Functional differentiation has long been at the heart of sociological thought, and as such has become a defining feature in the evolution of modern society – one that distinguishes it from pre-modern societies which have instead typically differentiated by means of segmentation, or by stratified social systems such as class. Drawing on the latest developments on differentiation theory in international relations and sociology, this book brings together contributions from leading IR scholars and sociological theorists to offer a unique interdisciplinary synthesis in which contemporary world politics is discussed as a differentiated social realm. Bringing Sociology to International Relations is an illuminating and innovative new resource for scholars and students, which strives to respond to a significant question across all its chapters: what happens when this well-established framework based on sociological theory is transposed from the domestic level, for which it was originally designed, to the larger and more complex subject of international relations?

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Bringing Sociology to International Relations

*World Politics as Differentiation Theory*

*Edited by*
Mathias Albert, Barry Buzan and Michael Zürn
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Preface

This book has been rather long in the making. That is not at all uncommon for academic books, often due to mundane matters such as deadlines not being observed. But in the present case the long maturing has mostly been due to the fact that, first, it took time for three people walking different intellectual paths in International Relations (IR) to converge on the same spot and, second, that we allowed ourselves and the group of authors assembled in this volume a number of revision rounds for the texts, including two authors’ workshops.

Convergence on the subject of social differentiation in IR originated in a joint discussion, starting in 2005, between two of the editors (Mathias Albert and Barry Buzan) on the relation between the notions of sectors and functional differentiation. Rather than being a one-off discussion, this led to further exchanges, the results of which have now been published in two articles (Buzan and Albert, 2010; Albert and Buzan, 2011). The duo expanded into a trio when Mathias Albert pushed Michael Zürn to look at his theses about a ‘legally stratified multi-level system’ from the point of view of differentiation theory. This discussion led to a debate about the interplay between different forms of differentiation. In common discussions we then soon found out that differentiation theory provides a useful way of focusing the thoughts of contributors from different backgrounds in both theoretical and empirical work in IR; and, indeed, that differentiation theory provides a promising basis for substantive discussions and exchanges between sociological and IR approaches.

This book would not have been possible without the engaged participation of its contributors. We would like to thank the Social Science Research Center in Berlin (WZB) and the Institute for World Society Studies for each sponsoring one workshop which allowed us to bring the contributors together. Thanks for very helpful substantive input go to
Preface

Peter Haas, who served as discussant at one of these workshops, as well as to two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press. Valuable research assistance at various stages of the project has been provided by Julia Löhr and Thomas Müller, both at Bielefeld, and Georg Simmerl at the WZB.