Identity politics and the political field – a theoretical approach to modelling a ‘field of identity politics’

by
Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer

This paper will be published in
Josef Raab, Sebastian Thies, Olaf Kaltmeier (ed.): Ethnicities under Construction: Inter-American Perspectives on Identity Politics. 2011

© 2009 Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer, Universität Bielefeld
Abstract

This contribution will focus on the theoretical and methodical construction of a “field of identity politics”. After a short glimpse at the literature on identity politics we will briefly remember some basic principles of the actor centred concept of “field” by Pierre Bourdieu. Then we will determine some working definitions of “politics” and “identity” congruent on the one hand with the Bourdieuan concept of “field” and on the other hand as open as possible in order to serve the task of constructing a field of identity politics best. Finally – in order to avoid any essentialist reification of the concept and to propose a basic mode of construction – we shall sketch an outline of an abstract model of the field of identity politics. This model, developed by my research group on theory at this university, is analyzing in depth how Bourdieu constructs the fields of economy, art, politics and religion. The model comes with a set of open categories derived from many different works of Bourdieu and is related to a model of the social space and an additional model to describe relevant strategies of identity politics.

Introduction

Identity politics based on ethnic or religious identification, cultural habits or nationality are becoming increasingly important when it comes to the mobilization of movements, electorate, E-mail protests, transnational cooperation and migrants’ networks. Countries are going to be “healed” spiritually and politically by religious presidential candidates, presidents are being elected because of their ethnic bloodline or religious creed, wars are being waged to achieve ethnic or religious “cleansing”, and actors establish transnational cooperation simply because of belonging to the same religious confession or the same ethnic “people”. According to a strong line of actual research “identity politics” precisely is the way in which social movements – ethnic, religious, gender-related, homosexual or otherwise culturally based – weave transnational relations and become involved in politics to further their identity claims. Such identity politics imply the scientific task – as Christian Büschges and Johanna Pfaff put it1 – to capture the practical logics of:

- the “change in semantics and models of argumentation and legitimation”,
- “putting on the political agenda” of identity based action, and

---

1 Büschges, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007, S. 12.
the “main actors and media as well as the actors’ strategies of reinterpreting the political realm” and of positioning themselves within it.

Given that for identity politics symbolic operations and relations of recognition are as important as material resources and power “quota”, it is helpful to approach within a framework of a social theory capable of:

- “understanding” (“Verstehen”, Max Weber) actors, their action and its meaning, ...
- its socio-structural framework and
- the special field of practice where it is developing.

The social theory of Pierre Bourdieu provides such an approach. As identity politics spawn very special dynamics, it seems to be worthwhile to ask, if the Bourdieuan concept of “field” allows for capturing these dynamics and – going further – if it even allows for constructing something like a special “field of identity politics”. In this article I will focus on this question and suggest the combination of three models as an approach to the analysis of identity politics and towards the construction of a special “field of identity politics” in the future. In any case, I would like to underscore, that these models are models in a strict sense of the word. They help to organize and structure observational data, each under a clearly defined, but therefore very limited aspect. A model has to be economical, frugal; it cannot explain all relevant aspects of social praxis at once. For this reason – and for the time being – we suggest a combination of three models. Thus, the special aspects that each of them contributes to the understanding of social praxis can be combined by interpretation. Before outlining the models, however, our approach requires a brief clarification of four basic terms: “field”, “identity”, “politics” and “identity politics”.

**Basic terms**

**Field**

If a German hears the word “field” probably the association of a “soccer-field” is evoked. Most of us, of course, would think of a stadium like – in Bielefeld – Schüko-Arena or Chelsea in London. There, the “field” is clearly defined by lines on the grass, goals, corner flags etc.; and it is surrounded by a huge concrete structure, gates, watchmen etc. This kind of field...
appears to be more a “system” – maybe of Luhmannian nature – than a “field” according to Pierre Bourdieu.

To shape up an idea of a field according to Bourdieu just remember your youth: a small street in your quarter or a meadow back the grocery store, some boys, maybe some girls, too; a ball thrown to the ground and everybody running after it, knowing intimately the nomos – the rules – of the game: “catch the ball and place a goal”; and being part of the common belief (the doxa) of all players that it is worthwhile doing so. Everybody invests the force of his or her body into the game according to its best sense for the game following the interest to manage the ball. Quickly, as the guys kick the ball back and forth, two teams begin to gather. Somebody puts a stone, another one puts a sweater, and there is a goal; and then shortly after that, there is a second goal with another goalkeeper. The dimensions of the game are taking shape. The individual interest transforms into the common interest to make the team win by scoring goals. By the time, differences according to velocity and skill (the means of production) as well as according to previously acquired capital (experience and fame out of former games) will generate the different positions of the players and the teams. Some are experienced and strong players, arrivée in the field, some are unskilful newcomers. And finally, one team will win. And maybe a few days later the team compete against another team from the wider neighbourhood. This is how a field emerges.

This metaphorical account is simply to illustrate some truisms about Bourdieu’s theory. First, the field theory is actor-oriented, but in no way individualistic. It does not comprise “fields” as fixed structures or even systems. If we want to work with it, it is good advice to begin with the actors, their interests, their dispositions, their sense of the game, their doxa and their capital, in order to understand the nomos (the regulating principle) of a certain game.

Second, fields are not preexistent or independent of social activity; you do not “find” them in reality. They are scientific constructions to understand social praxis better. There is no political or economic field with essentially fixed attributes. Praxis itself is fuzzy, and economic, religious, political, ethnical, gender-related and whatever interests mix over and over again.

---

2 See Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992, S.102, where Bourdieu stresses the differences between his theory of fields and Luhmann’s Systems Theory.
A model provides mainly two benefits: It helps to describe regularities and, even more important, it constructs a theoretical frame for the object of study. A theoretical model of a field, thus, establishes artificial boundaries which turn the fuzzy movements of praxis into something describable. So the theoretical boundaries of a model serve as common criteria of description – quite a benefit for a large group of scholars trying to describe a still quite unclear praxis as it is “identity politics”.

Third, the Bourdieuan concepts of “field”, “space” and “habitus” are not simple metaphors either if they are even used as such in literature by thousands. Look at Bourdieu 1979 for the term of “social space”, at Bourdieu 1992 for “field” or at Bourdieu 1977 for “habitus” – you don’t find metaphors, but scientific terms used for modelling social praxis. The metaphorical usage – for whatever reasons, maybe often simply for a fancy “Bourdieu light”-feeling – gives up the benefits of a fairly precise scientific vocabulary.

