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Differentiation: A Sociological Approach to International Relations Theory

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Abstract

This article sets out an analytical framework of differentiation derived from Sociology and Anthropology and argues that it can and should be applied to International Relations (IR) theory. Differentiation is about how to distinguish and analyse the components that make up any social whole: are all the components essentially the same, or are they distinguishable by status or function? We argue that this approach provides a framing for IR theory that is more general and integrative than narrower theories derived from Economics or Political Science. We show why this set of ideas has so far not been given much consideration within IR, and how and why the one encounter between IR and Sociology that might have changed this – Waltz’s transposition of anarchy and functional differentiation from Durkheim – failed to do so. We set out in some detail how differentiation theory bears on the subject matter of IR arguing that this set of ideas offers new ways of looking not only at the understanding of structure in IR, but also at structural change and world history. We argue that differentiation holds out to IR a major possibility for theoretical development. What is handed on from Anthropology and Sociology is mainly designed for smaller and simpler subject matters than that of IR. In adapting differentiation theory to its more complex, layered subject matter, IR can develop it into something new and more powerful for social theory as a whole.

Introduction

Except for a quite old debate around Waltz, the term ‘differentiation’ is rarely heard in mainstream discussions of International Relations (IR) theory, yet for Sociology and Anthropology it is a foundational idea for how they theorize the social world. Differentiation is about how to distinguish and analyse the components that make up any social whole: are all the components essentially the same, or are they distinguishable by status, capability or function? That this way of thinking resonates with IR is evident from terms such as ‘like-units’, ‘sovereign equality’, ‘hegemony’, ‘great powers’, ‘empires’ and suchlike. Yet because IR has drawn its main lines of theorizing from Political Science and Economics, where differentiation does not feature explicitly, the concept has not influenced how IR conceives of its own theoretical enterprise. Those two disciplines are already narrowly specialized because they are founded on the assumption that a functional differentiation separating out specific ‘political’ and ‘economic’ domains, or *sectors*, of activity has already occurred. Some people like to think of IR simply as ‘International Politics’ (the macro-side of Political Science), in which case the single sector framing leaves some, but not much, room for differentiation. We think that Anthropology and Sociology are closer in form to IR than Political Science and Economics because like IR they address the human condition in broader terms that range across several sectors. That IR shares this multi-sectoral view with Anthropology and Sociology is shown by the prominence within it of terms such as ‘international society’, ‘world society’, ‘international political economy’, ‘international law’, ‘globalization’ and the ‘global environment’. This similarity of perspective suggests that a differentiation approach might have something to contribute to IR.

In what follows we have three specific aims:

1. To extract a set of concepts about differentiation, and a taxonomy, from Sociology and Anthropology, and to show how these provide a coherent framing for the notoriously fragmented debates about IR theory;
2. To identify, and up to a point explore, some of the new analytical leverage that this framing creates for thinking about IR generally and system structure in particular; and
3. To begin thinking about how the levels of analysis issue, which is a strong feature of IR theory, plays into the intellectual apparatus of differentiation, and vice versa.

Our general aim is to make a *prima facie* case that differentiation could make a major contribution to IR theory, and that by adapting it for this purpose, IR might itself make a more significant contribution to social theory than it has done so far. The next section sets out differentiation as an approach to social theory. Section 3 concentrates particularly on the story of Waltz and functional differentiation. The debates around Waltz have been the main exploration of differentiation in IR, and a critique of Waltz's transposition of functional differentiation from Sociology is an instructive way of showing what was missed, why, and how to do the job better. Section 4 looks forward, and outlines the principal ways in which we think differentiation theory could be put to work in IR, particularly its utility for understanding structural change, and therefore the evolution of international systems and societies.

Differentiation

Anthropology and Sociology both make extensive use of differentiation in their theories, but they do so in ways adapted to their particular subject matter.

Together, these disciplines study the forms, processes and structures of human social organization ranging from small-scale bands and tribes up to large scale societies. The division of labour between these two disciplines is complex, and need not concern us here. What is of interest is that both, like IR, study the social arrangements of humankind in a systemic way across a wide range of both scales and sectors, and that they make extensive use of the concept of differentiation to do so. It is not our purpose here to go into the details of their inner debates. We want only to extract the essentials of the differentiation approach so that we can see how these might apply to the particular subject matter of IR, and what the problems and benefits of such a transposition of concept across disciplines might be. We are particularly conscious that the main (not the only) focus in Anthropology and Sociology is on systems and societies composed of individual people, whereas the main (not the only) focus in IR is on systems and societies composed of units that are themselves systems and societies of individuals (systems of systems, or second order societies). One key question is therefore what difference does it make to think in terms of differentiation in the two-level realm of IR?

As we see it, there are five elements of differentiation that might usefully be transposed to thinking about IR:

- A taxonomy by which different types of social structure can be classified according to their dominant principle of differentiation.
- A sense of history, closely attached to the taxonomy, in which there is a general tendency for the simpler forms to come earlier, and the more complex ones to grow out of them.
- Ideas about the driving forces that push the movement from smaller/simpler to larger/more complex social forms.
- Ideas about what holds social forms together, especially as they become

larger and more diversified internally.

- A tension as to whether what is being studied is the emergence of social form itself (more the case in Anthropology), or whether the existence of a social form – ‘society’ – is taken as given, and what is to be studied are the internal dynamics of what holds it together (more the case in Sociology).

We need briefly to explain each of these elements and to suggest how they relate to IR.

Taxonomy is not currently fashionable in IR, but we think that it is foundational to all theory and therefore intrinsically important. Flawed taxonomy generates flawed theory. The taxonomy of differentiation can vary from author to author, but Luhmann (1982: 232-8; 1990: 423-5) is a useful guide because he approaches the matter in terms of basic principles, noting (1982: 232) that ‘only a few forms of differentiation have been developed’: segmentary, stratificatory and functional. We agree that all other variants vary within these three principles, and we are attracted by the idea that these three potentially provide not just a unifying vocabulary, but potentially some theoretical input as well, to the notoriously fragmented domain of IR theory.

- *Segmentary* (or *egalitarian*) differentiation is where every social subsystem is the equal of, and functionally similar to every other social subsystem. In Anthropology and Sociology this points to families, bands, clans and tribes. In IR it points to anarchic systems of states as ‘like units’. Segmentation is the simplest form of social differentiation, though that does not mean that societies of this type are in any general sense simple. Like all human social constructs they are capable of great elaboration and complexity. As Durkheim (1968: 79-80, 84-5, 105-7) argues it, such ‘mechanical’ societies are held together, indeed defined

by, a collective conscience, which is ‘the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society’. This totality, which today we would discuss as ‘identity’, transcends the individuals that compose it and so operates as an independent structure across space and time. A segmentary form of differentiation is the one most prone to be organized in terms of territorial delimitations, although this is not necessarily so.

