

# **We're Off to See the Wizard: Politics, Charisma, and Community Change**

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## **Abstract**

The phenomenon of the charismatic leader is explored from the perspectives of the circumstances that give rise to such a status and the significance of these statuses relative to the leader and the leader's followers. The Ghost Dancers of the Native American West and the Zomians of Southeast Asia are historical particulars that demonstrate the phenomena of societies under threat and the rise of charismatic leaders. The Descriptive concepts of World, World Reconstruction, Culture, Status and Status Assigner are the conceptual anchoring points for this discussion. This paper builds on earlier papers that elaborated the concepts of community, organization, institution, and culture as well as ones elaborating world reformulation. It concludes that a community, indeed a culture, seeks persons who reformulate the community's world to survive grave threats to its existence.

As Dorothy's house is set down "gently for a cyclone", she emerges to find herself in a totally new world of silver shod witches and adults no taller than she. The Good Witch of the North describes to her an uncivilized land still brimming with sorceresses, magicians, witches and wizards. And all Dorothy wants is to get back home. The great American fairy tale written early in the 20th century has been analyzed many times for its political metaphors and allegories (Littlefield, 1964; Barlow, 2003). This paper will utilize the fable of Oz as a starting point in understanding the phenomena of charismatic leaders and millenarian movements.

### **The Wizard of Oz**

Oz, the great and terrible, is Dorothy's hope to get back to the world she misses. He is rumored to be a good wizard and to grant wishes. He builds a modern city and has the people wear green tinted glasses in order that they see their world in a particular way. He arrived miraculously from the sky and was at once declared Wizard. Why wouldn't a lonely and lost girl put her hopes in such a great and powerful person?

Yet, he disappoints in one way and succeeds in another. As Oz famously states

after being revealed as merely a man behind the curtain,” Oh... I’m really a very good man, but I’m a very bad wizard...” (Baum, 1900, p. 201). Dorothy and her pals are not merely disappointed but angered by his failure to be the all powerful savior they once envisioned and believed they experienced. Yet he does confer on the Scarecrow intelligence, the Tin Man sensitivity, and the Lion courage. Descriptive Psychologists recognize his wizardry as effective status assigning and the results as world changing (Putman, 2010).

There is no dearth of literature on charismatic leaders. The word “charisma” originally designated religious leaders, those “touched by god” or given a special gift to usher in a new world (Rapoport, 1979). Later Max Weber, the German political philosopher, discussed charismatic leadership as one particular form of three major categories of political leaders (charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational) and described it as marked by “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities”(Schweitzer, 1974, p. 151).

Historically, charismatic leaders have been associated with political or cultural movements known as millenarian (Hobsbawm, 1965; Huggins, 1987; Scott, 2009). These movements usually consist of dispossessed, powerless people and generally involve an anarchist approach to the problematic conditions of the population. The leader(s) and followers call for a radical reconstruction of the political community if not the whole culture. These movements may end badly, as charismatic leaders tend to be long on rhetoric and short on effective political or military power. But images of a new world are invoked in which the peasants seek salvation and equality, and may even reverse their fortunes and become the leaders and rulers of those who have oppressed the masses. Scott (2009) commented that as irrational as these movements may sound to outsiders, the very belief in this new world could spur action, protest, and revolt.

This paper will present some paradigm case millenarian movements and the charismatic figures arising within these movements. The connection between the conditions accompanying these movements and the rise of this type of leader will be discussed by utilizing the concepts of culture, world, status, status assigner, and the particular statuses of actor, observer, and critic.

### **Charisma and Millenarian Movements**

In Western culture, the religious themes of salvation, of the coming of a messiah or a messianic age, are familiar. Secular thinkers may dismiss much of this as a convenient mythology for some and outright deception for others. Indeed, many historians have wrestled with the “emotional or irrational appeal” of charisma and how to make sense of the phenomenon. Huggins (1987) observed that rationalist scholars struggle with explaining a phenomenon dependent on the emotional and spiritual state of the person. Significantly, these charismatic leaders and millenarian movements have arisen throughout history and have not been dependent on Judeo-Christian theology or imagery to envision saviors (Pereira de Queiroz, 1965; McCann, 1966; Scott, 2009).

