

## The Praxeological Square as a Method for the Intercultural Study of Religious Movements

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A well-known problem in intercultural studies is the imposition of one's own cognitive and evaluative dispositions on the actors observed. According to structuralist and constructivist common sense, everybody makes distinctions such as 'cooked vs. raw', 'rich vs. poor', 'free vs. dominated' etc. in order to organize his or her cognitive and practical universe. Such distinctions extend from insignificant, ordinary habits to important markers of individual and collective identity. In the case of religious convictions, such distinctions (such as 'saved vs. not saved', 'God vs. Devil', 'nirvana vs. affliction' etc.) are normally very important for the actors observed *and* for their observers. Although researchers may or may not be religious, they will nevertheless always have a certain standpoint on religion in general and/or certain specific religious practices. Thus, implicit or hidden cognitive and emotional dispositions will structure the way they construct their objects of observation, what they see and how they interpret their findings.

I will sketch the problem briefly. The method presented in this article was developed for a large research project on Pentecostals in the counter-insurgency war during the mid-eighties in Guatemala and Nicaragua. In my first field study I had noted that Pentecostals tended to enforce discipline in quite a rigid way. A female member of the Assemblies of God explained, 'Well, the Assemblies of God have a very hard and jealous order. If we Christians want to be saved, we have to obey strictly.' With my Lutheran dispositions, which distinguish 'Law vs. Gospel', 'coercion vs. freedom', I perceived such statements as markers of 'lawful' theology and 'unfree' religious practice. What happened here was that my perception was being structured by dispositions that were important to my own practice but not to the practice of the actors observed. Any perception is distinction, and the basic distinction (between 'Law and Gospel' in our case) is like the 'blind spot' in the retina, which makes vision possible but cannot see itself and can only be made visible in an experiment (see Luhmann 1991: 62; Maturana/Varela 1992; Schäfer 2002). That is, the basic distinction works as an implicit preconception that makes observation possible at the price of structuring reality in a *certain* way.

A first and commonly-known answer to the problems of 'preconceptions' in the processes of comprehension has been provided by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975). Hermeneutic philosophy seeks to make preconceptions visible by reflecting on them. This is a necessary first step. However, the problem is more deeply rooted. Simple reflection may bring an awareness of the problem as such, but it does not guarantee the identification of the dispositions that really shape the perception. In addition, as Luhmann puts it, in order to make a perceptual distinction visible, it is necessary to establish another – invisible – distinction, and so forth. In this way we fall into an endless regression, and thus, the problem cannot be solved in a categorical or principled way. Instead, it has to be dealt with by methodological measures.

## 1. Basic guidelines

During my field work, I discussed the observational problem with my wife, an anthropologist. We saw that a first difficulty arises from an analysis that does not take into account the context in which the practices and interpretative concepts are being 'used' (Wittgenstein). But this does not say much. Another difficulty arises when the categories basic to the major distinction employed in the research are too closely related to those that structure the practice of the actors observed. It is not a good idea to study religious practices using a research tool based on a distinction of religious terms. Thus, we concluded that it would be best to construct a research tool that would be as formal as possible and capable of capturing the practical processes of the people observed, allowing us to reconstruct how people make 'sense' (Max Weber: 'Sinn') of what they think and do. First of all, a formal, or at least a non-religious, instrument would allow us to observe whether religion was at all important for the actors. Second, the instrument would not interfere too much with the actors' narratives of their religious practices in open interviews. Third, it would facilitate the combination of interview analysis with observations and other data leading to the reconstruction and interpretation of the actors' practices. A formal model, nevertheless, should not adhere to structuralist binarism, quasi-metaphysical concepts of 'symbolic forms' or 'symbol systems', but should show how people generate practical sense as a sense for their praxis (Bourdieu). So, fourth, a model should enable researchers to structure the processes by which actors generate a sense for their praxis. And fifth, since we are trying to understand alien praxis in its social context, the instrument should also be action-related *and* provide a way to relate the findings to the surrounding social structure; it should be a model for analyzing praxis in the Aristotelian (*bios*) and Marxian (*Theses against Feuerbach*) sense of the word. Thus the model presented in the following is based on the presupposition that in order to understand alien practice, it is necessary to establish formal, action-oriented distinctions to guide the observation.

The model is based upon the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, namely upon his theory of practical logic, framed by the concepts of habitus and social space as well as, to a certain extent only, by the theory of fields (see Bourdieu 2000, 1996, 1980, 1977, 1971, 1971a; Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992; also Schäfer 2006, 2005a, 2005b, 2003 (with literature on social movement research), 1998). As Pentecostalism is a religious movement, approaches of social movement research have been taken into account, both identity-oriented and strategy-oriented strands. Most important for this publication, however, are the methods borrowed from French structuralists Algirdas Julien Greimas and François Rastier (Greimas 1995; Greimas/Rastier 1970). These were helpful in developing the model of the 'praxeological square' using Bourdieu's theory of practical logic, which functions as the centerpiece for a network model of practical operators.<sup>1</sup> The square serves first as the basic model of an analytical method

