. based on the consolidation of peacebuilding as a highly legitimized field of action) at the same time. Or think of the rise of nationalism and self-determination, which can lead both to a neat consolidation of territories under nation-state rule bordering each other and also to offensive claims on other people's territory. Where such tensions exist, they tend, from the perspective of the overall system, to attest to an increasing consolidation of the system's external differentiation, since they are largely based on internal dynamics – such as struggles within and across primary institutions with respect to their specific outlook – that clearly distinguish the system in question, say world politics, from others. This confirms Luhmann's observation that systems are characterized by differentiation rather than unity and homogeneity, world politics being no exception in that respect.

In precisely this way peacebuilding can be understood as contributing to the autonomization of world politics. As part of the internal differentiation of world politics, over the course of at least the last two centuries, peacebuilding has become a densely institutionalized complex within it. Some violent conflicts, but not all (more on that below), are seen as relevant to its overall system, requiring international interventions in the form of peacebuilding to curtail violence in conflict zones and establish 'peace'. As we explain below, such interventions revolve around the evolution of an ideal of non-violence that has, over time, become firmly anchored in world politics diplomatically, legally and normatively (Linklater 2016). This ideal should not be understood in an idealistic way, however, but in its relationship with the underpinning 'program' of world politics, namely its relation to the maintenance, or transformation, of the actual balance of power predominating in a given era.

This embedding of peacebuilding within the paradigm of the balance of power is particularly apparent on two levels. Firstly, and as far as autonomization is concerned, it is to be found in the overarching securitization logic of world politics reflected in the notion of 'zones of peace' and 'zones of war', both globally and regionally (see Buzan and Wæver 2005), to which peacebuilding is tightly linked. In fact, as Article 1. 1 of the UN Charter elaborates, 'peace' and 'security' are regarded as two sides of the same coin. Secondly, it is evident when one addresses hierarchical complexity, as we do below, building on Richmond's (2006) genealogy of peacebuilding. Thus, we can identify several stages in the evolution of peacebuilding that closely correspond with a given form of, or disputes regarding, the balance of power dominant in world politics in different eras. Prevailing notions of 'peace' in world politics – including alternative concepts – have never been insulated from claims to authority (*Herrschaft*): from the reactionary forms of the victor's peace hegemonic throughout most of the nineteenth century to the emancipatory forms of peacebuilding aimed at transforming a merely state-based balance of power, which have been on the rise since at least the 1960s and highlight human security, local security and positive peace thereby challenging statism, Eurocentrism and great power interests (Autesserre 2009).

But before we study the peculiarities of peacebuilding as an institutionalized complex we have to first ask the basic sociological question as to why violent conflicts have become an object of observation in world politics in the first place. A short detour into conflict theory is useful here, for it will allow us to discuss the challenge that conflicts, in particular violent conflicts, pose for any system.

As conflict theories from Georg Simmel to Louis Coser, Niklas Luhmann and Heinz Messmer have shown, conflict is a social structure that has its own in-built inclination to escalate and colonize or even destroy its 'host system'. A complete overarching of world politics by violent conflicts would threaten system stability, in the form of total war, Armageddon or some other doomsday scenario. One might also think here of spatial contexts in which violence rules (almost) unconstrained and, as a result, violence rather than power (i.e. social relationships in which at least some form of political legitimacy is sought) shapes social relations, as for example in Nazi extermina-

tion camps or gang- and militia-ridden favelas in deprived neighbourhoods across Central and Latin America.

The in-built tendency of social conflicts to escalate is the reason why the institutionalization of practices aiming to contain conflicts is not unique to the (world) political system, but can be observed in various social realms. More specifically, in the context of functional differentiation different systems have developed their own distinct forms of regulating conflicts and the modern era is characterized by a widely positively-connotated impulse to actively address and name such conflicts, while engaging in their resolution in a professionalized (and highly individualized) manner that aims to establish 'peaceful relations': from constitutions that define the parameters of political conflict resolution in mainly national political systems to positive law that can be evoked in courts, and from mediation at the workplace and in families to psychotherapy, the latter addressing inner conflicts, with therapists acting as 'peacebuilders'. Seen from that perspective, it becomes clear why, within the political system, only a certain amount of violent conflict can be tolerated, such as – as far as world politics is concerned – in the provisions of the UN charter, which in Chapter VII limits the use of physical violence to national or collective self-defence against aggression or UN Security Council-mandated military interventions to 'maintain or restore international peace and security'. But what does the 'international' in international peace and security refer to? This is precisely about the politics of peacebuilding, the evolution of semantics and practices that determine which violent conflicts count as targets of international intervention.

In that sense, (violent) conflicts contribute to the evolution of world politics. This is very much in line with a general function of conflicts, namely to prevent stasis in a system, which is well reflected in the psychological notion of 'not suppressing' conflicts. The challenge for any system then, including politics, is to integrate conflicts within the overall system logic and its main programmes, allowing them to trigger evolutionary adaptation. Historically, one can think here of the way in which the (violent) conflicts over decolonization revealed, in Europe and elsewhere, that there are polities beyond the imperial powers with claims to political (self-)determination. Under

that premise conflicts can be a resource for learning and flexibility, although there is always the possibility of escalation that could disrupt a system or threaten its very existence. There is, thus, a thin line between giving space to (and even encouraging) conflicts, on the one hand, and avoiding their unrestrained escalation, on the other. There is also an evolutionary component to this because conflicts as sites of contestation – defined by the repeated communication of a 'no' (Stetter 2014) – are closely linked to variation, a prerequisite for any adaptation to changing environments. This can be observed in political theory as well, for example in Chantal Mouffe's (1999) theory of agonistic conflicts, in which she argues that even stark conflicts of identity should be moved into the centre of political struggles, and that this will ultimately contribute to (democratic) stability. Bahar Rumelili and Lisa Strömbom (2022: 4) have put forward a similar argument in relation to 'agonistic peacebuilding', suggesting that preserving a sense of 'ontological security' among conflicting parties in international politics will, in certain contexts, require stopping short of a complete transformation of conflicting identities in order to avoid a backlash that would only harden those identities. Thus, 'the continuity and stability of self-narratives and the ideological and moral certainty provided by the conflict's "formed framework"' (ibid.) must, through statecraft and everyday politics, be balanced with the gradual establishment of political structures that overcome inimical Self/Other distinctions. In short, any social realm is confronted with the challenge of seeking a balance between allowing and containing conflicts – or, in evolutionary terms, finding an answer to the question of how much contestation and conflict is bearable for further evolution.