- *Stratificatory* differentiation is where some persons or groups raise themselves above others, creating a hierarchical social order. Stratificatory differentiation covers a wide range of possibilities and can be further subdivided into rank and class forms distinguished by whether or not there is significant inequality not just in status (rank), but in access to basic resources (class). In Anthropology and Sociology this points to feudal or caste or aristocratic or military social orders, though it can also be about the conquest and absorption of some units by others (Johnson and Earle, 2000: 35). As this suggests, stratification can occur in many dimensions: coercive capability, access to resources, authority, status. In IR it points to the many forms of hierarchy: conquest and empire, hegemony, a privileged position for great powers, and a division of the world into core and periphery¹, or first and third worlds.² Collective conscience applies here too, but with the additional element that stratification must be accepted as legitimate. However, the lower the degree of legitimacy, the higher the necessity to maintain a stratified order by force.³
- *Functional* differentiation is where the subsystems are defined by the coherence of particular types of activity and their differentiation from other types of activity, and these differences do not stem simply from

rank. The idea was initially drawn from biological metaphors about the different subsystems that compose living organisms (Durkheim, 1968: 41, 125, 127, 271). Functional differentiation is mainly studied in Sociology where it is generally thought of as the essential characteristic of modernity. It is closely related to the idea of a division of labour in the sense understood by economists, but when applied to society as a whole it points to its increasing division into legal, political, military, economic, scientific, religious and suchlike distinct and specialised subsystems or sectors of activity, often with distinctive institutions and actors.

Durkheim (1968: 56, 64-5, 267, 274) argues that through a logic of interdependence and non-competition the functional differentiation of a division of labour itself generates a new form of social solidarity which he labels 'organic'. The practice of thinking in terms of functionally differentiated sectors is not uncommon (See Braudel, 1985: 17; Mann, 1986: ch. 1). In IR functional differentiation points, *inter alia*, to international political economy (IPE), international law, world (or global civil) society, transnational actors, and the debates about deterritorialization, a set of elements that have so far lacked a unifying concept in IR theory debates (other than the extremely loose one of 'globalization').

The sense of history in differentiation involves an idea of evolution in which more complex forms grow out of the simpler ones that precede them: segmentary hunter-gatherer bands precede the stratified city states and empires of ancient and classical times, which precede the functionally differentiated societies characteristic of modernity (Luhmann, 1990: 423ff; see also Durkheim, 1968: 256, 277, 283). In this view, segmentary, stratificatory and functional differentiation form a sequence in that the higher tiers depend for

their existence on having developed out of, and overcome, the one that came before. The sequence is thus both empirical (roughly corresponding to the general pattern of human history) and qualitative (from simpler forms of differentiation to more complex ones). Although such evolution is common, it is certainly not inevitable. Specific societies can end up in stasis, or can revert back to simpler types. Evolution does not mean that higher forms of differentiation totally eliminate those below them. The logic is structural: social orders are characterized by the co-presence of different forms of differentiation, the key question being which form is dominant in shaping the social structure as a whole (Durkheim, 1968: 260-61; Luhmann, 1982: 242-5). This co-presence framing is immediately apparent in contemporary society, where it is easy to identify all three types of differentiation in simultaneous operation. It puts into context the debates in IR about the nature and direction of the contemporary international system which seems to contain elements of all three forms, with the dominant segmentary one (territorial states, sovereign equality, anarchy) being questioned by both stratificatory elements (the return of empire, hegemony, core-periphery) and functional ones (globalization, deterritorialization, transnational actors, an increasingly autonomous global economy). More generally, it provides an overall framing for thinking about not just how states evolve, but about how the whole international system/society has developed, and what the relationship between these two levels might be both historically and now.

Underlying this sense of history are theories about the driving forces that push societies from simpler to more complex forms of differentiation. One of these is Durkheim's idea of *dynamic density* as the driving force pushing societies from a segmentary to a functionally differentiated form (Durkheim, 1968; 257-64; Barkdull, 1995: 669-74). Although Larkins (1994: 249)

dismisses dynamic density as a weak concept, it is in fact central to Durkheim's whole argument. He hypothesised that *'the division of labor varies in direct ratio with the volume and density of societies, and, if it progresses in a continuous manner in the course of social development, it is because societies become regularly denser and generally more voluminous....[T]he growth and condensation of societies...necessitate a greater division of labour....it is its determining cause.'* (Durkheim, 1968: 262). This is a materialist theory claiming that as the numbers of people in a society increases, contact and interaction also increase, and the social structure moves from simple and segmentary to a more complex division of labour. As this movement occurs, the basis of social solidarity automatically shifts from mechanical (collective consciousness) to organic (functional differentiation).

This type of thinking is particularly well developed in Anthropology which has many cases of failure (social collapse) to consider, as well as evolutionary successes that move up the differentiation ladder. Johnson and Earle (2000: 14-37) posit population growth and technological evolution interacting with each other within the context of environmental constraints, as the 'primary engine' of social evolution. Larger and more technologically capable societies make more demands on their environments, and when environmental limits are reached, this can lead to stasis or collapse (Diamond, 2005; Wright, 2004). The basic story, however, is one of evolutionary increase in size and complexity. As size increases, complexity and differentiation become necessary to deal with collective problems such as food storage, defence, trade and capital investment that are beyond the capacity of smaller, simpler units. This in turn drives societies up the differentiation ladder from segmentary through stratificatory to functional differentiation in 'an iterative process of social evolution' (Johnson and Earle, 2000: 29). It is not difficult to

see how theorizing along these lines could be related to IR concerns about things ranging from the evolution of international systems/societies, through the strategic consequences of population and technological innovation, to whether or not humankind is playing its last and greatest game with environmental carrying capacity.

The last two elements of differentiation theory – what holds social forms together; and whether the study of differentiation should be focused on how societies emerge, or on how existing societies cohere – are so interwoven that it is easiest to consider them together. This is a rather complicated issue which has substantive implications for how differentiation theory can be transposed to the subject matter of IR. It hinges on the move up to functional differentiation, and since that move is mainly in the domain of Sociology, the easiest way to explain what is at stake is to look briefly at how the debate unfolded in Sociology. We will again simplify, looking only to draw out the essentials relevant to IR, and not to attempt a full portrait of the debates in Sociology.