Fourth, Bourdieu’s concepts of “field” and “habitus” are intimately interconnected, not least by doxa as their common joint. This means that the objectivistic perspective on the relations between actors in a constructed field can be related easily to these actors’ practical logic and their dispositions, which means, finally, related to their identity. Thus there is a good deal of chance to understand precisely the cultural production of the actors as identity based strategies that contribute to the emergence of what we sociologically capture as the political field and might even, in the future, be able to model as a “field of identity politics”.

Identity

Talking about identity, a German thinks, most probably, first of a “normal” German. The ordinary “man on the street” would not catch the observer’s eye in a special way. Nevertheless the man has his habitus and his identity: stereotypically, one could think that he grew up, maybe, in a grey neighbourhood (perhaps even without soccer), had no real conflict with his father has learned some mediocre stuff at school, and his greatest achievement is a boring job. His habitus – as Bourdieu would call it – of mediocrity was simply brought forth as it was. But nevertheless he, for himself, knows and feels his own convictions in his day by day praxis as something very individual, very much of his own; but he would not consider others as making certain ascriptions to him as to delimit his identity. On the other hand, foreigners thinking about German identity might imagine a typical German probably in a different way. They might find those “typical Germans” for example at the “Oktoberfest” (October festival)
in Munich, dressed up in livery (and looking forward to meet foreigners). These “traditional Germans”, in turn, know about the ascriptions the foreigners make and, in consequence, might expose their otherness. Even though the identities of these special actors are based in their habitus, too, the difference to Mr. Nobody is that the relations to foreigners and their ascriptions these actors tend to highlight certain traits of their habitus – according to the special field condition of October festival – creating a special cultural identity that can be useful, for example, in business.

This little stroll through German landscapes showed that identities have two aspects, as Frederik Barth in his later work has put it: 

3 Marked difference against others which forms the group as “us” over against “them” (form); and certain cognitive, affective and in many cases even bodily traits common to the members of a given collective (content). Nor is identity build by cognitive contents alone, nor by simply distinguishing “us” versus “them”. To understand an actor’s identity, the mutual influence between contents – e.g. convictions – and difference (or boundaries) is the clue. Experiences of distinctions and differences are basic in any process of growing up, as Piaget reminds. But these notions become part of our cognitive dispositions as cognitive content. And as such they will guide future experiences of difference; and – at the same time – they will be modified again by such experiences; and then they will put forth, again, further perception, judgement and action. This is, in slightly other words, how Bourdieu (2007, 1980) describes habitus as a set of dispositions and its operation in the actor’s practical logic. Only a little step further takes us to describe a concept of identity on this base – while Bourdieu himself did not elaborate on this particular issue. The actor – lets say the Bavarian at (the October festival) “Oktoberfest” –, experiences in the encounter with his “life world” – family, neighbours, competitors, foreigners and so forth – that some of his cultural dispositions, more than others, slip into the focus of his own practical attention. 

4 Thus, going a small step beyond Bourdieu, we can define identity as

---

3 In his classic study on identity Barth (1970) opposes older essentialist theories of identity by a concept focused in difference (‘boundaries’). Later on (Barth 1996) he stated that cognitive content is needed as well in order to construct identities.

4 Not just „consciousness”; this term – by the opposition of conscious (rational, clear) vs. unconscious (or subconscious: emotional, unclear) – prevents understanding an important characteristic of habitus and practical logic, which is: both are operating implicitly and explicitly – as Bourdieu says – at the same time. Digging into religious and ethnic identities, this is an important feature. However, we are not able to detail upon it here. See Schäfer 2003 p. 273, 344.
such dispositions of the actor’s habitus that are explicitly (“consciously”) practised by the actor and perceived by others. Thus, we can think of identities as loosely woven, flexible, ever changing but, at the same time, practically coherent networks of dispositions (Schäfer 2005a, Schäfer 2003).

The network model of identity possesses the following characteristics:
First, it allows a better understanding of “hybridity” and “creolization”, of “fluid”, “patchwork” or “multiphrenic” identities.
Second, such a model enables the researcher to interpret – with a closed eye on specific individual and / or collective actors – discourses, pieces of art, film, literature, music, religious rites, ethnic dress or whatever cultural products as elements (strong or weak, central or peripheral) of the cognitive, emotional and bodily identity-networks of the given actors.
Third, the researcher can understand those cultural products, equally, as representational signs and symbols, as practical instruments of an actor’s strategies5 and, finally, as elements of the actor’s self description in terms of identity. All of these aspects of a habitus-based theory of identity have, of course, to be distinguished analytically.

Important for the quest of identity politics is that the network model of identity is closely combined with Bourdieu’s models of social space and of fields. That means, it allows for modelling a close linkage between the identities of actors and the conditions in which they act, which is primarily the field.
In more detail, this means the following:
First, it is possible to use the study of almost every cultural product and practice – form movie and novel, passing religious rites to interviews – to describe the networks of dispositions that shape a given (collective or individual) actor’s identity. Thus, the researcher can grasp the identities at stake according to their contents and their specific ways of tracing boundaries. In other words: this step highlights the subjective aspect of identity politics. (But, nevertheless, its details are not an issue to be discussed in this article.) The following steps rather model the objective, political, conditions of identity politics.

5 Wittgenstein 2009.
Schäfer: Identity politics and the political field 7
Second, on the basis of some general demographic data (income and education) the actors can be located within the framework of their social space – the most general model to describe the distribution of social and objective possibilities for action.

Third, more specific positioning of the actors can be achieved by locating them in a model of the political field, showing the opportunities for generating political effect by investing identitarian capital (e.g. ethnic music, religious campaigns etc.).

Fourth, the embodied capabilities and the recognized cultural products of a given actor can be conceived of as political capital enabling certain political strategies. The distinction of different types of strategies, thus, allows finally for a differential view of the political field, according to the dimensions of market oriented policies versus identitarian policies.

This combination of micro, meso and macro-level approaches helps to maintain a close link between (subjective) identities and (objective) conditions of action. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that a given cultural identity in the daily routines is something different than the same identity in political contention. Cultural identities have to be publicly mobilized and, thus, become more specific, more focused, more pronounced in order to operate in identity politics.

**Politics**

When Germans think about politics they might have splendid dreams or nightmares – in any case they think about an established, formal, procedural and highly systematic democratic system. A class of political specialists make up an old and very autonomous political field – upon which the laypeople only on election-day exert a certain, albeit minimal, influence. For official politics the formal “vestment” by an office is most important; Bourdieu calls it *investiture*. With identity politics, however, different actors form civil society and appear on the political scene, as Germans equally and lamentably know, for example by Neo-Nazi mobilization.

