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## **WORKING PAPER N° 218**

**Networks, Strategies and Resistance: A Critique and Reformulation of Strategic Groups  
Analysis**

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# Networks, Strategies and Resistance: A Critique and Reformulation of Strategic Groups Analysis

## 1. The Necessity of a Medium Range Theory in Sociology of Development

The 'Bielefeld approach' of strategic group analysis, after a debate triggered by Neelsen's vehement critique (Neelsen 1988; Evers and Schiel 1989; Neelsen 1989), has recently lost much attention. The revised and supplemented version of the approach presented in the volume 'Strategische Gruppen' (Evers and Schiel 1989) could not dissipate doubts about theoretical consistency. It rather became obvious that, more than 20 years after Evers's first formulations (1966; 1973), there was no further clarification and deepening of the arguments. The lack of conceptual refinement is particularly unfortunate as the concept attempted to fill a theoretical gap that is open until today: '*Die Erklärungsprobleme, die sich damals hinsichtlich der postkolonialen (und rückblickend der kolonialen) Entwicklungsverläufe aufdrängten* [obvious problems of explanation regarding post-colonial (and, in retrospect, colonial) courses of development]' (Evers and Schiel 1989: 563).

The crisis of the 'grand theories' of development has even worsened since; Marmora and Messner (1989) speak of 'theory ruins', Altvater (1989) of a 'fiasco of development research'. Keynesian and neoclassical modernization theories on the one hand and Marxist-based *dependencia* and world system theories at the other, have aimed at the definition of general and structural causes of underdevelopment. Considering a pronounced and increasing differentiation and heterogeneity of the developing countries – that is, of course, most visible in the large cities – the degree of abstraction implied in these approaches makes their linkage to empirical facts precarious. Menzel (1991, more detailed 1992) coined the handy formula 'End of the Third World': There are hardly common structural characteristics between the Newly Industrializing Countries and the Least Developed Countries, and the situation in the former communist block defies a description in conventional categories.

The necessity of a medium range approach is evident, thus, if we do not want to fall back to theoretical individualism or purely empirical-descriptive procedures, in other words: to the accumulation of incomparable case studies that are not linked by any systematic framework. As Schuurman (1994: 12f:) has convincingly pointed out, development theory has to come up with a meaningful integration of structure and agency in order to escape from its much-deplored "theoretical impasse". Although we share much of the criticism raised against Evers's and Schiel's approach we still regard it as a valuable starting point for working at such an integration. The problem of collective action and group formation in a complex environment – that is, in our view, fundamental for a theoretical analysis of dynamics and change – is at least addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> To date, unfortunately, only a German and an Indonesian edition have been published. In this discussion we will quote from the original English articles as far as possible and supply a reference to the respective passage of the book. If a formulation is only available in German, a translation is added.

Moreover, the reference to the orientations and interests of power elites in developing societies is obviously relevant for practical development policies: Those groups can either merely reap and enlarge their sinecures in a despotic and exploitative way, or they may be won for a politics of common welfare on the basis of their own well-considered interests.

We suggest to grasp the diversity, heterogeneity and dynamics of the developing countries by scrutinizing groups and factions within the upper class that have emerged historically and are in a process of continuous change – or in the words of Evers and Schiel: in relation to the sequence and formation of strategic groups. Some glaring weaknesses in the conceptual framework yet necessitate a reformulation of the approach. To date, the central terms, namely ‘strategy’, ‘strategic action’, ‘group’, and ‘appropriation of surplus’, are neither clearly defined nor linked to a conclusive theoretical concept.

## 2. Strategic Groups as an Equivocal and Undertheorized Concept

The basic objective of the original version was the transformation of ‘quasi-groups’ with unrecognized common interests and goals of appropriation into strategic groups. Group cohesion, solidarity and social integration emerge on the basis of a common lifestyle, increasing self-recruitment, and the foundation of voluntary organizations (Evers 1973: 114f.; Evers and Schiel 1988: 26f.). Evers (1987) announced a conceptual shift toward ‘strategic action’ that was carried through in some newer studies (e.g., Buchholt 1990). In their reaction to Neelsen’s critique, eventually, Evers and Schiel treat strategic groups, strategies, and strategic action as more or less synonymous: *‘Strategische Gruppen sind eben dadurch definiert, daß sie strategisch handeln ... . Unser theoretischer Ansatz versucht plausibel zu machen, warum und mit welchen Zielen Strategien verfolgt werden und welche Erfolge und Mißerfolge der gebündelten Strategien sich möglicherweise einstellen können* [Strategic groups are defined just by the fact that they act strategically. Our theoretical approach tries to make plausible why and with which goals strategies are pursued, and which successes and failures of the bundled strategies can possibly be the outcome]’ (Evers and Schiel 1989: 567).