Although American political culture debates the separation of the political from the religious, Scott (2009) pointed out that "... virtually all popular struggles for power that today would qualify as 'revolutionary' were before the last quarter of the eighteenth century, generally understood in a religious idiom. Popular mass politics was religion, and religion was political" (p. 294). Galbraith (1982) demonstrated the striking similarity in communities of the Xhosa and Zulu of Africa, and the Maori of New Zealand, to the Native American ghost dancers. Each one of these communities developed millenarian movements that "emerged from the trauma of defeat in war, loss of land, and the accelerating disintegration of traditional society" (p. 122). Wallace (1956) expanded on the idea of millenarian movements and postulated several types of revitalization movements, millenarian being one type. He described these movements as various versions of practices that sought to transform a significant part of a culture if not the whole of the culture. Wallace has made the case that communism had all the earmarks of a millenarian movement without the religious imagery. Hobsbawm (1965) argued similarly that the various political Isms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism, socialism, communism (to name a few), have become routinized versions of millenarian movements. Their followers saw the world through those glasses just as the prophets did through a version of the world that included God, Allah, Buddha and others.

When communities/cultures are threatened with instability, deprivation, possible extermination, history, time after time, demonstrates human resilience in the form of millenarian movements. Characteristic of these movements is a point of view, a philosophy, a world view, of renewal, of the advent of a new world. This new world generally restores what is for this community an ideal situation in which the dead come back, all are fed, no one is in danger from human threat, disease, or natural disaster. Frequently certain individuals seek and are assigned by the threatened community members a place from which to espouse such a world view and to serve as a leader of the movement.

Two examples or paradigm cases of millenarian movements and charismatic leaders will be presented. The Native American Ghost Dancers and the hills people of Southeast Asia, dubbed Zomia by Scott (2009), will be described and then evaluated with respect to concepts of Descriptive Psychology.

### **Wovoka and the Ghost Dancers**

During the late 1880's, the prophet of peace, Jack Wilson, also known as Wovoka, was a member of the Paiute tribe and prophesied an end to American expansion into the west. He urged his followers to dance the Ghost Dance, a ritual which would hasten days of peace and a return of dead ancestors to the earth. This traditional circle dance was often accompanied by trances and prophesying. Jack Wilson claimed to have left the presence of God convinced that if every Indian in the West danced the new dance to "hasten the event", all evil in the world would be swept away, leaving a renewed Earth filled with food, love, and faith (Overholt, 1974).

According to one account:

Wovoka taught that the time was coming soon when all the dead Indians would return to this earth. The youth of these returning dead would be restored, and their advent would be accompanied by a restoration of the important game animals and a supernatural destruction of all Whites (by a flood). ...life would henceforth be free of disease and suffering. The restoration of the game animals ... would follow the millennium of the reestablishment of the old ways of life (Overholt, 1974, p. 42).

Mooney (1896) commented:

By performing this dance at intervals, for five consecutive days each time, they would secure this happiness to themselves and hasten the event. Finally God gave him control over the elements so that he could make it rain or snow or be dry at will, and appointed him his deputy to be in charge of affairs in the west while "Governor Harrison" would attend to matters in the east, and ... God would look after the world above (p. 772).

The original prophesy of the Ghost Dance had developed in the wake of a devastating typhoid epidemic some 20-30 years earlier. This epidemic and other diseases disrupted the nomadic way of life of the Plains Indians and restricted many families economically. Such devastation was a blow to autonomy as well as to the culturally accepted practices of the tribes.

