1 Introduction

This chapter has four tasks. The first, following on from the general background set out in the Preface, is to explain the approach of the book. The second is to set out the concepts, terms and definitions that I use to conduct the discussion, and explain some of the underlying theoretical positions. I appreciate that this long section makes a dry and difficult start to the book. Those who prefer, can skip these definitional essays now, and go straight to the historical chapters. They can refer back to the conceptual discussions as and when needed, using this section as a glossary. The third task is to give an overview of how the empirical part of the book is structured, and to explain the logic that defines the subdivisions into parts and chapters. The fourth is to set out the aims of the book. I hope this will give readers as clear an idea of why they are reading it as I have of why I wrote it.

Approach

This book is aimed at an audience interested in the study of how humankind works on the largest scale as a system/society. Its 'big picture' approach has resonance with the more macro-style of work in International Relations (IR), Global Historical Sociology (GHS), International Political Economy (IPE) and Global/World History. It uses ideas from the English School (ES) to build bridges among these fields. It is more abstract and less detailed than historical approaches, focusing mainly on the broader narrative of how the social structure of humankind has evolved. By social structure, I mean what the ES calls *primary institutions*: ideas ranging from kinship, territoriality and trade; through dynasticism, empire, diplomacy, law, religion, human equality/inequality and sovereignty; to nationalism, the market, sport, science and environmental stewardship. These ideas, and others like them, are the key both to what kind of collective entities and identities humans form, and what kinds of behaviour among people and polities are judged appropriate and legitimate, or not. This is further discussed in the next

subsection. The narrative in this book is structured around the story of these institutions. There are thus almost no personal stories in here, whether about great kings and queens; victorious generals or warlords; heroic workers, women, soldiers, or intellectuals; wealthy merchants, or brave explorers. While it addresses war as an institution of global society, it does not focus much either on specific wars, big or small, or on the rise and fall of particular empires or great powers. Conversely, the approach taken here is much less abstract than the grand sociological theories of Marx or Wallerstein, or the IR ones of Waltz, that seek big and simple driving forces such as class, capitalism or power to explain history. In classical English School style, this book offers a middle path, developing an alternative way of telling the human story on the largest scale.

It is not the first book to venture into the space between History, IR, IPE and GHS. Some historical sociologists such as Michael Mann (1986) have tried it, and so have some 'big' historians, such as David Christian (2004, 2019), both making path-breaking contributions. So while this territory is not exactly new, neither is it yet fully or convincingly occupied. Global historians venturing there have the problem that their narrative method, for all of its many merits, comes under increasing stress as the scale of space and time covered increases. Those coming from the social sciences usually try to solve this problem by seeking big simplifications that somehow embrace all the differences. This book aims to split the difference by finding a level of simplifying abstractions that, on the one hand, solves the problem of how to deal with large scale in time and space, while on the other hand offering an approach that is sufficiently fine-grained to sustain a global narrative across a timescale of over fifty millennia. In that sense, it has quite a lot of resonance with Mann's 'IEMP' scheme in which he looks for ideological, economic, military and political sources of power as they define 'the capacity to organize and control people, materials and territories' (1986: 1–3). The key difference is that Mann uses the IEMP framing to concentrate on comparative civilisations. He is not particularly concerned with defining eras, and uses his scheme to look in detail at the differences across many cases. As Mann acknowledges, his scheme produces a very complicated picture of human societies as a 'patterned mess' with innumerable different combinations of factors in different times and places (Mann, 1993: 4). My approach aims to expose more pattern with less mess.

