
MEANING-MAKING IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Grounded Utopian Movements: Subjects of Neglect¹

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Abstract

This essay argues that grounded utopian movements (GUMs) have generally been overlooked in recent cross-disciplinary theorizations of social movements, and seeks to rectify the neglect. GUMs, unlike other social movements, do not seek recognition either from capitalist institutions or modern nation-states, but are instead grounded in visions of alternative “ideal places” (utopias), and set out to establish alternative ways of living which their members find more just and satisfying than at present. We discuss the Ghost Dance of the Great Plains, the Rastafari movement of the Caribbean, and the long-durée Maya movement as grounded utopian movements of the periphery, to illustrate major aspects of theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approaches to the study of GUMs. We conclude with a brief treatment of the global justice movement as a contemporary GUM. [Keywords: grounded utopian movements, social movements, Ghost Dance, Rastafari, long-durée Maya movement, global justice movement]

SThe Ghost Dance movement in the United States, the Rastafari of Jamaica and the Maya Movement of Guatemala, and other movements like them have been widely referred to in the anthropological literature as “revitalization,” “cult,” and “nativistic” movements (Barrett 1977; England 2003; Linton 1943; Wallace 1956; Warren 1998). Although these ascriptions have been debated, central to these movements has been innovative use of cultural resources such as religious beliefs, the creation of new cultural formations and meanings, and the manifestation of culturally-embedded movement practices. We refer to these movements and others like them as grounded utopian movements.

Grounded utopian movements, such as the Ghost Dance, Rastafari, and Maya are thoroughly modern movements; they are not “archaic” or “pre-modern” formations. They have emerged, persisted, disappeared, and re-emerged across decades, even centuries. These movements are “utopian” in that they point to a “ideal place” (utopia)—like the new world of the Ghost Dance or Mount Zion for the Rastafari—and by implication, to a better time and more satisfying social relationships and identifications. “Utopian,” however, also connotes impracticality, romanticism, and for some observers, irrationality and flightiness. Although all movements have a utopian dimension because they imagine alternative futures (Gusfield 1994:69) and their interest in utopia points to a commonality across movements, grounded utopian movements have been distinctive in that their visions of strong utopias have formed to counteract conditions of racist imperial oppression (e.g., slaughter, ethnocide, displacement), and have focused on group integrity and identity instead of on instrumental action with respect to states and capitalism. In this sense, they might be deemed “impractical.”

To the extent that grounded utopian movements challenge American and European conceptions of activism, they have been treated as reactionary or escapist, and not as progressive. Such connotations perhaps underlie the neglect within mainstream social movement studies of grounded utopian movements: they are considered insufficiently substantial or determinate to be considered *proper* social movements. This is why, in part, we point to the *grounded* feature of these utopias. By *grounded* we mean that the identities, values, and imaginative dimensions of utopia are culturally focused on real places, embodied by living people, informed by past lifeways, and constructed and maintained through quotidian interactions and valued practices that connect the members of a

community, even if it is a diasporic one. The three social movements of the periphery discussed here—the Ghost Dance, Rastafari, and long-durée Maya activism—exhibit these overlapping meanings of being grounded in the utopian visions and transcendental ideals of those who belong to them. By the periphery we mean those formerly colonized and remote places where much anthropological study of movements was conducted; this includes colonized areas inside colonizing nations, such as Indian reservations in the United States.

What do dominant approaches and theorizations in the social movement literature such as the resource mobilization, political opportunity, framing, and new social movements approaches within the literature have to say about such movements? At it turns out, not much. For example, our search of the ten years' contents of *Mobilization* found not one article out of the entire number of 134 that referred to terms used for what we call *grounded utopian movements* of the periphery: “messianic,” “millenarian,” “chil-iastic,” “nativistic,” “revitalization,” or “articulatory.”² We did find forty-seven references to “culture” and “cultural” (out of 134 articles) alluding to concepts of cultural “framing,” “narrative,” and “biography,” which provide useful affinities to our own approach of studying movements in terms of lived experience. Nonetheless, the analyses utilizing these concepts did not extend to movements like the Ghost Dance, Rastafari or five-centuries-long Maya activism. While anthropologists have confronted these issues more extensively, the discipline of anthropology has not been at the core of social movement studies by social scientists for some decades; the discipline even lacks a premier journal dedicated to the field of social movement studies, comparable to *Mobilization* in sociology.

What we call grounded utopian movements of the periphery have been overlooked by the dominant approaches to social movements, as suggested by searches of *Mobilization's* contents. However, our argument in this article is more ambitious than merely pointing to their neglect. In the following sections of the article we argue that not only are analyses of grounded utopian movements (GUMs hereafter) of the periphery largely absent from the dominant literature in the social sciences, but so too are the theorizations and the ethnographic and narrative techniques appropriate to their study. We find that the historical, spatial, and social characteristics of these movements are understudied in the post-1970s social movements literature, and should inform it, and we briefly address these characteristics in the third section of the paper. Our analysis is informed by decades of

research into GUMs by anthropologists and others. We suggest that while anthropologists have paid much attention to what we call GUMs, what we describe is relevant far beyond the movements of the periphery and former colonies of empires, and includes movements studied by the dominant social movement approaches, such as those described as new social movements. In this way GUMs of the periphery can be imagined as a subset of GUMs.³ As illustrations, we offer four case studies of GUMs, including an analysis that views the global social justice movement as a GUM.

Grounded Utopian Movements: Decentering States, Markets, and New Social Movements

It is worth asking why grounded utopian movements have been neglected by the dominant approaches within social movement studies. Dominant approaches within social movement theory, whether the approaches of “resource mobilization” (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and “political opportunity structure” (McAdam 1982) or more recent developments such as “culture and emotion” (McAdam 1994; Snow et al. 1986) or “narrative” (Jasper 1997) make two assumptions that contribute to neglecting GUMs of the periphery.

First, the dominant approaches to social movements give central priority to and take for granted the modern nation-state and capitalist markets as either the objects of strategic contention by social movements or as the fields of contention within which social movements arise and develop. In this sense, social movement political practice, organization, and mobilization are assumed to be instrumentally oriented toward achieving change by transforming capitalism or the formal political institutions situated within the “container” of the nation-state. On this assumption, “real” social movements seek to affirm the rights to representation by their members in decisions related to the operation of capitalism (e.g., rights of women to equal employment and pay), or seek recognition by the nation-state of the rights of their members within political institutions (e.g., the right to vote or receive public monies). More rarely, “revolutionary” movements seek to gain control of the state’s apparatus, and to transform or eliminate capitalism. Yet the hybrid activities of GUMs of the periphery that seek to build a more satisfying society by pursuing alternative cultural practices in the face of (and as a cushion against) repressive state actions and capitalist exploitation are not typically labeled “social movements.”