All this is, finally, complicated by the fact that, given the ubiquity of conflicts, including violent conflicts, in the social world, it cannot be determined ex ante which of these (violent) conflicts are to be seen as politically relevant within the realm of world politics. To resort to the terminology of securitization theory, the evolution of peacebuilding can thus be understood as an ever ongoing political struggle over which referent objects are legitimate targets of political measures (e.g. international/regional peace and stability, state sovereignty, independence, human rights, local peace, etc.),

the definition of 'existential threats' (e.g. those of a transborder nature, 'domestic' conflicts or even 'structural' root causes such as climate change or poverty, etc.) and the security professionals that should be involved in peacebuilding (state leaders, diplomats, IOs, developmental assistance personnel, NGOs staff, local communities, etc.). Overall, such political struggles over what counts as an 'international' conflict requiring action at the level of world politics are a defining feature of the evolution, and conceptual widening, of peacebuilding witnessed over the course of the last 200 years – revolving, as we will discuss in more detail below, around the ideal of non-violence that underpins peacebuilding, on the one hand, and being closely linked to either the maintenance/defence of hegemonic manifestations of the balance of power or resistance to them and their transformation as the underlying 'programme' of world politics, on the other.

Autonomization

The selection of discourses and practices related to an emergent ideal of non-violence – which, admittedly, is regularly evoked in order to justify the use of violence, as in so-called humanitarian interventions or on the basis of claims of resistance – has contributed to the consolidation of a distinct institutional complex within the system of world politics, thereby attesting to the overall process of internal differentiation. In accordance with a broad strand of literature in peace and conflict studies we identify this institutional complex as the realm of 'peacebuilding'. We transcend this literature, however, by highlighting in what follows the systematic embedding of peacebuilding within an overall logic of the autonomization of world politics. Core to our argument is that there has been a process of social and cognitive (normative) learning in world politics – revolving around a hegemonic ideal of non-violence (see Koloma Beck and Werron 2017) – that underpins the consolidation of peacebuilding as a specific form of internal differentiation within the realm of world politics. Two interrelated dynamics stand out here. Firstly, the emergence and subsequent consolidation of semantics and practices in world politics that not only allow instances of violence to be regarded as a challenge

to international peace and security that has to be addressed by (international) peacebuilding, but links this to an ideal of non-violence that structures this institutional complex. Secondly, an increasing (hierarchical) complexity within this institutional complex. From the nineteenth century until today we have witnessed constant change in what peacebuilding is about, with 'older' versions, such as the victor's peace, transforming but not disappearing, and many newer forms, such as 'institutional peace' or 'emancipatory peace' (see Richmond 2006) enriching the arsenal of peacebuilding semantics and practices. In that context the link between the practice of peacebuilding and the way peace is studied academically deserves attention too, for example the growing emphasis on 'structural peace' and 'positive peace' (Galtung 1969; Senghaas 1982) or the more recent 'local turn' (MacGinty and Richmond 2013). Central here is the observation that notwithstanding an increasing autonomization of peacebuilding within the system of world politics, both the prevalent practices and the alternative/critical approaches remain closely linked to the overall 'programme' of balance of power – either in an affirmative way (the bulk of liberal peacebuilding practices) or *ex negativo*, by actively challenging prevailing state-based, Western forms of balance of power in critical peacebuilding practices.

This underlying linkage and hierarchy between balance of power, on the one hand, and peacebuilding, on the other, figures in the fundamental division into 'two worlds' (Buzan and Wæver 2005: 125) that shapes international security architectures and conflict formations. This has to do with the question of which conflicts and which world regions are regularly addressed in world political arenas as threats to security and as sites of intervention. As Oliver Richmond (2006) explains, a major selection made here is the social construction of a zone of conflict, identified with the Global South as a realm of insecurities and as an object of interventions, vis-à-vis a zone of peace, associated with the Global North, in particular the Atlantic–Pacific West, but also comprising other regions and states that follow the West's model of security, especially by setting up regional security communities, such as ASEAN or the AU. Furthermore, this 'zone of peace' – jointly with International Organizations and NGOs – is the major provider of international security in the form of interven-

tions by military, developmental, economic, cultural and diplomatic means. There is, in other words, an underlying distribution of power and hierarchy when it comes to peacebuilding and the fundamental distinction between zones of peace and zones of conflict is itself an expression of an underlying balance of power principle governing world politics. While we share with critical approaches in peace and conflict studies and IR the view that many postcolonial injustices and Orientalist tropes are connected to this notion of 'a zone of peace and a zone of conflict' (Buzan and Wæver 2005: 18), our evolutionary approach allows us to theorize the reasons related to the rise and persistence of this binary structure. Thus, because peacebuilding does not constitute a completely autonomous realm of world society in its own right, its semantics and practices are linked to the maintenance or challenging of concrete manifestations of 'balance of power', whether in the distinction between UN veto power countries and other states, the West and the rest or the aforementioned 'zones of peace' and 'zones of conflict'. This, to be sure, is relevant not only to debates on peacebuilding. It is also of concern to many mainstream liberal, social constructivist, institutionalist and realist IR theories that either ignore balance of power altogether – presumably because of this concept's 'realist' odour (liberalism, institutionalism, social constructivism) or because hierarchies are neglected on the basis of ahistorical (and Eurocentric) assumptions about anarchy (various brands of realism and geopolitics, but also Wendtian US-constructivism).

This embedding of peacebuilding within the 'balance of power' logic of world politics systematically structures semantics and practices of peacebuilding. While the ideal of non-violence allows us, in theory (see below), to identify all possible forms of (political) violence as legitimate targets of peacebuilding, this is filtered by the balance of power principle. Thus, violent political conflicts within the territory of states with UN veto power or linked to such states (as in the case of China's Xinjang province, Russia's war against Ukraine since 2014/2022, the fabricated arguments for the US intervention in Iraq 2003, etc.) are usually not subject to peacebuilding, or only in their aftermaths (as in Iraq) – although normatively these conflict sites are widely seen by global publics, NGOs and even a UN

special rapporteur in the case of the Uyghurs as threats to security and gross violations of human rights. Consequently, the bulk of UN peacebuilding, following a similar balance of power logic, has been aimed at conflict sites beyond the 'zones of peace' – to various locations in the (extended) Global South, Timor-Leste, Cambodia, the Congo, Lebanon and Cyprus, rather than to the mainly Western core, think of the Basque Country, South Tyrol and Northern Ireland.