This pattern-seeking approach brings into focus, and combines, three broad factors:

1. The state of the planet itself as it provides conditions for human life and civilisation. This includes the climate, sea levels and the

biosphere, as well as the ability of the planet to provide resources in relation to human wants and needs. This material factor is a fairly orthodox and well-understood story that is not controversial except for the remaining deniers of contemporary human effects on climate change.
2. The material conditions of humankind in terms of the technologies possessed by humans, and what kind of materials, energy sources, and means of transportation these make available to them and their societies. This factor is likewise not particularly controversial, and is well documented by archaeologists and historians.
3. The social resources possessed by humankind in terms of the *primary institutions* that give structure to human societies. This is the most novel part of the approach, both in itself, and in the combination with material and planetary conditions. It is the key to opening up an analysis of the whole human story that is both abstract and quite fine-grained.

These three factors play into each other as both causes and consequences.

In the more than 50,000 years under surveillance here, all three of these factors have undergone major changes. They are not independent from each other. Each feeds into the others in myriad and significant ways, creating a Gordian knot that makes it extremely difficult to give simple answers as to what drives the historical changes in the human condition. That sounds dauntingly complicated, and in some ways it is. But the payoff for placing one's perspective in the space in-between historical detail and general abstraction is that larger patterns, along the line of what Bayly (2004: 1) calls 'global uniformities', come into view, simplifying the complexity. These patterns define long and durable eras in terms of a distinct set of material conditions and primary institutions that structure their societies. I broadly accept the conventional view that there are three such eras – hunter-gatherers, conglomerate agrarian/pastoralist empires (CAPE), and modernity (e.g. Gellner, 1988). I depart from that view by emphasising that there are transitions between these eras, when material conditions and social structures, and sometimes the condition of the planet, undergo major conjunctural changes. At the time of writing, we are still in, or perhaps just emerging from, the transition from the CAPE era to modernity. These eras, and the transitions between them, are how the book tells the story of humankind. When looked at through the lens of this analytical scheme, eras come into a clear and detailed focus. So too do the forms of social glue that hold societies together. This allows a fine-grained assessment not only of

continuities and changes, but also of the essential material and social characteristics of both the eras themselves, and the transitions between them. Up to a point it also allows modest assessments of the driving forces behind eras and the transitions between them.

On this scale, causality is multiple and complex, emerging from the crystallisation of a range of contingent processes. For example, a warming and stabilising global climate played a big role in the transition from mobile hunter-gatherers to sedentary and, eventually, agrarian CAPE societies with bigger populations and more differentiated and hierarchical social structures. Technologies sometimes play a big role, as in the discovery of hard metals (bronze and iron) during the CAPE era, and the development of steam power exploiting the vast reserves of fossil fuel that launched the transition to modernity. This book offers a characterisation of the CAPE era that is more homogenous and precise than other interpretations. It makes a feature of the neglected question of how to track and understand the transition from CAPE to modernity, and how we might assess when 'modernity proper' has arrived. The opening phases of the transition to modernity were both a complex social transformation involving old and new primary institutions, and an unrestrained, often rapacious, pursuit of wealth and power. The emerging third phase confronts environmental limits that seem to be forcing a choice between some degree of planetary catastrophe, and a wrenching turn towards a much more constrained pursuit of sustainable development.

Concepts, Terms and Definitions

This subsection sets out the main terms and concepts that will be deployed in subsequent chapters. Many of these are drawn from the English School, which has a well-established and distinctive analytical vocabulary and taxonomy for thinking about international relations. But framing a very large-scale study like this one also requires concepts drawn from elsewhere in IR theory, but which are interoperable with the ES approach. The ES concepts are:

International system, *international society* and *world society*
Interpolity, *transnational* and *interhuman domains*
Primary and *secondary institutions*
Solidarism and *pluralism*
Raison de système and raison de famille.

The concepts from elsewhere in IR theory are:

Interaction capacity
Evolution

Dialectics
Differentiation theory and sectors
Uneven and Combined Development

There are three other non-ES concepts that I have reconstructed to serve the particular purposes of this book:

Era
Social glue
Globalisation and Global society.

Finally, to help orientate the discussion at the level of humankind, I have set up a simple model of *five possible pathways* that the species can take: regression, extinction, empowerment, suicide and self-replacement.