Approaching cultural identity politics in the present day, America means to deal with a great number of new actors in the political field, additionally to old ones as the Catholic Church: ethnic movements, migrants’ organizations, Protestant (most Pentecostal) churches, women’s organizations etc. These groups enter as actors on the political field, albeit with still
quite “fluid”, unstable and changing identities when compared to long standing official actors. Nevertheless, these new movement organizations and their representatives exert a measurable effect on official politics, as can be seen, e.g. by the election of indigenous presidents. So they can be legitimately dealt with as actors on the political field, employing the specific political style of “identity politics”. As long as they act by peaceful means, movement actors achieve their political effect by mobilization of people for their political goals. That means they rely on recognition, in the double sense of the term: to be known and to be appreciated. Recognition is precisely one of the dimensions of the political field according to our study of Boudieu’s writings on this topic. This means, for now, that we can construct the political field according to quite established criteria and deal with the specificities of identity politics within that framework.

**Identity politics**

Weaving things together (and forgetting about the Germans for a while): The literature on identity politics is rapidly increasing. Any such contribution would deserve some attention. But for the present article it is sufficient to focus briefly on two issues only.

First, the distinction between “identity politics” and “interest politics” (e.g., Goldstein, Jeremy Rayner 1994, Rothman, Olson 2001) helps to distinguish different political strategies – not goals! It can be useful for a heuristic model to locate and describe different styles of political strategies. Nevertheless, we need to make a small terminological change. The term “interest” is too broad, if it is not conceived in a Rational Choice way. In general, “interest” refers to identitarian styles of politics, since these are interested in fostering the position of its specific group of reference. The quoted authors, nevertheless, refer to “interest” in a much more specific sense. It is limited to (negotiable) material goods in distinction to (not negotiable) identity. Thus, the term “interest” is limited – as we define it later on – to market opportunities. On the one hand “interest”, in this sense, is focused on “having” while identity is focused on “being”. On the other hand, we consider that the term “interest” should not be used in this limited sense only. As for now, we therefore will circumscribe the term “interest” with “material interest” or the like, if we refer to the distinction over against identitarian politics.
Second, the use of signs, symbols, art, religious rituals etc. is an important issue for research on cultural identity politics. The most important effect of signs (and therefore of meaning) in identitarian politics relies on the specific social use of signs and meaning. Signs – according to a Wittgensteinian and a Pragmatic understanding – are not simply representations. More than that, they are tools that exert effect in human praxis because practices have a dimension of meaning and exert “symbolic” effects on actors. Signs and practices, thus, can acquire the function of “practical metaphors” (Bourdieu). A metaphor, in literary sciences, is conceived of as linking different levels (“realms”, “domains”) of meaning. For a Bourdieustyle sociology – and in identity politics – practical metaphors connect different fields of praxis to one another. Thus, they contribute to the conversion of capital between different fields. For example, religious metaphors (“healing the nation”, “spiritual warfare”) can convert exclusively religious recognition of a certain movement or representative into recognition on the political field, fostering like this, e.g. an electoral campaign. Thus, practical metaphors are important instruments for the mobilization of cultural (religious, ethnic etc.) actors in favour of a certain political goal. Inversely, this means for the study of discourse, literature, film, rites etc. – briefly: for any element of a given cultural identity – that under the perspective of identity politics these artefacts and practices are most interesting in their function as practical metaphors; in other words: as operators of power within the constellations of the political field.

A third point I would like to make here might seem to be a little anachronistic in post-postmodern times – in neoliberal times, maybe it is not. I would like to remember that “money makes the world go round”, or more precisely: money and the knowledge to use it. As for understanding identity politics and politics in general, it is important to know where in the overall space social power a given political actor is located. It is simply not the same for its political strategies, if a collective actor is poor and lacks technological knowledge or if it is middleclass intellectual. Therefore, as already mentioned above, a recommendable objectivist step of analysis is to pinpoint the relevant actors (according to some basic demographic data) in a model of the social space.

**The social space of political styles**
The following model is explained quickly. It is very much the same as Bourdieu’s model of the social space developed in *La distinction* (Bourdieu 1979). I have adapted this model during the nineteen eighties to religious actors, obtaining a “social space of religious styles”. We then developed in my research team at Bielefeld University means of statistical measurement of economic and cultural capital. In a similar way, this model can be applied to political actors, obtaining a “social space of political styles”. To exemplify this, in the following I draw on my research data from Guatemala and on Andrea Althoff’s excellent dissertation on ethnicity and religion in Guatemala.

![Social space of political styles](image)

**Social space of political styles**  
**Guatemala apr. 1990**

**Vertical** = overall volume of capital: sum of the two aggregated forms of capital.

**Horizontal** = Structure of capital: volumes of capital in inverse relation.

The vertical axis of the model (fig. 1) represents the aggregation of economic and cultural capital (simply measured by income and schooling). Positions in the upper scales gather much of both, income and (formal) education. The horizontal axis represents the two forms

---

6 Althoff 2005; shortly to be published in English.
7 This is of course a very strict way of measuring. The original idea in Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2000b) is that the vertical axis represents *all* of the capital accumulated by given actors. But this rendered to complex to measure even for Bourdieu himself. On the contrary, an economical design of only income and education as the forms of capital employed is easier to handle and facilitates international comparison.
of capital in opposition to one another (plotted A against B). On the right, there is relatively more economic capital than cultural capital; on the left it is the other way. This means that the positions that have the same level on the vertical scale can be differentiated, on the horizontal scale, according to the *structure* (or: composition) of their capital. This marks important differences between social positions that – by a simple distinction according to high and low general capital, “rich” and “poor”, to say it colloquially – might be estimated as equal. The idea is quickly evident, examining the different professional groupings in the model: e.g. the “industrialists” compared to “large landowners” or the “small peasants” compared to “industrial labour”. This structure is a frame to pinpoint the relevant actors of identity politics according to their position within the general distribution of capital in society. This is possible, because any “identity movement” – as any other social actor as well – disposes of a certain amount of economic and cultural capital. This capital can be measured (or estimated) and, thus, serve for locating the movement at stake in relation to other social actors within the model of the social space.

