

PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS A COLLABORATION between a European political scientist and an American anthropologist. Despite our different disciplinary backgrounds, each of us has a strong interest in the culture, history, psychology, and structure of social movements and political organizations. Zúquete has written about the “missionary politics” of populist movements and issues of identity and culture in contemporary times; Lindholm has written about charisma and authenticity and has made cross-national studies of power and compliance. In conversations about our own work, we realized that although the world-saving groups we were studying often present themselves as totally opposed to one another, they seem to share a great deal, structurally, ideologically, and experientially. These similarities were ignored by most studies, so we decided to explore them. The resulting text is a truly cooperative endeavor. Each of the authors has substantially contributed to every chapter, and we have shared the burdens and pleasures of reading, commenting, and editing through many drafts. At times the labor did feel of worldwide proportions due to the abundance and enormous variety of material and sources at hand. “Yours in struggle!” soon became a common way of ending our many e-mail exchanges. Maybe the reader will appreciate the irony. We certainly do.

While the book was written, the world, at least according to the media, seemed to be on the verge of an abyss. Dark predictions about the future loomed everywhere. It looked as though the lonely bearded man standing on the corner of the street holding a sign proclaiming the imminent end of the world was right after all. Prophecies of disaster, of course, are as old as humankind.

But the beginning of the twenty-first century seemed especially prone to dismal predictions about the environment, the global economy, or the explosion of religious and ethnic conflicts. It was as if the “struggle for the world” was the struggle to redeem a world that was already ruined. The book is our reflection on and analysis of these fears and anxieties, which, although specific to the era, are universal in their implications. Our aim is to shed light on the ways in which people imagine salvation from the ills of today and pursue a better world in the future.

In order to give credit to the actors’ own understandings and experiences, we have used the methodology of “archival anthropology.” Most of our data come directly from the ways the groups portray themselves in their internal communiqués, their propaganda, their statements of purpose, and other public presentations and performances. We have also used member’s personal accounts, and we have referred as well to commentaries from writers who have had firsthand experience of the particular movement. Whenever possible, we have read these texts and accounts in their original languages (English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish).

From our analysis of a wide variety of concrete cases, we reveal the fundamental similarities existing among movements that look very different on the surface. Our intent is to take an initial, but essential, step to a comprehensive and realistic understanding of the political and spiritual climate of our times. At the end of our project, after identifying the shared features, dynamics, and goals of utopian resistance to globalization, we summarize our findings, consider why these commonalities exist, and interpret their implications.

Our task in this book is not to judge the validity or morality of any of the antiglobalization movements that we discuss. Although we do not see ourselves as detached observers standing on Olympian heights, for the most part we have foresworn enthusiastic endorsements as well as expressions of skepticism or scorn. Our goal has simply been to illustrate, contextualize, compare, and make some sense of some of the most powerful alternatives to globalization. Whether readers like the destination, we hope they will still enjoy the ride.

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