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<sup>1</sup> 'Operators', according to my understanding (and close to the late Wittgenstein), are elements of social relations (including semantics) like statements, actions, signs, things etc. that exert

for reconstructing the practical dispositions of interviewees and second as the empirical 'groundwork' for a theory of 'Identity as a Network' (Schäfer 2005a). The former will be the focus of this paper. The underlying empirical research took place in Guatemala and Nicaragua in 1983, 1985 and 1986. Over a period of two years I conducted 195 open interviews, taped 100 sermons, took minutes on some 120 services and kept a field diary of observations. For this study it is important to note that the religious actors were strongly polarized according to the polarization of the overall social space in war-torn and crisis-ridden Guatemala. Thus, the most instructive samples we refer to are, on the one hand, Pentecostal groups in the traditional lower classes, and, on the other, Neo-Pentecostal groups in the modernizing upper-middle classes (see Schäfer 2006). Over a very short period of time and under the pressure of social polarization, these groups developed very different religious styles despite the fact that they refer to a common set of religious symbols. Nevertheless, in this article our focus lies not on the impact of social class on religious praxis. Rather the examples here serve to show that in intercultural research a formal, action-oriented and *non*-religious instrument for the study of religious actors helps, first, to avoid content-oriented presuppositions and, second, enables the researcher to detect and reconstruct very different kinds of religious praxis even though the actors at stake use the same inventory of religious signs and symbols (and were widely described by observers as having the same religious style. In the following, we will focus exclusively on the method.

## 2. The praxeological square – basic form

As we are looking for a formal model, basic relations of formal logic seem to fit our needs most exactly. Three basic relations of Aristotelian logic have long been used to structure the logical syllogism: implication, contraries and contradictories. These basic relations are culturally universal, since in any culture people know the relations of causality (rain implies wet streets), of difference (green versus blue) and of mutual exclusion (light versus darkness).<sup>2</sup> During late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, these relations were organized into the so-called syllogistic square. This model was

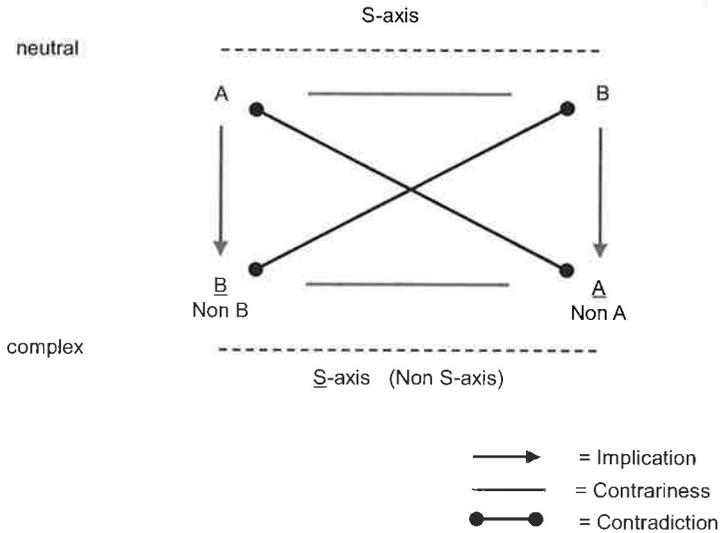
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*effects* upon those relations. However, an operator is nothing without the relations in which it operates (e.g., in the expression ' $y = (a)x$ ' ( $y$  is  $a$  of  $x$ )  $a$  is the operator which relates  $y$  and  $x$  in a specific way). A statement such as 'We are living in the end-times' is not simply a religious sign or symbol, and even less is it the signification of a factual condition. Above all it is a social operator that implies certain ways of perception, judgments, actions and, therefore, social relations.

<sup>2</sup> There is a discussion as to whether the Aristotelian law of non-contradiction is valid since in Asian logic supposedly 'A' can be 'B' as well. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account whether we are talking about 'A' being 'B' in regard to a certain aspect, perspective or context. In such a case, the difference between 'European' and 'Asian' ways of thinking are no longer so grave. Darkness can be light for a European mystic as well; however, this kind of religious experience makes sense only within the framework that the *normal* or *general* relation between light and darkness is one of mutual exclusion.

adapted by Greimas and Rastier (1970) to analyze 'deep structures of the semantic universe'. The square, as the two French structuralists use it, describes the constraints according to which meaning is produced. The square is made up of terms (A, B, Non-A and Non-B) which are linked to one another by three relations: contrary (A to B), implication (A to Non-B) and contradiction (A to Non-A). The S-axis (contrary) is 'neutral', so that the terms have an 'either-or' relation. The S-axis<sup>3</sup> (sub-contrary) is 'complex', so that the terms have an 'as well as' relation. Then, the relations of implication are named deixis. The first deixis (A and Non-B) is defined as positive; the second (B and Non-A) as negative. Finally, the transverse relations (A to Non-A, B to Non-B), the 'schemata', are contradictory. For the deep structures of the semantic universe, the model shows that meaning is constituted by difference and logical transformation. To put it simply: to go from 'active' to 'passive', logic has to pass over 'non-active'. Greimas and Rastier use the model to describe the semantic universe of gender relations in France. Thus, they distinguish, in positive deixis, 'matrimonial (prescribed)' and 'normal (not forbidden)' relations as 'allowed' from the relations in negative deixis as 'excluded': 'abnormal (forbidden)' and 'non-matrimonial (not prescribed)'. The model helps in understanding the logic underlying the cultural systems of meaning. But it is not yet suitable for understanding the *social* processes of 'making sense' of one's practices (and thus constituting 'praxis').