In our graph (fig. 1) we limit ourselves to three significant Guatemala actors: indigenous Pentecostals, Maya intellectuals, and Neo-Pentecostals\(^8\) (see Althoff 2005). Later on, I will give more details on their praxis. Now, their location in the social space is of primary interest. We see that the indigenous Pentecostals are very much associated to a low social position with relatively little cultural capital: the small traditional peasantry. The Maya intellectuals appear to be a movement of intellectual petty middle class. And, finally, the Guatemalan Neo-Pentecostals are located in the upwardly mobile, educated upper-middle class. Any of these clusters practises a certain style of identity politics, of course related to the overall size and structure of capital they dispose of: the indigenous Pentecostals are oriented locally and in their immediate ‘life world’ (Schütz); the Mayan intellectuals have ethnically defined goals for the nation and dispose of some transnational linkage; the Neo-Pentecostals are religiously anti-ethnic and pursue nationalistic and Western civilizational goals. The model of the “social space of identity politics” allows for estimating how any of these styles is linked to an

---

\(^8\) The concept of „Neo-Pentecostalism“ refers to a certain current of the Pentecostal movement. It split away from „classical“ Pentecostalism in the USA during the nineteen-fifties, expanded to established Protestant and Catholic churches and developed a large number of independent „ministries“. Its most important distinction from „classical“ Pentecostalism is that – from ist beginning – it has been a middle and upper middle class movement with more action oriented religious beliefs and with quite clear cut conservative social and political strategies.

Schäfer: Identity politics and the political field
objective position within the distribution of overall social power. In other words, it shows up to what point a certain identity movement can be interpreted as a “class movement” as well. The position of an actor in the social space (“class”), of course, exerts an important influence upon its possibilities to pursue its identitarian goals effectively and mobilize the public accordingly. But the position in the social space is, in no way, the only external condition for effective identity politics. The relations of power are very important in the field of (identity) politics itself.

**Tools for field construction**

In order to construct a *model* (!) of a field – the political field in general or the field of identity politics – it is necessary at this point to sketch some theoretical baselines. We draw upon the approach put forth by Bourdieu in *Les regles del art*. But we designed the model in a more abstract way, in order to be able to measure more easily and to avoid reification. Leif Seibert (2010) was first to develop such a model for the religious field. We draw here upon his general considerations on constructing field models.

Additionally, it is helpful to establish some orientation on the use of Bourdieu’s vocabulary concerning the theory of fields in general. Bourdieu employs a certain set of categories in order to construct multiple aspects of the struggle that takes place in diverse fields of social praxis. He uses some of these categories in a quite constant and stable way; some other concepts undergo changes or are being used less frequently. This corresponds to Bourdieu’s idea of theory as a toolkit for empirical research. It is precisely this understanding – and not scholastics – that made us feel in our team like appreciating a list of terms as a box of heuristic tools for the construction of the field. So we “distilled” such a list from Bourdieu’s writings by elaborating definitions of the most important categories and determining their

---

9 Bourdieu 1996, 1983. For some lines about our research process, please, see in footnote 1.

10 A term like “sub-field” already suggests that a field is a given entity in reality, a part of which can be conceived of as a second, subordinated entity. Bourdieu himself, with a constructivist impetus, argues very strongly against reification of models; but he triggers this misunderstanding by using terms like “sub-field”. The positioning of the field of art within the field of power (cf. Bourdieu 1983 319) can also be misunderstood in an essentialist way.
equivalents in different fields. The categories are intended to facilitate empirical observation and to provide further possibilities to conceptualize identity politics according to the Bourdieuian framework. The following terms seem to be the most significant to us:

Nomos means the central, objective principle of praxis of a certain field. In the capitalist economic field this would be “profit”, “l’art pour l’art” in the field of arts, and “domination” in politics.

Doxa corresponds to nomos on the side of the actors as its subjective aspect. Thus it refers to a habitus that corresponds to the given field. In the field of arts it would be “beauty”, in politics the self ascribed “right to dominate” and in economy it would be the right to “make profit”. In relation to the doxa of a field, actors can position themselves in different ways. They can be orthodox and maintain a position of power in the field (the “priest”), codifying and enforcing a certain, generally conservative interpretation of doxa; they also can be heterodox and in opposition (the “prophet”), generally mobilizing against orthodoxy; and finally they can be allodox (the “sorcerer”) and exert in a subordinate position some doxa-like practices on the margin of the field and without an explicit interest in dominating the field.

Actors in a field are those groups and individuals whose action exerts an effect on the field according to its nomos. Actors are specialists in the respective mode of production and compete with other specialists in the field for favourable positions within the field. Bystanders are not actors; but public can be mobilized and enter the field with short (a revolt) or with lasting (the French revolution) effects. In economy, actors are investors (even small ones), in politics they are any kind of spokespersons, and in religion typical actors are the priest, the prophet and the sorcerer. They act according to their sense of the game.

---

Bourdieu 1983, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d, 2000e, 2003 and Bourdieu, Fritsch 2000. Bourdieu1988 (chapter 3) shows how Bourdieu works very freely and interchangeably with the notions of “field” and “space” as well as that both terms always are understood according to power relations. We did not include this chapter into our analysis, but take it as a warning not to “sclerotify” the Bourdieu’s tools into something like orthodoxy.
Sense of the game is the ability to understand and feel what the game is about and how it works, based on habitus and, thus, experiences in the field. This dispositional calibration of the actor and the field can be called the sense of business in economy, the aesthetical sense in arts, the sense (or feeling) for power in politics and the sense for the holy or sacred in religion.

Resources are mobilized according to the sense of the game and the states of fluctuations (conjuncture) of the field. Resources are material, cognitive, bodily or whatever goods at the disposition of given actors that can be mobilized for the struggles in the field. The economical resource is “money”, an artistic resource might be originality (“genius”, according to Kant), and political resources are political knowledge and free time.

Stakes are actually used resources, invested goods put at risk of losing them in the game. They are at the same time subjective and objective. In economy an idea for investment or, simply, money can be a stake. In politics it is mostly an “idée force”, a basic distinction with the power to mobilize masses: the rich against the poor, the French against the Africans etc. If it does not work, it is lost. Subjectively the actor is affected since he ties to his stakes his own illusion, the emotional and cognitive involvement in the game.

Means of production are whatever the actors can use in a specific field to produce its product. In economy they are skills and investment goods, in politics it can be competence, mandate and broadcast.

The product is the result of the processes of production and exchange in a field. In economy these are commodities, in arts the work of art and in politics the statements.

Capital is the product of field specific production which is best suited to be reinvested in further accumulation. In economy this is, simply, money; in arts it seems to be the recognition that stems from a successful work of art; in politics most probably it is prestige. Capital circulates in the processes of production and exchange within a given field.
Exchange in a field converts the specific products of the field in relative values according to the distinct worth of the products for varied actors in the field (thus, generating exchangeable value). The processes of exchange in the diverse fields of praxis, of course, are not limited to economic modes of exchange, but comprehend ritualized (gifts) and symbolic (honour) modes, too. In economics, exchange takes place as trade and acquisition; in arts as exposition and recognition; in politics as representation and delegation within the framework of political institutions and of institutionalized public (voters).