Classical Sociology has been largely concerned with the impact of modernity on national societies. Modernity has been mainly conceived as the shift from stratificatory to functional differentiation. In this framing, society was something that existed *before* functional differentiation became dominant. The marker for society was the existence of shared beliefs and sentiments, Durkheim's *collective conscience*, that both gave social cohesion to a particular group of people and differentiated them from other cultures. This concept of society leaned strongly towards *Gemeinschaft* (community), understanding it as something evolved, historic, and old. From that starting point, the problem was how the cohesion of such societies could survive the ever more pervasive impact of modernity as functional differentiation. What unites the classical works of Sociology, ranging from Herbert Spencer (1968) and Emile Durkheim

(1968), through Georg Simmel (1908) and Max Weber (1968), to Talcott Parsons (1961, 1967) and Niklas Luhmann (1997), is that modernization and the evolution of society in general are seen in terms of a continuing specialization of tasks and the division of labour in society. Although ‘not all social change is differentiation’ (Alexander, 1990: 1), the ‘differentiation of tasks in society – or the division of labour – is a central focus of sociology’ (Holmwood, 2006: 142). The puzzle was whether the increasingly elaborate division of labour in modern societies would destroy the traditional (mechanical, identity) cohesion that defined what society was, or would itself serve as the basis for a new type of (organic) social whole that was defined by the interdependence of its division of labour.

The responses to this puzzle went in two directions: *decomposition* and *emergence*. Some saw functional differentiation to mean a process of a *decomposition* of society in which the stability of a pre-existing cultural entity is compromised by an evolution that decomposes it into ever more specialized units, subsystems, and roles. If society was viewed as community and shared culture (*Gemeinschaft*), then functional differentiation was corrosive. The importance of the organic, evolved identity in Sociology underpinned the concerns of those such as Tönnies (1887) and Gellner (1988: 61) who worried about the loss of *Gemeinschaft* in the transition to modernity and *Gesellschaft* (society as something instrumental, contractual and constructed). Crucial to this view is an account of what it is in the first place that makes society hang together as a whole despite ongoing processes of differentiation. This social glue is variously referred to as ‘collective conscience’ (Durkheim), a ‘societal community’ (Parsons), or a ‘lifeworld’ (Habermas), all of which point to the realm of shared values and norms. These cultural bonds act as the counterforce to the centrifugal tendencies of functional differentiation that were perhaps

most graphically captured by Marx's idea of class war.

Others, most notably Weber and later Luhmann saw functional differentiation as a process of *emergence* (see Schimank and Volkmann, 1999: 8ff). In other words, it is the processes of functional differentiation itself – the emergence of recognisably different spheres of politics, law, economics, religion etc. – which account for the existence of society as a 'social whole' in the first place (see Nassehi, 2004). If society was viewed as *Gesellschaft*, then functional differentiation was integral to its existence, not antagonistic to it. Durkheim is in the middle, seeing decomposition as a necessary condition for emergence. Functional differentiation then does not mean that an integrated whole is somehow decomposed, but rather that as society evolves into functional differentiation it undergoes a process of newly emerging structures and systems. These systems build 'global accounts' of the world, i.e. the functionally differentiated political system reconstructs the world in terms of power, the legal system reconstructs the world in terms of legal/illegal, the scientific system in terms of true/false, etc. Luhmann completes this turn by asserting that society (which for him cannot be anything but world society) can only appear as such because it is internally differentiated, i.e. there is no 'integrating' force in addition to the form of functional differentiation itself.

Several points of relevance to transposing differentiation theory into IR emerge from these debates in Sociology:

- The decomposition view has little relevance for IR because IR does not start from the assumption that any sort of international society is already in existence. IR is very much in the emergence camp, with international society not taken as given, but having to be constructed. Most of the IR mainstream starts from the assumption that the system of states is only minimally a society (in the recognition of sovereign equality in a segmentary/anarchic

structure), and mainly a stratified hierarchical system in which order rests on the use of force by great powers.

- Yet while the decomposition view does not fit well with IR, its idea of society as community, involving shared values and identity, is prominent in IR. The English school's whole idea of international society is based on shared norms, rules and institutions, and many constructivists and thinkers about global civil society also focus on the development of shared norms as the key to social theory approaches to IR – most obviously democratic peace theory.
- Despite the better fit for IR of the emergence view, there has as yet been little explicit thinking in IR about social structure as a property of functional differentiation. Some elements of IPE, world society, and globalization thinking lean this way implicitly, but since mainstream IR has hardly engaged with functional differentiation, the path to this type of thinking remains largely unexplored.

We conclude that both lines of thinking about society – whether as shared culture and values, or as a structural property of functional differentiation – are relevant to IR. We also conclude that the emergence view of society fits well with the needs of IR, and that therefore the bad fit with decomposition doesn't matter. Indeed, there is no reason why the shared culture and values view of society cannot be compatible with emergence. Here IR is better lined up with the anthropological view of differentiation which is more about how societies develop and expand. There is no reason why one cannot look at the emergence of shared values and culture as an act of social construction. Rather than an organic *Gemeinschaft* being threatened by an instrumental *Gesellschaft*, the reverse is also possible, where the construction and operation of an instrumental *Gesellschaft* paves the way to a shared culture *Gemeinschaft*.

Why IR Theory has not Engaged with Differentiation

Since differentiation theory seems to offer considerable riches to IR, the next question to answer is why mainstream IR has shown so little interest in it. Some sociologists have argued for the need to extend the discipline's purview to the international and global realm (Moore, 1966; Smelser, 1997), but nothing much has been done. A current mainstream textbook on so-called 'Global Sociology' (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007) has no index references to any aspect of differentiation, nor, indeed, to international society. The works of the Stanford school (Meyer et al., 1997) and Niklas Luhmann's work on 'world society' (Luhmann, 1997, 2000a) both address 'world society', neither is widely read or understood within IR. There have been several other sociological approaches to IR, which we do not have the space to review. The point is that while most were rooted in accounts of differentiation, none of them imported the idea into IR.

There is some irony in the fact that mainstream IR's principal engagement with functional differentiation was initiated by Kenneth Waltz, the founding father of an approach to IR which is about as far from 'sociological' as one could get: Neorealism. Although Waltz borrowed some arguments from Durkheim, his main inspiration was microeconomics, and his main aim was to build a materialist, not a social theory of international politics. Thus the one serious engagement with differentiation in IR was developed in such a way as to close off the main lines of theoretical significance.