Second, social movements, it is assumed, engage in actions within the container of a certain *kind* of nation-state—the Westphalian state which, in Weber’s ([1918] 1993) classic typology of the modern European state, has come to be taken as “the state” (see also Giddens 1985). This assumption finesses major questions about contemporary states. For instance, states are not always easily coupled via a “hyphen” with a nation where the latter is a “political formation” coextensive with a “racial grouping” (Williams 1976:168–9). Not all states have legitimate monopoly over the means of violence within “their” territories. And we doubt that contemporary states all show the rational bureaucratic administration which Weber and successors (e.g., Giddens; Foucault) found extant in European states from the late seventeenth century to the present. In this respect, we could challenge Foucault’s claims by pointing out that some states lack the resources and opportunities to successfully transform the people they rule into “disciplined” and “docile” subjects.

Charles Tilly illustrates both assumptions in his well-known essay “Social Movements and National Politics”: “A social movement is a sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support” (1984:306). It is clear that the “power holders” in question are either state officials, or corporate managers. Even the effort by social movement theorists to transgress the compartmentalization of social movement studies by focusing on the characteristics common to “contentious politics” continues to privilege the role of government and generally neglects movements of the periphery (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001).

The actual postcolonial world of the present varies greatly from this model of a world composed of similar Westphalian nation-state units, each with its own capitalist markets. What we observe instead is a world dominated by a single financial and military super-power (the United States) showing increasing oligarchic tendencies, and by allied multilateral institutions (e.g., World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank) attempting global governance. This world moreover manifests novel and restructured emergent transnational states like the European Union (previously composed of Westphalian states) (Shore 2000); ethno-nationalist armed separatist movements that rule

over peripheral zones (Ekholm Friedman 2003); regional mafia/warlord or other organized criminal networks exercising state-like functions as proxies of transnational corporations seeking geo-strategic control of resources across sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America (Nazpary 2002; Nordstrom 2000, 2005; Reyna 2003); NGO-ruled mini-states (Hanlon 1991); and other forms of “apparent states” (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2003:233–4; Sampson 2003). Increasingly, these new formations are varieties of oligarchic-corporate states which are no longer committed to meeting the economic needs of large proportions of their citizen populations, or, in the most extreme cases, even their needs for bare survival (Kapferer 2005).

The two assumptions mentioned above limit the range of the social movements considered worth studying and implicitly privilege certain modes of acquiring knowledge about the movements. The focus in resource mobilization theory on rational choice which investigates the availability of resources that allow movements to take actions vis-à-vis the state or capitalist markets (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977) is well known. Much important work has been informed by this theory, but it is largely confined to Westphalian nation-state domains. The “political opportunity structure” approach (McAdam 1982) sets its state-based assumptions out even more explicitly, because it is precisely the state which is implicated in many of the “opportunity structures” which social movements must capitalize on, if they can.

It is notable that the emergence of three of the grounded utopian groups we discuss below was associated with a prior period of turmoil in state formation—the expansion of European colonial rule. The turbulence, re-formation, and disorder associated with contemporary state formation processes should raise broader questions about the appropriateness of uncritically assuming the Westphalian state model, even for the kinds of movements emphasized by the dominant theoretical approaches to social movements.

As for the study of the present, what matter are that the epoch of Westphalian states incorporating movements within their civil societies is passing, that a new period of turbulent state recomposition is now in effect, and that, like prior periods of colonial expansion and imperialism, the times are propitious for the proliferation of GUMs. We thus suggest in this article that our fourth example, the global justice movement, is a GUM coming out of the current conjuncture. All the more pity, therefore, that the social movement literature has largely overlooked them.

Instead we ask, what of movements whose members are seeking relative autonomy, creating new identities or reinventing older ones, or trying to realize the values of community within a “lifeworld” (as Habermas [1981] called it) unencumbered by the advance of techno-rationality and the system-world of capitalism and government? What of movements that do not aspire to gain political power within the modern state or to challenge capitalism—but whose internal identity-work transforms the lives of their members, and even the social setting around them, as they seek to bring about a more satisfying world? Some might respond that new social movements theory and the constructionist turn in movement studies address these questions.

New social movement (NSM) theory posits the rise of new movements that are not class-oriented or focused on states and capitalism, but on autonomy, identity, and reflection on the socially-constructed nature of reality. According to this theory, these movements operate in a postmodern and postindustrial world, a “new world” influencing the emergence and form of social movements. Melucci develops the idea of new social movements as “spontaneous,” “anti-authoritarian,” and “anti-hierarchical,” in terms of their protest (1980:220). He argues that they are not focused on the political system, and that they reject representation and “all mediation” (1980:220). We would agree that an important contribution of NSM theory has been its emphasis on the importance of everyday interactions to social movement life, which is where many identity, affective, relational, motivational and networking activities happen.

However, NSM theory has substantial shortcomings. First, the novelty it claims for certain social movements due to conditions in the contemporary period is difficult to substantiate. The relationships claimed between changes in values, social and technological transformations (e.g., growth in information production), and changes in movement orientations, are easily asserted but difficult to empirically demonstrate (Pichardo 1997). In fact autonomy, solidarity, identity, rejection of representation and mediation are characteristic of many movements that preceded the 1960s, Melucci’s turning point. Furthermore, although Melucci notes the religious orientation of many of the social movements he focuses on, the presence of a spiritual orientation within a variety of movements is neither definitive of a type nor of a certain period in history, and it does not have to take the form of organized religion or discrete ritual practices analytically divorced from other cultural practices. What may be new

instead is the self-reflexive and explicit acknowledgement of the importance of identity and information to social movements (e.g., Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield 1994; Pichardo 1997:425).

Second, normality for Melucci in the formation of new social movements is a hyper-globalized world in which information dominates all. This theory not only implies a radical discontinuity in time which may not be justified, but also a discontinuity over space between movements in the periphery and those in the core. Such a view of contemporary movements, even of a subset of them, keeps the focus of the movement theory lens disproportionately aimed at movements that are predominantly white, middle class and located in Western Europe and North America (Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994:189), away from movements such as the GUMs we discuss here which have generated utopian visions in the face of racist imperial onslaughts, often in sustained efforts at cultural maintenance over decades or centuries.

Our assessment of NSM theory is thus a mixed one. While we realize the virtues of its analysis of some social movements, particularly in Latin America, which unfortunately have had little influence on social movement studies in the US and Europe, its shortcomings have led us to develop the alternative presented here. In contrast, our idea of GUMs seeks not only to bring movements of the periphery into the social movement theory center, but also to situate social movements in a cross-cultural and historical framework.