Profit is the surplus value produced by any kind of investment (work, investment goods etc.), and it is put at stake in the production and exchange of a specific field. In the economic field this is, again, money; in arts it is recognition; and in politics it is mobilization of approval and thus, on the long run, a more settled domination of the field.

Dimensions of a field – as we have seen above – can be constructed according to the two abstract terms of achievement and autonomy. Achievement refers to the establishment of actors in the field and of the field itself. In economy we understand achievement as wealth; in arts, Bourdieu identifies it as consecration (subjective) and as the academies as institutions (objective); in politics, achievement equals office (“investiture”). Autonomy refers to the degree an actor is free of compromise from outside in a given field and acts according to the fields premises (its nomos). For the field of arts, Bourdieu defines autonomy as being guided by the principle of “l’art pour l’art” and compromise as being guided by economic interests and the public. For politics we define autonomy as integrity of a political actor in correspondence with recognition by the public.

The state of fluctuation (“conjuncture”) of a field is a conditioning factor for almost all processes in the field. It influences the chances of production and exchange and is defined as the state of power relations between the different actors of the field in a given situation in time. The conjuncture depends on internal as well as on external factors. For economy we identify

---

12 As far as we can see, Bourdieu’s concept of „profit“ is not as specific as the one of Marx who relates profit only with the surplus generated by human labour in distinction to investment goods.
it as the conditions for investments; for arts it is fashion; for the political field we define it as the current debates and elections (when they are near).

*Compromise* means external influences on the field contrary to its nomos, distorting its internal relations of power and its dynamics of reproduction. In economy this is morals and politics, regulating the logic of the free market forces; in arts, Bourdieu defines it as commerce; and in politics compromise mostly takes place by scandals and corruption.

*External relations* of a field relate the specialists (who make up the field), first, to the relevant “lay people” and, second, to other fields relevant for the reproduction of the field in question. The external relation to lay people is important for politics and religion, since these specialists depend very much on their capacity to mobilize people. This is especially the case under conditions of democracy and a relatively free “religious market” – while dictatorship involves military into politics and official religions involve politics into religion. In economy, typical external relations are law and professional education; in the field of arts these are relations like taste, patronage and political change; in politics typical external relations seem to be primarily elections, journalistic coverage and polls.

The external relations of the political field are particularly important for identity politics, since these are developing on the “public fringe” of the field. They employ different means of production in order to politicize cultural products. Thus, they become a symbolic mean for political mobilization and for exerting effects on the power relations of the political field. It is important to note that the strategies of identity politics tie up to cultural *habitus* and the corresponding practical logics. They transform cultural products creatively into political statements. Thus they create and foster unorthodox political actors who employ identity as their specific resource in politics.

**Identity politics in the political field**

In our research group we invested quite some time into constructing what might be called a specific “field of identity politics”. However, there are two reasons to be – by now – somewhat reluctant to do so. First, we feel that we need some more empirical research on the
specific dynamics of identitarian politics to determine the specific dimensions, capital, exchange processes etc. of this very special field. Second, we think that, for now, a recommendable approach to such empirical data is the one to understand identity politics as a specific way of doing politics in distinction to other forms. As we neither want to use the term “field” only in a metaphorical way nor invent something like a “subfield” of politics, we simply opt for constructing general models of the political field and the relevant strategies while taking into account the actors and dynamics of identity politics. As for now we base this decision in the following consideration: The political significance of identity relies precisely on the fact that it is a special kind of politics. So when identity politics are shown in its practical difference(s) to other kinds of politics specificity can be understood best.

The intentions of our model of the political field are quite similar to those of the social space model. It relates actors to one another. But as a model of a field, it relates actors according to the special conditions of that specific game, in our case the political one. So, the actors of identity politics appear within the power relations of general politics. In order to understand the specific logics that facilitate the mobilization through identity issues better, our second model – of political strategies – allows for some specification of what can be visualized in the model of the political field. Thus, the model of strategies – interest versus identity – will be, for now, the last step of our deliberations. We hope, however, that these models mark helpful steps towards a construction of a model for a “field of identity politics” as such in the future.

In the political field, like in a soccer game, actors invest their skills and assets at stake in order to achieve a dominant position. From this position they dominate society by political means. In order to participate in the political game, it is necessary to become politically mobilized and exert an effect on other political actors. This is a condition of participation in the field and, in turn, it marks the limits of the field: the ability to cause political effects. Actors without political effects are not part of the field, but any actor – formal or informal – that

13 In methodological terms: it relates the actors to the dimensions of the model and, in consequence, to one another according to the specific perspective of the model (in our case politics).

14 We distinguish between power and domination/dominance in the way Weber proposes it (Weber 1978). Power means the ability to impose one’s will on others and is associated more to force, while domination means a relation of power based on recognition.
exerts effects on politics, takes part in the field. The nomos of the field – or: the way it works – is that actors struggle for dominance. The term of “dominance / domination” is understood as the recognized ability of a given actor to impose its will on other actors. The belief of the actors – their doxa that enables them to participate in the game – is that they feel entitled to dominate the field.

As we pretend to capture at least some important aspects of these relations in a model, we first have to name the dimensions of the field at stake.

Bourdieu proposes to construct the field of art according to two dimensions that find analogies in his writings on politics and seem useful to us for constructing a model of the political field, too:

1. First, this is the degree of achievement (or success, “été arrive”) of the participating actors in the field.

---

15 This is a difference to Bourdieu, who finds the nomos of the political field in the struggle for power. As we distinguish power and dominance, we can associate these different concepts to different degrees of autonomy of political actors; see below.

Schäfer: Identity politics and the political field
2. Second, it is the degree of autonomy that a given actor has over against compromising influences from outside the field; that is to say the degree of sovereignty to obey exclusively the nomos of the field – in our case the struggle for dominance. According to Bourdieu, but with a small change, we project the scale for achievement vertically and the scale for autonomy horizontally.¹⁶

Then we identify “autonomy” within the political field as equivalent to integrity and (professional) recognition. In this sense, an autonomous politician is one who can act on the basis of his recognition without too much heeding factional or ideological frontiers. This concept correlates positively¹⁷ with “public recognition”. The two axes describe the dimensions of the field.