Neither the upper classes nor any other segment of society has a monopoly of strategic action. Individuals, families, clans, cliques, patronage systems, associations, non-government organizations, labor unions etc. – they all do not merely react spontaneously to events in their environment but also pursue plans and try to have an effect on future developments. The exclusion of group formations among the dominated strata is conceded as a ‘desideratum’ of the theory by Evers and Schiel (1988: 13; 264). Only if these groups are generally seen as restricted to a hand-to-mouth existence they can be sensibly neglected in a theory of strategic action. The fact that, in the introduction, the authors say explicitly that peasant movements are non-strategic (1988: 13) but denote them several times as strategic groups in their further elaboration (e.g., 1988: 26; 29), adds to the confusion.

The sweeping generalization that non-appropriators of surplus were per se *‘nicht strategisch handelnde Teile einer Gesellschaft, d.h. eine schweigende Mehrheit* [parts

of a society that do not act strategically, i.e. a silent majority]<sup>2</sup> (Evers and Schiel 1988: 13) is defeated not at least by Bielefeld studies on subsistence strategies (see Workgroup of Bielefeld Development Sociologists 1981). The authors fail to give reasons why monks and students can be strategic actors but labor unionists, peasants, or organized slum dwellers cannot. Sungsidh (1989) and Kanchada (1989) have actually analyzed the emergence of a labor movement in Thailand as a development towards a new strategic group. In a qualifying remark, Sungsidh describes this ‘movement’ as a combination of very heterogeneous ‘workers’ circles’ that act strategically in actual conflicts but have not yet a fully developed group consciousness<sup>3</sup> (1989: 273f.). Both studies apply the concept of strategic groups in order to analyze and arrange a multitude of historical and empirical findings. We can conclude from their work that there is a capability for collective, organized and strategic action among interest groups that do not have a part in the dominance system of Thai society. Neither Sungsidh nor Kanchada answer the question whether this potential will ever give rise to a strategic group that is capable of effectively challenging the established dominant groups.

The Bielefeld approach brought about quite a number of well-founded empirical studies that offer plausible analyses of complex social situations and actual and specific developments in certain societies. Most of the authors, however, restrict themselves to the usage of the terminology and refrain from discussing the conceptual foundation. Neelsen’s (1989: 569) critique concerning a lack of ‘*theoretische Gesamtperspektiven* [comprehensive theoretical perspectives]’ that should have been opened after 20 years of research is to be taken serious. We agree that the concept of strategic groups is still undertheorized. With all sympathy to Evers’s and Schiel’s dislike of orthodoxy and the construction of abstract models (1988: 9), we will propose some steps toward a more systematic foundation of the theory.

Evers’s sober statement: ‘A rigid class structure and intensive class conflict are not very common phenomena’ (1973:116; Evers and Schiel 1988: 27) is very evident until today. At the same time, criticism sets in at this point: Classes are no ‘phenomena’ at all. They are no empirical, factual entities that can be directly observed in a society, and neither are strategic groups. This objection appears to be oversubtle but becomes, in our view, the key to a fundamental dilemma of the concept. It failed to clarify whether strategic groups are objects which implies that their definition, if necessary at all, is accomplished by the actors themselves; or categories which means that social aggregates are examined with regard to their correspondence with theoretical abstractions.

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<sup>2</sup> Oddly enough, the authors contradict themselves in the same paragraph by speaking of ‘counter-strategic groups’ who try to evade the strategies of appropriation and, therefore, also act strategically (!) by trying to influence the societal development in their sense. (Evers and Schiel 1988: 13)

<sup>3</sup> To speak of ‘class consciousness’ makes even less sense as Sungsidh points out at the same place.

Evers and Schiel claim to solve this problem by proposing a medium range theory: ‘*Unser Ansatz versucht, zwischen dem theoretischen System der Klassen als einer Tiefenstruktur und den empirischen Daten der Oberfläche zu vermitteln* [In our approach, we try to mediate between the theoretical system of classes as a deep structure<sup>4</sup> and the empirical data of the surface]’ (1988: 13). Yet this claim could only be fulfilled if there were systematic rules for the connection of both levels. The analysis of actual historical developments, then, had to be done on the basis of a discussion of the general possibilities and conditions for a certain development (Evers and Schiel 1989: 565). Existing studies, however, have restricted themselves to an ad-hoc mediation of micro and macro level and declare actual activities as ‘plausible’ in retrospective. More often, unfortunately, the problem is eluded by fading out one level in favor of the other, in other words: coming up either with an objectivist or a subjectivist version of the theory.