GUMs exhibit a range of ideological, cultural, racialized, ethnic, geographic and political expressions. These include conservative and radical groups, religious and secular movements, and hybrids that fall somewhere in between; what they share in common is a collective search for an "ideal place" generated under conditions of imperial duress which threaten an entire cultural group, people or community. Some GUMs may be on liberal modernity's other side in a different sense: some religious fundamentalist movements (e.g., the Christian identity movement or transnational Wahhabist Islam) incorporate the identity-work being performed by their members in pursuit of grounded utopias into violent strategies aimed at repressive political objectives vis-à-vis states and "heretic" populations.

The idea and empirical reality of GUMs are not limited to contemporary or past movements; they are not bounded by religion, politics, or class. GUMs seek that ideal place, as defined by the actors, that alternative to a current or past oppressive condition. We are not arguing for a

catch-all category nor are we reducing movements to a singular dimension. However, we concur with the suggestion by Holland et al. (this issue) that theories should encompass more variety than less. Theorizing about members of GUMs in pursuit of ideal places draws on cultural production—the many ways that people search for new modes of being, relating, and thinking. GUMs, although constrained by the penetration and expansion of modern nation-states and capitalisms, are not sutured to either the logics of “capital” or of “the state,” and the theory of GUMs challenges scholars to think beyond these dominant logics.

The constructionist turn in social movement studies offers the possibility of rapprochement between the study of GUMs of the periphery and social movements studies, especially in sociology. We recognize that some social movement theorists have attempted to more effectively address decision making, personal and group motivation, biography, culture, decentralization, emotions and networks (e.g., Jasper 1997; Kurzman 2004; Morris 1984; Payne 1995; Polletta 2002; Snow et al. 1986). However, we recognize that the turn to constructionism is emergent, faces resistance from some proponents of the hegemonic models of social movements, and runs the risk of fetishizing meaning-making while drawing attention away from the materiality and sociality of movements, central to the ethnographic approach we advocate here.

Our broader theoretical point extends beyond GUMs as such. Although it is not our focus here, we would argue that contemporary social movements are collectivities whose members, internal politics and networks, worldviews, and strategies are capable of *both* being oriented toward gaining power and representation vis-à-vis the state and capitalism, *and* seeking through meaning-making to constitute more satisfying lives and generate personal transformations in pursuit of grounded utopias. Thus, the dominant approaches in the social movement literature have neglected or over-compartmentalized not only the distinctive GUMs discussed here, but also the grounded utopian dimensions within what are conventionally treated as secular, state-oriented and market-oriented movements. Thinking rigorously about GUMs can assist scholars in developing richer analyses of other kinds of social movements.

In the following sections we briefly examine three cases of grounded utopian movements. Themes common to all three are their cultural embeddedness, a search for ideal places, survivability over time, reticulation, and segmentation.

The Ghost Dance (1889–1920s)

In 1889, thousands of native Americans belonging to scores of tribal groups throughout the Great Basin and Great Plains regions enthusiastically took up the Ghost Dance. They followed charismatic prophets who showed them the dances whose performance led to their falling into trances in which they saw a new world where they were reunited with happy ancestors, the buffalo and their old ways, and foreswore the work set out for them by whites.⁴ Beginning with the Paiute prophet Wovoka in Nevada, the movement spread rapidly to the south, north and east for hundreds of miles. New prophets arose among the different groups, confirming (and sometimes repudiating) Wovoka's visions, and in turn converted new followers within their groups and those nearby to the Ghost Dance. Among most tribes, the doctrine "remained one of peace, a simple hope that a change was coming which would give the Indians back their land, their buffalo and their old life" (Lesser 1978:59). However, state repression of the Ghost Dance inspired a Sioux rebellion in the Dakotas, where some Sioux sought to flee army forts and reservations in order to live again on the plains. US efforts to contain the Lakota led tragically to the 7th Cavalry's massacre of them during a dance at Wounded Knee in 1890.

Word of the new world which Wovoka's visions revealed, along with the idea that the new world had no place for whites, traveled quickly. News of Wovoka's visions was spread through sign language between tribal groups speaking different languages, through letters in English written by young Native Americans educated in government schools, and through visits of tribal "delegates" via railway to inquire about the Ghost Dance among faraway groups. People revived the old customs, dances, songs, sodalities organized around hunting and war, bundles with ritual power, and games, which were revealed to them in their visions of the new world. The groups represented a movement revitalizing their social fabric—one damaged by colonization, conquest and ethnocide—and used indigenous networks and practices to diffuse information, without reliance on telephone or newspaper.

From the 1890s onward, agents and police sought to suppress the dances. One agent, for example, announced to Pawnee assembled for the Ghost Dance that the Dance would not be tolerated, that the Natives should be obedient, and return to their previously quiescent ways (Lesser 1978:65). However, when extinguished in one locale, dancing would occur elsewhere on tribal lands; its expressions were reticulate, segmented and ephemeral,

but grounded in the histories of groups and their locales. Eventually performances of the Ghost Dance became more secretive, unannounced, and unnamed. Still, there is evidence that, despite suppression, it lasted for at least two more decades into the 1920s. It may even still be discreetly performed in some powwows nowadays (Kracht 1992). After a long period of being underground, recent Native American prophecies have emerged with close affinities to the Ghost Dance and related movements (e.g. Sun Dance), and are possibly leading to new grounded utopian movements in the present (Johnson 1996; Morris and Wander 1990).

The Rastafari of Jamaica

Jamaica's Rastafari emerged in the early 1930s as small and decentralized, reticulate clusters associated with charismatic individuals (e.g., Barrett 1977; Chevannes 1994; Lewis 1993). They sought to make sense of the crowning of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia. Their movement "tendencies" were unmistakable at some points in time, invisible at others. As a movement, they appeared fragmented, dispersed, and perhaps even weak. Their ideology and discourse showed continuity with movements from late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jamaica (e.g., the Alexander Bedward and Marcus Garvey movements) in their focus on race and redemption (Price 2003). Consequently, identity, morality and the supernatural have been central concerns for them. The Rastafari, historically, have drawn upon a "Black moral economy," a racialized conception of what constitutes goodness and justice in ways of living and relating (Price 2001:87–94).

The Rastafari imagine a world free of oppression and oppressors, and treat the past, especially slavery and racialized injustice, as central to understanding the present and creating a more satisfying future. They express no desire to gain representation in parliament; they do not view the tools of government as the way to change society or their circumstances. A moral vision animates them: freedom from oppression and symbolic and literal pursuit of liberation, dignity, and justice. Ritual gathering focused on extinguishing evil, deep introspection and contemplation, spiritual discipline, discourses of communalism, and rejection of status quo trappings are primary tactics—not membership drives, fund raisers or analyses of political opportunities. The key resources involved are not buildings, elites and funds, but cultural resources and ideologies around which movement commitment is built. Direct action is a part of

the Rastafari repertoire, though mobilization is not always the result of strategic planning. Power, authority and control are dispersed; there is no central command, no single leader and no single position. The Rastafari want their own state (their “new society”), but none that currently exists, including the Ethiopian nation-state that they cherish. The Rastafari state will be a “theocratic government” guided by a constitution based on divine principles: a moral state. Though many Rastafari eschew politics, their practices make them political and people’s reactions to them are one way in which they are further politicized.