Overall, prevailing notions of peace – and challenges to them – are closely related to historically hegemonic manifestations of the balance of power, that are either defended or challenged, but in either case provide the underlying foundation of peacebuilding. This was already the case with the hyper-conservative (Richmond 2006) notions of international peace that emerged during the nineteenth century, defined the maintenance of peace and security as the 'white man's burden', and problematized 'local violence' while legitimizing imperial counterinsurgency. Of course, hyper-conservative notions did not remain uncontested, they were challenged by leaders, civil society actors (including in the West, e.g. philanthropic societies) and non-Western elites – and it is precisely these variations in the form of contestations that explain the gradual differentiation of new semantics and practices of peacebuilding. While the balance of power principle has been with us since at least the Congress of Vienna in 1815, its specific outlook has changed. And so has the outlook of peacebuilding. The specific semantics and practices of constraining, managing and rationalizing organized political violence for the sake of (international) 'peace' have altered considerably over time. That is why the history of organized violence in world politics can be read not only as the evolution of wars, old and new (Kaldor 1999; Bartelson 2017), but also as the history of the manifold ways of managing these conflicts and bringing about 'peace'. The emergence since the nineteenth century of an institutional complex of peacebuilding attests, in sum, to two dynamics. Firstly, the restabilization of peacebuilding as an institutional complex within the realm of world politics, triggered by variations in the nature of violent conflicts that have led to the selection of new ideas for regulating these conflicts by, say, congress diplomacy, global multilateral institutions, international law (coevolution with law, see

below) or new normative practices linked to initially marginalized conceptions of a shared humanity that gradually replaced various forms of (scientific) racism as the legitimate view of humankind as a whole (coevolution with normative consciousness, see also below). Secondly, this institutional 'thickening' of peacebuilding, in particular when seen in conjunction with the thickening of other internally differentiated realms of world politics (say, primary institutions such as trade, diplomacy, war, environmental politics, human rights regimes, etc.) and the joint linkage of these realms to the underpinning principle of balance of power stabilizes the autonomization of world politics as a system.

Key to understanding peacebuilding in the modern international system, then, is the notion that observing violent conflicts not only legitimizes the use of violence through various practices related to the evolution of war (self-defence, having recourse to legitimizing programmes based on sovereignty, nationalism and suchlike, protection of global/regional security mandated by the UN Charter etc.) but also defines conflict as something that needs to be actively contained by means of peacebuilding. While it can reasonably be argued that the sites of violence that are observed as potentially relevant to 'international peace and security' have expanded over the course of the last two centuries, still only a tiny number of (violent) conflicts are considered as relevant to world politics. Thus, bullying involving 16-year-old girls and boys in a schoolyard in Jakarta or Geneva is unlikely to be elevated to the status of a political problem that triggers variations and selections in world politics – but it might be at the national level, giving rise, for example, to new educational programmes, penal laws, etc. By contrast, since the nineteenth century violence between social groups, particularly between those that define themselves on the basis of ethno-national belonging and are pursuing self-determination (resulting in inter-state wars, civil wars, decolonization, etc.), has regularly been framed as related to international peace and security – and regularly becomes subject to peacebuilding endeavours. From the perspective of a theory of evolution, this sensitivity of world politics (and other social realms, such as mass media, academia, law, education, etc.) to violent conflicts is not a given, but itself subject to social evolution

– and not only because, prior to the nineteenth century, no norm of 'nationalism' existed on the basis of which communications could be clustered in a discursive formation based on self-determination and conflicts related to it. The same is true for human rights violations and how they trigger conflicts. In addition, this can only be seen as threatening international peace and security if at least some form of human rights regime has emerged, either in positive law, political practice or from various human rights' advocates. A set-up in which (violent) conflicts are a case for (international) peacebuilding is thus a major site for political struggles. Over the course of the last two centuries these struggles have led to considerable changes in the definition of what constitutes a conflict and what are legitimate forms of peacebuilding. If violent conflicts are addressed on that basis, they trigger variations in the system of world politics and lead eventually to selections that establish peacebuilding as a major site, or institutional complex, of world politics.

The ideal of non-violence plays a major role in this context, for it provides the semantic and practical background for viewing 'violence' as something that ought to be opposed in the name of security and peace, even if this includes temporarily enacting violence for the sake of 'international peace' (e.g. robust mandates given to UN peacekeepers, humanitarian interventions). Koloma Beck and Werron (2017) have shown how the discursive frame of 'local' violence as a world political problem emerged in the course of the nineteenth century, and how this fostered a 'hegemonic ideal' of non-violence in international politics, the ideational underpinning of the peacebuilding paradigm. On that basis, semantics and practices related to this ideal stabilized, including a wide variety of communities of practice that at least partly legitimized their actorhood in relation to this ideal (e.g. great powers, International Organizations and non-governmental organizations). While the question as to which forms of 'local' violence are regarded as a world political problem – in other words the politics of peacebuilding – remains deeply contested until today (Autesserre 2009), regarding selected instances of local violence as issues that need to be solved in world politics based on an ideal of non-violence has had tremendous effects. Koloma Beck and Werron (2017: 279) highlight in that context a 'progressive dele-

galization and delegitimation' of inter- and intra-state violence. This should not, though, be misread as 'straightforwardly progressive' (ibid.) not least because the ideal of non-violence 'embeds local conflicts into global competitions' (ibid. 286). These competitions can result in a given conflict becoming the object of peacebuilding but can also, paradoxically, trigger violence. An example would be where conflict parties aim to draw attention to 'their' conflict or subtly induce their enemies to use violence in order to increase global attention. Moreover, as mentioned above, observing violence through the prism of the ideal of non-violence shapes semantic disguises of the use of violence, such as in humanitarian interventions.

The evolution of this ideal of non-violence was initially based on isolated variations to the 'normal' way of doing things by great powers, in other words it was about contestations that challenged the practice of great power politics in dependent territories. The ideal of non-violence is closely related to the 'human rights revolution' (Akira et al. 2012) that emerged in world politics around the same time Since the late eighteenth century claims for self-determination from Haiti to Greece – and supported by social movements 'which campaigned against specific forms of cruelty or violence which were not yet regulated by national jurisdiction' (Koloma Beck and Werron 2017: 277) linked the ideal of non-violence (which required temporary resistance to colonialism though) with the human rights of every individual, including self-determination for non-Westerners, as an alternative to the entrenched state-centred, colonial and imperial practices that dominated world politics in that epoch (see Reus-Smit 2001). In sum, the 'de-legalization of inter-state violence was to be closely interlinked with the codification of human rights' (ibid.: 278). Over time, these more or less isolated communicative variations paved the way for selections that translated these variations into the aforementioned discourses, practices, forms of knowledge and models of actorhood that started to shape the newly emerging institutional complex of (international) peacebuilding. Initially (see also below), great powers tried to accommodate these novel semantics within their entrenched power prerogatives (e.g. by jointly administering parts of China and the Ottoman Empire), but

in that era other forms of peacebuilding were already emerging that attested to an evolution in this institutional complex itself.