Although Evers and Schiel, as of late, have vehemently denied the validity of ‘objectivist and statistical’ criteria for the definition of strategic groups (1989: 564) there are many passages in the volume ‘Strategische Gruppen’ that indicate the contrary. The lengthy deduction of ‘modes of appropriation’, to start with, makes sense only if they are the basis for the emergence of groups and, in turn, the groups are defined by the way they acquire their share of the surplus. Eventually, the ‘sequential analysis’ of strategic groups – central part of the attempt to explain different developments in the Southeast Asian societies – makes it necessary to define groups in a categorical way, by ‘objective’ characteristics. Sequential analysis is based on three assumptions:

- Under rapidly changing social conditions, the group that emerges first has a chance to establish a ‘superstructure’ (political and economic system) that is most suited to its interests. Succeeding groups must contend with the already established framework and have, thus, a specific competitive disadvantage. Any changes of the superstructure are impeded not only by the established groups but by the system’s inertia as well (Evers 1982: 4; Evers and Schiel 1988: 44f.).
- Each mode of appropriation corresponds with a typical political orientation: Professionals and small traders tend to promote parliamentary democracies, bureaucrats and the military aim at the enlargement of the state apparatus in military regimes and one-party systems, and big businessmen and entrepreneurs are in an ambivalent middle position and seek alliances with both other sides (Evers 1982: 5f.; Evers and Schiel 1988: 46f.).

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<sup>4</sup> Whether classes are part of any ‘deep structure’ at all is exactly the question. Neelsen’s (1988: 305ff.) assessment that developing societies are ‘*dem Wesen nach bürgerlich* [essentially bourgeois]’ is indeed a case in point of overabstraction. We agree with Evers earlier statement (1973:116) that a class system does not require a ‘deeper’ level of analysis; classes may emerge through hybridization and coalition of strategic groups and dissolve into such groups again.

- The most important indicator for a group's success is the numeric growth of its membership as it denotes the increasing importance of the mode of appropriation, the relative power of the group and, therefore, its capability for political domination.

The time series models that are used for empirical corroboration are based on figures of *the* professionals, *the* military and *the* bureaucrats, presumably because statistical data were available (Evers and Schiel 1988: 32ff.; 242ff.). The procedure, obviously, suggests that these aggregates *are* strategic groups; it does not imply, however, that they are 'monolithic blocks' of persons in common situations with identical interests, as criticized by Neelsen (1988: 288). On the contrary: The emergence of opposing interests within one strategic group is a central concern of the approach. Even the bureaucracy as the apparently most corporate entity is merely a '*Handlungsfeld* [field of action]': '*Damit ist impliziert, daß auf diesem Feld unterschiedliche Gruppen jeweils unterschiedliche Ziele verfolgen* [This implies that, within this field, various groups (!) pursue various respective goals]' (Evers and Schiel 1988: 72).

A comprehensive determination and definition of strategic groups seems to be impossible in the face of the variety and diversity of appearances. As a consequence, the claim to deliver an analysis of the whole society – well justified by the inadequacy of theories of modernization, dependency, class conflict etc. – is explicitly withdrawn. The subjectivist reinterpretation as a 'theory of action' (Evers and Schiel 1988: 81f.), however, means to relinquish any theoretical claim whatsoever. If the term 'strategic action' does have some selectivity and categorical potential – what is, for instance, its relation to purpose rationality as discussed by Weber? – it remains to be demonstrated convincingly. We see an increase of arbitrariness instead: Virtually every aggregate of persons can be denoted as a strategic group if it is capable to develop some kind of planned and purposeful action.<sup>5</sup> The concept becomes a mere label, completely emptied of its content, and it is, thus, prone to Evers's and Schiel's own critique of class theories: '*Das Etikettieren sozialer Gruppierungen mit Klassenetiketten halten wir für irreführend* [We think that it is misleading to mark social groupings with class labels.]' (1989, S. 564).

According to Neelsen, strategic groups analysis ends up as an 'empirical-descriptive, eventually *agnostic* approach' (1989: 571; emphasis by Neelsen) which implies its ultimate failure: '*Der ... Anspruch, eine integrale Theorie zu Klassenbildung und Staat zumindest 'in Grundrissen' vorgelegt zu haben, ist einfach nicht haltbar* [The claim to have presented, at least in outline, an integral theory of class formation and state can simply not be upheld]' (Neelsen 1989:570). If societal processes are not to be described as '*Abfolge von Happenings* [sequence of happenings]' (Evers and Schiel 1988: 13) it takes, indeed, more than vague statements about structural developments which set plausible 'options' for (individual) decisions.

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<sup>5</sup> Schiel himself, eventually, went to the extreme by identifying the Indonesian *Jago* as a 'strategic figure' (1988).