The case of the Rastafari suggests how those who belong to GUMs focused on pursuing their own agenda cannot completely avoid influencing and being influenced by the people who surround them (see, e.g., the concept of “alter versions of movement identities” in Holland et al. [2008, this issue]). The Rastafari have made a deep and lasting impression upon Jamaica. The Rastafari, and GUMs in general, are exemplars of prefigurative movement practices. Not only do the Rastafari try to enact the world that they imagine, groups like them can be politically effective and revolutionary through acts of “engaged withdrawal” without toppling states or attacking market institutions (see Graeber 2004:60–61).

Long-Durée Maya Activism

Many accounts locate the emergence of Guatemala’s “Maya Movement” in the 1980s. During this period schooled Mayas stepped outside the left-right political struggles that had dominated that country during its civil war and formed organizations that promoted indigenous culture, identity and languages in a way that fostered sociopolitical reform. Crucial to the Maya Movement of the last few decades has been the idea of a pan-Maya identity defined according to a phylolinguistic model originally developed by ethnologists. Social scientists have emphasized the importance of the Maya movement organizations and urban-schooled activist-intellectuals (e.g., Bastos and Camus 1995, 1996; Fischer and Brown 1996; Flores Alvarado 1993; Gálvez Borrell et al. 1997; Warren 1998). Contemporary Maya activism has been variously portrayed as a new social movement, an identity movement, a civil rights struggle, and most generally, as a “revitalization movement.”

Yet ask contemporary Maya activists when the Maya Movement began, and many answer that it began in 1492. For many Mayas, cultural activism in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States since the 1980s is only the

“Maya Movement of today,” the most recent phase of a centuries-long struggle for autonomy and cultural survival (Esquit Choy and Gálvez Borrell 1998; Raxche 1989; Waq’ Q’anil 1997). Ask who is the prototypical Maya activist, and Mayas refer to ancestors who deliberately kept speaking their languages, weaving their own clothes, cultivating maize, and praying at sacred sites in the face of biocultural trauma, colonialism and continuing political domination. Rhetoric focused on the year of Columbus’ arrival in the Americas encourages Mayas to not only value persistent struggle, but also to link Maya activism to resistance by indigenous groups throughout the Americas. The year 1492 marks the start of protracted, internally-oriented Native struggles to rearticulate Native cultures in response to the intrusions of Europeans and Euro-Americans. Though many indigenous people may only have begun to self-identify as “Mayas” and acknowledge the importance of 1492 as a political symbol because of international protests against the 1992 quincentenary celebrations, we should not conflate the anti-quincentenary upsurge with the birth of the movement. We caution against any foreshortened ahistorical perspective that does violence to the temporalities of the Maya movement or other GUMs. Jakaltek Maya anthropologist Victor Montejo warns, “We cannot forget those Maya who patiently work in their communities, telling stories and promoting the values of their cultures so that young Maya learn more about their histories and strengthen their identities” (Montejo 2005:xvii).

Mayas’ understanding of their movement does not fit dominant movement models because Mayas not only adopt a longer time frame, but also envision their movement’s structure differently. Like the “articulatory movement” that encompassed the contemporary Native “scene” in North America according to Lurie (1988), the Maya Movement has generally been acephalous. Though ephemeral charismatic leaders have emerged during periods of movement coalescence, institutionalized leadership has yet to emerge, even in recent decades, as formal movement organizations with their own charismatic leaders and spokespeople have proliferated. This structure recalls how Gerlach and Hine (1970) characterized the decentralization of the Black Power Movement: the lack of institutionalized leadership and a proliferation of leaders may actually be a source of vitality (Gerlach and Hine 1970), or a source of heterarchic order (Crumley 2003).

While at times confrontational, most Maya activism is oriented inward toward maintaining the resilience of Maya culture and community. Maya activism has changed form repeatedly over the centuries but has always

featured grassroots networking and a segmentary mobilization structure. Everyday efforts to secure lifeways are punctuated intermittently by charismatic leaders, violent rebellions, and messianism. Consistent with our formulation of GUMs, the lengthy history of people reacting to colonization is not merely the “background” or “framing” of a modern social movement. Such a “collective enterprise of survival” (Farriss 1984) is a long-term movement in itself.

Grounded Utopian Movement and Marginalized Places, Paradigms and Methods

The foregoing examples of grounded utopian movements have much to tell us about the social science of social movement studies. By reflecting on what we can learn from GUMs like the foregoing, we believe it is possible to make theoretical, epistemological and methodological advances in the comparative study of social movements. To start with, a disciplinary division of labor (Edelman 2001; McAdam et al. 2001) and affiliated paradigmatic and theoretical approaches explain partially why some movements get more attention than others, why some movement practices are naturalized and exalted, while others are disparaged or problematized. The unevenness in the assessment of movements through time and across space hints at a persistent ethnocentrism reflected in how researchers continue to conceive of institutions and civil society in Eurocentric terms. This is not an admonition but an observation on the scarcity of cross-cultural analysis of social movements and the preponderant attention paid to (North and Latin) Americans and Europeans. For instance, think of how infrequently political theorists look to nonwestern societies for models of democracy, despite its indigenous equivalent among many such societies (Graeber 2004:88).

The division of labor within the study of social movements deserves attention since it implies that different research practices and modes of theory construction compartmentalize social movements research. Grounded utopian movements of the periphery have especially been the focus of anthropologists (e.g., Aberle 1962; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Harkin 2004; Linton 1943; Mair 1958; Voget 1959; Wallace 1956, 1970; Worsley 1968), although sociologists, historians and others studied these movements through the 1970s (e.g., Barber 1941; Cohn 1970; Lanternari 1963; Thrupp 1962; Wilson 1973). The interdisciplinary cross-fertilization of

movement studies continued into the early 1970s, as exhibited in the work of Gerlach and Hine (1970). However, since the 1970s, North American sociological attention became more focused theoretically on the nation-state-as-container of social movement activity, on big movements seeking institutional reform, and on rationalist and structuralist modes of inquiry. While European sociological analysis has critiqued the state, class and market-centric orientations, it has not abandoned completely the state or market in its "new" emphasis on globalization, information, and postindustrialism.

