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Erin Kania
Roger Williams University

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The American Militia Movement in the Age of Globalization
Erin Kania, History and Anthropology/Sociology '05

The relatively recent expansion of a global consciousness in the United States has caused many citizens to question how they fit into the emerging international world and to recognize that their conceptions of identity must be redefined. The United States has always prided itself on such characterizing features as guaranteed personal freedoms and liberties, individualism, independence, and democracy. Each American, theoretically, has equal representation in the government and an equal ability to voice dissatisfaction with the choices and decisions of their policymakers. The current trend of globalization, led largely by a rise in technological advances and increased accessibility of communication between countries, is beginning to influence the major social institutions that are present within American society. The traditional systems of the family, economy, education, law and politics, and the religious communities are being forced to implement new strategies and identities based on the adoption of globalization.

There has been much literature published by economists, political scientists, and sociologists on the theory of a new world order. Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004) describes the world order as "...a system of global governance that institutionalizes cooperation and sufficiently contains conflict such that all nations... may achieve greater peace and prosperity, improve their stewardship of the earth, and reach minimum standards of human dignity" (p. 15). The author suggests that this type of authority would allow leaders to share information and resolve borderless conflicts at a much faster pace, without the official bureaucratic formalities that are currently encountered. The 2002 report from the International Forum on Globalization includes the position that "The proper role of global institutions is to facilitate the cooperative coordination of national policies on matters where the interests of nations are inherently intertwined" (Lechner et al., 2004, p. 440). The Forum understands that many supporters of an increased globalization process view a new world order as a positive outcome.

While many individuals may fail to recognize how the new global society directly affects their everyday lives, there is a growing population within America strongly opposed to the developing ties between the United States and other countries. Anti-globalization movements and grassroots organizations in this country, varying in levels of position and approach, have experienced a surge in membership since the late 1980s. Participants in these movements are attempting to resist the increased influence of globalizing policies and relationships. The American Militia Movement, also known as the "Patriot Movement," may be the most radical example of American citizens that oppose globalization and the embracing of a new world identity.

The American Militia Movement is categorized as an extreme right-wing social and political movement. According to Captain Robert L. Snow (1999), "Militias are groups of individuals who have formed in paramilitary organizations that stockpile and carry assault-type weapons, wear military uniforms, practice military maneuvers, and yet are not part of the military" (p.14-15). An outsider coming into contact with one of these militia organizations during training could easily mistake what he/she views as part of a vigorous, physical combat drill being completed by the United States Army. As mentioned above, however, these militia groups are not sanctioned or recognized as legitimate by America's political, legal, or military institutions. In fact, the government and its officials are the primary enemy of Militia members. Sociologist Manuel Castells (2005) explains that for the militia movement the federal government is the representative of the "New World Order," which is being applied without the consent of the American citizens (p. 89). This globalization is "...aimed at destroying American sovereignty..." and "...is enacted by a conspiracy of global financial interests and global bureaucrats that have captured the U.S. federal government" (p. 89).

A comprehensive study of the American Militia Movement would have been extremely difficult to conduct prior to the early 1990s. People who would eventually emerge as prominent and noteworthy advocates of the Militia's platform were either members of other right-wing movements or had not yet publicly formed this identity. It was due to two nationally reported events, beginning in 1992, that many citizens came to realize that they shared similar philosophies concerning their identity. Many also held a common fear that the current situation of the country was threatening to strip this identity away and replace it with an internationalized identity.
The first occurrence was in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, in 1992. Randy Weaver was scheduled to appear in court on charges of selling weapons to an informant of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. It was under the guise of this charge that officials hoped to find evidence to support their suspicion that Weaver was involved with an extreme social movement that had been responsible for other illegal activities. Weaver never showed up for trial. Weaver took his family to a secluded cabin in Ruby Ridge and vowed that he would not surrender. The FBI surrounded the cabin, and a confrontation resulted in the death of Weaver's son, his wife, and a U.S. Deputy Marshal, as well as the injury of Weaver. It was only when the FBI allowed James Gritz, a former Vietnam War commander who had ties to right-wing movements, to meet with Weaver and conduct negotiations that Weaver finally surrendered to the FBI. During the meeting, Gritz presented Weaver with a letter from another right-wing organizer urging Weaver to yield to authorities, for the sake of shedding no more blood (Dees, 1996, pp. 11-29). Gritz's willingness to engage in negotiations, the letter received by Weaver, and the supporters protesting the actions taken by the FBI revealed that there was a considerable amount of people who sympathized with Randy Weaver and the incident at Ruby Ridge.