English School Concepts

The core of the English School's approach to the study of international relations is the idea that just as people live in societies, which both shape them and are shaped by them, so too do states (or more broadly, polities).[1] In my view, society is what frames Baldwin's (2017 [1958]: 166) observation: 'People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.' The same is true for the durable collective polities that people construct, and the societies that those polities form. This looks like an idea that should be rooted in Sociology. But in practice sociologists have not taken much interest in developing this perspective, perhaps because of antagonism to the idea of second-order societies (i.e. societies whose members are other societies, rather than individuals) (Buzan and Albert, 2010). The idea of a society of states emerged first during the nineteenth century among positive international lawyers. Positive legal thinking assumed that such law required a society to make it. The clear existence of international law thus easily led to the idea of international society, because if there was positive international law, then that must reflect the existence of an international society. Positive law is made by states and cannot exist outside a society of states. The term international society thus became intrinsic to discussions of international law well back in the nineteenth century (Schwarzenberger, 1951). Knutsen (2016: 2) argues that the nineteenth-century international lawyer James Lorimer (1884) already largely sketched out the concept of international society, in form similar to that which would emerge out of the work of the English School during the 1960s and 1970s, but that his pioneering work has been

[1] The text in this section draws on that in Buzan (2014a: ch. 2) and Buzan and Schouenborg (2018).

forgotten. By the late nineteenth century, American legal and political thinking about IR had clearly identified the existence of an international society among 'civilised' states, and captured this in the term *internationalism* (Schmidt, 1998: 124). Elsewhere, the German historian Heeren's (1834) discussion of states-systems set up the idea of international society picked up later by thinkers in the English School tradition (Keene, 2002; Little, 2008).

The ES does not focus on material conditions, but it does not exclude them either. It accepts that material power plays a big role in international relations, but then focuses mainly on the social structures that arise to try to deal with that. As noted above, for analytical convenience and clarity, I discuss material factors separately from social structures, though taking into account the strong interplay between them. I also divide material factors into two categories: planetary conditions, and the more general material resources available to humankind in terms of resources, energy and technologies. Most ES work has focused on the period since the transition towards modernity began, with occasional, but growing, excursions to earlier times (e.g. Wight, 1977; Watson, 1992; Linklater, 2016; Neumann, 2020). Since material factors vary so much when looking at the history of humankind as a whole, it is necessary to take them into account in a systematic way. Putting material factors back into the ES in a structured way is part of the purpose of this book. As I will show, variations in material conditions are part of what motivate, shape and define not just the social structure but also large historical eras. As the later discussions in the book demonstrate, the rapid rise of environmental issues during the past few decades is a major case of the interplay of material conditions and social structure.

A key reason for choosing the ES is that its societal approach to international relations and international history generates a taxonomy of concepts and types that is rich and distinctive compared to other IR theories. Taxonomy constructs what one sees and chooses to analyse (or not), and is the foundation of theory. I concentrate in this book on the ES's taxonomy of primary institutions as what defines global society, trying both to extend this, and apply it in a new way to the large-scale analysis of world history. In building on the ES, I follow two theoretical positions set out in my earlier work.

First, as argued in Buzan (2004a: 169–71) my approach adopts the same micro-foundations as Bull's in the propensity of humans to form societies on functional grounds to limit violence, establish property rights and stabilise agreements. Like him, I see the imperative to form societies working at multiple levels from small to large groups of humans, and including 'second order' societies, like Bull's 'anarchical society' of

states. My approach also draws on the functional argument from Buzan (1993: 340–3) about interstate societies being derivable from the logic of anarchy in giving advantages to the units that form them, which links to Waltz's (1979) arguments about socialisation and competition generating 'like units'. Some form of society is the default condition of human beings whether as groups, or as groups of groups.