**The semiotic square according to Greimas/Rastier**

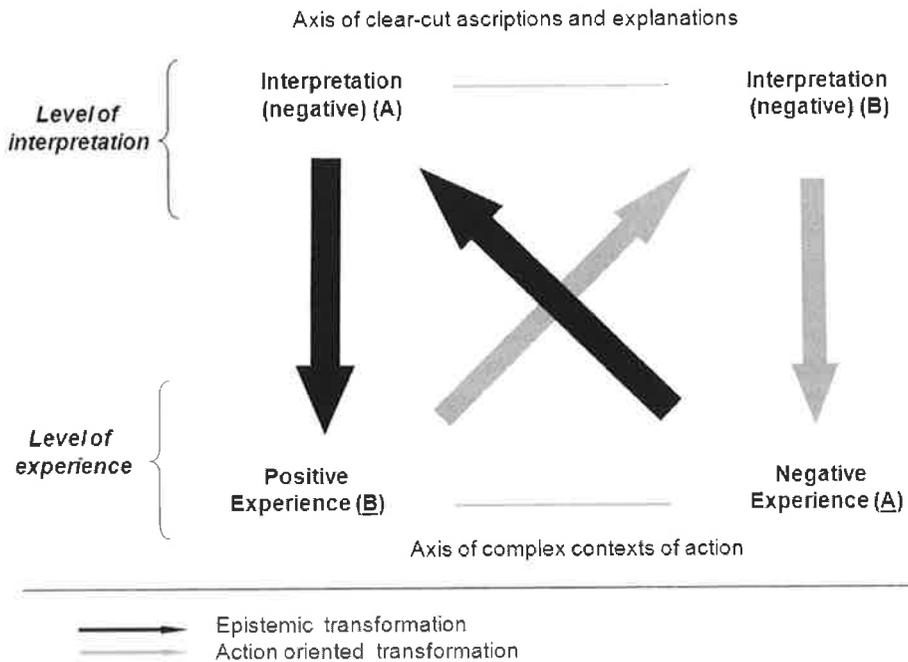


**Diagram 1: Semiotic square according to Greimas and Rastier**

<sup>3</sup> Non-S, non-A and non-B will be referred to as 'S', 'A' and 'B'.

The model has to be transformed if it is to be used in sociological analysis. For sociology, especially in a Bourdieucian/Wittgensteinian framework, it is not the *semantic* universe as such that is of interest, but rather the actors' use of signs, signification and meaning. Signs are themselves not (primarily) representations, but operators of perception, judgement and action. As operators they organize the interpretation of experience in the sense that interpretation is already operative in the basic act of perception. At the same time, experienced objective circumstances (legal institutions, the police, the distribution of material goods, social recognition combined with the access to certain social places etc.) are not only social 'hardware', but also function as signs relevant for human practices and not only as their objective conditions.

**Praxeological square: cognitive transformations**



**Diagram 2: Praxeological square: cognitive transformations**

Working with Bourdieu's theory of practical logic, the square can be transformed for sociological use. For this purpose I distinguish terms for the *description* of experience (A and B) from other terms (A and B) for the *interpretation* (*Deutung*) of experience. Thus, the model has one term each for negative and positive experience as well as for negative and positive interpretation. Moreover, the model will be read not so much like a static structure of meaning but like a structured process of transformation. The transformative process runs through all the terms, generating sense by interpreting experience – that is, ascribing meaning to practices (as Weber would say). In its sociological use, the model allows for two perspectives of analysis.

Examining the mere cognitive operators, it helps us to understand the basic cognitive transformations that operate in the deep structure of practical logic. Drawing conclusions about dispositions of habitus, the model allows us (within the limit that ‘disposition’ is not subject to observation [R. Carnap]) to understand central operations of identity- and strategy-formation among the actors observed.