The second event occurred in 1993 at a compound outside of Waco, Texas. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms attempted a raid on David Koresh, the leader of a religious and militia cult known as the Branch Davidians. The initial raid was unsuccessful, due to the fact that Koresh had received prior notice of the agency's design. The attack resulted in the death of four government officials, five Branch Davidians, and Koresh's daughter. Additionally, sixteen government officials were wounded. The FBI then began negotiations with Koresh; the government hoped that he would now surrender himself. When the negotiations failed, the FBI launched another attack on the compound. This time a deadly fire started—varying stories exist as to whether this fire was an accident or a preconceived tactic employed by the government—and seventy-five of the Davidians were killed (Dees, 1996, pp. 71-79). Supporters of Koresh and the Davidians, many espousing Militia ideology by this point, were on site for the entire duration of the Waco incident to protest the measures employed by the federal government.

The Ruby Ridge and Waco confrontations drove some citizens to strengthen their belief that the government was overstepping the parameters of its authority. The individuals involved at Ruby Ridge and Waco were merely scapegoats. Some who heard of these incidents no longer trusted that the government's first priority was the American people and their liberties. The government did not want the voice of opposition to fog its attempt of executing the new world order. Because this view is one of the founding ideologies of the American Militia Movement, it makes sense that interest and membership in the movement would sharply increase following these standoffs between government and nonconformists.

Manuel Castells, in the second volume of his series The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, The Power of Identity, uses the "terms of Alain Touraine's classic typology that defines a social movement by three principles..." to describe and examine the social movements he presents to his audience (2005, p. 74). Following this method and investigating the identity, the adversary, and the societal goal associated with the history of the American Militia Movement, the group can be identified as a social movement (p. 74). The identity of a social movement, according to Castells, focuses on how the group defines what and who they are, with no emphasis on or reference made to the opinions formulated by individuals outside the boundaries of the group movement.

This essay, however, will include discussion on how both the members of the Militia identify themselves and how mainstream American society views those affiliated with the Movement. William Gamson and David Meyer (1996) state that social movements are "sustained and self-conscious challenge[s] to authorities or cultural codes by a field of actors...some of whom employ extranstitutional [sic] means of influence" (p. 283). Further description of the American Militia will reveal that the organization fits perfectly within the constructs of Gamson and Meyer's definition. Challenge to governmental authority is a primary strategy among the Militia members, and many of the individuals involved in the movement are not reluctant to use physical, violent, and martial force to combat their enemies and what they see as the creation of a new world order.

Since secrecy is a dominant characteristic for many of those associated with the Militia Movement, it is difficult for an exact number of members to be computed. Written records of membership, in many cases, simply do not exist. Figures suggest that there are approximately five million United States citizens who are either directly involved with, or are sympathizers of, the Militia Movement (Dees, 1996, p. 32). Under the umbrella of the 'American Militia Movement,' hundreds of individual groups exist. Attempts have been made by some leaders to organize these groups together, but, to date, this has, ironically, proven unsuccessful. The Internet, which in itself is a promoter of globalization, has been one of the most important factors in allowing the Militia groups to advance and advertise their ideologies and identity to increased numbers of citizens.

Statistics reveal that "Most of the people involved in militia movement are white, male, and politically and socially conservative" (Chermak, 2002, p. 30). While members of mainstream society often draw similarities between Militia members and white supremacists, the Klanwatch/Militia Task Force states that this is
simply not the case. Rather, it is because the majority of the Militias do not discriminate due to age, class, gender, and, sometimes, race that "...Patriots have been able to bridge minor ideological differences in favor of a broad unity on the anti-government agenda...". They have created the most inviting insurgent force in recent history, home to a wide variety of anti-government groups whose organizational roles may differ dramatically" (Castells, 2005, p. 93). Research by Sean P. O’Brien and Donald P. Haider-Markel also concludes that "...militias seek to recruit those with paramilitary experience or those who have access to weaponry" (O’Brien et al., 1998, p. 460). Their findings show that there exists a relatively high percentage of militia members who are veterans of the Vietnam and Gulf Wars. Many believe the current war in Iraq has links to the globalization process and the new world order. It will be interesting to see if significant numbers of soldiers involved in this conflict, upon returning home, migrate towards the philosophies of the American Militia Movement. The ease in which the Militia identity encompasses room for individuals from so many varying backgrounds and circumstances helps to keep the movement successful.