Waltz's theory is entirely one of international politics. Using Durkheim for authority, and levels of analysis as a weapon, Waltz first confines functional differentiation to the functions of government (essentially therefore about sovereignty). He then adopts a definition that relegates this exclusively political

functional differentiation to hierarchic systems, and banishes it from anarchic ones (Waltz, 1979: 104, 115, 197; 1986: 323-30; 2004: 98-9). This move privileges territoriality along the lines of segmentary differentiation: the 'like units' on which Waltz (1979: 97) builds his vision of anarchic structure. The prominence Waltz accords to the absence of functional differentiation in the international system of states reinforces Parson's (1961: 241) view of the international domain as a 'social system', not developed enough to be a proper society. By removing the social element, Waltz reduces the status of the whole to a mere system (Larkins, 1994, 249-53; Barkdull, 1995: 674-6). By driving functional differentiation exclusively into domestic politics, Waltz's theory explicitly removes it from IR theory. This move was challenged by Ruggie (1983. See also Barkdull, 1995; Buzan and Little, 1996, 2000), but the IR debate about functional differentiation nonetheless took place entirely within the political sector, closing the door on its more general meaning.

Waltz and Ruggie also contested over the role of another Durkheim concept, *dynamic density*, and the role of increasing social interaction in generating structural change in society. As we showed above, dynamic density is a materialist theory of the driving forces that push development up the ladder of differentiation. As Ruggie, Barkdull, and Buzan and Little all see it, by importing Durkheim's model Waltz necessarily brought with it the logic that a rising volume and intensity of social interaction must inevitably drive society from mechanical/segmentary/simple (like units) to organic/functionally differentiated/complex. If dynamic density is increasing within the international domain, as it unarguably is, then it undermines one of the key elements in Waltz's theory: that anarchy (i.e. a mechanical/segmentary/simple social structure) is a stable and self-reproducing form. Durkheim's theory of dynamic density opens Waltz's scheme to the arguments of interdependence theorists

and globalizationists that the rapid increase in material density and social volume is the defining feature of the contemporary international system. That logic points to the instability of anarchic structure, opening the door to those such as Milner (1991) and Cerny (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) who want to argue that the international system is indeed transforming from a simple anarchy with no functional differentiation into at least the beginnings of a division of labour in which functional differentiation in both Waltz's narrow sense, and the wider one of Sociology, is becoming more conspicuous. This threatens not only the stability of Waltz's anarchy, but also his confinement of functional differentiation to the political sphere.

Although both Waltz (2004: 99) and Ruggie (1983: 262) noted the transposition of Durkheim's structural logic from the unit level to the international system level, there was no consideration of whether this might be problematic. Waltz (2004: 99) simply takes Durkheim's distinction between *mechanical* (segmentary) and *organic* (functionally differentiated) societies and transposes it directly, saying that mechanical ones represent 'the anarchic order of international politics' and organic ones 'the hierarchic order of domestic politics' (Barkdull, 1995: 674-6). Waltz (2004: 99) also follows Durkheim's analysis that structural transformation from mechanical to organic is a conflict-laden process which establishes forms of stratification in addition to functional differentiation. Here the stronger units in the mechanical society impose a division of labour (e.g. the core-periphery of the world economy) on the weaker ones thus imposing both hierarchy and functional differentiation.

To gain some perspective on this transposition it is useful to return to the differentiation taxonomy set out earlier: segmentary, stratificatory and functional. Durkheim's mechanical society transposes pretty neatly onto segmentary, but his organic one is either effectively a jump to functional

differentiation (given Durkheim's interest in the division of labour), or a conflation of stratificatory and functional differentiation. Either way, the difference between Durkheim's dyad and the triad of differentiation matters when it comes to Waltz's transposition. Because Waltz has narrowed the meaning of functional differentiation down into the purely political (functions of government, sovereignty), his reading of Durkheim can only go from segmentary to stratificatory. Being purely political, Waltz's 'functional differentiation' is not, and cannot be, functional differentiation in the sociological meaning because only one sector – politics – is in play. It can only be stratificatory differentiation, a point underlined by Waltz's focus on great powers and polarity. In this sense Waltz's political understanding of 'functional differentiation' leads exactly to the political differentiation within anarchy that several IR authors have developed: Ruggie (1983, 1993) in his thinking about the medieval system and the EU; Watson (1990, 1992) in his pendulum theory of international order; and Buzan and Little (1996; 2000) about political differentiation in world history from empires, city-states and barbarians to the centre-periphery structure of European colonialism. Stratificatory differentiation, with its emphasis on unequal status, opens up precisely the blurring of anarchy and hierarchy that Waltz was so keen to avoid.

Although it opens up some interesting insights, this repositioning of Waltz still leaves unanswered the legitimacy of the whole transposition of Durkheim to the international system in the first place. The near silence on this point is deeply ironic given that it is fundamentally a question about levels of analysis, an issue on which IR theory is well primed, and about which Waltz is the undisputed king. Yet in this instance Waltz simply assumes that the basic structural idea will apply regardless of level. How tenable is this assumption? The obvious difficulty with it is that the segmentary/mechanical form is lifted

from a sociological context in which Durkheim understood it as a type of *society* integrated by a shared identity (Larkins, 1994: 252), and moved to an IR one in which it is understood as a mere *system*, operating mechanically as an anarchic struggle for power/survival without any integrating social content. Durkheim's label of *mechanical* facilitates Waltz's dumping of the shared identity element, and thus society, but as the more neutral label *segmentary* underlines, the segmentary/mechanical form of differentiation still has to be understood as a type of society. That is to say it must possess social cohesion and some sense of being a whole. Durkheim's linking of mechanical solidarity with repressive sanctions against challengers to the collective conscience did not suggest that this social element was thin in mechanical societies (Durkheim, 1968: 84-5, 106).

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

By transposing from Durkheim, Waltz thus offers two rich gifts to his critics. The first is that if the segmentary analogy is carried across from the domestic to the international level, then the holistic element of society must be carried with it as well. Via Durkheim, Waltz opens the door to both international and world society, validating the foundations not just of the English school but also of many constructivists. This in turn raises the question of how ideas about society can be transposed from the domestic realm to the international one. In Sociology, it is mostly individuals who are the constitutive elements of society, and even in segmentary societies it is individuals that carry the collective conscience that unites the 'like units'. Although some of IR theory is reductionist in this way, much of it is based on methodological collectivism, in which states and other collective entities are treated as actors. It is far from clear how concepts like Durkheim's collective conscience can be carried across from first-order societies (individuals as members) to second-order ones (collective actors as members). In interstate society it is the collective 'like units' of the society (states) that share identity (sovereign equality, or at a higher level, democracy), not necessarily the individual human beings within them. This distinctive quality of international society does not as far as we can see, have any clear analogues in sociological theory.