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### 3. Networks and Nodes: From Strategic Actors to the Formation of Strategic Groups

In an attempt to reconstruct the original ‘essence’ of the theory as formulated by Evers (1973), we see strategic groups analysis as an actor-centered approach to a theory of dominance; strategic groups, then, can be defined in a first step as collective actors striving for participation in the dominance system of a society. This definition underlines the medium-range level of the approach: The emergence of groups is neither an inevitable outcome of macro-level, structural developments nor merely the result of a voluntaristic decision of individuals to join forces.

Before we can build hypotheses about how and why strategic groups are formed in certain situations, the term itself needs to be scrutinized and put more precisely. Not even the bureaucracy and the military, despite their clearly defined membership rules, are groups in a strict sociological sense, not to mention professionals, businesspeople or industrialists. At the empirical ‘surface’ we find, first of all, a multitude of actors who employ strategies to alter the societal framework to their advantage and, of course, others who try to preserve the status quo for the same reasons. Their common goal is the accumulation of power and the establishment of legitimate dominance, either in the society as a whole or restricted to domains, like regions or certain fields of activities. The political system is, consequently, a crucial field of action for all strategic groups. Except in extreme cases like dictatorships, individual power tends to be limited and segmented; its bundling into collective actors is, thus, an obvious solution.

The transformation of ‘quasi-groups’ *an sich* in the sense of Dahrendorf (1959) into groups *für sich* is a necessary condition for collective action and the capability for conflict. The simplest case is the founding of actual, corporate groups like clubs, associations, professional organizations, parties and the like.<sup>6</sup> To make short work of it by denoting such empirically observable associations, or at least some of them (which?), as strategic groups is not a viable option in face of a complex reality. Various connections of the members, including multiple memberships, rather suggest the picture of a network of strategic actors, with organizations as the nodal points and nerve centers. It can be presumed that the actual strategies – which do not, of course, come out of nowhere to the heads of the actors – are devised and planned at these nodes, and communicated from there to the members of the network. There are obvious logistical advantages, too: People have to get in contact with only one member of an association to be able, in principle, to communicate with all. The flow of informations is easier, more reliable, and less dependent on coincidence than in pure personal relations. At the same time, the chance to actually influence political decisions is vastly improved by organizations as collective lobbying and bargaining are more momentous than individual efforts. In complex societies, we expect a number of different networks, each of them characterized by relatively close and regular internal contacts and rather situative ad-hoc communications with other networks.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that organizations are not necessarily formed by individuals in the same position and with common interests, as suggested by class theory. At least as significant for the development and coordination of strategies is the communication of complementary interests between unequals.

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Strategic groups are defined, in a second step, as such organized networks of collective strategic actors; they are, thus, not actual groups in the sense that each member has contact with all others. This definition also implies that strategic groups are not a factual, observable object of research but rather an instrument of analysis. Why, then, do we not totally drop a term that is apparently misleading and indeed quite frequently misunderstood? The alternatives seem to be either at least as misleading (like the concept of power elite which also suggests a rather static view); or they are distinctly awkward (like 'collective strategic actors'). Moreover, we do think that the existing approach of strategic groups analysis has made its points: The organization of groups that are capable of pursuing strategies is as much of current interest as the categories for the examination of such strategies, like hybridization and coalition building.

To accomplish a re-linkage to a holistic theory of society a theoretical dialogue is necessary: Neither has the discussion of class concepts ended with Marx and Engels nor is the dissatisfaction with reductionist versions restricted to Third World societies. Sayer (1992), for instance, has likewise criticized abstract political economic theory for overlooking the real divisions between producers and between producers and consumers. Giddens' (1983) critical revision of class theory, eventually, seems to be fully compatible with Evers' and Schiel's approach. Instead of simply insinuating the existence of a homogeneous 'ruling class' and analyzing its relation to the oppressed over and over again, Giddens suggests to focus the attention to the internal structure of the upper classes. The dominance of a ruling class is one end of Giddens' elaborate scale; the other is the exercise of power by diversified 'leadership groups' (1983: 119) that can well be seen as synonymous to strategic groups.