The following application of the model focuses on social movements. We understand, correspondingly, the terms of the square according to the specific forms of practice in this field. This means that, for example, the term for ‘negative experience’ (A) is being described as ‘*crisis*’, since social movements, according to New Social Movement theory, react to ‘grievances’. Negative experience, however, must be coded appropriately, according to the field of practice examined in a given research project. The same is the case for any other term.<sup>4</sup>

### Praxeological square: generation of Identity and strategy

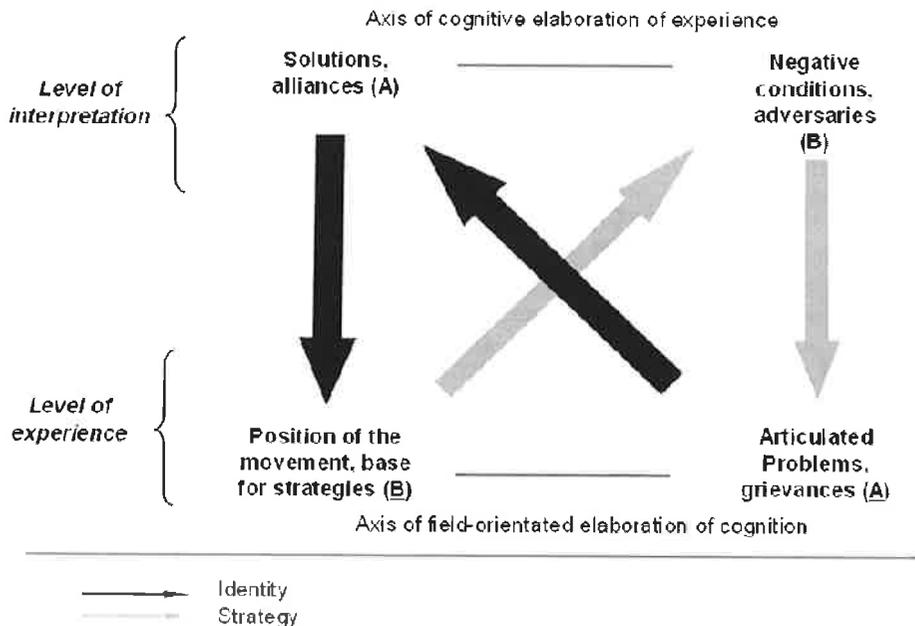


Diagram 3: Praxeological square: generation of identity and strategy

The basic use of the model is to structure *cognitive operations*. In this regard, it helps to understand the creation and transformation of meaning as a way in which actors process their experiences cognitively and generate perspectives of action. Accordingly the model allows us to capture two transformations: an epistemic and an action-

<sup>4</sup> This means, for guided interviews, simply that four questions according to the four terms have to be formulated in correspondence with specific negative or positive experiences and interpretations in the field of interest.

oriented one. Both transformations operate under the axiomatic dichotomy between 'positive' and 'negative interpretation' (A and B), which is to say that clear cut ascriptions and explanations interpret complex contexts of experience and action. The *epistemic transformation* accounts for the fact that experience is already being classified and assessed during the very act of perception. In the model, this corresponds to the transformation between 'negative experience' ( $\underline{A}$ ), 'positive interpretation' (or: reasons for positive experience, A) and 'positive experience' ( $\underline{B}$ ). Perception, judgement and self-positioning, thus, can be understood as one, albeit differentiated, epistemic act. Correspondingly, the *action-oriented transformation* ( $\underline{B}$  to B and B to  $\underline{A}$ ) accounts for the fact that an actor's concepts of actions not *only* are being molded by his opportunities and constraints, but also by perception and evaluation of experience. Moreover, the model implies that the processes of structuring experience by perception and of designing action can be understood as homological.

For social movement theory the relation between a movement's *identity and strategy* is an important sociological issue. In this regard, the model can be read as a process by which actors, in our case religious movements, position themselves within their perceived social context and, thus, develop identities and strategies. (Collective) actors articulate grievances ( $\underline{A}$ ), imagine and formulate solutions (A) for the causes of the grievances (B), and affirm their position ( $\underline{B}$ ), e.g. as a religious movement. This process of interpretation and self-ascription allows for a 'cognitive elaboration of experience' in order to find a position in the field of action and an *identity* as a social actor (position  $\underline{B}$ ). Moving further from this position, the actors are modeled as developing *strategies* to cope with the 'structural conditions' and 'adversaries' (B) that cause their 'grievances' ( $\underline{A}$ ). The model thus articulates dispositions of perception and judgment as conditioning the design of strategies, which is to say that strategies are embedded in identity. Nevertheless, the model does not exclude the possibility of a strategic calculus in a principled way.

From both perspectives, that of cognition as well as that of identity and strategy, the model allows us to structure the logic of the transformational processes of ascribing meaning, valued positively or negatively, to experience and action. In both perspectives, the model distinguishes a level (or, according to Greimas, an 'axis') of experience from a level (or 'axis') of interpretation. The distinction between these levels is important in understanding the transformation which takes place by ascribing meaning to experience and action. Meaning – ideas, 'symbolic systems' etc. – is by no means a simple mirror of 'reality' (Rorty 1999). Meaning is itself an *operator* in human practice. It does not simply represent states of practice, but, by virtue of being 'used' by humans for ascription or attribution, it becomes 'instrumental' (in a Wittgensteinian sense), that is to say, a practical operator. This is how meaning comes to terms with the process of interpretation of experience in our model.