The second gift, as already hinted above, is that Waltz cannot really get away with squeezing everything out of Durkheim's model except politics. For better or worse, a differentiation approach brings the whole spectrum of human activity with it, not just politics, but economics, law, religion and all. Though neither uses the language of functional differentiation, this validates both English school solidarists, who deal with human rights and economic issues, and globalizationists, whose mode of analysis is sufficiently multi-faceted that it begins to close the gap between how networks of complex interdependence

work in the international system, and functional differentiation as understood by sociologists. By using Durkheim, Waltz undermines his own narrowing to the political, and opens the way for those wanting to take a much wider view of what comprises an international system/society, and therefore of what IR is actually about.

We can see, therefore, that both Waltz and much of the debate around him, constitute a wrong turn in relation to the discussion of functional differentiation in IR. By reducing functional differentiation to something within politics only, and then confining it to the unit level, Waltz and those who followed his lead basically ended up using the terminology of functional differentiation to talk about the difference between segmentary (anarchic) and stratificatory (hierarchic) systems. This wrong turn, while not quite a dead-end, has pre-empted a proper discussion of functional differentiation in IR by stealing its clothes. IR readings of Waltz' work have mainly followed his reduction of functional differentiation to a 'within politics' meaning. This means that the repeated calls to roll back Waltz's closure of functional differentiation (Ruggie, 1983; Buzan et al., 1993: 238-40; Sørensen, 2000) have not addressed the full question. Even some of those IR conceptualizations that challenge the idea that international relations can adequately be described in terms of an anarchically structured system of states have neglected the issue of functional differentiation (World Society Research Group, 2000; Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2004).

The wrong turn initiated by Waltz does not, however, stand in the way of IR now taking up the full meaning of differentiation. Despite the hegemony of Waltz's narrow interpretation, functional differentiation in its wider meaning has been explicitly addressed within IR in a couple of places marginal to the mainstream. One of these is in IR readings of the Luhmannian concept of world

society (Albert and Hilkermeier, 2004). Another is the work of Cerny who follows Waltz's link to Durkheim in order to critique Neorealism. Cerny (1993: 36-7) argues that the international system is moving from simple (segmentary) to complex (functional) differentiation. These works point the way to the idea that Waltz's use of Durkheim might open the door to a much wider use of differentiation in IR. How might mainstream IR pursue a theoretical development along these lines?

Looking Forward: Differentiation as IR Theory

In this section we focus on how differentiation fits into IR theory debates, and what agendas its adoption would open up. The re-engagement of IR with differentiation has to begin with recognition of the three lessons learned from the critique of Waltz. First, that the use of differentiation carries with it the assumption of society. Second that to confine functional differentiation to the political sector takes away most of its useful meaning. Rather than using functional differentiation to look inward into the political sector, as Waltz did, we need to use it to look outward into the international system/society across sectors, and to aim at understanding the whole of which the political sector is but one functionally differentiated part.⁴ And third, that one cannot transpose differentiation into IR without thinking hard about the difference made by moving from the domestic to the international level of analysis. With these lessons in mind, we return to the taxonomy of differentiation, and the analytical ideas associated with it, set out at the beginning of this article with a view to illustrating in more detail both the issues they raise for IR theory and the contributions they might make to it.

Perhaps the major contribution of differentiation to IR is that it offers a

novel taxonomy for thinking about the structure of both units and systems. Taxonomy is foundational to all theory because it sets up what it is that is to be understood and/or explained. The taxonomy of differentiation both maps onto and enriches the dominant concepts in IR. As we have shown, segmentary maps onto anarchic, and stratificatory onto hierarchic. But functional differentiation, when properly understood, is both an additional form of structure and a radical departure from the anarchy-hierarchy dyad. Unlike other attempts to break away from the dominance of the anarchy-hierarchy dyad – Ruggie’s (1983) ‘heteronomy’, Deudney’s (2007: 48-9) ‘negarchy’ or Watson’s (1990, 1992) spectrum of anarchy, hegemony, suzerainty, dominion, empire – functional differentiation moves beyond the political sector.⁵ It opens up a concept of structure that embraces rather than denies wider understandings of international systems/societies incorporating the whole range of sectors. To get a sense of how the adoption of this approach might play into IR thinking it is necessary first to think about the transposition problem of moving differentiation from the mainly domestic level, to the international system/society level.

What difference does it make for applying differentiation concepts that the subject matter of IR is mainly at the international system/society level rather than at the domestic one? There are two ways of thinking about this question. The first is relatively simple: since there are two levels in play in IR, one needs to apply the structural questions of differentiation to both, asking not just how the individual units are differentiated internally, but also how the international system/society as a whole is differentiated. Standard answers to these questions might be that the leading units display quite advanced degrees of functional differentiation, while the international system remains a mixture of segmentary (sovereign equality) and stratificatory (hegemony). Does this difference in the dominant mode of differentiation across the levels matter? Does the disjuncture

create tension and constitute a driving force for change? Should we expect the leading units to project their domestic form of differentiation into the system as a whole? This offers an interesting new dimension to the classic problem identified by Wight (1966) and Walker (1993) of inside/outside in IR theory. It also offers a pathway into setting up a structural analysis for the territorialization/deterritorialization problematique in globalization, which can be quite nicely framed as a set of tensions among the different types and levels of differentiation.

The two levels framing of differentiation in IR also means that segmentary differentiation itself has to be reconsidered. In Sociology and Anthropology, segmentary differentiation represents the simple/primitive end of the differentiation spectrum. But IR starts from collective units and works up to international systems and societies, and in this perspective segmentary differentiation at the system level can become much more sophisticated because the 'like units' that compose it may themselves have very complex and sophisticated modes of differentiation within them. A segmentary differentiation based on units that are functionally differentiated internally is neither simple nor primitive. A two-level perspective on differentiation along these lines points towards second-order societies, where the entities that compose international society are not individuals but collective units. This framing moves into the terrain of the English school and of constructivists such as Wendt, where differentiation offers additional analytical tools for thinking about international society. It raises, for example, the question of how the different modes of differentiation both within states and at the system level, play into the rise, evolution and obsolescence of the institutions of international society studied by Holsti (2004). Specifically, if great powers are the key generators of such institutions, can one link the nature of their own internal

differentiation to the specific types of institutions that they promote and support? The suggestive evidence for such a link is strong. Colonialism and great power management surely link to stratificatory differentiation, sovereign equality and nationalism to segmentary differentiation, and the market and international law to functional differentiation.