#### **4. Dominance and the Control of Strategic Resources**

We see power and dominance, and no longer the appropriation of surplus, as distinguishing characteristics of strategic groups. This view knocks the bottom out of the reproach of economic reductionism that has been raised against Evers and Schiel. The 'modes of appropriation' have anyway been largely ignored in the practical application of the approach; at best, they were used as heuristic categories for a rough arrangement of strategic groups. We think it is more plausible to distinguish strategic actors by their fields of action and the specific resources that are the basis of their domination of others. Resources can be "strategic" in a double way: Firstly, they allow dominance; and secondly, they can be applied to improve access to, or even gain control of, other resources (Schuurman 1994: 1). The 'strategic resources', along with persons and institutions who typically make use of them, can be arranged in five basic categories:



- Force/coercion (military, police)
- Law (politicians, bureaucrats, judges)
- Property (industrialists, traders, landowners)
- Information/qualification (professionals)
- Ideology/tradition/belief (religious and charismatic leaders).<sup>7</sup>

It becomes evident, in this view, that not every society can sensibly be grasped by strategic groups analysis. The emergence of several groups requires a minimal independence of the fields of action they can engage in which implies a differentiation of society. If the control of a crucial resource enables one group to control all others, a theory of despotism or class dominance will be more appropriate. The resource ‘force’ has a particular position; if it is not controlled, and largely monopolized, by a functioning state it becomes a ‘master resource’ and makes other bases of power obsolete. In large parts of Africa and in the former Yugoslavia and Russia, military strategy is more important than hybridization and coalition building, and armies, gangs and warlords have taken the place of strategic groups.

The resource ‘ideology’ has a complementary particular position because it is of crucial importance for all strategic groups. Dominance without a dominant value system which is accepted, or at least deferred to, by the subordinate strata is sheer despotism. The power and privileges of a group appear to be legitimate only if other groups, or ideally the whole society, expect advantages from its dominance, e.g. welfare or security. Strategic groups need, therefore, a clientele to stand their ground in their common and crucial field of action, namely the political arena. This is obvious in the case of democratic systems; but even dictatorships and military regimes require a certain degree of loyalty of the subordinate<sup>8</sup> parts of the society as the costs of repression would become boundless otherwise.

Whether strategic groups emerge – in a certain society and at a certain time – along, or across, the said differentiation of resources is an empirical question that is not to be answered *a priori*. In most cases we can expect hybrid forms with various accents. The formation of strategic groups is, thus, more adequately grasped by a dynamic analysis, e.g., as a shift of power from one group to another or as increasing coalition building between both, than in a static description. Comparative studies are another field of application: Berner and Korff (1991) have demonstrated in a comparison of the Phil-

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<sup>7</sup> The theoretical status of the categories has to remain open in this paper; it is, however, plausible to assume that no group can dominate without access to at least one of these resources. A theory of strategic groups could not, anyhow, supply a systematic foundation out of itself. As a medium range approach it is dependent on a theory of society if it does not want to slip into a tautology – strategic resources are those used by strategic groups, and vice versa.

<sup>8</sup> While resistance against authoritarian regimes is limited in economically successful countries like Indonesia and Singapore, the Philippines’ Marcos dictatorship was overthrown when its promise of development and wealth proved to be chimeric. Other examples are found in many countries of Latin America and Africa.

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ippines and Thailand that one group's monopoly of all strategic resources may cause a long-term blockage of development, whereas competition and mutual control of several groups rather ensure societal dynamics and economic growth.

On this basis we are able to further conceptualize 'strategic action': It takes place in the framework of strategic groups formation, and it is directed to at least one strategic resource. An established group will normally try to increase its integration, impede the access of others to the group and its resources, enlarge the basis of power and legitimacy and, thereby, consolidate its dominance. To accomplish this it has to keep control of its 'own' domain as a solid ground on which it can possibly enter other fields of action (hybridization). Whether it does so in cooperation and coalition, or in competition to other groups is not at least dependent on the consolidation of the whole power formation: A number of historical examples indicates that an acute threat from below may actualize the elites' common interest in status quo maintenance and conceal internal conflicts. Scott (1968) has described a 'constant pie orientation' in this kind of situation.

The research program of the approach can be outlined as follows: We observe and analyze strategic action of collective actors at the various 'interfaces' (in the sense of Long 1989) of a society. The common theoretical and conceptual framework allows to systematically interrelate and compare the results and come to more abstract generalizations. The mutual connection of theory and empirical data does not prevent the inclusion of dominated groups that was demanded programmatically by Evers and Schiel (1988: 13). On the contrary: the relation of strategic groups to the subordinate parts of the society has to be an integral part of the theory. From the very start, the analysis of strategic groups formation among the powerholders (that can be a class formation in the extreme case) has to consider the interfaces towards the subordinate strata of society, the specific way of exercising power, and its limitations and contestability.

#### **4. Loyalty and Resistance: Strategic Groups and the Strategies of the Dominated**

Strategic groups analysis has a close connection to the concept of social inequality. Strategic groups found their dominance on exclusion; they become established by excluding others, normally the majority of the population, along certain criteria.<sup>9</sup> To control the resource 'means of production', for instance, means the exclusion of non-owners and allows access to their labor. Following Weber's classical definition, power principally implies resistance. The basis of a strategic group's dominance is, consequently, always precarious. Not only does it have to withstand the competition of other strategic groups, but it has to be enforced at the interface with the dominated strata without losing its legitimacy.

