Preface

This book reports on the work of a research group that was established at the University of Bonn in 2013. This group 'Comparative Research on Democracies' is a part of the 'Forum Internationale Wissenschaft' in Bonn, an interdisciplinary research institute that focuses on the functional differentiation of contemporary world society. In the Forum we created three departments for the study of contemporary religion, for research on the global system of science and for research on the world polity.

In our days, there are many thousands of academic research institutes in the world. But the 'Forum Internationale Wissenschaft' appears to be the only one among them that truly concentrates on the 'functional differentiation of world society' as its major research problem.[1] This special and rare position is for us a challenge and an obligation. In this book – the first of two volumes – we do not run the whole gamut of functional differentiation of society. Instead, we focus on one function system, the world polity, a function system consisting of hundreds of democratic and authoritarian political systems. However, we always write from a perspective that seeks to compare function systems. In studying features of modern political systems – patterns of internal differentiation, the duality of representation and responsiveness, the dynamics of problem expansion and problem retreat in polities – a comparison to similar dynamics in other function systems is inescapable. Furthermore, many of these characteristics derive from ecological relations among function systems. Thus, though we are primarily interested in polities, we have to understand them on the basis of the relations of the polity to other function systems.

We do not arrive at an adequate understanding of modern polities if we primarily study them as modern transformations of premodern states. Premodern states were at the apex of a stratified, i.e. hierarchical, society. They dominated

1 One of the authors of this book was part of an earlier, somehow similar endeavor, also related to a new research institute. See Renate Mayntz, Bernd Rosewitz, Uwe Schimank, Rudolf Stichweh, *Differenzierung und Verselbständigung. Zur Entwicklung gesellschaftlicher Teilsysteme*, Campus Verlag: Frankfurt/New York 1988. It might be interesting to compare these two books, asking the question how far the understanding of functional differentiation has progressed in 32 years.

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society and all its groups and strata. In doing this, they constituted the whole of society and included every societal relevance into their domain. Religion may have made similar and competing demands on society. It was the only other function that could claim the whole of society (including the state) as being part of its domain and subordinate to it. As long as these interpretations were dominant and decisive for societal structure formation, society consisted of the competing claims of two totalizing functions, both of which were monistic, not pluralistic visions of society. This monism embedded into stratification constitutes the radical difference between premodern society and modernity.

Modern polities have to be understood through the ecology of relations among function systems. They have to find and incessantly redefine their place in society. They produce decisions that are collectively binding, but in preparing decisions they experience constraints and knowledge deficiencies that are always related to the complexity of a functionally differentiated society. This book concentrates on six key analytical perspectives that mirror the way modern polities are embedded into the ecology of functionally differentiated world society. In the following, we summarize these six analytical perspectives.

There is, first, **inclusion** (Ch. 1)**,** which is a universal imperative in all the function systems of world society. They are all based on **inclusion revolutions** which begin in the eighteenth century and continue into the present. Inclusion is related to the institutionalization of the **individual** as one of the core inventions of modernity that connects locality and globality, structures and beliefs. Polities always have to balance individual and collective inclusion. How they do this shapes the democratic or autocratic or populist regimes they build.

Modern political systems can no longer adequately be described by looking at the apex of a hierarchy. To do so was instructive in the premodern world, but it is instructive no more. Function systems of the modern world achieve their autonomy and identity by building complex patterns of **internal differentiation** (Ch. 2). The best way to understand a function system is to understand its **milieu intérieur** (Claude Bernard), that is its internal environment, the practices and imperatives built into it, and the way the system is different from all the systems in its external environments on the basis of the complex reality of its internal environments. To understand autocratic mainland China one needs to study its villages and regions and provinces and cities and the immense multi-level governmental apparatus, the way decision capabilities are distributed in it, and the way decision alternatives are generated and made use of. Another core question is the interrelation between the ongoing internal differentiation of a function system and the processes of differentiation progressing in its external environments.

What is characteristic for political systems and distinguishes the polity from other function systems is that politics is almost never a profession, which can be learned by studying a specific **knowledge system** (Ch. 3) that – as a scientific or

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intellectual knowledge system – defines the core of what politics is about. In contemporary society in most world regions exist a profession of law and a profession of medicine and often a professionalization of religious core roles, and even, in the last decades, a certain amount of professionalization of managerial roles in the economy. But there is no profession of politics. The inclusion into political public roles (voters and the public sphere) and political performance roles (political parties and political offices) is independent of professionalization. The inclusion of everyone with equal rights of participation seems to be so important that it conflicts with any professionalization imperative for politics. If one starts from this diagnosis there arises the core question of how political processes organize the access to the knowledge resources they need in order to work on the ever more numerous societal problems that are being redefined as part of the problem set in need of collectively binding decision-making by political institutions. For this they need advisors and experts and other forms of knowledge import. The study of modern political systems will in one central respect be the study of these forms of knowledge import.