The second principle used by Castells and Touraine in defining a social movement is the adversary, which "...refers to the movement’s principal enemy, as explicitly identified by the movement" (Castells, 2005, p. 74). According to the American Militia Movement, as Lane Crothers (2002) succinctly puts it, "...the Enemy is the Shadow Government, also known as the New World Order, that is corruptly manipulating the institutions of American government and the media for selfish ends" (p. 226). There is a worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of American freedom. The definition given to the new world order by Militia members is incredibly different than the definition provided earlier in the paper. William Pierce, who is also affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan, defines this order thusly:

The New World Order is a utopian system in which the US economy...will be 'globalized'; the wage levels of all US and European workers will be brought down to those workers in the Third World; national boundaries will for all practical purposes cease to exist; an increased flow of Third World immigrants into the United States and Europe will have produced a non-White majority everywhere in the formerly White areas of the world; an elite consisting of international financiers, the masters of media, and the managers of multinational corporations will call the shots; and the United Nations peacekeeping forces will be used to keep anyone from opting out of the system. (Castells, 2005, p. 87)

It may be easy to understand why American citizens who see the above as the eventual implications of a new world system would be so ardently against the globalization of American society and institutions. The commonality among members of the Militia is found in their certainty that the federal government of the United States can no longer be trusted. It is feared that the government is not looking out for the safety and protection of its citizens, but is instead attempting to limit the rights and liberties that the Founding Fathers and the Constitution intended all individuals to possess. The Government is moving toward global policies while ignoring the voices of those citizens in opposition. An example, according to the Militia, of the government’s effort to limit resistance from Americans who do not want to conform to a system of the new world order is the continuous placement of bans on personal gun ownership. Members of the Militia Movement emphasize that the Second Amendment of the Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to possess guns. Lane Crothers states that in the eyes of the Militia, “There is, thus, no difference between guns, freedom and individual rights....” (2002, p. 228) To take away one’s gun is to take away one’s rights. It is these weapons, combined with the willingness of many of the Militia to use these weapons, which will protect citizens and society from an encroaching federal government and the imposition of a new global identity.

The final defining principle of a social movement is the societal goal which "...refers to the movement’s vision of the kind of social order, or social organization, it would wish to attain in the historical horizon of its collective action" (Castells, 2005, p. 74). The desire felt by a majority of those involved with the American Militia Movement is the return to the fundamental and traditional identities advocated by the original Constitution and Founding Fathers. More than ever, citizens of the Militia feel it is their duty to "...serve to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States" (Crothers, 2002, p. 227). Members expect that this defense will likely include the use of violence. If globalizing forces were to diminish, the United States would not have to rely so fervently on the Militia to protect the country from being overtaken by the new world order. This decrease in the globalization process would also lead to less corruption in the federal government. Kofi Annan states that, with globalization, “Even the strongest States look weak, to many of their citizens, because they seem unable to respond to the challenges of unemployment, deteriorating services, rising crime levels, and intrusive social change” (Lechner, 2004, p. 242). Before globalization was a
main concern, the government took a greater interest in fixing the problems found at ‘home.’ The American Militia Movement’s goal is to revert back to a time when globalization was not fully conceptualized.

The future of the American Militia Movement is difficult to predict in this age of globalization. This movement has the ability, through violence and destruction, the likes of which were realized during the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, to affect groups, individuals, and institutions throughout the country. While the federal government and the supporters of a new world order are the targeted enemies of the Militia, innocent members of society often become the victims of the fight. Another potential problem is the development of “splinter groups” or small groups of individuals who have broken apart from the main Militia groups “...because they are more difficult for law enforcement agencies to detect” (Pitcavage, 2001, p. 976). These splinter groups often believe that their former Militia groups had not been using enough force or physical action against the enemy. It is already complicated for federal authorities to identify individuals belonging to the large and more widely recognized Militia groups because of the secretiveness that envelops the social movement. Those involved in “splinter groups,” aware that there is such a minimum chance of being detected by officials, are able to plot, train, and execute against the enemy with little fear.

The Militia Movement may see increased membership in the coming years if multinational corporations and industries continue to move manufacturing from the United States to less developed countries. When economics, manufacturing, and the labor force are determined by global factors, the government is not working in the interest of its people. Laborers are losing wages and work to individuals in foreign countries. By continuing to conduct business with these multinational corporations and by allowing the importation of their goods at cheaper costs, the American government is sanctioning this piece of the new world order. If this continues, others may begin to see the federal government as the enemy. Those Americans no longer left with the security of employment may easily place blame on the boom of globalization (Castells, 2005, p. 100).

There is already legislation within many states that technically prohibits the organization of the paramilitary and Militia. The government seems so unconcerned with the threat of the Militia that these laws are rarely enforced (Dees, 1996, pp. 222-224). If, however, the power and strength of the Militia becomes a problem, the government can uphold these laws more strictly. More organizations, such as the KlanWatch, that monitor and detect the movements of the Militia can be set up. The only way in which the American Militia Movement can cause any effects in the global environment is if the United States government changes its current course and begins to react positively to the ideologies promoted by the Militia. The likelihood of this occurring, however, seems slim. While it seems that the presence of the American Militia Movement and its program of anti-globalization is not going to be eliminated from society in the near future, it also does not seem plausible that the social movement’s platform will be able to change the American direction towards a new world order and international connectedness.

References