This internal differentiation of world politics, indicative of a process of autonomization, is a perspective on international politics that Tang (2013), for example, completely misses in his state-centric evolutionist ontology.[7] What he observes is merely a shift to a defensive realist world, a rather simplistic concept in light of the multiplicity of quasi-constitutional structures in world politics anyway. What he overlooks is the immense institutional density and complexity of world politics, a field that comprises a much broader set of constitutional structures than realist orthodoxy allows, and of which peacebuilding revolving around an ideal of non-violence is one element. To sum up, semantics and practices explicitly linked to a hegemonic ideal of non-violence contributed to the internal differentiation of world politics. In theory, and once this ideal has become sufficiently anchored across various communities of practice as well as in people's minds (and in legal frameworks), almost every conflict in which violence occurs – or could potentially occur – can become a theatre of peacebuilding. The question as to which concrete actions and actors are considered legitimate in peacebuilding has evolved – but can be well studied by turning to the hierarchical complexity of peacebuilding, which we examine in the next section on the basis of Richmond's (2006) genealogy.

Hierarchical Complexity

This autonomization of world politics, based on internal differentiation that includes inter alia the stabilization of peacebuilding as one of its core institutional complexes, is not static. Peacebuilding is subject to hierarchical complexity, with the notion of 'liberal peace' (Richmond 2006: 193) becoming a hegemonic, but contested ideal over time. The hierarchical complexity of peacebuilding figures in

7 Before the 1990s, peace and reconciliation was often affected by third parties that mediated/created back channels between states. Mediating conflicts inside a sovereign state, however, was exceptional. Nonetheless, since the late 1980s and especially the 1990s, it has become standard: Israel, Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Spain are telling examples (Neumann 2015).

the selection – and at times the deselection – of specific procedures, discourses, practices, institutions, programmes and mentalities intended to ensure peace through collective interventions by the 'international community', thereby containing the uncontrolled spread of violence and establishing some form of legitimate authority that secures 'peace'. The collective interventions through which this took place changed over time. Firstly, there were joint colonial intrusions, for example into China in the nineteenth century or into the Ottoman Empire where a British protectorate was established in Egypt and an Austro-Hungarian protectorate in Bosnia and Hercegovina in spite of the *de iure* sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire to which these territories formally belonged. These were followed, secondly, by trusteeship and great power management before and after World War I, for example under the mandate system. Thirdly came state-building orchestrated by international organizations, or contemporary humanitarian interventions and developmental assistance. In all these settings the question of which conflicts were considered a threat to the system remained paramount – and for that reason the definition of which conflicts should become sites of 'peacebuilding' is still a heavily politicized field. It is, that is to say, a discursive context in which variations occur, some of them selected as viable peacebuilding measures, some not – all of them being closely related to the overarching context of how they affect or change the hegemonic manifestations of the balance of power in a given era. While world politics arguably continues to be read in terms of secure vs insecure spaces, the former associated with the Global North, in particular the West, the latter with the Global South, changes are evident. Thus, the 'zone of peace' has gradually expanded (Richmond 2006: 190) to include today 'dominant actors in International or Regional Environment' (ibid.) such as international and regional organizations and regional powers from the Global South that have become central actors in peacebuilding. This evolution of the notion of zones of peace is mirrored by the evolution of the 'zone of conflict' in which a growing number of issues have been defined as threats to peace, a growing number of institutional programs enacted and, finally, a growing number of actors identified

as not only recipients but subjects of peacebuilding (including local communities and individuals).

The evolution of peacebuilding comprises four main stages (see Richmond 2006: 217). Hyper-conservative, joint administration of colonial or quasi-colonial spaces by mainly European (but also American) imperial powers, with brute force being a viable but heavily disguised (i.e. counter-insurgency) method. The rise of the hegemonic ideal of non-violence challenged this hyper-conservative model though. Conservative notions of peacebuilding revolving around the ideal of a 'victor's peace' and 'constitutional peace' construed peacebuilding as a responsibility to intervene and establish a self-ruling 'post-conflict' order. 'Peace is a product of force and elite diplomacy' (ibid.) and accompanied by robust peacekeeping, mediation and truces. This was the hegemonic model of peacebuilding before and after World War II. The period since the 1960s has witnessed a constant widening of intervening actors and fields of intervention. Peacebuilding has shifted to some degree from force (or avoiding force as in peacekeeping) to more active measures revolving around notions of positive peace, thus supplementing constitutional peace with a widening agenda of 'institutional peace' that works through hegemony rather than force (as opposed to the victor's peace) and is concerned not only with self-determination and constitutionalization (as reflected in the UN Charter), but includes a much wider and longer-term engagement of the international community and local/national actors in various governance arenas: the economy, education, health etc. This 'peacebuilding consensus', that further profited from the end of the Cold War and the expectations that an 'Agenda for Peace' was now a realistic option for conflicts throughout the globe, underpins what is referred to in peace and conflict studies as the 'liberal peace', a 'peace constructed in conflict environment consensually through democratization, development, free-market reforms, human right, and the construction of civil society. External peacebuilders seek alliances with international actors as well as international sponsors' (ibid.: 193).

The liberal peace is not uncontested, however, not least because, as Autesserre (2009) points out, most peacebuilding endeavours fail to curtail violence, not least because the overall framing of peace-

building neglects and Orientalizes local violence. That is why emerging semantics and practices of 'emancipatory peace' (MacGinty and Richmond 2013), based on an ontology of hybridity, local legitimacy and social justice, can be observed in many conflict sites, being advanced not only by more or less marginalized actors and taken up, although often in a superficial way, by hegemonic liberal peacebuilding actors. To sum up, hierarchical complexity with respect to peacebuilding as a main institutional complex of world politics figures in a change in – and generally speaking a widening of – its institutional contexts (global/UN, regional/regional organization, state-based multilateralism etc.), actor constellations (states, IOs, substate communities, international and national NGOs, local communities) and scales of intervention (broadly from negative peace to positive peace) in that context.

Coevolution and global peacebuilding

Finally, this internal differentiation of global peacebuilding, including the process of hierarchical complexity, does not happen in systemic isolation but rather in constant relation with development in other social realms. Four areas of coevolution arguably stand out.

Firstly, the coevolution between politics and science, exemplified by the fact that peace and conflict studies, like IR some decades earlier, has become, over time, a (highly interdisciplinary) discipline within the social sciences, attesting to a process of internal differentiation in the science system – the emergence of the discipline of IR taking place in a complex coevolution with the emergence of world politics (which is a good reason for backdating the core of IR theories to the nineteenth century, as Hobson (2012) does), and the emergence of peace and conflict studies post-World War II taking place in a complex coevolution with the institutional consolidation of liberal peacebuilding.