Dimensions of a field describe the frame within which the struggles for the field’s profit take place. We thought that the two formal criteria, introduced by Bourdieu to trace the dimensions of the field of art, are useful for the construction of other fields, too.¹⁸ The dimension of achievement reflects the degree of establishment of a given actor within the field and, finally, the degree of establishment and stability of the field itself. “Achievement” connotes a time of practice and, more than that, the existence of a field-specific order: long standing actors in “office” versus novices, and – to a certain degree co-dependent – a strong institutionalization in an “old field” versus weak institutions in a “young field”. As for our model of the political field we code achievement as authority of office (investiture). The dimension of autonomy or – inversely – compromise reflects the degree to which an actor acts according to the nomos of the field or is compromised or corrupted by external factors. For the field of arts, Bourdieu defines “autonomy” of an actor as being guided by the principle of “l’art pour l’art” and “compromise” as being guided by economic interests and the public. In the field of politics under democratic conditions (or at least aspirations) the role of the public is differ-

¹⁶ We do not reproduce the negative correlation between public recognition on the one hand, and recognition, on the other, within the field of arts. The artistic field, as analyzed by Bourdieu, obeys to the logic of the true artist following the law of l’art pour l’art and keeping distance to the doubtful tastes of the “man on the street”. Now, constructing the political field in the same way would systematically establish a negative correlation between the logics of politics and public recognition. This is problematic under conditions of a widespread plausibility of democratic order or, at least, of some kind of popular representation.

¹⁷ …and not negatively as in Bourdieu’s model of the field of art.

¹⁸ See e.g. on the construction of the religious field, Leif Seibert 2010.
ent: the public contributes to the legitimacy and efficacy of domination by the way of recognizing it. Therefore, we decided to follow the route that Leif Seibert traced for the religious field: we construct the axis of autonomy “positively”, that is, focused on the integrity of an actor in correspondence with recognition by the public.

This mode of construction is based on the decision to introduce some differentiation into the concept of political power. Bourdieu’s term of “power” is a generic one that encompasses domination (or dominance) and coercion (or force). According to Max Weber, however, “power” is defined as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” (Weber 1978, 53).

The concept of “domination” is more specific in the sense that it presupposes a – however motivated – consent with the relation of dominance that “implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience”. (Weber 1978 I, 212) Consent is important, since it allows for conceiving cultural production in an intimate relation to the maintaining of political power and to challenge it (thus remembering Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of ‘hegemony’ and ‘historical bloc’). From the concept of “domination by consent” we can draw a line to the other end of an imagined continuum: “power by means of coercion or force”. Where there is no chance to base power relations in consent and, therefore, existing power relations render illegitimate, consequently coercion by menace or implementation of violence substitutes consent. (In Gramsci, for this reason, coercive regimes represent a crisis of hegemony.) This means for our model that we are more specific on the nomos of the field and on its profit. We implement the concept of “domination” or “dominance” instead of the concept of “power” and define the nomos as the/a “struggle for dominance” and the profit, simply, as “domination”.

The degrees of authority through integrity, on the one hand, and authority of office, on the other hand, mark the social coordinates within which the actors (whatever kind of spokesmen) mobilize their resources (free time and knowledge) to produce statements or opinions according to the states of fluctuations (conjunctures) of the field (ongoing debates, elections, demonstrations, revolts etc.) and put them as mobilizing ideas (idées forces, semantic di-
tinctions with the power to convince) at stake in the struggle for the profit of the field: political domination.

Domination, then, is the best position in the field and correlates with high achievement and high political autonomy of the respective actors – although it is by definition dependent on public recognition. Coercion, on the other hand, still is a technique in political relations; but – albeit combined with high achievement – it is understood as a sign of heteronomy of the respective actors. In the case of military dictatorship, for example, the group in power is not able to manage a “crisis of hegemony” (Gramsci) by political means and, therefore, recurs to military force – compromising the political field and their own autonomy and integrity. In consequence, the diagonal in the midst of both axes (see arrow in fig. 2) represents the increase of domination over the field as a result of successfully participating in its struggles. The dominant position in the field (upper right corner) is the one that combines high office with high recognition within (and without outside?) the field. High institutional power with low recognition (the upper left corner) disposes simply of “coercion” without social consent, thus relying very much on force of repression and buying political power for the price of dependency of politics upon military and financial capital. On the other hand, there are positions of low achievement near the bottom line of the model. They also can be differentiated according to their autonomy (or integrity). Thus, the strongest potential for mobilization and creating new movement actors in the political field is located on the lower right corner. This potential for mobilization depends on the ability of political actors to mobilize non-political actors (the public) for politically relevant action and, thus, to enter the political field as legitimate political actors. Public recognition of an actor and its goals operates on the fringe of the field and allows fostering the actor’s position in the field. Inversely, the political field is also prone to be compromised by corruption, violence etc. – operating on the fringe of the field, too. This is to say that external factors are quite important for the development of the political field itself. We therefore finally establish two external factors: public recognition works according to the logic of the field and shapes domination on the basis of conveying legitimacy to government or of changing government by political means. Compromise, in many cases corruption, interferes into the political field by non-political means and distorts the relations of power in the field.
Going again to our Guatemalan example, we can see the following. Indigenous Pentecostals have a certain power of mobilization and conviction, but only on the local level. Sometimes they achieve the office of a village mayor for their representatives. Mayan ethnic intellectuals (e.g. Rigoberta Menchú or Vitalino Similox) mobilize for national politics and have run for governmental office. They act on the level of national political parties. The Neo-Pentecostal religious transnationalistic project, finally, achieved twice the highest office in government: once by the dictatorship of Efrain Rios Montt (1982-83) and then by the electoral victory of Jorge Serrano Elias (1991-93). The former, as a dictator, never had much public support all over the country; the latter lost his initial support as he compromised his integrity – and thus the rules of the political game – by corruption. As for the political field – as the set of conditions for accumulating political capital in order to crest a position of dominance –, it is important to note that in Latin America and the USA the conditions are stable enough for political parties to function as an institutional “filter” between mass mobilization and public office. Mobilization has to be channelled through institutions like parties in order to become officially effective. It is this potential to unite ethnic and partisan mobilization that makes, in Bolivia, the case of Evo Morales unique.