In 1890, the US government broke up the Sioux reservation (which before had covered much of what is now South Dakota) into 5 smaller reservations and attempted to assimilate the tribes into American culture by introducing farming. But a devastating drought made this impossible. The plan was problematic from the beginning because the climate was semi-arid. The government was supplementing the food supply but political pressure led to a cut in rations to the Sioux by half and starvation became a possibility as few buffalo remained. The Sioux had been victorious over Custer some 20 years earlier and many of those fighters including Sitting Bull himself were still alive. The humiliation was compounded relative to these past triumphs (Overholt, 1974).

For ... the tribes to which the dance spread, this was a time of acute cultural stress characterized by White domination and the break-up of the old way of life. ... It is enough to recall that the cultural, economic, and political situation of these tribes was drastic, and the message preached by Wovoka correlated perfectly with it: The Whites had ruined the world by subjugating the Indian peoples and destroying the bases of their traditional life, and now it was time for a supernatural power to do what the Indians themselves could not, by eliminating these invaders and renewing the world which they had so fatally scarred (Overholt, 1974, p. 46).

## The Zomians

There is another culture that is a good working example of the conditions under which charismatic leaders tend to be cast. This is an example of a set of communities in Southeast Asia which over 2000 years evolved approaches to handle such potentially devastating occurrences and has survived. To the extent that the story of Native Americans is one of the destabilization of community and the tragic destruction of culture, the story of Zomia is a story of the resilience of communities, communities that adjusted in order to deal with imminent threat and potential domination.

In the “The Art of Not Being Governed”, Scott (2009) described the hills people of Southeast Asia. An area that is contiguous with about 8 major political states, the region dubbed “Zomia” today is populated by 80-100 million people. For two thousand years, prophets and millenarian movements emerged primarily in response to threats from the “Valley” states, China, Burma, Thailand, Viet Nam and others (Scott, 2009). Scott quipped that prophets were a cottage industry in these communities. The Valley states threatened the people of the hills by attempting to annex areas for their food, for their taxes, and for their labor, generally in the form of slavery. But over time these communities developed a variety of social practices that allowed the people to escape.

Known as barbarians by people in the valley states, the people of Zomia were commonly seen by them as primitive and uncivilized. They lived in the hills, rarely had a written tradition, fed themselves via slash and burn agriculture (swiddening) or foraging, and produced prophets who were frequently harbingers of protest and revolt. Their social structure tended to be egalitarian. Many of the legends were about killing headmen who had become too authoritarian.

The people of Zomia in any one area could be characterized by several ethnic identities. It was not unusual according to Scott (2009) for individuals to speak up to three languages.

Such mobile, egalitarian, marginal peoples have long histories of defeat and flight and have faced a world of powerful states whose policies they had little chance of shaping...Faced with slave raids, demands for tribute, invading armies, epidemics and occasional crop failures, they appear to have developed not just the subsistence routines to keep the state at arm's length but a shape shifting social and religious organization admirably adopted to cope with a turbulent environment ( p. 314) .

Comparable to the conditions of Native Americans in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Zomians for at least two millennia have faced conditions ripe for the rise of charismatic leaders. The Valley states characterized Zomians as barbarians in a way parallel to the American's view of Native Americans as savages. The invasions threatened their lives, their culture, their world view of themselves, their families, their communities. Scott said of the Karen, one particular group of hills people:

No matter what their religious convictions, the Karen have shown again and again, a devotion to wonder working, charismatic, heterodox healers, prophets, and would-be kings.....They are millenarians, forever generating warrior leaders, sects, “white monks” and prophets, all persuading themselves that the Karen kingdom is, once again, at hand (Scott, p. 286).

Zomia illustrates a variation in a community in which what was normal was to be prepared for change. The culture was under threat from the large valley states and developed social practices to escape such capture.

How can one evaluate the function or purpose of charismatic figures? To what extent do such persons figure in the survival of a community or culture? What explains a community member’s motivation to follow such a leader? What tools are available to understand the relative resilience of the Zomian communities in contrast to the near total destruction of Native American communities within a short period of time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The following section presents concepts of Descriptive Psychology that can be utilized to do the job.