Secondly, the coevolution of world politics and international law, in particular in relation to the legal regulation of the problem of war and violence, a process that spans the period from the establishment of the International Red Cross following the battle of Solferino, to the Hague Conventions of 1899/1907, the Declaration of Human Rights

and the UN Charter with its prohibition of the use of violence (except for carefully described exceptions) and the Rome Statute that led to the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002 – but also the development of soft law, such as the major human rights conventions of the 1960s and the notion of the 'responsibility to protect' that did, though, also serve as a justification for the NATO-led military intervention in Libya in 2011, a phenomenon that could also be read as contributing to the evolution of war, rather than that of peacebuilding.

Thirdly, the coevolution of world politics and the media system, which has a share in rendering the world a 'small place' in which violent conflicts elsewhere can be reported and decried, evoking political action to remedy them, and, not least, creates huge potential to rally concerned audiences from all over the globe that demand action for the sake of 'peace' (see Koloma Beck and Werron 2017: 284–285). And, fourthly, the coevolution of peacebuilding and learning/consciousness, expressed, for example, in global celebrations of peace as a human heritage. The Nobel peace prizes are an interesting case study here, not only because this is a form of social activism that is strongly institutionalized on a global scale, but also because the evolution of the awards shows precisely the shift to a growing range of activities (e.g. environmental protection, social justice and redistribution) and actors (earlier mainly statesmen, today also stateswomen and, in particular, non-state actors such as international organizations and individuals) that revolves, broadly speaking, around an evolution from proto-liberal, through liberal to emancipatory peace (Salmon 2002).

To conclude, one should keep in mind that, evolutionarily speaking, all these adaptations are precarious. Our analysis of how peacebuilding attests to an internal differentiation in world politics must not be read as an emancipatory story of how international politics contributes to overcoming violence. Quite the contrary. First of all, peacebuilding competes with other forms of internal differentiation, some of which are much more positively geared to the legitimized execution of violence for utilitarian objectives (war, nationalism, etc.). Secondly, peacebuilding always contains the possibility that violence will be legitimized either explicitly or implicitly. Thirdly, the mere ex-

istence of peacebuilding as a mode of observation that relies on identifying violent conflicts that have to be dealt with in the first place arguably supports the observation (and subjective impression) that over the long run world politics has not been getting more peaceful, but is shaped by theatres of violence that require urgent peacebuilding interventions.

4.3 The evolution of world politics through the practice of diplomacy

The example of peacebuilding in world politics reveals how historical trajectories that integrate 'old' ways of doing things into 'new' discursive frames – such as, for example, the balance of power and an ambivalent (legal) ideal of non-violence – contribute to the process of restabilization of world politics. However, 'old' forms do not simply disappear. The general evolutionary pattern – for as long as restabilization continues – is that they become more complex, leading to an increase not only in the overall complexity of social arrangements, but also in hierarchical forms of complexity that need to be processed discursively. Diplomacy and its contribution to the restabilization of world politics is a case in point. Diplomacy is the emergent stylized form of communication authorized by polity leaders that dates way back far into prehistory and that is attested in writings from the First Axial Age onwards. It is, therefore, a particularly promising site on which to trace hierarchical complexity. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the discursive marker 'new diplomacy' has characterized reflection on this phenomenon, and revolutionary as well as revisionist practices have defined the evolution of diplomacy ever since. Before we turn to a discussion of these developments, we wish to give some short examples of how the triad – variation, selection, restabilization – worked on cognitive models of diplomacy before the onset of modernity, focusing on how antecedent discursive layers were integrated into modern diplomatic practices.

We know a little about the evolution of diplomacy among hunter-gatherer bands from nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies of hunter-gatherers throughout the world (Neumann 2016; Numelin

1950). *Homo sapiens sapiens* lived in foraging bands of some 20 to 200 individuals since it emerged some 200,000 years ago, by which time *Homo sapiens* had already been doing the same since its emergence. These bands were dependent on a certain level of cooperation for finding and processing food, reproducing, etc. By archaeological consensus, the level of cooperation increased radically as a response to an environmental factor, namely the possibility of capturing big game. Regardless of the method of hunting adopted (driving animals into abysses, digging holes, spearing etc.), it would take a group rather than an individual to carry it out. The result of collaboration was pivotal in evolutionary terms, because it immediately led to a change in the unit of selection. With increased cooperation, the unit of selection changed from individual to group. For leading individuals, this revolution posed a challenge, for the superior individual hunting skills that had made them leaders were no longer an optimal environmental fit on their own, but had to be complemented by skills pertaining to leadership and collaboration. This change was driven by levelling behaviour, which meant that alpha males were lived down by coalitions that went in for sharing food, group sanctions and suchlike (compare Shostak 1976).

With the coming of agriculture (and, in select places, the possibility of establishing a stable food source from riparian resources), habitat density drove a selection process characterized by increased competition and also cooperation between polities. A pattern was initiated whereby culturally similar but politically distinct entities emerged. These polities interacted on a regular basis from territorially stable positions. The result was institutionalized patterns of interaction, which may be seen as the first embryonic diplomatic settings. We know of them from ethno-historical work, particularly on North America (Jennings 1985). As an example, consider the fifteenth- to nineteenth-century Iroquois Confederacy or League, or, more correctly, the Haudenosaunee (People of the Long-House). Their diplomacy was rooted in myth and centred on two loci, namely meetings at the wood's edge and, subsequently, in conference, around the campfire. Diplomacy focused on a particular form of messaging involving a kind of belt made of wampum (strings of beads or shells). Wampum holds considerable interest, for it is the

best documented of what was possibly a number of techniques that could be drawn upon to conclude treaties before the advent of writing (another one is the knots or *quipo* of today's South America, a mnemonic system that may or may not share an origin with wampum).

Considered as objects, wampum belts consisted of cylindrical beads made principally of shells drilled through from opposite ends. They were then strung in rows, forming a rectangular belt that was usually longer than it was wide. Colours conveyed meaning, with white symbolizing peace and life, black symbolizing war and death and so on. Belts were archived and could be read by specialists. Here we have early, rudimentary examples of treaties, archives and conferences.

Particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, wampum played a key role in diplomacy, as it did in law-making. The importance of these belts went beyond graphic depiction, for the belt was said to carry the message of one council to another. These messages were literally read into the wampum before it was taken by a messenger to be presented to another tribal council (where the messenger lent the message voice). Diplomatic signalling took the form of making, presenting, receiving and handling the wampum. Words did not come alive without the help of the belts. Note that a spiritual, mythic realm must therefore be said to underwrite the wampum. From the seventeenth century onwards, as relations with English colonists took on increasing density, it also became increasingly wampum-based. Indeed, while the English definitely experienced this as a foreign practice, they took steps to make wampum more available and grasped that wampum was something that had to be learnt, and learnt well. This took time. On the basis of archival studies, Nancy Hagedorn (1988: 70) reports how, on more than one occasion, Iroquois delayed meetings with the English because the wampum sent beforehand was 'no more than Strings'. Hagedorn also details wampum's actual use in negotiations:

> the passing of a wampum string or belt punctuated each proposal or section of a speech. … Once a belt had been received across the council fire, protocol demanded that similar belts or strings ac-

> company each portion of the respondents' reply. When responding, the speaker displayed the received belts and strings in the order they were delivered by laying them upon a table or hanging them across a stick and repeating what was said on each. At the end of every article, he returned thanks, added his group's reply, and passed the new wampum across the fire. The return of the original belt without another one in reply indicated a rebuke or the rejection of the petitioners' proposal (ibid.: 66–67).

To the Iroquois, the wampum seems to have been to the spoken word what the written word is to the spoken word in literate cultures. In both cases, at formal occasions between two polities, the two go together. In both cases, the spoken word takes second place.

With the coming of writing and the First Axial Age, we can follow the evolution of these patterns in more detail (Podany 2010). A number of third-millennium archives on stone tablets with cuneiform inscriptions have come to light. Some of these tablets constitute surviving diplomatic exchanges between city-states. Up until the 1700s BCE, they circulated primarily in a Babylonian civilizational milieu. However, with the rise of the Hittite empire in the middle of that century, and with Egypt entering into denser contacts with its neighbouring states to the north, an intercivilizational diplomatic system came into being. IR scholars have now firmly established the so-called Amarna system as the world's first fully-fledged states system and the conventional bookend of historical scholarship. Its existence in the fourteenth century BCE is well documented, among other things through Pharaoh Akhenaten's (r. 1353–1336) library (Moran 1992). Diplomatic practices settled on ritualized exchanges between polity leaders who referred to one another by kinship terms (brothers, sons/fathers), enquired about one another's health and asked about gifts and favours. All this notably took place first in fourth-millennium BCE Sumerian and then in second-millennium BCE Akkadian, a language that by then was not the language of any of the polities involved (Babylonia, Egypt, Hatti, etc.; see Cohen and Westbrook 2000). This first large-scale diplomatic system disappeared with the late Bronze-age breakdown around 1200 BCE. A new formalized system emerged only some seven hundred years

later, when the ancient Greeks formed institutions such as amphyctrionic leagues and Olympic Games. These institutions, whose primary purpose was to uphold cultic places (such as in Delphi) and make possible stylized and non-lethal competition, also served as diplomatic sites. Once again, however, this system was superseded and gave way to unilateral practices of approaching other polities, such as the Roman ones.

Although the Roman Empire was on many levels more differentiated than the Greek city-states, as far as diplomacy was concerned. hierarchical complexity was higher in Greece. This fact exemplifies our argument about the non-linearity and non-teleology of social evolution. Thus, Romans reverted to basic exchanges by messengers. The post-Roman world then came to know elaborate missions, where delivering a message was a function joined by the function of negotiation. These were called embassies. From the fourth century CE, different branches of Christendom saw the evolution of the institution of *apocrisiarii*, whereby some representatives of the Catholic Church were resident in Byzantine cities. The first permanent, reciprocal and fully-fledged example of secular leaders having resident representatives in other polities – what came to be known as permanent diplomacy – stems from the fifteenth-century Italian city-states system. This system selected permanent diplomats over messengers and embassies, to the extent that an embassy came to be the term not for a peripatetic, but a permanent mission. Diplomacy, as the umbrella within which diplomatic communications were processed, restabilized, in other words, as permanent diplomacy, a form that rapidly spread to cover all of Europe.

Before the Fourth Axial Age, the autonomization of diplomacy was negligible. A key reason for this was diplomacy's intimate coevolution with religion. Like previous forms of diplomacy, European diplomacy was rooted in myth, more specifically in Christian founding myths. The world was seen as God's creation. God's will was seen to be that all humankind should live at peace with one another in a society anchored in religion. It followed that, when there was strife, it was because people were not living in accordance with God's will. Diplomacy, understood as the work of recreating the peaceful situation that God willed, was seen as a necessity in an imperfect

world. People who specialized in reconstituting peace – and here we have one possible understanding of diplomats – were therefore doing God's work (Der Derian 1987). We have a wonderful example of how practices were rooted in myth and how this rooting may have been selected from the 1400s, the time when religiously defined Christendom began to transform into territorially defined Europe:

> Vladimir, Prince of Galitch, on being upbraided for not honouring a promise made on the cross of St Stephen, retorted that it had only been a very small cross, to which the complainant's envoy replied that it was nonetheless miraculous and that the Prince should be fearful for his life. (Hamilton and Langhorne 1995: 94)

Note that this interaction would have been impossible had there not existed a myth that laid down peaceful relations as the norm and a narrative sociability concerning the drawing up of promises, agreements and treaties, with specific ritual practices (the kissing of the cross was a practice which bound the kisser to the agreement entered into) and sanctions (heavenly punishment for breaking promises). Note, furthermore, that the myth and the practice are doxic and unchallengeable on their merits. Vladimir was reduced to quibbling over how ritual was performed rather than ritual as such, over adherence to a norm rather than the norm itself.

Autonomization

By the 1400s, with the diplomacy of Western Christendom well stabilized, variation raised its head again. Until 1455, diplomacy was conducted on a one-off basis, with an envoy and his entourage conducting a trip on behalf of one crowned head to another. That year, the Duke of Milan sent Nicodema de Pontremoli to Genoa in order to set up a permanent representation, for contacts had become so dense that a permanent presence made more sense than a series of intermittent visits. In about a century, most European states had such permanent representations. Whereas before, diplomats were courtiers and, as such, part of daily political life except when on embassies abroad, the fact that they were now away from court on a permanent basis singled them out as separate and gave them much

more autonomy in their dealings with their host states. Previously, the same courtiers who were used for embassies abroad were often sent by the king to parley with his more exalted subjects; this practice was now wound down. Permanent embassies were, therefore, a key development in the autonomization of diplomacy. As non-European powers followed suit and established their own permanent embassies from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the same autonomizing process was eventually in evidence throughout the globe.[8]

Autonomization was also strengthened by the emergence of what was to become known as the *corps diplomatique*. The emergence of permanent representation meant that ambassadors from different states regularly rubbed shoulders at the court to which they had been sent. Out of this grew the institution of the diplomatic corps, the totality of diplomats accredited to a particular sovereign at any one time considered as a body, for example, all the diplomats accredited to the Court of St. James's (that is, to the United Kingdom) or all the diplomats in Washington, DC. Traditionally, diplomats representing different sovereigns, particularly ambassadors, were rivals, and, although they tended to share an aristocratic background, there were few institutionalized cross-cutting bonds that made for solidarity. In 1556, England was already insisting that permanent ambassadors pay for their own lodgings. A century later, this was becoming a practice. The ensuing common material interest that foreign diplomats shared in seeing to it that their host country kept up its end of the bargain was clearly a factor making for solidarity, which further strengthened the *corps diplomatique* and, by extension, the autonomization of diplomacy as well.