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<sup>9</sup> The complementarity of our approach to the concept of social closure (see Murphy 1988 for a comprehensive account) can only be suggested here. It becomes most obvious in the work of Parkin (1974) who analyzes strategies of social closure in the formation of classes.

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Non-dominant groups have to act strategically, too, if they want to make any impact on the societal system. They have to become a group in the first place: Contrary to the assumptions of classical class theories their shared social situation and common interests do not necessarily drive them into solidary action and conflict with others. Different strategies, like individual patron-client relations to members of dominant groups, may promise more success. The excluded groups have to be able to define their interests as common ones; their very exclusion from certain resources, for instance, may become a basis of group identity. Moreover, they have to develop own symbols in the sense of a 'little tradition' (in the sense of Redfield 1956), social cohesion and integration, and independent group structures and organizations. If they fail to do so they remain a floating mass, incapable of collective and strategic action.

Many movements of protest and resistance formed by workers, peasants, small traders, squatters etc. speak of a considerable potential of action within the lower classes. Schubert and others (1993) propose to conceptualize these movements, along with ethnic and religious minorities as well as capital, bureaucracy, the military etc., as '*konfliktfähige Gruppen* [groups capable of conflict]'. To simply rename strategic groups and extend the concept of to all strata of a society is, however, misleading. According to Parkin (1971: 94), there is a fundamental difference between dominant and subordinate groups (which he, of course, calls 'classes'): Underclass communities lack the institutional power to legitimize a value system that is sharply at odds with the dominant value system.<sup>10</sup> They are, therefore, not capable to influence the political system that remains reserved for dominant – i.e., strategic – groups.

Following Parkin, the basic characteristic of the subordinate value system is the fact that it is developed in the 'moral density' of local communities: 'They generate a meaning system which is of purely parochial significance, representing a design for living based upon localized social knowledge and face-to-face relationships' (1971: 90; cf. Berner and Korff 1995). Jackson (1988) speaks of a 'geography of resistance' in which locally based subordinate groups may challenge the dominance system. Social groups that emerge on this basis are not incapable of action. They may put up violent and organized fights, particularly if they are hit by measures that are of questionable legitimacy even according to the dominant norms (cf. Scott 1985). To actively challenge the dominance system beyond local, reactive and spontaneous resistance, subordinate groups need alliances with factions of the upper class, in other words, existing or potential strategic groups: 'Organized citizen movements do not, as a rule, occur spontaneously, requiring instead the catalytic action of an outside agency' (Friedmann and Salguero 1988: 19). The latter can claim to represent parts of the

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<sup>10</sup> Parkin sees an exemption in the 'radical' value system that has developed on the basis of Marxist and socialist ideologies in some European industrialized countries. After the breakdown of state socialism, however, we note a relapse into 'instrumental collectivism and trade union consciousness' (1971: 97) – in other words, into subordinate consciousness – even there. In the developing countries there is hardly any basis for this type of radical value system because the proletariat in the Marxian sense remained a small minority; Sunghidh (1989: 268) estimates the share of permanently employed wage laborers as 7% of the economically active population.

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population and use discontentment as a strategic resource in their competition with other groups.<sup>11</sup> We see structural differences between strategic groups on the one hand and subordinate, potentially resistant groups on the other at least at four levels:

- Strategic groups are capable of pursuing long-term plans in their respective field of activities and change the institutional framework in their favor. In contrast, peasant rebellions and urban revolts come about, in most cases, if people feel affected by the strategies of dominant groups. They are reactive and defensive rather than directed at positive goals (cf. Scott 1985; Walton 1990). Revealingly, Schubert and others (1993) see refusal, boycott and delegitimization as the characteristic conflictive potential of such groups.
- Influence on the educational system and the media as well as the control of most building activities are the basis of strategic groups' hegemony in the definition of meaningful symbols. To develop a resistant world of symbols is a crucial precondition for a group's capability to organize and enter conflicts. The breakdown of socialist systems and ideologies has made this an even more difficult task. Religious fundamentalism, ethnic specificity and the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) can be interpreted in this context.
- Strategic groups command effective channels of information that enable them to communicate shared interests and help to develop solidarity across spatial and social distances. The social coherence of subordinate groups is much more dependent on direct personal contacts. The results of our research in the Philippines demonstrate that supra-local alliances come about only with the help of non-government organizations (NGOs) that are themselves formed by discontent members of the middle and upper classes.
- Eventually, lower-class groups need allies from NGOs and media to attain a however limited influence on the political system. Their means of conflict, like rallies and boycotts, require extensive logistics that cannot be put up without vertical alliances. For strategic groups within or outside the state apparatus, it is downright constitutive to have influence on political decisions. A group that loses this influence for more than a limited period runs the danger to get marginalized and excluded from the formation of strategic groups.