Moreover, the distinction between the two levels (or 'axes') in the model leads to another observation. In late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the model was used principally for propositional logic. This usage points to an important difference between the two axes, the contrary and sub-contrary. While one (in our case the 'interpretation') affirms and negates 'universally', the other one (in our case

‘experience’) affirms and negates ‘partially’.<sup>5</sup> In terms of Greimas, the first is ‘neutral’, the second ‘complex’. In our sociological use of the model, this means that the terms of interpretation of experience (A and B) represent a ‘clear cut’ meaning ascribed to fuzzy experience (B and A). Since the actors ascribe – according to their habitus, social position and interest – meaning to experience, they generate clear concepts of experienced social processes and structures that help them to shape their actions. This is the case with any interpretation. Religious praxis, however, often operates with a stark difference between experiential and interpretational terms. This, precisely, is the reason for its social power.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the formal model can be read as emulating the concept of habitus, the incorporated and creative generator of perception, judgement and action (Bourdieu 1980). The model operationalises the Bourdieuan theory for qualitative empirical research. Ideally, such research rests upon slightly guided interviews that give interviewees the chance to describe and interpret their praxis (in a certain field). There are, basically, only four necessary narrative impulses. One focuses on negative experience such as problems and grievances; the second on positive experience, for instance, one’s own position as a member of a religious movement or as a successful individual; the third on interpretation of negative experience, such as the reasons for a crisis, adversity etc.; and the fourth on interpretation positive experience, for example, ideas for positive future developments, divine or human helpers etc. Such texts will not only disclose the basic structures of the habitus in question, but will most probably also produce a huge surplus of signification, since the interviewees will associate many experiences and interpretations with each question. This points towards two tasks, one analytical and the other theoretical and methodical. As for the analysis of interviews, it is necessary to establish the logical connection between signs as well as the hierarchy of meaning within the texts. As for the latter, the analysis focuses on paradigmatic relations and can be carried out by Greimas’ method of isotope construction (Greimas 1995). The former focuses on syntagmatic relations and can be carried out by an analysis of basic logical junctions underlying the semantic relations in sequences of text. The analytical operations of both steps cannot be shown here due to a lack of space (but see Schäfer 2003). However, the analysis points to the theoretical and methodical task of reconstructing wider relations of meaning from the interviews. This corresponds to the theoretical notion of practical logic as a large network of incorporated and practically operating dispositions of a given habitus (Bourdieu 1980). Before I sketch this extension of the basic square, I would like to demonstrate the results of the application of our model to the concrete intercultural study of Pentecostals in the Guatemalan war.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the positions in our first graph: Position A means ‘subject affirms predicate universally’, e.g. ‘all pigs (s) are pink (p)’; position B means ‘subject negates predicate universally’, e.g. ‘no s are p’; position B means ‘subject affirms predicate partially’, e.g. ‘some s are p’; position A means ‘subject negates predicate partially’, e.g. ‘some s are not p’.

<sup>6</sup> The specific dynamics of religious practical logic cannot be discussed in this paper; see Schäfer 2004.

### 3. Praxeological square – cultural contents

As shown above, the interview questions did not focus on religious content, such as the ‘image of God’ held by people etc., but were formal and oriented toward the basic logic of ascribing meaning to (whatever) negative and positive experience. Thus the interviewees themselves made sense of their experiences while relating them.