Second, since this book emphasises social structure in the form of primary institutions, it requires a position on the agent-structure debate. I take the same position in this book as I have done in previous work (Buzan and Little, 2000; Buzan, 2004a), following the mainstream constructivist idea of structuration, in which agency and structure are co-constitutive. The mutual constitution of agents and structure was identified by Giddens (1979) and taken forward by (Wendt, 1999), and to my mind is the practical essence of the mainstream ES view: that the units of international society both constitute, and are constituted by, the social structure. As structure, primary institutions such as sovereignty, territoriality and nationalism constitute the state and shape its behaviour. As agents, states and other actors both reproduce those structures, or amend or even dismantle them, by their behaviour. Sovereignty is reproduced in uncountable daily statements and actions, but is also pressured and questioned by changing understandings of human rights and environmental stewardship. Imperialism and racism used to be reproduced daily, but became illegitimate after 1945. This process of reproduction and contestation goes on continuously across the interpolity, transnational and interhuman domains.

International System, International Society and World Society

Traditional English School thinking is built around this triad of key concepts: *international system*, *international society* and *world society* (Cutler, 1991; Little, 1995: 15–16). Broadly speaking, these terms are understood as follows:

- *International system* is about power politics amongst states/polities, and puts the structure and process of international anarchy at the centre of IR theory. This position is broadly parallel to mainstream Realism and Neorealism and is thus well developed and clearly understood outside the ES. It privileges the distribution of material power among states (polarity, balance of power) over all else as the main driver of international relations. If all international systems are also societies, it makes sense to downgrade this differentiation, and address the question as being about the relative weight of calculations about the distribution of power as against the influence of shared norms, rules and

institutions. There are now different views within the ES about retaining system, with some thinking it should be kept, and others that it is redundant.[2]

- *International society* is about the institutionalisation of mutual interest and identity amongst states, and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of IR theory. Wight (1991: 137) nicely captures it with the idea that international society is a social contract among societies themselves each constituted by their own social contract. But because states/polities are very different entities from individual human beings, this international society is not analogous to domestic society (Bull, 1966; Suganami, 1989), and has to be studied as a distinct form. When units are sentient, how they perceive each other is a major determinant of how they interact. If the units share a common identity (a religion, a system of governance, a language), or even just recognise each other as like-units sharing a basic set of rules or norms (about how to determine relative status, and how to conduct diplomacy), then these intersubjective understandings not only condition their behaviour and identity, but also define the boundaries of a social system.
- *World society* takes individuals, non-state organisations and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and puts transcendence of the state system at the centre of IR theory. It is mostly about forms of universalist cosmopolitanism, which could include communism, but as Wæver (1992: 98) notes during the heyday of US primacy, was usually taken to mean liberalism. This position has some parallels to transnationalism, but carries a much more foundational link to normative political theory. World society has for long been something of a conceptual dustbin, useful as a moral referent (representing the great society of humankind) for normative theorists, but being too vague to be of much use to social structural approaches.

Following earlier work of my own (Buzan, 2018a, where interested readers can find a more detailed discussion), I disaggregate world society into three meanings:

1. *Normative* world society reflects both Bull's 'great society of humankind', and Buzan's (2004a: 118–59) idea of 'interhuman societies' mainly expressed in patterns of shared identity, which can be partial, such as nations, civilisations, races, and religions, or holistic, generally as humankind.

[2] For a summary of this debate, see Buzan (2014a: 171–2).

2. *Political* world society comprises all the non-state social structures visible within humankind as a whole that have both significantly autonomous actor quality, and the capacity and interest to engage with the society of states to influence its normative values and institutions. It is therefore close to transnational perspectives. These non-state actors might be rooted in religion, or commerce, or civil society more broadly.
3. *Integrated* world society is an aggregating concept, representing the idea that the social structure of humankind can best be understood by linking together international and world society. It is what global governance, with its emphasis on the intermingling of states, intergovernmental organisations, non-state actors, and people, points towards as an eventual outcome of an ever-more densely integrated and interdependent human society on a global scale. This is one foundation for what I call *global society*, on which more below.