But how does the political system observe society? If modernity no longer has a problem set that defines which problems are the invariable core responsibilities of political systems, one has to find out how political systems select the problems they work on. For this selection process modern political systems make use of two strategies by which they try to affirm and expand their relevance for society. These two strategies are **representation** and **responsiveness** (Ch. 4). Representation is based on inclusion which, via votes, petitions, protests and public opinion allows the political system to apprehend the problem perspectives, preferences and interests present in the population. These are then selectively represented in the system. Representation already works in small-scale political systems. But political systems grow in complexity over time. They build an institutional set of their own and this set of political institutions develops diagnostic tendencies regarding relevant societal problems that operate independently of direct inclusion. We call these somehow autonomous diagnoses responsiveness. The path from representation to responsiveness seems to be a general feature of the differentiation histories of function systems: they start as relatively simple machines for the representation of environmental features, only over time do they build much more complex interpretive schemata which demonstrate cognitive autonomy. But the responsiveness of polities is obviously limited, as polities are organized around the fight for power, but not around the search for knowledge.

Besides the power structures, ever more organizations and institutions arise in complex political systems. These institutions and organizations are specialized on functionally defined policy fields and relatively specific problems in those policy fields. Policy fields are obviously near to the functional differentiation of society and they operate as channels for the interaction of the polity and the other func-

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tion systems of society. The institutions and organizations (central banks, constitutional courts, cartel and patent offices and many others) are often endowed with autonomous competences for collectively binding decision-making. They are **functional autonomies** (Ch. 5) and as such insulated from power processes, although their decisions can claim the force of collective bindingness, which is only available in a political system. Such autonomous organizations are always expert organizations and the kind of expertise they represent is in most cases near to the problem perspectives of other function systems beyond the polity. The rise of these organizations documents the respect for knowledge which is unavailable or not sufficiently protected in the power processes of political systems, and it documents the respect a democratic polity may build regarding the autonomy of other function systems. Functional autonomies are the structural form through which polities accept the primacy of the functional differentiation of society and operate with self-limitations on the basis of this acceptance.

The inclusion revolution at the beginning of modernity is clearly a democratic revolution. But in most cases this was a slow process, in which mixed forms of government – monarchies, aristocracies, democracies – dominated for most of the 19th century and into the 20th century. At least until 1918 (dissolution of empires as a consequence of WWI) and in some respects until 1960 (final decolonization) the most important states were empires, what implies that different regime types were part of the same empire. Only after 1960 did the modern system of the universality of national and territorial states arise. In this modern system the **bipolarity of democracy and authoritarianism** (Ch. 6) becomes the dominant regime difference. Authoritarian regimes mostly do not mean the continuing dominance of traditional aristocratic elites. In some respects, autocracies participate in the democratic revolution as most of them call themselves democracies and they affirm the universal inclusion of everyone in the possibilities of participation they offer. The major differences of democracies and autocracies have to do with the way they react to functional differentiation.

Democracy seems to be the political regime that maximizes the compatibility with functional differentiation. Democracies are receptive towards a plurality of societal values and they limit their Eigenvalues to core values that protect the autonomy of the individual. They create the autonomous institutions analyzed in Ch. 5, and thereby enlarge the social spaces for other function systems and processes of self-organization in other function systems. They identify and fix political problems in open search processes that aim for representation and responsiveness (Ch. 4). Compared to such structures authoritarianism nearly always means the resistance to and a partial negation of functional differentiation. Autocracies realize the renewed dominance of a stratum, an ethnic group or a family/dynasty in politics and society. In other cases, autocracies institutionalize a prevalence of one of the function systems of society over the other functions. This may be reli-

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gion (theocracies or ideocracies of quasi-religious systems), the economy (technocracy), or the polity itself, if there is a political actor who successfully claims a non-negotiable domination (a political party, the military, a dominant person). These different claims for dominance are often based on non-contingent values.

The research group that produced this book will continue the work on the analytical perspectives presented here and add further perspectives. We prepare a second volume with case studies on Mainland China, Russia, India, the EU and the USA. We have to thank the University of Bonn and its rectors who established and continue to support the 'Forum Internationale Wissenschaft'. We are grateful to the other members of the democracy group who did not contribute chapters here but actively participated in the conceptual work and discussion of these papers: Lena Laube, Felipe Peréz-Solari, Philipp Rückheim, Anna Skripchenko, Gioconda Vallarta-Cervantes, Pascal Goeke and Christine Weinbach. Special thanks are due to Jennifer Eggerling-Boeck (Madison/Wisconsin) who contributed language editing and to Raja Bernard who functions as the organizing spirit of the research group.

Bonn, September 2020

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