The influence of external factors on the political field reflects in a certain sense the systemic compromise of democracy by ‘sugar bakers’ (Plato): those who promise more sweet pies are going to be elected. Nevertheless the conversion of public recognition into political mobilization and then into political capital (prestige) is precisely the way that identity issues become present in the political field. It is the “public fringe” of the political field (the right and the lower rims of the model in fig. 2, so to say) where social movements and especially identity movements act. Newcomers enter the field from the “fringe” and introduce changes. So the processes of converting different symbolic and social “currencies” into political capital are one of the most important objectives of research on identity politics. Having determined the position of a given actor within the field we can study the effects that, for example, transnational ties, media ownership, communication skills, implementation or invention of identity forging symbols in literature, movie, music, pictorial and performing arts do exert on the positioning of the actor within the political field. In other words, we have the possibility to study how and to what extent identity oriented practices are able to redefine the relevant
content in the political field and strengthen the ability of a given actor to achieve a more dominant position.

This task reminds us that any position in the political field is not only a specific point within objective relations of power, but conveys certain *habitus* of the correspondent actors. Field and *habitus* are co-dependent – but not in the essentialist and reifying way the concept of *habitus* frequently is misunderstood. A *habitus* – as an open, slightly structured set of cognitive, affective and bodily dispositions for perception, judgement and action – spawns strategies of discourse and action. Those strategies follow a practical logic and can be found in whatever kind of cultural practice and product of a given actor. The Neo-Pentecostal project of religious identity politics in a transnational and neoliberal scope, for example, anchors in deep religious convictions of the like that indigenous religion and people are possessed by demons, that Neo-Pentecostals are the only legitimate representatives of God and His Spirit, that God grants material prosperity to honest believers, that the nation has to be healed by exorcism and that the North Atlantic Protestant model of culture is the most appropriate for Guatemala. This strategic logic can be observed in throwing Napalm bombs on Indian villages as well as in casting out demons of alcoholics and dismissing social politics with the argument that poor people do not worship the right God.

The model shows that Neo-Pentecostal identity politics one time (1991 with Serrano) achieved an optimal position on the political field. But it does not show to what extent identitarian strategies contributed to it. Another model has to locate the actors according to the type and mix of their strategies.

### Identity strategies

This concept seems to be an oxymoron – at least if it is understood on the background of the long standing antithesis between social theories of macro structure and theories of micro action, as Marxist structuralism (e.g. Althusser) vs. Rational Choice theory (e.g. Homans). In the theory of social and religious movements this juxtaposition of approaches corresponds to a more specific antithesis: on the one hand the “New Social Movements Theory” (NSM)
identity oriented and of European origin (e.g. Melucci), on the other hand the “Resource Mobilization Theory” (RMT) strategy oriented and of US-American origin (e.g. Zald). Up to a certain point, this distinction is homologous to the one between culture and class oriented movements (Eder 2000, Eder et al. 2005) discussed in the context of the indigenous revival since the seventies in the Americas or even to the distinction between “identity politics” and “interest politics” in the frame of research on peace building (Rothman, Olson 2001) insofar as the logics of “interest politics” are more compatible to Rational Choice.

We cannot discuss this right now. For us it is important to note that the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu bridges the gap between the schools of theory intentionally and effectively, since it is oriented, likewise, in actors and structures. Using Bourdieu’s framework in a proper way, identity and strategy can be conceived of as two faces of the same coin. His theory integrates the opposition between “structure versus action” as well as the one between “value oriented action versus rational action” (Weber) into one frame and facilitates the development of corresponding methods. Finally, the discussion in social movement studies between mobilization by grievances and mobilization by opportunities can also be integrated in this theoretical framework, thus enabling to interpret data in both ways. It is precisely this integration which makes it possible to distinguish different types of action or strategies within one coherent framework without separating them. Thus, we can adopt the distinction between – on the one hand – class or interest oriented strategies and – on the other – culture or identity oriented strategies in order to project both within one model. This allows for locating strategies of given actors within a field of strategic alternatives according to their

---

19 See a classic appraisal in Cohen 1985 and an overview by the most important authors in Rucht 1991.

20 It is important to note that one of the most influential events at the start of the internationally noticeable indigenous movement was an initiative of the World Council of Churches, Geneva - a very important ecumenical body for worldwide issues of justice and peace whose knowledgeable interventions in public affairs is notoriously ignored by the social sciences. The event was the 1971 Barbados Conference of Indigenous and Church leaders and anthropologists, originally in criticism of the Christian missionary movement. For the Barbados I Document see Native Web Barbados; for the WCC participation see World Council of Churches Indigenous people; for background see Bonfil 1979 (historical) and Speiser 2004 (recent); for the new role of religion in identity politics see Cleary/Steigenga 2004. For social science and other publications out of the perspective of the indigenous movement on the web see http://www.abyayala.org/index.php.
nearness to the pole of “culture” or the pole of “class”; in other words: the pole of “being” and “having” or of identity and material goals.

However, we should be clear about the fact that this model does not focus on political positions and the capital of given actors (as the former did), but simply on the kind of strategies the actors employ. If these strategies may lead to achievements or do not, may be discussed in comparison with the models of the “political field” and of the “social space of political styles”. No model whatever shows everything at one time; models simply support the interpretative task of social sciences.

According to the distinction between strategies oriented in culture or in class we construct the *model* by a “class”-axis and a “status”-axis. The vertical axis represents the focus of a given strategy on market opportunities and, thus, on (economic) achievement, while the horizontal axis represents the focus of a strategy on the affirmation of the actor’s particular identity and, thus, on his (cultural) autonomy. In terms of political strategies, the axes represent different types of how actors render their goals plausible to a wider public (in order to gain political capital). Accordingly, the vertical axis represents plausibilization by arguments oriented in interest and of an inclusivistic kind. (“We have an interest in participating in political decisions and as co-citizens we have a right to do so.”) The horizontal axis represents the use of identity oriented and exclusivistic arguments. (“Because we are – for a long time oppressed – indigenous people, we have the right to special conditions of participation.”) The two axes allow for the construction of a two dimensional model.

---

21 In a metaphorical – but incorrect – way one could say that the first axis represents the “Marxian” and the second axis the “Weberian” view. In any case, Weber takes also “class” into account, as well as Marx does “status”. One could think – drawing on Hegel and Marx – of the class-axis as the one of the actor “in itself” and the status-axis as the one of the actor “for itself”.