The contributions of anthropologists may have become marginal within post-1970s social movement studies in part because of their approach: they treated social movement practices in the peripheries as legitimate, focused on "exotic" groups, privileged interpretive research methods over positivist ones, and focused on people's subjectivities. Anthropologists described GUMs as "cults," or as "millenarian" and "messianic" "revitalizations" of culture, while scholars in other disciplines considered them antiquated, deviant or abnormal, in contrast to movements the latter described in terms of resources, structures, rational choice and postmodernism.

From its institutional inception, anthropology did not seek to understand collective behavior, crowds or fads in urban, industrialized nation states, but instead attempted to make sense of resistance, resilience and rebellion by movements in areas peripheral to capitalist development and industrial nation states.⁵ Generally speaking, anthropologists, often with the support of colonial administrations, were likely to be studying colonial and peripheral movements, consisting of people who had been conquered or colonized.

Many of the movements studied by anthropologists expressed some combination of prophecy and eschatology (Nicholas 1973). Such movements tended to focus on reviving or maintaining their perceived older lifeways and autonomy. As noted above, social movement theory, though, has until recently privileged the proactive and instrumental movement focused on changing politico-economic institutions (Foweraker 1995), consigning others to the dustbin of neglect. Embedded in some social movement analyses is the assumption that somewhere in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, a transition occurred when movements shifted from "communal and reactive struggles to national and proactive" struggles (Foweraker 1995:14). A corollary of this assumption is that "archaic" movements are unimportant or have disappeared.⁶ However, the view of expressive and defensive movement behavior as passé, passive, ineffective and apolitical is

changing (e.g., Graeber 2004; Jasper 1997; Polletta 2002), as movement theorists more closely examine culture, motivation, emotions, and personal experience as these relate to movement dynamics, and recognize how movements relate to the past in complex ways. Social movement theorists are just now addressing what studies of GUMs of the periphery have long shown: movements represent innovative experiments with new ideas, reworked values, and different social relationships and result in the emergence of new social groups (e.g., Burrige 1969; Gerlach and Hine 1970; Lanternari 1963; Lawrence 1987; Wallace 1956). Thus, until recently, focus on “big,” instrumental and proactive North American and European movements neglected indigenous networks organized around kin, identity, religion, cultural practices or the supernatural, as legitimate elements of civil society.

In the academic division of social movements studies, anthropologists have utilized the research methods and strategies that characterize their discipline. Some of these approaches, such as those that focus on meaning-making and lived experience, can further enrich the study and theorizing of social movements. Anthropological research practices involve “being there,” experiencing and intervening in the phenomena being studied through participant observation and extended field research projects. The anthropological ideal is to understand how people organize their social and cognitive worlds, in their own terms, and to not conflate anthropological categories with those that the “other” uses to make sense of her world. This is the emic perspective. Anthropologists have taken seriously protestors’ beliefs, which is what Kurzman proposes for contemporary social movement theorizing (2004:115). Anthropologists, who focused on culture, which they analyzed holistically (e.g., Edward Tylor’s view of culture as a “complex whole”) and as situated in places, were less concerned than other social scientists in separating movement politics, identity and practice from other phenomena such as kinship and beliefs about the supernatural. It remains difficult for Americans and Europeans to accept that “There are some...cultural systems that define politics in a seemingly odd way or do not include a political domain even though we can find forms of action in the corresponding societies that strongly resemble what we, from our peculiar cultural perspective, call ‘politics’” (Nicholas 1973:65).

A sophisticated emic approach is not the same as merely describing how people see and interpret their social worlds, although it needs to begin with such description. This approach also seeks to understand the contentions and debates among the people studied and their own attempts to make

sense of and to analyze their own circumstances in conditions of danger, uncertainty and risk, without impugning their rationality or evolutionary status (Fabian 1983). Such an approach also acknowledges frankly that the capacity to form social science knowledge about relatively powerless groups has its own responsibilities, the highest of which is to acknowledge the limitations of social scientists in representing these groups—who can best represent themselves—and to seek to meet the obligation to engage in critical analysis of the world that has both made them relatively powerless and created the apparatus of scholarship that makes their study possible.

Anthropological research has frequently involved problem formulation in ways usually but not uniquely different from other disciplines, e.g., we acknowledge sociology's longstanding field and qualitative research tradition. The emic perspective, ethnography, analytic induction, a focus on lived experience, and finding the research problem in the field as well as in the literature, create a situation whereby a research problem itself has to be recognized as unstable due to potential contention related to types of data and the nature of interpretation. Nicholas noted more than thirty years ago that movements that anthropologists study were a bundle of contradictions: "unstable," "evanescent," and potentially "disruptive" (1973:64), and not all social science data collection methods are amenable to grasping these complexities (see Klandermans & Staggenborg [2002] for discussions of research methods and social movement study). An anthropologist may enter the field seeking to explore a particular problem, but find that she has to change her original conception based on what people are doing and saying, and Lichterman (2002) has made similar suggestions for participant observation studies of movements. This need to be flexible and open-ended challenges the view that research is an orderly, tidy and linear process that follows a set sequence of practices. Approaches to studying movements that emphasize rationality, objectivity, control measures, causality, and reduction of social behavior to discrete containers such as economy, politics and religion, ignore or misperceive the fluid substance and interlinkages of social life that constitute movements.

GUMs of the periphery frequently display characteristics that are fluid, polycentric, segmented and culturally embedded, to list a few that pose challenges to conventional theory. Although the new social movement theorist Melucci (1994), for example, recognizes movements as polycentric, this is not applied beyond the usual movement suspects: civil rights, women, youth, environmental, animal rights and sexuality-oriented movements.

Imagine however, how social movement theorizing might benefit from lessons learned from GUMs of the periphery, such as those that have faced imperial and racist oppressions, but have built upon and reworked cultural resources that have existed for several generations or longer.

It is crucial to recognize that while members of GUMs have sought to create new social realities, officials of states have perceived them as being dangerous in their potential to disrupt arrangements favorable to elites and exploitation. British colonial authorities, for example, felt threatened by acephalous and polycephalous movements like the Rastafari because they could not be extinguished as easily as centralized ones. Nevertheless, the British were clever at disrupting such movements; for example, they began spying on Rastafari meetings within a couple of years of their emergence. In this respect, state officials have taken GUMs more seriously than mainstream social movement theorists.

Anthony Wallace's early (1956) analysis of revitalization movements identified internal processes within these movements that support people's efforts to create a more cognitively and emotionally satisfying culture, and the transformations in personal and group worldviews attendant to these efforts. Wallace's definition is compatible with our conception of GUMs since the members of all such movements, even movements we do not like, are primarily working to create a lifeworld they find more satisfying. Similarly, Hallowell (1943:240) argued that the study of movements focused on attaining a new dynamic equilibrium (e.g., after conquest, disasters, disease) and on cultural reclamation—what we call GUMs—could provide insights into problems of modern western societies, such as the example of the damage wrought by the Nazi movement in Germany to democratic societies and their values.