Pushing this line of thought even further leads to the second way of responding to the levels problem. If the international system level is segmentary, or even stratificatory, then it is still possible to stay within a state-centric model of international system/society. In IR terms, segmentary differentiation embodies the central place that territoriality occupies in much thinking about IR – and not just in IR: as Scholte (2000: 56-61) points out, ‘methodological territorialism’ is also strong in Economics, Sociology, Politics and Geography. Stratificatory differentiation is clearly present in the interstate domain in the privileges of great powers in interstate society. An interesting literature has arisen about the tension between the strong (segmentary) legitimacy principle of sovereign equality, versus the prevalent (stratificatory) practice of hegemony, which although crucial to international order, lacks any accepted legitimating principle (Watson, 1992: 299-309, 319-25; 1997; Clark, 1989; Hurrell, 2007: 287-98).

Moving to the idea that there is any serious functional differentiation at the system level would have major implications for what kind of units are in play. It would almost certainly require a move away from state-centric models of the international system/society towards ones where non-state actors, whether firms or civil society associations, and even individuals, have standing as units. This points to work from IPE such as Cerny’s, already mentioned, and Stopford and Strange (1991); from ‘world society’ thinking in the English school and elsewhere which bring both state and non-state actors into the picture (see

Buzan, 2004: 27-89); and from the globalization literature that points to deterritorialization as the principle trend in global politics (Scholte, 2000), and a global civil society of nonstate, often transnational, actors (Anheier *et al.*, 2001). Thinking about more diverse types of entity in international relations also opens up another perspective on segmentary differentiation, which is that it might apply not just to states as argued above, but to other formations such as nations, religions and civilizations that often do not line up with state boundaries. In these ways, opening up the system level to functional differentiation is a radical move. It raises interesting questions about what the whole is that is being differentiated (Albert, 2007), and it shifts attention from arguments about what units compose the international system/society, to what the underlying structure of society is of which the units are an expression.

Yet despite the limited use of functional differentiation in IR, it is far from an alien way of thinking. IR is riddled with unconscious usages of functional differentiation-like formulations: ‘the international economic system’, ‘international law’, ‘the international political system’, ‘international society’, and indeed the very divisions amongst the disciplines within the social sciences reflect a logic of functional differentiation indicate thinking in terms of sectoral divisions of the subject. Realists from Morgenthau to Waltz talk firmly in terms of *political* theory, assuming that dividing the subject into sectors is a necessary condition for effective theory-building, and therefore necessarily, but silently, presupposing that some social whole exists from which politics has been differentiated. In Security Studies, thinking about security in terms of *sectors* – military, economic, political, societal, environmental – has been around since the 1980s and has now become a standard way of organizing texts. All of this no doubt indicates a less deep understanding of functional differentiation than the division of labour prominent in most sociological theories, but it is

nonetheless substantial enough to fuel liberal, IPE, globalizationist, Wallersteinian, *dependencia*, English school, much critical theory, and some constructivist rebellions against the state- and politics-centric orthodoxies of Realism. Ruggie's response to Waltz, especially in his linkage of how private property and sovereignty defined the transition from medieval to modern can also be read as a rejection of an exclusively political understanding of IR. At stake here is the meta question for IR theory of what constitutes international system/society. Is it states as the dominant unit, and thus segmentary and/or stratificatory differentiation? Or has functional/sectoral differentiation proceeded sufficiently that international system/society can only be understood adequately as comprised by different types of actors interacting across several sectors?

If functional differentiation is already implicit in IR, what would it look like if made more explicit? Specifically, how would functional differentiation at the system level play against segmentary and stratificatory differentiation? In sociological theory one form of differentiation has to be dominant even though all may be present. The process of modernity is understood as having elevated functional differentiation to the fore within advanced industrial societies, creating the tensions noted above for the decompositionists who worry that this development threatens the shared identity developed in earlier times. Much of the discussion about international relations rests on the assumption that either segmentary (anarchic) or stratificatory (hegemony-empire) differentiation remains the dominant form. This is even the view of Milner (1991) and Cerny (1993), who like some globalizationists see functional differentiation only as an emergent quality of the international system/society, not (yet) as the dominant one. Given the absence of a pre-existing society in IR, analysis of functional differentiation at the system level cannot follow the decomposition line and

must therefore think in terms of emergence. Although the emergence view, as noted, can be transposed to IR, in some other ways the subject matter of IR, and specifically the issues posed by operating at the international system level, open new ground not explored in sociological debates. An emergent functional differentiation plays against existing segmentary and stratificatory forms, but not against a *Gemeinschaft* society covering the whole system as it would have to do in Durkheim's scheme. Any emergence of functional differentiation at the global level would have to play into the *Gesellschaft* international society established by states.

Although the mainstream IR view is almost certainly that functional differentiation is emergent but not dominant at the system level, Luhmann (1982, 1997; see also Stetter, 2008; Albert, Kessler and Stetter, 2008) offers a view in which it is. He posits a 'world society' composed of subsystems of communication each of which is organised around a distinct social function: legal, political, economic, scientific, religious and suchlike. In this theory, the segmentary and stratificatory differentiations are pushed into the background, seen as only having residual importance in the political and legal subsystems where territoriality (i.e. segmentary differentiation) still matters. Luhmann (1982: 242-5) sees politics as the great survivor of segmentary differentiation and, to a lesser degree, class as the survivor of stratificatory differentiation within a world society now dominated by functional differentiation. This world society is still thought of as a society because, like Durkheim's organic solidarity, it is the logic of functional differentiation itself, and the need for each subsystem to adjust to the environment created by the others, that composes society. The Luhmannian view is almost certainly too radical to find widespread support in IR, both because it dissolves the unit-system distinction, and because most people coming from IR would find its marginalization of

territoriality and agency implausible. But it does serve as a useful foil for anyone wanting to think about what the dominance of functional differentiation would look like at the system level.