Schäfer: Identity politics and the political field
It can be questioned, however, why we do not simply establish a linear continuum between “class” and “status” and conceive of these two strategic focuses as inversely co-variant: while class orientation increases status orientation decreases. This could be done. But a two dimensional model facilitates more interpretative depth. There are at least two benefits: First, if we conceive of the increase of either orientation (class and identity) at the same time as an increase of intensity of the correspondent conviction, the diagonal between zero and maximum of both (lower left to upper right, fig. 3) shows the “ideological loading” of certain strategies (high score) versus a pragmatic openness of strategies (low score). With a high ideological load, a strategy is fought vigorously and is hard to change; with a low ideological load a strategy undergoes more easily pragmatic adaptations. Second, a strategy located near the diagonal can be understood as very encompassing, since it combines elements of status and class orientation.
As we cannot yet provide, at this point in time, scales for measuring, the more it is important to establish a set of criteria to distinguish between the two types of strategies and to estimate a proper location for any actor / strategy observed within the model: First, it is a good idea to define identity and interest politics both as means to achieve an objective. Second, the objective itself might broadly be defined as maximum control over public goods as e.g. the access to natural, economic and social resources as well as social recognition, political representation and influence, secure livelihood and so forth. In relation to the political field only, the goal is, of course, dominance. Third, identity oriented strategies tend to recur to arguments (be it ethnic, religious or gender) that foster exclusive interests of a defined group and operate by exclusion of others. Strategies oriented in mere material goals tend to employ arguments (without necessarily following universalistic interests!) that include as many actors as possible under the umbrella of the actor’s interest. Fourth, since identity based strategies put the selfhood of the actor at stake, they are harder to negotiate and tend to combine with more violent conflicts (ethnic cleansing etc.) than strategies for market opportunities do. Fifth, identity politics bear more risk than interest politics. Thus, the mobilization is more probable as a last resort in case that the actors do not perceive other possibilities of participating in the political game.

We finally go back to the example of the Guatemalan actors (fig. 3). Let me first mark two ideal-typical extreme positions in the model: the completely class oriented Social Democratic Party (social justice) and, on the other extreme, the ethnic or religious sect conceiving of itself as the chosen people. Applying the model to the ethnic religious actors analyzed by Andrea Althoff (2005), we can see that Neo-Pentecostals and Mayan intellectuals both use quite encompassing strategies. The movements affirm strongly both status and class orientation on the level of national politics, while the Mayan intellectuals focus somewhat more on identity and the Neo-Pentecostals focus somewhat more on market opportunities. The in-

---

22 In case of the model of the religious field, used in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however we have such scales and already used the model successfully in a survey.
digienous Pentecostals seem to combine interest and identity strategies as well, but with a much lower ideological profile and more pragmatic flexibility in their communities.

**Combining the views**

No model can explain everything. So, each of our three heuristic models does not open more than a single perspective on complex and multi-faceted social praxis. The first step to move back again from reduction to complexity, is to interpret the positions of the actors in all three models at one time. I will briefly sketch this by the Guatemalan Neo-Pentecostal example.

In the *strategy model* (fig. 3) we can see that Neo-Pentecostals operate with a peculiar mix of identity and class oriented strategies that are highly ideological and socially exposed. They combine two strategy types employing the promise of individual prosperity as the mobilizing symbol, which also marks the neoliberal bias of the movement. At the same time, the realization of prosperity is said to be dependent on the power that the Spirit of God subjectively infuses into each true believer – and only into believers. In comparison to the Mayan/Mayas’ intellectual’s strategy, the Neo-Pentecostal one is less dependent on objective (ethnic) belonging and therefore easier to project on universalistic strategies of market opportunity – while nevertheless being based on religious identity at the same time. Moreover, its neoliberal focus on individual prosperity at least in the nineteen nineties coincides more with the overall societal trend towards individual progress only. During the nineteen eighties, the overall project of Neo-Pentecostal identity politics was symbolized by the discursive operator of “spiritual warfare” of the saints against the demons of guerrilla, indigenous revolt, labour unions, Marxism etc. which was projected onto official politics. Later on, during the nineties, in Neo-Pentecostalism the symbol of “healing” – anchored in the ritual practice of faith healing – became more important and was projected on politics as the program of “healing the nation”. The religious symbols of “spiritual warfare” and “healing” thus function strategically as practical metaphors to translate religious content into political discourse and into capacity of mobilization – obviously a process of semiotic and capital conversion on

---

23 See on the use of this and other symbols in actual religious identity politics in Latin America Cleary et al. 2004.
the “public fringe” of the political field. Those strategies based upon social metaphoric operations seem to me very important to understand the role of cultural production for political mobilization within the frame of a theory of identity politics.

By social metaphoric conversion the symbols of “spiritual warfare” and of “healing” find their way as a mobilizing discourse into the power constellations of the political field (fig. 2). Both are associated right away with a position of achievement even above the barrier of political parties. During the nineteen eighties, the “spiritual warfare” scheme colluded with the legitimizing discourse of a dictatorial counterinsurgency regime. The idea of exorcising political enemies, thus, gave a special connotation of Christian identity politics to counterinsurgency measures – especially as they hit “devilish Indians” and “atheist Marxists”. Ten years later, the idea of healing a wounded nation by Christian faith and truth accompanied the election campaign of Jorge Serrano Elias and some time of his office – until the corruption affairs and dictatorial measures began. In any case, Neo-Pentecostal identity politics in the political field of Guatemala can be seen quite closely related to positions of relatively high political achievement and, thus, not all too dependent on public mobilization.

Finally a short glimpse on the model of the social space of political styles (fig. 1) shows that Neo-Pentecostals, during the eighties and nineties, had their social base in the modernizing sectors of the upper middle class. This observation allows to interpret the strategies of the movement and its position in the field of politics as specific to a social class with sufficient resources (money, education, time and transnational connections asf.) for political action and sufficiently good perspectives for overcoming the crisis and, at least, maintaining its position as a class. The symbols of Neo-Pentecostal identity politics – “spiritual warfare” and “healing the nation” – thus appear as semantic instruments of social power-brokering and as linkages in an intimate combination between identity politics and class politics in an upwardly mobile and quite potent social position.

Finally, the combination of the three models – space, field and strategies – can guide a careful comparative interpretation of identity based politics within the wider frame of political power-brokering and social structure. The objectivistic description of actors and strategies provides a framework for an in depth analysis of the actor’s identities (as briefly referred to
in the chapter on identity). This can be done by a “habitus analysis” (Schäfer 2005a, 2005b, 2006) applied to discourse, film, press, rites etc. of the collective actors at stake. It shows the deep operational schemes behind the actor’s practical logic. The models of space, field and strategies then, in turn, help to understand the objective conditions within which the identity based operations achieve their special meaning – thus completing a meaningful analysis of identity politics.

**Bibliography**


Schäfer: Identity politics and the political field 32

Rucht, Dieter (Hg.) (1991): Research on social movements: the state of the art in Western Europe and the USA. Frankfurt: Campus.