Although we appreciate Wallace's approach, we recognize its shortcomings as well, such as its organismic analogies and functionalist assumptions. We also recognize that anthropological studies of GUMs were often limited by the dominant thinking of their time. Analyses inspired by Marxism and dependency theory sometimes looked down on GUMs for lacking class consciousness or for privileging the supernatural. Approaches based on mainstream modernization theory sometimes suggested that GUMs were fated for extinction as soon as their societies reached a certain stage of development. Other models put emphasis on deprivation or poverty. Today, a possibly more satisfactory approach to the study of transformative processes within social movements would attend to the cultural

work of constructing individual and collective identities and how “we,” “you” and “they” are dialectically constructed.

Although anthropologists and the movements they have studied have at best had a minimal impact upon contemporary social movement theory, this may be changing. Since the 1990s there are emergent anthropological orientations toward speaking directly to the dominant social movement schools of thought (e.g., Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998; Edelman 2001; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Nash 2005).

Issues of Movement Structures and Orientation

The structure and orientation of GUMs of the periphery offer instructive lessons, some of which converge with what social movement analysts have posed from NSMs. Some GUMs may even seek to avoid classification as movements in order to “pass under the radar” of governments or other bureaucratic institutions. Participants may not even consider themselves participants in “social movements,” making it easy for both scholars and sociopolitical bodies to overlook the existence of GUMs or to ascribe an identity to a collectivity. For example, it was Jamaican elites who first identified the Rastafari as a “movement,” a label some Rastafari later adopted (Price n.d.). So, what are some of the lessons that can be drawn from an anthropological analysis of GUMs of the peripheries that are relevant to the study of movements in general? The following observations highlight inter-related structural, processual and orientational characteristics of GUMs.

GUMs should be understood relative to their own rationalities, often based in religious or non-Western cultural perspectives—rationalities which cannot be reduced to instrumental grievances against states or capitalist markets. Movements that have been characterized as expressive and defensive emphasize social and cultural survival and relationships. They may give importance to supernatural influences. Charismatic leaders may articulate a movement’s aims, but paradoxically, it is possible to find cases where leaders lack the authority to enforce their will. These beg for an emic understanding—a Weberian *Verstehen*—that is ideally gained through close study of the lived experience of members of the movements. Once we take an emic perspective, what looked like defensiveness may turn out to be proactivity; expressiveness may eclipse instrumentality.

GUMs seek to restore or create alternative realities distinct from existing states and markets. Empire-building, colonization, oppression, and segre-

gation create situations in which movements emerge around reclaiming past heritage and statuses and imagining utopian futures. Too often, these movements have been marginalized and dismissed as archaic cults, a denial of their coevalness with modernist institutions (Fabian 1983).

GUMs make networking a primary concern. The Zapatistas, for example, consider segmentary networking along the traditional model of “bees” and “ants” to be an end in itself, noting that such organizing empowers communities. By performing countless minute tasks without detection, members of a community can accomplish great projects, such as the maintenance of community. An emphasis on networking is integral to any movement that seeks to promote group solidarity. Indeed, some GUMs are focused on supernatural relationships between humans and animals, spirits or nature, which also provide the basis for networks between people.

GUMs are constituted through segmentary-like mobilization, characterized by fission and fusion of sub-elements. Segmentary mobilization allows GUMs a potentially spontaneous and even amorphous structure that can make their movement character imperceptible. They do not require stable hierarchies but are “heterarchical” with many nodes of organized structure (Crumley 2003), where interests of allied segments situationally direct control.

Though segmentary organization is a characteristic feature of GUMs, it is not limited to them. Indeed, it is a common and well-described cross-cultural phenomenon. Moreover, segmentary structures are not precapitalist or premodern relics; they have coexisted and flourished with modernity and capitalism. Recent focus on modern technologies of travel and communication that some contemporary activists employ to organize collective action has brought renewed attention to such structures and networking, although such mobilization practices were actually described long ago by scholars. For example, examining what they called “movements of social transformation” such as the Pentecostal Movement and the Black Power Movement in the USA, Gerlach and Hine (1970) recognized virtues in decentralization, segmentation, and reticulation because these characteristics allowed for security, innovation and minimization of failure. Gerlach and Hine’s ideas are echoed in Melucci’s more recent description of the “segmented, reticular, and multi-faceted structure of movements” (1996:113). What may confuse some theorists is that segmentary organization need not involve hierarchical control or coordination, although at times there are nominal hierarchies. Instead, the latter mask heterarchical relations of

equity based on culturally-specific notions of close affinity that substitute for centralized, top-down mechanisms of control (Crumley 2003). This is why we disagree with McAdam when he decries these characteristics as a weakness because of a lack of “centralized direction” (1982:185). It is now clear that centralized organization and segmentation are divergent organizational forms that can function optimally in different situations.

The “swarming” behavior that Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1996) have described as a feature of the global social justice movement, guerrilla warfare, and modern protests has segmentary-like qualities. Nash, describing populist movements in post-1970 Mexico, notes that the segmentary nature of swarming challenges the fixation of mainstream western social theory on centralized formally organized social movements:

...it is almost impossible to conceptualize the fluid and often acephalous organization of *campesino* mobilizations. Self-designated names for the resistance groups and settlements, such as “Abejas” (Bees), “Hormiga” (Ants), and “Kiptik ta Lecubtesal” (United by Our Strength), give us clues to the collective base of their organizational practices (Nash 2001:173).

Though scholars have long debated the importance of leadership for peasant movements, the persistent deference of the Zapatistas’ charismatic spokesperson, Sub-comandante Marcos to the collective will of indigenous Maya communities redirects attention to the more *collective* aspect of movement action, including the hybrid participatory-democratic decision-making of the Zapatistas’ regional consulates or *caracoles*, “snails” (cf. Caracoles 2003; Earle and Simonelli 2004).