Interpolity, Transnational and Interhuman Domains The English School has so far mainly thought about integrated world society as something not yet achieved, but which might lie in the future as something to be aspired to (e.g. Vincent, 1986). In this book, I stand this assumption on its head by using the idea of *three domains*, defined by the type of actor and activity dominant with them (Buzan, 2004a: 118–28, 257–61; Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018: 27–8). The scheme of three domains is intended to replace the traditional ES triad, by clarifying and separating its essential components, and making them the component parts of *integrated world society*.

The *inter-polity/state domain* is about the second-order society of states/polities, which has been the main focus of the ES. Given that states are relatively recent, I use Ferguson and Mansbach's (1996) useful term 'polities' to cover the quite wide range of political entities, and the interactions among them, in play over the course of human history: chiefdoms, city-states, kingdoms, empires, states, etc. Generally, I will use the term *interpolity domain*, though in modern times I will also use *interstate* domain. The defining activity of the interpolity domain is politics, and the reason for treating it separately is that political actors usually claim primacy over all other types of organisation.[3]

[3] This might – justifiably – be thought a vulnerable basis for making such a big taxonomical differentiation. While it is true that politics, broadly understood as the process of legitimate government in human societies, has been the dominant sector since the beginning of civilisation, its primacy is not automatic. It can be, and has been, challenged by commerce and religion. Europe at the time of the Crusades was arguably led by the Roman Catholic Church. Venice and many other city states and Leagues were dominated by merchants. It is entirely possible to imagine the dethroning of politics (e.g. Pohl and Kornbluth, 1960; Vernon, 1971), and therefore giving primacy to politics has to

The *transnational domain* is about collective non-state/polity actors (e.g. guilds, firms, religious organisations, many kinds of interest groups from sport to stamp collecting), and how they relate both to polities, and to each other as transnational actors (TNAs) across polity boundaries. The transnational domain does not have a single defining activity. Many of the organisations within this domain will have advocacy as one of their purposes, both up to the interstate domain (e.g. lobbying government, participating in diplomacy), and down to the interhuman one (e.g. proselytising/recruiting, marketing). Some of the actors here will be uncivil, such as criminal and terrorist entities.[4]

The *interhuman domain* is about people, and its defining activity is collective identity formation, a rather subtle and amorphous process, but one with big consequences for the social structure of humankind. In the interhuman domain, only individuals have actor quality, and the main social structure is patterns of collective identity ranging from the universal one of humankind as a whole, through civilisational and religious identities, to racial, national, tribal, and kinship ones, all of which are subglobal in extent. These identities do not in themselves possess actor quality, but they do act powerfully as constraints and opportunities to enable or restrain various kinds of actors in the transnational and interpolity domains, for example, religious institutions and nation states.

When the analytical lens of the three domains is deployed instead of the classical ES triad, it quickly becomes apparent that integrated world society has been around for a very long time, and that the nature of primary institutions cannot be understood apart from it. Demonstrating and illustrating this is a key theme of the book. These three domains are, like functional differentiation and sectors (on which more below), another way of approaching the social whole. The interhuman domain is the closest to the traditional sociological understanding of society as being composed of individual human beings sharing an identity. As noted, the classical ES's discussions of 'the great society of humankind' suppose that no such society exists at the global level in practice, and its

be seen as a provisional categorisation based on empirical current conditions, and not something chiselled in stone. Given that both interstate and transnational are second-order societies (composed of collective actors), they could be merged into a single grouping differentiated from interhuman, and without primacy being given to any particular type of collective actor. Alternatively, religious, commercial, or even criminal actors could, in principle, or in fiction, or should empirical developments justify it, be elevated to prime position, and differentiated from the others. The tension between political and religious primacy is most evident in current global society in the Islamic world, and in the role of the Christian right in the US Republican Party. This is, therefore, only a provisional and contingent way of dividing up the social whole. For definitions, see under 'Differentiation Theory and Sectors' below.

[4] On the civil/uncivil distinction, see Buzan (2004c).