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<sup>11</sup> Scott's reflections allow the conclusion that even the Red October of Russia – an epitome of a radical overthrow – can be reinterpreted as an alliance of this type. Following this argument, the workers restricted themselves to 'bread-and-butter demands' and factory-specific claims until the very eve of the revolution. The Bolshevik leaders who used the situation to grasp for power came entirely from other classes (Scott 1985, S. 341f).

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## The NGO Movement in Thailand and the Philippines: Ascent of New Strategic Groups?

We have proposed to see strategic groups analysis as a principally dynamic approach. It is, therefore, most adequately applied in situations of change within the power balance and crisis of the dominance system. Since the Seventies, such a crisis is taking place in many countries; a new type of collective actors has emerged that has been discussed extensively as 'social movements'. The political order in Western democracies has been challenged by these movements implicitly, and often explicitly (cf. the contributions in Dalton and Kuechler 1990). Castells's study 'The City and the Grass Roots' (1983) has emphasized the urban origin of the movements and extended the perspective to Latin America where his analysis found wide reception.

Castells and others suggest an inherent anti-systemic impetus of social movements. A critical reassertion of the literature and of some empirical studies in particular (e.g., Nelson 1979; Friedmann 1989; Schuurman and van Naerssen 1989) indicates that this may be wishful thinking on the side of European researchers. Moreover, the studies emphasize the role of NGOs for the development of new forms of collective action in the Third World. NGOs speak out programmatically for a development in favor of the poor, but are made up of members of the educated urban middle classes almost exclusively. Their rise is connected to the crisis of a development policy of state-controlled modernization and industrialization that took place in the Seventies. As a consequence, international development funds were redirected to NGOs which appear to be closer to the target groups and less corrupt than the state bureaucracy (OECD 1988).

Kastorius (1993: 23ff.) emphasizes the structural parallelity between the emergence of a NGO movement in Indonesia and the rise of strategic groups, the bureaucracy in particular: Based on the new resource 'international financial aid', organizations emerge and become a 'strategic instrument' of group building. The holders of positions in NGOs develop an 'awareness that ... [they] are affected in a similar way by the economic, social and political forces' (Evers 1973: 114; see Evers and Schiel 1988: 24). Their hidden agenda, namely the common interest in the survival, consolidation and enlargement of the organization itself, becomes predominant in the course of institutionalization and bureaucratization. The most important strategy to reach this goal is the building of alliance and cooperation networks among the organizations, but particularly with government institutions.

Paradoxically it is not the unavoidable dissociation from the target groups that puts the rise of Indonesian NGOs to a independent strategic group into question, but rather their lack of distance to the state. In Indonesia, any NGO activities that are not merely 'complementary' to government programs are strictly sanctioned. Moreover, an independent ideological system of concepts and values – a necessary precondition for any substantial influence in the political arena – can hardly be developed. The groups can only claim expertise for the solution of actual problems and, thereby, try to get their voice heard in the lower ranks of the administration. Whereas Indonesian NGOs, according to Kastorius, have hardly any characteristics of a social movement, they are neither adequately described as a strategic group. Instead, they run the danger of

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becoming a sub-department of the bureaucracy and a mere instrument of other strategic groups.

In the Philippines, the NGOs have been much more successful in gaining access to ideological resources. They managed to largely occupy the concept of 'development' which is of course crucial for a Third World country. A formation of strategic groups that was oligarchically ossified had blocked social dynamics for decades (cf. Weintraub 1973; Berner and Korff 1991). The Philippines that used to be Asia's 'tiger economy' in the Fifties, next only to Japan, became the 'sick man of Southeast Asia'. Marcos's attempt to install the *Bagong Lipunan* or 'New Society', a military-based development dictatorship shaped after the Indonesian model, had drowned in the swamp of corruption, cronyism and national debt. Aquino's 'People Power' government, eventually, was forced to make allowances for the interests of the military as well as the old elites and failed to fulfill its reform promises.

The resulting gap of legitimacy was deepened because parties based on a political program did not emerge after 1986 (Adriano 1992; Magno 1992); Villacorta (1991: 173) speaks of the 'ideological bankruptcy of party politics'. In this situation, a multitude of NGOs established themselves as 'Social Development Organizations' with an explicitly political claim. Increasingly, bureaucratic institutions concerned with development projects have to concede them a right to say, and NGO projects financed by international donors can expect subsidies from government sources. Today, the Philippines have one the densest and best organized networks of NGOs. The organizations offer positions as professionals and development experts to a vast number of well-trained activists.<sup>12</sup> There is a multitude of alliances and umbrella organizations, among them the 'Caucus for Development NGO Networks' (CODE-NGO) and the 'Congress for People's Agrarian Reform' (CPAR), as well as a number of publications like 'Intersect', 'Paghahasik' and 'Pakikiisa'.