Would functional differentiation break down segmentary by undoing the territorial packaging of the state? Or reinforce it by pushing the development of more elaborate forms of international society in which states remain the principal units, but do so within more open arrangements allowing room and rights for a range of non-state actors? Many empirical developments already under discussion can be framed in this way: the division of sovereignty in the EU's principle of subsidiarity; the rights given to firms in the state-sanctioned move to build a global market economy; the collective pursuit of big science in astronomy, space exploration and high energy physics; the emergence of global civil society; and the attempt to embed a standard of human rights in international society. Would functional differentiation break down stratificatory, or transform and reinforce it by making one sector dominant over the others? From IR, the idea that contemporary international relations could be seen as in transition from the dominance of the military-political sector to the economic one was floated by Buzan and Little (2000: 405), and Michael Zürn (2007) argues that the global system today resembles a legally stratified multi-level system of governance. At least the early Luhmann seems to be divided on the question, in one place (1982: 238-9) saying that functionally differentiated societies 'cannot be ruled by leading parts or elites as stratified societies (to some extent) could be', and in another (1982: 338) arguing that the primacy of politics was displaced by that of economics during the 17th and 18th centuries where 'the economy becomes the leading subsystem of society, because it began to define the developmental stage at which society had arrived, and both progress and regression began to depend on it'. From Anthropology, Johnson

and Earle (2000: 367-90), building on the thinking of Polanyi, also argue for the primacy of economics in a functionally stratified world, and similar thinking underpins most Marxist approaches. Again, the taxonomy of differentiation provides powerful tools for thinking about globalization, an area of IR with notoriously weak theoretical foundations.

Functional differentiation thus opens a way of thinking that enables many different strands of IR theory to be linked together in a framing that puts all of them into a single structural context. This potentially integrative solution to the problems of a (theoretically) divided discipline can be shown by indicating how most of the main theoretical approaches within IR can be related to the differentiation taxonomy:

- Realism gives primacy to segmentary differentiation in its general approach, and to stratificatory differentiation in its emphasis on great powers.
- Liberalism gives primacy to functional differentiation, starting from that between the political and economic sectors, but also acknowledges segmentary (anarchic structure) and stratificatory (hegemonic stability).
- Marxism combines functional differentiation (the primacy of economics) with stratification (whether in terms of dominant classes, or a more general centre-periphery structure of the international system).
- English school pluralists, like Realists, give primacy to segmentary differentiation in their general approach, and to stratificatory differentiation in their emphasis on great powers and the forceful expansion of international society. Solidarists are more open to adding functional differentiation into this mix.
- Constructivism does not employ assumptions about differentiation, but differentiation suggests an interesting starting point for thinking about the identities that are of central interest to constructivists. National identity

reflects segmentary differentiation; class, caste, hypernationalist and imperial-metropolitan identities reflect stratificatory differentiations; and layered postmodern identities reflect functional differentiation.

- Globalization follows liberalism in giving primacy to functional differentiation, starting from that between the political and economic sectors and adding global civil society. Segmentary and stratificatory differentiation are acknowledged in varying degrees, with the former mainly on the way out, and the latter, as in Marxism, shifting from arrangements within the political sector to a functional primacy of the economic one.

Viewed in this way, the main strands of IR theory can be seen as reflecting different choices about what to emphasise within a single general scheme of differentiation. In principle, the systematic application of differentiation theory to empirical assessments of the current state of development of the international system/society should provide a common basis for judging the relevance claims of the different theories. Adoption of a shared differentiation taxonomy could also relieve IR of the burden of thinking of itself as composed of incommensurable paradigms. Different approaches, certainly, but unrelated and mutually exclusive, certainly not. And at least in Durkheim's model, there is even room for both materialist and constructivist approaches to social structure, though his scheme gives primacy to the former.

Bringing differentiation into IR opens a realm largely unexplored by sociologists, and so offers IR the possibility to bring its own expertise, particularly on levels of analysis, to the development of the theory itself. Nobody has really thought about how differentiation works where first- and second-order societies are both in play. It could be argued that IR is principally about the study of second-order societies, which makes this obvious territory for it to occupy.

Keeping in mind all that has just been said about how to apply the taxonomy of differentiation to the layered subject matter of IR, we turn now to think about how the sense of history and the forces that allegedly drive the evolution of differentiation might be used to rethink how IR understands the history of international systems/societies. Recall that differentiation assumes general, but not inevitable, evolution up the sequence from segmentary to functional. It therefore offers both a social structural framework by which history can be benchmarked, and a set of expectations (*not* determinations) about the direction in which things should go provided that the dynamic density generated by population and technology is increasing. Because it is mainly a forward-looking subject, IR often treats history (other than its own) as a Cinderella subject, contenting itself with either event-driven narrative accounts of recent history, or selective raids looking for past cases to support or attack current theoretical positions. Many Realists find history dull because they see it mainly as repetition, and many liberals find it irrelevant because most of what they want to talk about happened quite recently. Serious commitment to developing a long historical view of international relations is mainly found in the English school (Bull and Watson, 1984; Watson, 1992; Buzan and Little, 2000) and World Systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974, 1984; Gills and Frank, 1993).⁶ Because it offers a potential theory of international history, differentiation could provide a more general stimulus to IR to develop a coherent view of history that links across its main theoretical approaches.

Some of the likely benchmarks in such a view might be as follows:

- Because differentiation sets up a link between IR and Anthropology it might facilitate a move away from IR's current practice of thinking about the origins of international relations mainly through the imaginings of European political theorists such as Hobbes, Kant and Rousseau, to thinking about

what actually occurred in prehistory (Buzan and Little, 2000: 111-162). At what point did the early stages of differentiation generate units capable of having recognizable 'international relations', and how were those relations affected as the domestic structure of the units moved up from segmentary to stratified?