#### Praxeological square: Neo-Pentecostals – modernizing upper middle class

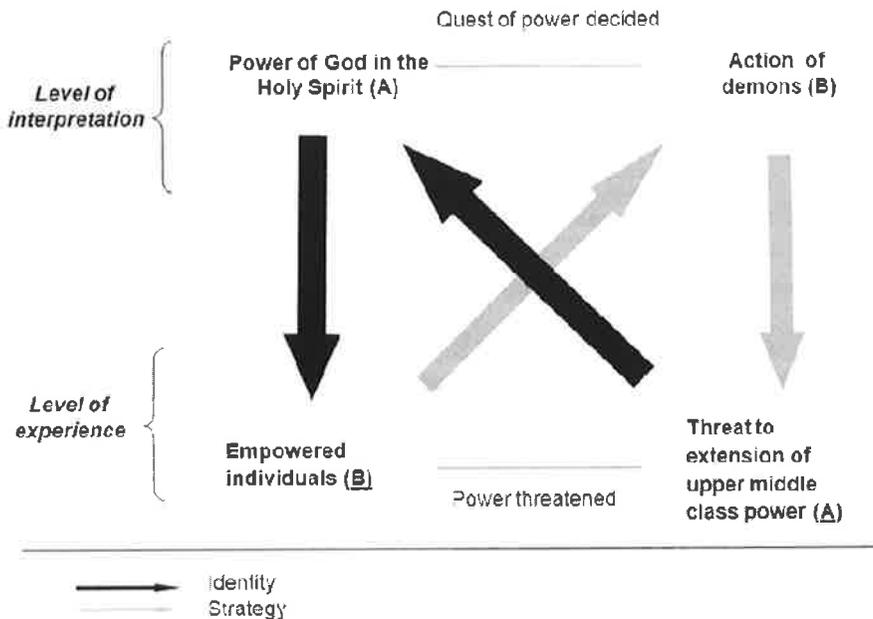


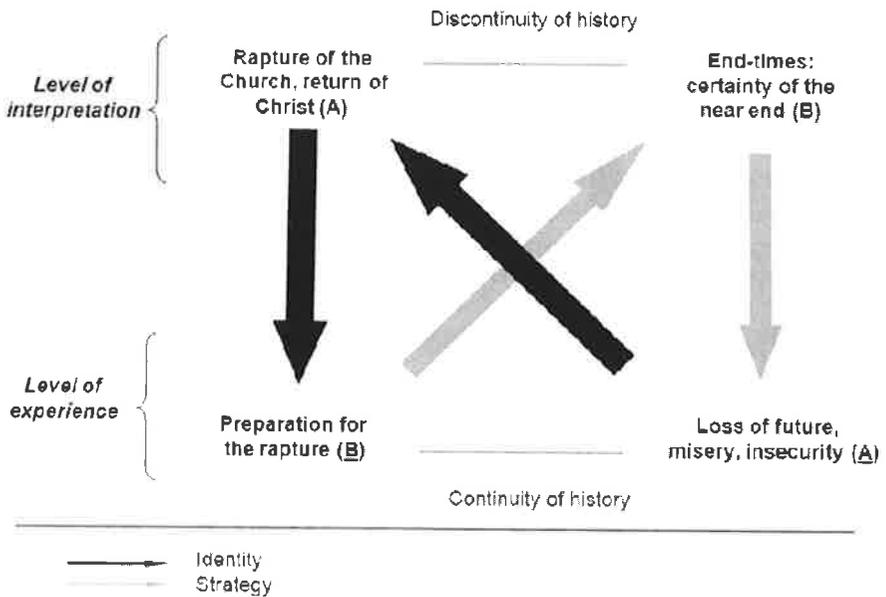
Diagram 4: Praxeological square: Neo-Pentecostalism

The most interesting result was that during the ongoing research, basically according to contrastive sampling, two major formations of religious habitus emerged: one among interviewees of the modernizing upper-middle class and the other among interviewees of the traditional lower class. Briefly, the former could be called a habitus of charismatic dominion over the world and the latter a habitus of apocalyptic escape from the world. This finding is important since it shows strong internal differences of religious praxis within what is often treated as a homogeneous religious movement. In fact, the Pentecostal movement in Guatemala was quite uniform in terms of ‘doctrine’ until the early eighties; and even after that different strands of the movement made use of a common repertoire of religious symbols. However, they have constructed a different habitus out of these symbols, according to their social position, their habitus of class, their interest, their opportunities and their constraints.

A brief look at the Neo-Pentecostals in the upper-middle class shows a religious practice revolving around the quest for social power (see axes). The experienced threat to their power (through the guerrilla movement, paramilitary forces, economic crisis and a loss of control over their personal lives) is countered by the power of the

Holy Spirit, constituting a new religious identity of empowered individuals. These individuals can combat the originators of the threat, the demons. Thus, exorcism turns out to be the central strategic pattern. The analysis of the whole network (see below) shows that this pattern is being imposed on many fields of action and even legitimatises Napalm bombings of Indian villages. As for the interplay between experience and interpretation, we see that the threatened social power (experience) was restored by religious interpretation, making religious ‘symbols’ become practical, in the double meaning of the term.

**Praxeological square: Classical Pentecostalism – traditional lower class**



**Diagram 5: Praxeological square: Classical Pentecostalism**

On the other hand, in the traditional parts of the lower class we find Classical Pentecostal praxis constructed around the quest for survival (‘history’). People feel that they lack any possibility to shape their future due to poverty and fierce military repression. They counter this situation with the promise of being removed by the rapture from this world during the near second coming of Christ. This hope results in their new identity as a church in preparation for the rapture. From this position, the explanation for their loss of opportunities becomes evident – during the apocalypse everything necessarily changes for the worse. In such a situation, the strategy is a clear break with political and social action and a withdrawal into the church – exactly the strategy that under conditions of repression and misery allows for survival through in-group solidarity. Thus, the religious interpretation of history (the break, see S-axis) turns out to be a rationale and strategy for an experiential continuity of history – which, practically speaking, means survival.

As for our interest in intercultural methods, we can state that it was precisely the formality of the model that allowed the interviewees to reproduce their own experiences and interpretative schemes, which, in the analysis, resulted in the emergence of two completely different sets of practical religious operators and, finally, habitus.

#### 4. Network of practical operators

In the next step, we construct a network of operators through an analysis of the syntagmatic-semantic relations. The praxeological square models the most important cognitive operators of any given actor.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, each of its terms has multiple semantic relations to other concepts within the interview texts. These syntagmatic links (mostly verbs and conjunctions) can be formalized to fit contrary, implicative or contradictory relations. With additional quantitative weighting, this procedure allows us to reconstruct many interconnected homological squares of secondary, tertiary etc. importance. In the present paper, this is only to show that transformational logic, reconstructed by our model, can be multiplied according to the subjacent 'deep structure' (Greimas) of the interviews.