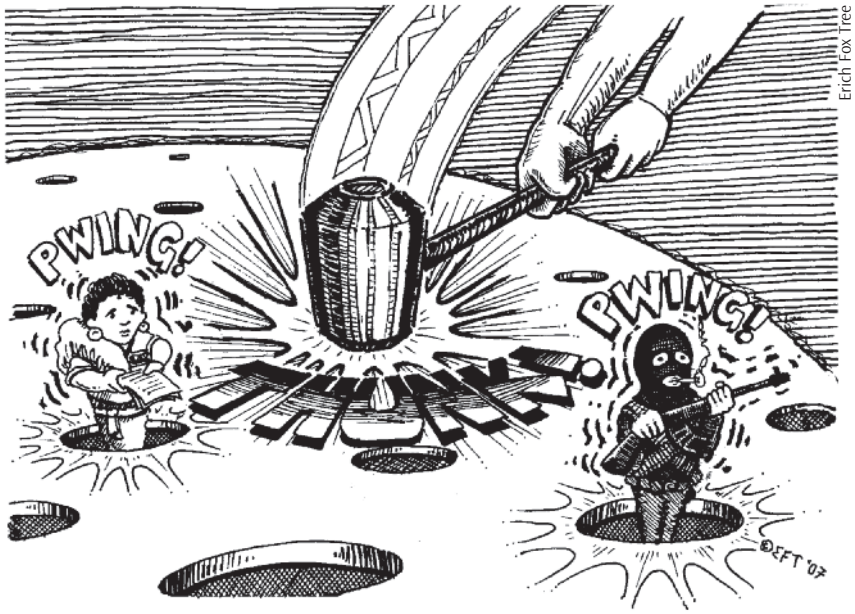
The segmentary nature of GUMs and their orientation toward networking can make them almost imperceptible as movements. GUMs may be acephalous or polycephalous, dispersed or concentrated. Being loosely structured and without formal leadership structures has some strategic advantages, especially since it is difficult to destroy a movement if its leaders are many and interchangeable. Such characteristics help explain how the British and Jamaican elites were unable to wipe out the Rastafari by imprisoning their leaders and dispersing their communities (Price n.d.). GUMs’ composition, operation, and objectives may not even require a leader—at least not a permanent one—especially when members emphasize cultural change through personal conversion and re-align-

ment. Charismatic leaders, such as those featured in Wallace's classic formulation of "revitalization movements" (1956, 1970), may emerge, but neither their leadership nor their example are requirements of GUMs.

A related capacity of GUMs is to be able to flexibly and rapidly reorganize, providing them with greater long-term survival potential. Because of their situational segmentation and shifting scale, GUMs may appear ephemeral because they only intermittently coalesce in a visible way. The temporary scale and reach of GUMs observed by ethnographers should not be identified with phases of a movement's life cycle or treated as measures of its vitality and success. Short of an adequate historical analysis, their being small and localized does not imply recent birth, lack of strength, or imminent demise. Focus on the moments of movement coalescence occludes ongoing movement activity, and the larger structure of reticulated movement networks (cf. Melucci 1996).

Grounded utopian movements may have short-lived manifestations; they may dissipate only to later emerge again, perhaps in a different place or in a different guise. Short-lived movements, in such cases, are only a part of a larger process of movement formation and mobilization that escapes observers. For example, Linebaugh and Rediker (1990) have described Britain's frustrating inability to prevent labor and slave rebellions and movements from repeatedly re-emerging in different sites, even under the pressure of brutal state repression. British colonial administrators and soldiers referred to these uprisings as "the Many-Headed Hydra," but British encounters with such recalcitrant and rebellious subjects could better be described as a deadly game of imperial Whack-a-Mole. Our point is that GUMs show similar capacities, within limits, to reorganize so as to be refractory to the repressions of modern imperial systems of control. Contemporary GUMs, moreover, have been able to amplify their flexible capacities through the new proxy technologies of communication and mobility associated with globalization. The global justice movement discussed below represents just one such GUM today, while Al Qa'ida, with an entirely different ethical code and utopian vision, represents another.

Small size at some points in its history offers other advantages to a movement. Scaling-up risks violent suppression by governments that cannot tolerate looming alternative realities within their boundaries. A conventional "critical mass" approach, whereby scholars decide to recognize movements as such only at the moment that they are large enough to



A deadly game of Imperial Wack-a-Mole.

arouse the attention of authorities, serves primarily to identify social movements that run the greatest risk of being challenged, rather than social movements more generally.

GUMs may be here today and gone tomorrow, only to return another day. When a particular GUM is not visibly active, it may be going through a period of quiet self-maintenance, or it may have in fact disintegrated as a movement. Only careful diachronic investigation can ascertain which. Long struggles for autonomy by dominated groups (such as indigenous peoples) require virtually invisible and indistinguishable everyday forms of cultural activity: speaking one's own language, eating traditional foods, or performing customary labor. Such deliberate but unorganized cultivation of one's culture becomes visible only during brief moments of outward confrontation, and is otherwise non-confrontational. Consider, for example, how the U.S. Civil Rights movement of the 1960s was a continuation of a long episodic struggle of Black people for rights, relative autonomy, and power, stretching back for decades and even centuries preceding the famous collective actions of the mid-twentieth century (e.g., McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Payne 1995).

GUMs Go Global: The Global Social Justice Movement

In this section, we suggest the applicability of our approach to current conditions by examining the global social justice movement as an example of a contemporary GUM. Like the Ghost Dance, Rastafari and Maya movements, it is animated by moral and spiritual values grounded in overlapping but not identical visions of an emergent transnational and translocal community. Its rubric is “another world is possible.” These visions are grounded in histories of the past and past struggles and future possibilities; in specific “ideal places” that members hold to be central to their identities; and in specific human (and even biotic) communities to which their members belong. That the grounding takes place simultaneously in these three ways provides a common reference point for members, despite acknowledged differences among them. Notions of “sustainability,” “livelihood” and “dignity” provide the themes of a shared discourse. The global social justice movement shows a dispersed, decentralized and acephalous organization which can rapidly shift and re-form at multiple scales. It has decentralized and charismatic leaders who refuse to identify themselves as leaders, like Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas, while some intellectuals in the movement such as Vandana Shiva and Walden Bello are revered, perhaps uncritically, by participants, and appear to external observers to be leaders, but are not.

The global social justice movement has a heterogeneous cross-class, multiethnic and multiracial membership that hints at its potential to bridge differences of ideology and politics. What may confound many observers and obscure their seeing its grounded utopian features are its multiple global locations and its technologies of the internet, cellular phones and jet travel. However, far from subscribing to the instrumental rationality of capitalism and modern nation-states that privileges technology in order to transform the world, commoditize new parts of it, and rule over it, members of the global social justice movement employ these technologies to transform themselves—to order, re-order, assemble and re-assemble, their own forms of networked organization in struggle (Juris 2004). Affinity groups allow members to develop close solidarities among a limited number, typically ten to fifteen people who work together over a period of time but shift priorities depending on the tactics at hand (Notes from Nowhere 2003). Although networks link affinity groups and individuals within and across larger organizations, these constitute parts of the global social justice movement, not the whole. These network practices

require cultural work, and the communication allowed by cell phones, email and internet, and frequent air travel makes rapid cultural work feasible (Juris 2004). Such cultural work takes place when morally grounded messages and stories about both “actions” and everyday life link individuals, groups and networks within the movement to one another. The technologies used are merely subordinate to these narratives.