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, the kind of highly stylized, permanent and secretive diplomacy that had by then been honed by aristocrats for 300 years came under direct attack. French Enlightenment philosophers presented a modern alternative, a

8 As so often, there were forerunners, such as the aforementioned *apocrisiarii*, representatives of the Catholic Church living with the Orthodox church, and Byzantine envoys sent to places like Kyiv at the end of the fourteenth century.

communicative variation, which they saw as a negation of old diplomacy. A 'no' is in evidence (Stetter 2014). This form of contestation is explained by Felix Gilbert, who points out that future foreign policy would entail a reversal of the diplomacy of the past, a new diplomacy:

> Relations among nations should follow moral laws. There should be no difference between the 'moral principles' which rule the relations among individuals and the 'moral principles' which rule relations between states. Diplomacy should be 'frank and open'. Formal treaties should be unnecessary; political alliances should be avoided particularly. Commercial conventions should refrain from all detailed regulations establishing individual advantages and privileges (Gilbert 1951: 15)

Here we have a clear example of normatively driven evolution. Note also the coevolution between the emergence of a postulated non-violent diplomacy focused on cooperation and peace and the emergence of a standard of peace as discussed in the previous section (3.2.). What was said in 3.2. about the importance of a certain constellation of the balance of power for the emergence of peace is equally relevant to the emergence of diplomacy. This diplomacy, which was characterized by its revolutionary French proponents as 'new', was briefly implemented (i.e. positively selected) by the revolutionary French regime, but was abolished (yet, as a negative selection, not forgotten) by the Directorate. It was, for example, the approach taken by early US diplomacy, only to resurface in 1919, when President Woodrow Wilson referred to the same alternative cognitive model of diplomacy as 'new', although by then it had been 'new' for some 150 years. A key aspect of this 'new' diplomacy came to be called multilateral diplomacy, diplomacy between more than one state.[9] Driven by increased social complexity but also by technological innovation in the area of communication, particularly

9 From an evolutionary perspective, it is particularly interesting to note that the meaning of the concept 'multilateral' seems to be changing, away from its basic descriptive meaning of diplomacy between more than two states, towards a richer meaning implying that no state may be barred from a mul-

in infrastructure, multilateral diplomacy became increasingly formalized in international organizations. As evolutionary phenomena always do, these international organizations had precursors, arguably stretching back all the way to hunter-gatherer meetings, as it were. More complex forms of multilateral diplomacy emerged with the irregular church meetings of the Catholic Church from the fourth century onwards and the kurultais that were called to choose successor rulers in the Turko-Mongol tradition of Eurasian steppe politics. Even more elaborate comings together of states such as the Congress of Augsburg (1555), the Congress of Westphalia (1648), the Congress of Vienna (1815) were then called to settle new orders after wars.

Hierarchical complexity

In the years after the Congress of Vienna, there was an attempt made to establish Congresses on a permanent basis, the so-called Concert of Europe. It was in operation formally from 1815 to 1822, when it met annually, and went on informally for decades thereafter. The point here was that the Great Powers met to settle matters that they perceived as threatening the European order, as in the expression 'working in concert'. The formal division of states into small and great powers that had taken place at the Congress of Vienna and that made the Congress of Europe possible, consecrated the hierarchization that had been in evidence since the autonomization of diplomacy. During the eighteenth century, for example, it fell to great powers to guarantee treaties between minor ones. At Vienna, great powers arrogated to themselves the right to exchange diplomats with the rank of ambassadors; all diplomats exchanged by smaller powers had to use other titles, such as minister.[10]

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tilateral set-up. Inclusiveness makes for denser relations, so this is a trend to follow.

10 With reference to what was said about the functional-structuralist character of Waltz's (1979) theory of structural realism above, note that, as far as diplomacy is concerned, there is a direct parallel between what Waltz talks about as the third layer of his generative model of the system and calls the

With the founding of the League of Nations in 1919, permanent multilateral diplomacy went global. The League of Nations itself was not a functional organization, but a general one. It combined features both of early Congresses (broad membership, overarching working area) and extant international organizations. Furthermore, the League served as a spawning site for new functional organizations, such as the International Studies Conference, where people who studied International Relations met, coordinated ongoing activities and initiated new ones. International organizations covering more and more specific activities came into being. Whereas former historians of the League tended to foreground its failure, most historians now think more in evolutionary terms and focus on the League's role as harbinger of the United Nations. Both organizations demonstrate the further evolution and densification of world society. The work of the perhaps hundred thousand international organizations that exist today has increased the number of people doing diplomatic work enormously and has lent global diplomacy a much, much more socially dense quality than it had only a hundred years ago. Whereas four-digit numbers sufficed to count the diplomats on the eve of the First World War, diplomats working for states today are reckoned in six-digit numbers, and if we add international civil servants, activists in non-governmental organizations, consultants, spin doctors and so on, we probably reach a seven-digit number. We will come back to the role of coevolution with the growth in state bureaucracies as a precondition for this development. As far as hierarchization is concerned, note that the United Nations has actually institutionalized the tension between diplomacy amongst sovereign and hence formally equal states on the one hand, and diplomacy as unequal exchange on the other. The UN's General Assembly works on the premise on the former; the UN Security Council on the premise of the latter. Note also that the growing autonomization of diplomacy goes hand in hand with its continued hierarchization. Perhaps lingering hierarchization is

'differentiation of power capabilities' on the one hand, and what we call hierarchization on the other.

even a precondition for autonomization, for in this way, great powers retain an indirect possibility of governing diplomatic processes that they would not have had without it. The possibility of indirect control makes it possible to renounce some of the possibilities of direct control, which evaporate with the increased autonomization of diplomacy (compare Neumann and Sending 2010).