Before the 1992 elections, the NGOs made an explicit demand for participation in the political system and endorsed candidates for offices on all levels, many of them from their own ranks. The claim for a share of dominance seemed to disappear into thin air when the postulated 'NGO vote' turned out to be a 'paper tiger' (Mayo 1992), and the nominees lost down the line. A number of other candidates, however, among them the president-to-be Ramos, had pledged support and loyalty to the NGOs and, thus, competed for the votes of their clientele. Immediately after their assumption of office, the Ramos administration promised that the NGOs' participation in development police was to be extended. Even if the Philippine NGOs as a group are certainly not capable of direct dominance they have a significant say in the formulation of the social agenda, and they can hold their position against other actors in the society: 'The incursion of NGOs into electoral politics stimulated the increase in public awareness of the problems of patronage politics and the underdevelopment of the country. This is primarily evident in the call of almost all sectors of society (church, politicians, business, youth and even of the state bureaucracy) for a new politics. The NGO en-

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<sup>12</sup> President Aquino herself declared her intention to work for an NGO after her voluntary resignation in 1992.

dorsement has become a much sought after element for political publicity and electoral campaigns' (Gregorio-Medel 1992: 273f.).

The Philippine NGO movement has all characteristics of a strategic group: a resource basis that can hardly be disputed by others; a marked group consciousness combined with the capability to organize and communicate; and a clientele who find their interests represented, at least better than by traditional politicians.<sup>13</sup> Their conception of 'alternative development' is a value system that claims dominant validity with increasing success. At the same time, there is an immanent contradiction in this progress that has consequences down to the daily work of NGOs: The institutionalization as a strategic group jeopardizes the basis of their legitimization, namely the unity with the poor population which is emphasized by the term 'movement'. One of the strategies of NGOs is, therefore, an institutionalization of the movement identity: Co-optation by the state is restricted by mutual control, their own role is frequently played down, and emphasis is put on the 'empowerment of the poor'. Even well-meaning observers doubt that the poor will actually become dominant forces in Philippine society (Gregorio-Medel 1992: 285); it is clear, however, that their chances of participation have considerably increased.

## Conclusions

Whereas the overthrow of a dominance system by a revolutionary class is no longer on the world's agenda, processes of democratization in many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America have found a lot of attention in recent years. Many observers see democratization as an immediate gain of power for the lower classes (cf. Schubert and others 1993). There is reason to be skeptic about this view: The empirical examples of Indonesia and the Philippines indicate that subordinate groups, at best, develop a restricted and reactive capability of conflict. In this situation, an analysis that interprets the changes as shifts in the formation of strategic groups opens the view on the actors without neglecting social structure.

The starting point of this analysis is a crisis of established dominance systems caused by the fact that economic and social development did not take place. The discontentment of large parts of the population can become a 'strategic resource' for ascending groups. A change of the political system towards democratization is an obvious goal for such groups as they see the chance to be accepted as representants of the majority's interests. Formal democracy is not the only criterion, however: The mere emergence of a new strategic group implies a de-monopolization of the dominance system. The possibilities to control the strategies of other groups are increased, and the latter can be prevented from pursuing their goals at all others' expense.

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<sup>13</sup> Schiel, in a concededly *halbgar* [underdone] paper (1992), calls them 'counter-strategic groups' on this background. His distinction between strategic groups – the exploiters – and counter-strategic groups – those who prevent exploitation – is, however, merely normative and eventually moralistic. In the phase of ascent, all strategic groups are anti-elitarian to a certain degree as they have to challenge at least the scope of dominance of established groups.

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## **Strategic Actors and Tendencies of Resistance: A Reformulation of Strategic Groups Theory**

### **Summary:**

Although the "Bielefeld Approach" of strategic group analysis has been severely criticized there is still an evident need of a medium range theory in sociology of development. Neither the rehabilitation of "grand theories" nor a restriction to purely empirical-descriptive procedures is adequate in face of the heterogenous and fast-changing developing societies. In a critical revision, we propose to conceptualize strategic groups as "organized networks of collective actors" which emerge on the basis of common or complementary interests and struggle to participate at the dominance system. Their determinative characteristic is not appropriation of surplus but access to material and non-material "strategic resources" which are seen as the precondition of dominance. Strategic group theory is, in our view, complementary to other sociological approaches like those of Giddens, Murphy and Parkin. Eventually, the emergence of a non-governmental organizations' movement in Indonesia and the Philippines is analyzed as the rise of new strategic groups.