The “swarming” of members into sudden gatherings followed by dispersal and reassembly noted above for the Zapatistas (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1996) has become more generalized for the global social justice movement (Notes from Nowhere 2003). It thus becomes possible for *local* groups to ally with others via *trans-local* networks to form large assemblages engaged in solidarity-building and protests focused on specific *local* sites where the rites of neoliberal globalization are performed (e.g., Seattle, Genoa, Davos, Cancun). Observers of the global social justice movement may also be confounded by the fact that despite its similarities to GUMs of the periphery, unlike them the global social justice movement explicitly targets states, corporations and multilateral institutions. However, the objective is to transcend individual states and their markets. Participants in these movements do not seek incorporation into the contemporary state system or into contemporary capitalism, but instead seek to disrupt or interrupt the incursions of both into the lifeworld of the communities to which they belong and with which they identify. This may sound paradoxical in that many participants in the global justice movement have intimate experiences of living with—and living within—the institutions of capitalism and contemporary nation-states, and are adept in understanding the *modus operandi* of these institutions. Yet, like followers of the Ghost Dance, the Rastafari and Maya, they are repelled by their contact with and even aware of their prior cooptation by these institutions. They thus refute theorists such as Hardt and Negri (2000) who argue that there is “no outside,” but neglect the processes through which new values and interests come out of contingent struggles, and do not exist prior to engaging in them.

Movement members enact daily practices of identity reformation created through solidarity with others very different from themselves, to whom they are allied by overlapping visions of other more satisfying ways of life and ideal places. Notes from Nowhere (2003:66–68) observes that this “movement of movements” shows the major features of complex, emergent, self-descriptive systems—what complexity theorists call “distributed intelligence” leading to “nearest neighbor”-based activities. Self-

organizing human systems are capable of rapid and unpredictable emergent behaviors—manifestations and mobilizations—based on their self-descriptions (Diener, Nonini and Robkin 1980).

Are GUMs, like the global social justice movement, to be regarded as a recursion during this period of late capitalism to an earlier period, like that of European colonial expansion? Or should they be viewed as a Hegelian transcendence of the secular, expanding, rationalizing social movements oriented to modern capitalism and modern nation-states favored until recently for study in the social movements literature? To suggest an answer, we return to our contention that, contrary to globalization rhetoric, the contemporary period is certainly not one of the “disappearance” of states but rather of their active recomposition in the direction of oligarchic and corporate states whose leaders increasingly see major sectors of their citizenries as dispensable (Kapferer 2005). On one hand, the restructuring of contemporary states in the global South and global North alike has brought on profound economic insecurity, militarization, constraints on civil and political rights and gross social inequalities for the large numbers of people who are not elites or sympathetic to elite agendas. On the other hand, the processes of neoliberal globalization have brought in the trail of their operation new forms of global consciousness, organizations, technologies, learning practices, narratives and experiences of transnationality to people like those who see themselves belonging to the global social justice movement.

In a self-reflexive era of globalization, is it surprising that the very ideas of contemporary states and capitalist markets and their capacities for solving the problems of daily life have become so problematic? There is no single outcome to how these processes will be read by suffering populations and by intellectuals who interpret to them their worlds—there are in fact many possible outcomes in terms of mobilized social movements. Some movements reject the risks and insecurities of globalization and aspire to the fixities of ethno-national fascism, xenophobia, fundamentalist religion and patriarchy, while others like the global social justice movement seek transnational transformations within a broader definition of a global human community. Other movements promote transnational solidarities based on exclusivist and irredentist religious or ethno-racial identities focused on homelands. Whatever the outcome, social movements like the global social justice movement show the characteristics of grounded utopian movements—their members are seeking “ideal places,” looking for new

kinds of communities and leaders, repudiating and challenging dominant definitions of what states mean to citizens and of what markets mean to those who depend on them for survival, and exhibiting flexibly shifting networks that respond to state repression while doing the cultural work of maintaining communities. It is an unsettling period of danger—one for which we already see evidence of the emergence of GUMs which have been the focus of this article. We predict their future importance in the chaotic conditions unfolding in the twenty-first century.

The global social justice movement is a movement “without guarantees,” in Stuart Hall’s words. But its resilience and flexibility as a grounded utopian movement are, we believe, a source of strength in this particular conjuncture.

Conclusion

Movements that focus on social, cultural and physical survival, identity formation, cultural and lifeworld regeneration, that are embedded within social forms different from Eurocentric conceptions of civil society, and that engage the supernatural, are not as different from the movements of mainstream social movement theory study as we might imagine. Acephalous pods that segment and recombine, that are here one moment and there the next, that are ephemeral and yet embedded in places, could describe many movements other than the Ghost Dance movement, Guatemalan Maya, Rastafari and the global justice movement. The power of charismatic prophet-like leaders and the supernatural visions of a satisfying collective past or apocalyptic future which motivate and galvanize grassroots members of America’s powerful religious right or Al-Qa’ida cannot be denied, just as they cannot be for the Ghost Dance or the Rastafari.

We call for incorporation of cross-cultural lived experience and emic perspectives gained through ethnographic and historical accounts into social movement theorizing. We suggest focusing on the “ideal places” that movements are seeking in the face of oppression, and on the ways in which they pursue them. We recognize that some sociologists, historians and anthropologists are moving in this direction, and we are inspired by their work and hope they continue to move in these directions. As a result we will better grasp social movement phenomena across time and space, and develop analyses of more significant theoretical and political value, and that will help movements themselves more rightly locate their practice and place

among all of the movements before them that have searched for a more satisfying world. After all, GUMs have been saying for centuries that a “better world is possible,” and that they will make it now, not later.

ENDNOTES

¹We are grateful to Michal Osterweil for providing us with valuable insights into the global social justice movement, to Erik Reavely for his research assistance in thematic searches of the journal *Mobilization*, and to David Hess and two anonymous referees of *Anthropological Quarterly* for offering critical and thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

²We searched the titles, keywords or descriptors, abstracts and references cited for all articles in *Mobilization* over this period. *Mobilization* does have eight references to religious movements.

³The subset “GUMs of the periphery” is an analytic device reflecting the academic division of labor in studying movements, not a claim that they are de facto empirically distinctive among all GUMs.

⁴Sources used for this description of the Ghost Dance movement are the classic publications of Lesser ([1933] 1978) and Mooney ([1896] 1965), and the more recent work of DeMallie (1982), Kehoe (2006), Kracht (1992), Martin (1991), Morris and Wander (1990) and Thornton (1993).

⁵However, peripheral areas are important in terms of supplying natural resources and human labor.

⁶The contribution of Marxists to this ethnocentric reasoning should not be overlooked, although this view is clearly a part of mainstream linear, progressivist conceptions of modernity more widely.

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