On the global level, the relationship between what we might call 'old' and 'new' diplomacy over the last 250 years or so is a good example of the variation and hierarchical complexity that is shaped by the ambivalence between these different forms of diplomacy and attests to the way in which the tension between the two shapes the constant restabilization of world politics as an autonomous social realm.[11] There is a general point to be made here. So far, old and new diplomacies have simply not diverged enough to be treated as two variants of diplomacy in an evolutionary sense. For that to happen, there would have to be changes in the principle that grounds both these styles of diplomacy. That principle is sovereignty, which, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, broadened to become a global principle of political organization. Sovereignty remains the key phenomenon framing the social and material environment within which diplomacy develops. Sovereignty itself, however, is not a phenomenon that stands still to have its picture taken. On the one hand, we see a traditional variant of sovereignty that insists on a world of clear boundaries between states that can always use their sovereign power to keep what is inside them separate from outside elements. Sovereignty is rooted in the state, which rules by bidding other entities to carry out its will. On the other hand, we see a newer version of sovereignty that insists on a world of

11 This also includes the emergence and global spread of permanent multilateral diplomacy, in particular the emergence of IOs since the nineteenth century. In that context, the number of diplomats and quasi-diplomats working for states, IOs, NGOs, etc. rose from four-digit numbers prior to World War I to probably seven-digit numbers today, thereby adding more and more layers of hierarchical complexity to diplomacy in the system of world politics, not least by involving an ever-growing number of actors in global peacebuilding.

permeable boundaries between states that try to handle the ensuing flows between what lies inside and what lies outside them. This kind of sovereignty is rooted in the international community, the state citizens of which partake in global governance through other kinds of polities such as non-governmental organizations, companies etc. If we map the old and new diplomacy onto these two variants of sovereignty, the fit is quite striking. State sovereignty grounds old diplomacy. Historically, the two have a complicated relationship, for in the eighteenth century the King's diplomacy was a major target for those who argued that sovereignty should be popular. Today, however, the principle of popular sovereignty is well ensconced, and is grounding diplomacy quite frictionlessly. The preponderance of old diplomacy is also helped by the changing balance of power. Most political forces in China and India are, in their different ways, following the broad understanding of sovereignty that grounds old diplomacy. Old diplomacy with its *faits accomplis* is, for example, on ample display in the South China Sea, where China keeps on creating new land at a brisk pace. Furthermore, and as already noted, in the face of stiffer competition from China, India and also Russia, the United States seems increasingly to follow the practices of old diplomacy as well.

And yet, stabilization around old diplomacy is not in sight, and is unlikely to take place, simply because too many well-ensconced 'new' diplomatic practices exist that are at variance with it. Within Europe, diplomacy has undergone a radical transformation in the form of the EU and its Brussels-based and committee-centred decision-making mechanism, while the 'old' form of bilateral diplomacy between EU member states endures in parallel. In the interstices between Europe and its neighbours, variation and hegemonic complexity can be witnessed on a running basis. Russia's 2014 invasion and incorporation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula may serve as an example. The takeover and its diplomatic follow-up were a clear-cut example of what, in terms of the old diplomacy, is known as a *fait accompli* (Constantinou 1996). The idea is to have one's way by presenting other states with an arm-twisting shock rather than aiming for the diplomatic practice of a prenegotiated solution. The action was seen by many Western leaders not only as illegal, but

as tellingly outdated. German Chancellor Angela Merkel reportedly told US President Barack Obama in a telephone conversation that 'Putin lives in another world' – a world that many Western leaders thought had been left behind (Fleischhauer 2014). What Merkel described here may be read in evolutionary terms as fatigue with the burden of a hierarchical complexity that one cannot get rid of, as dramatically underlined by the war between Russia and Ukraine that began in 2022. The drama of social evolution in which these actors are performing may be captured in the social evolutionary terms that we have drawn upon here. However, it is simply rooted in too deep a social shift away from the one-off interest-based games that characterized eighteenth-century interaction between states (still favoured by Putin) towards the iterative multilateral games (preferred by Merkel and Obama) to be captured by Tang's (2013) much more linear argument about a shift away from offensive towards defensive realism. Adler's (2019) focus on collaborative world-making would also struggle to capture what we have highlighted here, for the simple reason that his approach downplays the intensity and drawn-out temporality of the social struggles (and entrenched hierarchies) that often surround evolutionary selection.

Coevolution

The denser the information exchange within a system, the greater the perceived need for its units to formalize that information. There is a clear coevolution between the growth of systems density on the one hand, and the autonomization of diplomacy on the other, so much so that the autonomization of diplomacy and the widening and broadening of its field of operation have to be seen as constitutive of the system. A functionalist example would be how, first after the Napoleonic Wars and the Congress of Vienna and then after the Crimean War, what came to be known as fully-fledged 'international' organizations (i.e. organizations with states as members) emerged, such as the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (1815) and its equivalent on the Danube (1856; Yao 2022). They still exist, with the former having a membership of five states, a permanent secretariat in Strasbourg and a staff with a dozen plus members.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, these international organizations were joined by functional ones, such as the International Telegraph Union (originally the International Telegraph Convention, 1865, now a UN agency) and the International Postal Union (1874), which brought permanence to multinational diplomacy, just as permanence had been brought to bilateral diplomacy some centuries before. The emergence of these international organizations, which were also a precondition for the emergence of first the League of Nations and then the United Nations and indeed for permanent multilateral diplomacy of all kinds, must be seen in the context of coevolution between diplomacy on the one hand, understood as speaking to the other, and bureaucracy on the other, understood as a way of administering functional processes. Another example of the same type of coevolution can be found in the emergence of foreign ministries in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, and then across the globe. In this case, coevolution did not involve international, but national bureaucratic processes.

Coevolution with knowledge production is in evidence first and foremost with respect to international law. The standardization of who could send and receive diplomats and which titles they were supposed to use as well as the legal recognition of the *corps diplomatique* that took place at the Congress of Vienna was a clear turning point. A body of diplomatic law began to grow, with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and its twin on consular relations of 1963 being particularly noteworthy developments. The pursuit of social scientific study of diplomacy only took off some three decades ago, which is probably too short a time span for this to be a notable development in evolutionary terms.

Coevolution with the media has become increasingly important. Diplomatic press offices emerged in the interwar period, as part and parcel of so-called public diplomacy. Public diplomacy concerns attempts by the diplomats of one state to influence another state's agency by appealing directly and/or indirectly to that state's citizens. It was pioneered by revolutionary states, especially the United States and, a long century later, the Soviet Union, and is now mimicked by most other states. Note also how national and international media have come to hold an agenda-setting function over diplomacy, par-

ticularly in states with a fairly free press, to the extent that agendas at morning meetings in a number of foreign ministries often mirror press activity directly.