The example of Neo-Pentecostals in the upper-middle class shows, among other things, that the central strategic scheme of exorcism is being used in different fields of praxis. It is applied to lesser personal problems with an individual Christian as his/her own exorcist. It also addresses grave personality distortions, which call for a special minister as the exorcist. It can be applied to military conflict as well, with the 'Christian military' as the exorcist and the guerrillas or paramilitary forces as the 'demons'.

Such an extension of the basic model shows the broader structure of the network of operators which make up the practical logic of a given actor. Of course, such a network is not complete and conclusive, but has blank spaces and open ends – just as the practical logic of human beings is not entirely coherent, does not know about everything and is open to change and development. The 'actor' can be understood as an individual or a collective. That is to say, one can analyze a collective set of interviews together or analyze individual interviews and compare or superpose them later, depending on one's research interest. According to the theory, in any case, habitus is to a certain extent always individual *and* collective. This means that the network, finally, can be read as a model of dispositions of habitus, i.e. of a 'structured and structuring' generator of practice (Bourdieu). In this sense, it represents the empirical basis for a theory of 'identity as a network' (Schäfer 2005a). However, since habitus and field or social space never exist independent of one another, it is

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<sup>7</sup> This is assured by the interview technique and a quantitative element in qualitative text-analysis which cannot be discussed here. It may only be highlighted that the analysis of syntagmatic relations turns semantic relations into the three basic logical relations mentioned above and the relation of equivalence. Thus it gives the parameters to construct a wider network of practical cognitive operators. At this point, however, the discussion about the logical formalization of semantic relations cannot be addressed either.

necessary, in order to fully understand alien praxis, to relate the findings of the interview analysis to the social positions of the actors. According to the research interest, this can be done in relation to a specific field of praxis (e.g. the religious field), to social space in general or to both. In the following, I focus briefly on social space.

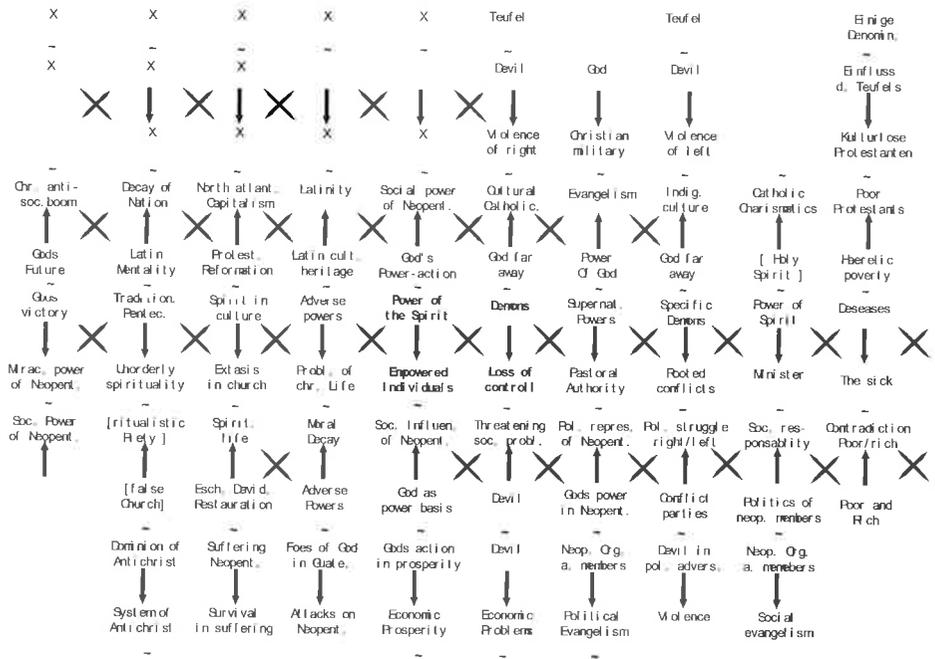


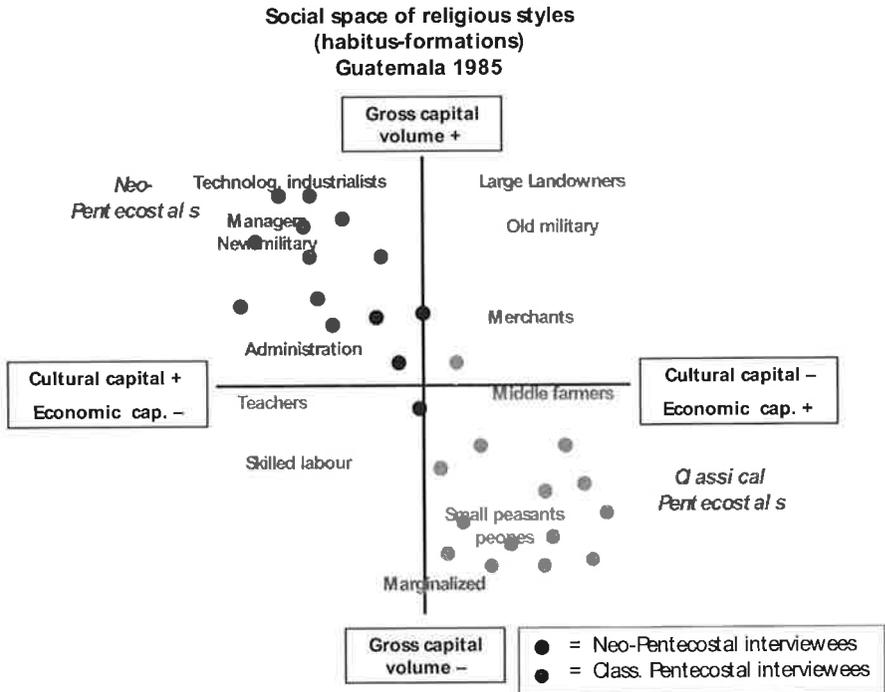
Diagram 6: Network of practical operators