### **Descriptive Psychology Concepts, Millenarian Movements, and Charismatic Leaders**

Two issues this paper will address are illustrated by the above descriptions. One is the destruction or survival of a culture and the factors that undercut a culture’s viability or serve to preserve that viability. Secondly, the rise of Jack Wilson and the prophets of Zomia from the point of view of modern day rationalists appears to be a flight of fancy for a community if not merely a con man’s game fomented by these would be prophets. But as noted above, the rise of prophets, messiahs, cultural saviors, charismatic politicians, is chronicled by many historians to be a phenomenon not specific to any one culture. I propose to use a set of concepts developed by the discipline of Descriptive Psychology to evaluate the stability/instability of a culture and to make sense of the phenomenon of millenarian movements and the rise of charismatic leaders in the context of such instability.

Descriptive Psychologists have developed concepts that address the competence of persons’ to handle trauma, to reconstruct worlds, to make sense of the world, and increase behavior potential (Bergner, 2007; Ossorio, 2006; Putman, 2010; Roberts, 2010). The concepts of person, community, and culture will be utilized to make sense of persons’ seeking charismatic leaders and forming millenarian movements. More specifically, the parameters of worlds, statuses (in particular the statuses of status assigner; and of actor, observer, and critic), and social practices will clarify situations that set up the circumstances for persons to seek a charismatic leader and/or millenarian type social changes.

### **The Concept of Culture**

In order to understand common factors in cultures as diverse as Native Americans and the Southeast Asian Zomians, conceptual tools are needed to allow a comparison. Systematic concepts of Descriptive Psychology are such a set of tools. Ossorio (1983) delineated the parameters of culture in the following way:

<Cu> = <WOL> = <M, W, S, L, SP, CP>, where

Cu = Culture

WOL = Way of Living

M = Members (Participants)

W = World

S = Statuses

L = Language

SP = Social Practices

CP = Choice Principles (Ossorio, 1983, p. 27)

The following are brief summaries of each of these parameters:

**Members.** Every community is composed of some set of members and this consists not only of those currently alive, but also those who are not now but were alive and still are members of the culture and its way of life.

**World.** “Every culture involves a set of beliefs, methodologies, ideologies, assumptions, presuppositions, and so on, concerning ‘the whole world.’ This also includes the place or status of the community in relation to the rest of the world and thus includes its past and future” (Ossorio, 1983, p. 28).

**Statuses.** These are the various places a member occupies and delineates what sort of relationships that member is eligible to act on within the social practices of the culture. Having a status and sets of statuses gives a person a particular significance within the culture. If a person is a friend to someone, his actions have significance different from that of being an enemy. The CEO of an organization has a different place or status compared to the janitor on the fifth floor and her actions are treated accordingly. A shortstop, a chess opponent, and a person lost in the woods are statuses that carry with them expectations of actions relative to others.

**Language.** Every society has a language that is spoken by its members. Common language facilitates interpersonal relationships and thus connects members to one another in a culture. Having at one’s disposal multi-lingual ability allows a person more easily to participate as a member of more than one culture.

**Social Practices.** This is what there is for members to do in the culture. Organized sets of social practices are known as institutions. Educating its children, protecting its citizens, making the traffic flow, acquiring resources, choosing its leaders, are just some of the sets of social practices a culture will have.

**Choice Principles.** Ossorio (1983) stated:

Both an individual social practice and a set of social practices which make up a way of living have a hierarchical structure involving a multiplicity of options. Since participating in either one on a given occasion must be done in one of the ways it can be done, choices are unavoidable and many different individual life histories are possible, reflecting the variety of choices among options within social practices and among social practices. The range of options results in part from the range of different statuses for

which different practices or different options are appropriate (p. 28).

Ossorio (1983) identified several approaches to delineating the choice principles of a culture. These included policy statements, values, slogans and mottos, maxims, problem solving strategies, and finally scenarios. He went on to say:

In a cultural context, the most relevant scenarios correspond to myths or to the lives of historical or literary figures. These latter are often called 'culture heroes'. A historical person can pattern his life on the life of such a cultural figure. Indeed, there is some speculation to the effect that a primary cultural function of myths is to provide just such patterns... (Ossorio, 1983 p. 30).