- The ancient and classical worlds offer a model of international relations in which stratificatory differentiation dominated both within the units (kings, emperors, slaves) and at the system level (unequal status, empire), across several millennia and several distinct international systems. This includes even the much-raided IR case of the ancient Greek city states, which, despite their standing as the archetype of anarchic (segmentary) international relations, were embedded in a larger system/society including the Persian Empire. Within this dominance of stratification one also finds elements of functional differentiation in the existence of well-institutionalised trade diasporas. Because stratificatory differentiation involves unequal access to basic resources it requires coercion to sustain it and this suggests that stratified units will both concentrate coercive power internally and resort to war externally (Fried, 1967:185-230).
- In the perspective of differentiation, the Medieval period (largely a European phenomenon) was both stratified (popes, emperors, the nobility), and up to a point functionally differentiated (churches, guilds), yet without there being a single authority overall. The Medieval story is important in IR because it is the precursor to the Westphalian order that arose in Europe and was imposed from there onto the rest of the world (Ruggie, 1983).
- These characterisations of the ancient and classical, and Medieval worlds raise major questions for how differentiation works when it is in play on both the domestic and international system/society levels. A two-level game

is bound to have quite different dynamics from the single-level model of Durkheim. When two levels are in play, it is far from obvious that the single-level model of progress up the ladder from segmentary to stratificatory to functional differentiation, driven by increasing dynamic density, will apply. In post-Medieval Europe, for example, the leading units moved internally from stratificatory (absolutism) to functional (modernity) differentiation, while the European system became more segmentary (sovereign equality). This system/society expanded out into the rest of the world in which both units and systems were still largely in stratification mode on both levels. European imperialism perpetuated systemic stratification in the rest of the world on both levels, while Europe and the West became more functionally differentiated domestically, with a segmentary international subsystem of their own. Decolonization extended segmentary differentiation (sovereign equality) globally at the system level, albeit leaving much domestic stratification domestically in the third world, and not inconsiderable elements of stratification remaining at the system level (the P5 in the UN Security Council, the core-periphery structure of the global economy, the hegemony of the West). These patterns suggest that the operation of differentiation is considerably more complicated when two levels are in play. If IR takes up differentiation, it will have to think through these implications, and may find some possibly major opportunities for theoretical development within both IR and social theory more widely.

- The last benchmark is the apparent move from a mainly segmentary/stratificatory Westphalian international system to one in which functional differentiation is emergent at the global level. As discussed above, a key question here is how this development at the system level relates to what is going on within states. On the face of it, a case could be

made that the push for functional differentiation systemically comes from those states where it is most advanced internally, with this in turn creating problems for those states whose internal differentiation is less advanced.

These benchmarks show how differentiation offers a powerful organizing principle for studying the history of international systems in a way that links together the concerns of many different approaches to IR. They also raise questions about how the historical development of international systems relates to the driving forces side of differentiation theory. IR is not without its own ideas about driving forces though for the most part these remain in the background of its debates. Realists stress war (Gilpin, 1981; Howard, 1976; see also Tilly, 1990) and more generally changes in the distribution of power. Liberals and globalizationists look to changes in the economy and especially the rise of interdependence as a structural feature and more autonomous non-state actors as a unit one. Marxists also start from the economy, but look to class conflict, which might be seen as an aspect of stratification. Luhmann (1982: 45-51) sees the rise of mass communication, along with functional differentiation, as the basis of a single world society. All of these approaches are aware of technological advance as a general driver, but all are also Eurocentric. Although a thousand years of war might have produced the Westphalian state in Europe (Tilly, 1990), it did not do so anywhere else in the world. There is a need within IR to think more deeply, and over a longer historical stretch, not only about how to benchmark systemic change but also about the forces that drive it. The ideas from Sociology and Anthropology discussed above about the interplay of population growth and technological innovation within environmental constraints as the 'primary engine' for the evolution of social forms, look like a good place to start such thinking. The interplay of Durkheim's dynamic density with the environmental constraints

featured by Anthropologists applies as much to the system level as to the domestic one. But although the logic of this 'engine' is broadly the same at both levels, its impact might well differ because of differences in scale. Other things being equal, the increase of dynamic density should push the process of differentiation within states faster (because they are small) than at the system level (because of the constraints of distance). Yet even here there can be crucial exceptions. The central role of ocean-going shipping in world history created a significant increase in systemic dynamic density when the units themselves were still a long way from being internally integrated. These ideas about driving forces are clearly applicable to the early development of international relations, and just as clearly applicable to the present, where the environmental constraint is now global, and the pressure from population and technology immense. However it is labelled, IR needs to pull together its thinking about what drives the evolution of international systems/societies, and relate its existing ideas to the more basic ones attached to differentiation.

Conclusions

In this article we have extracted a set of ideas about differentiation derived from Sociology and Anthropology. We have shown why this set of ideas has so far not been given much consideration within IR, and how and why the one encounter between IR and Sociology that might have changed this failed to do so. We have set out in some detail how differentiation bears on the subject matter of IR, how it adds a radical third dimension to IR debates about structure, and how it offers a general framing within which much of IR theory can be located, and possibly integrated. We have argued that this set of ideas offers new ways of looking at the subject matter of IR, and new insights into it.

Our aims have been to set out a general rationale for bringing differentiation into IR theory debates, and to show some of the main things that might be done with it. We think that differentiation offers to IR a major possibility for theoretical development. What is handed on from Anthropology and Sociology is mainly designed for smaller, less layered subject matters than that of IR. In adapting differentiation to its larger scale, more layered subject matter, IR can develop it into something new and more powerful for social theory as a whole. This is an opportunity not only for IR to strengthen its own theoretical apparatus, but also to make much more of a splash among other social sciences than it has done so far.

Notes

1. There is an ambiguity in Luhmann (and quite a debate) on whether ‘centre-periphery’ is a form of differentiation on the same scale as segmentary, stratificatory, and functional differentiation. We do not have the space to engage with this discussion here, but want to point out that when Luhmann refers to this form of differentiation under the condition of a primacy of functional differentiation, he does *not* mean it in a geographic sense at all, but refers to the centre and the periphery of function systems (so that, for example, a court decision would certainly belong to the centre of the legal system, whereas the legal relation underlying the purchase of a pint in a local pub would be more on the periphery).
2. For an extensive discussion see Donnelly (2009). It should be noted here as well that Immanuel Wallerstein frequently describes the modern world-system explicitly in terms of stratification (although he does reject the notions of ‘First’ and ‘Third’ World).
3. The legitimacy (and thus also the stability) seems to be directly related to the degree to which a stratified order is differentiated into various strata. As Luhmann (1997: 613; translation BB/MA) notes: ‘This form [stratification; BB/MA] also has its basic structure in a binary distinction, namely that between nobility and the common people. In this form it would however be relatively unstable as it could be reversed easily. Stable hierarchies such as the Indian caste system or the late-medieval society of estates thus produce, in whatever artificial way, at least three different levels in order to create the impression of stability’.
4. This is not to deny that in addition to viewing the political sector as functionally differentiated from other sectors one could argue that it is also functionally differentiated internally; see Albert (2002) for a book-length elaboration on this issue.
5. Donnelly (2009) also seeks to break away from anarchy-hierarchy, and his exceedingly complicated scheme does in places move beyond the political sector.
6. A noteworthy exception is Deudney (2007).

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