5. Social space of religious styles

The two habitus formations encountered, Classical and Neo-Pentecostals, are located in different positions in the social space. Space is, according to Bourdieu (2000), theoretically constructed. It is modelled as a coordinate system by the implementation of two different forms of capital: economic (income) and cultural (education). The y-axis (see Diagram 7) represents both forms of capital; actors with a high amount of either form of capital are at the top; actors with a low amount at the bottom. The x-axis consists of the two forms of capital differentiated against one another; actors with relatively more economic than cultural capital are on the right, and those with relatively more cultural capital on the left. Thus, in Guatemala, big landowners are positioned in the upper right while industrialists and managers are in the upper left, small peasants in the lower right and skilled labour in the lower left etc.

According to basic social data (income, possessions, education and profession – for reasons of research control), the interviewees can be located relatively well within the model of social space. Thus, we can observe that similar formations of habitus

cluster in specific areas of the social space – the Neo-Pentecostals in the upper right and the Classical Pentecostals in the lower left. This last step allows for the interpretation of networks of cognitive operators as *practical* operators, since it puts them into their social context of ‘use’ (Wittgenstein). It makes clear what level and kind of social power, expectations, constraints, opportunities etc. the different religious perceptions, judgments and actions are associated with. It shows, for example, that a power-broking religiosity such as the Neo-Pentecostal variant is related to a social positions of *relative* (but not absolute) social power and combined with perspectives of social ascent, but is being blocked by the old oligarchy. And it shows that apocalyptic religion that fosters withdrawal from the ‘world’ can be an effective strategy of survival in a situation in which the political, military and economic threats to survival are overwhelming. As the model allows us to locate religious actors according to their social position, the coordinate system thus transforms itself into a model of the social space of religious styles.



**Diagram 7: Social space of religious styles**

It may, of course, be that the structuring of social space or of a certain field of practice follows other criteria than those of economic and cultural capital. Some might say that in traditional societies, tribes, or post-war societies (like Bosnia) social capital is of more importance. If that is so, the relevant form of capital in such a setting can be used to construct the appropriate model. There are many good reasons to adhere

to a simple way of measuring economic and cultural capital and to leave the rest to scholarly interpretation, as the research of our Bielefeld team<sup>8</sup> indicates.

It is only this last step that can complete an intercultural study of religious practice. Precisely in an alien cultural and social setting, the motivation of social action, be it driven by values, ends, affection, tradition etc., cannot be understood even in a basic sense without relating it to the social context in which it was generated and is being used. The work of relating habitus and field or space, however, is the task of the researcher's interpretative work.

## 6. Conclusion

It seems that a central hermeneutical problem, the imposition of preconceptions, can find, up to a certain point, a methodical solution. A general solution – some objective standpoint – is not possible, since this would presuppose that human understanding is able to exit the hermeneutical circle (which would then be metaphysics). Intercultural social science, as I see it, is much more modest. We step outside the hermeneutical circle of religious contents by applying a formal method which gives the actors observed the chance to provide their own content. We still have preconceptions, but these are implicit in the formal, praxis-oriented *method*, not in any religious or cultural content. We simply presuppose that religion is praxis and we try to construct a model, as formal and general as possible, for the interviewees to fill with the content relevant to *their* practice. We do not presuppose more than, first, that every person has experiences that he or she values positively and others that he or she values negatively; second, that, every person interprets such experiences in some way, regardless of the signs or symbols he or she may use to do so; and, third, that every person lives within a social context, whatever it may be.

My initial Lutheran 'Law vs. Gospel' scheme from my first field exploration proved completely invalid after studying Classical Pentecostal practice. Contrary to my first assessment, the term 'authority' (instead of 'Law') had a very different use within the network of religious operators. To obey authority in order to gain (!) one's own salvation was, in the context of the impossibility of any social action, a way of obtaining new orientation and, even more importantly, of maintaining self-esteem and dignity as a person appreciated by God. Precisely this was confirmed when I had the chance to validate my findings and my methods during nine years of teaching in Latin America, among others, Pentecostal students. Although the findings were widely accepted, the method was even more so. Some of my students were, in fact, looking forward to applying it to German Lutherans.

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<sup>8</sup> Leif Seibert and Patrick Hahne on Bosnia, Jens Köhrsen on Argentina, and Kurt Salentin as guest specialist for international quantitative research.

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