These parameters allow an analysis of a particular culture. Each parameter is a reminder to look at a culture relative to that particular parameter and to note to what degree which instances of the parameter, for example, are going right and which are going wrong, what the nature of parameter is in culture A versus that parameter in culture B, etc. Utilizing this parametric analysis provides an approach to evaluating the relative stability or instability of a culture.

### **Basic Human Needs and Community Breakdown**

What goes wrong when a community/culture breaks down? How can we characterize the difference between a culture that is failing and one that is resilient? When we compare cultures by utilizing each parameter as a kind of window through which we can see how a culture is working, what is it that tells us whether that culture is succeeding or failing? The concept of Basic Human Needs (BHN) is proposed as a way to explicate the relative breakdown and/or resilience of cultures. Ossorio (1983) formulates the idea of Basic Human Needs as a "a condition or requirement such that if it is not satisfied at all, Deliberate Action (and the participation in social practices) is impossible" ( p. 23). The following are needs that find general agreement in the literature as basic human needs: Adequacy, Competence, Order and Meaning, Self-esteem, and Safety and Security (Ossorio, 1983). A person in a situation in which deliberate action is impossible is in a pathological state. If the social practices of the community have broken down or if the members of the community experience more limited behavior potential as their standing in the community is reduced, then conditions of profoundly restricted deliberate action prevail.

Persons who encounter natural disasters, find themselves homeless, or lose their community standing as they go from economic security to poverty face such losses of behavior potential. Significant political changes that alter the place of whole communities and /or subcultures do the job as well. Jews herded into ghettos and Hutu's massacred by Tutsis faced the trauma of a collapsed or nearly collapsed culture.

Having a range of options available at any point in a social practice is an enhancement of a person's behavior potential within that practice. That condition allows a person to seek solutions as new options are available. A limitation of those



choices reduces the possibilities and creates a situation of greater uncertainty, one in which a person may regard himself as helpless, hopeless, and so forth. In addition, a failure of social practices to achieve certain BHN such as, for example, safety and security, limits and reduces the behavior potential of the members. A community under threat is one in which its members may lose their places of prominence, of significance within the culture. What was possible under a set of circumstances ruled by Us is no longer possible in situations ruled by Them. Members' statuses have been diminished to the point of humiliation and lost autonomy; social practices and institutions fail to bring order and meaning to their lives.

A person's world that needs reformulation is a world in which she has lost her place, a world in which she has lost her way, a world in which she has lost her future. Her ways of living are disrupted, blocked, made impossible. The acquisition of basic needs is severely limited. If by virtue of others' actions, a person is not allowed to or rendered unable to participate in the social practices that are an expression of her status in the community, then that person is in need of reassignment. A person unable to satisfy BHN is in a pathological state. Ossorio (1998) states, "The world is subject to reformulation by persons" (p. 14). This competence of a person to reformulate his position in the culture on his own or to seek another to reformulate that position is a key component of millenarian movements.

### **Worlds, Statuses, and Social Practices**

Ossorio (1983) described the world not as some set of facts that we spend our life trying to discover. A community of persons creates, maintains, and sustains a concept of world. As noted above, he emphasized that what is the case for a particular member of a particular community includes formulations of "(1) the place of the community in the world, (2) the history of the community, including its relations and interactions with other communities, and (3) the history of the world" (p. 28). The social practices that persons engage in, the values and choice principles that inform choices, the kinds of relationships and sets of relationships engaged in by persons, both formal and informal ones ( an employee with her boss or a person with his friend), are part of the fabric of this world. And note above, Ossorio emphasized that knowledge of the past, one's history, and the history of others, the whole world, is part of a particular conception of the world as well.

A person has a place in this scheme of things and that is her scheme of things. That place is a place in a particular context. Her actions take on a particular significance relative to that place. Another person with a different life history, a different set of present relationships, and a different set of choice principles and expectations about how the world is and will be, finds himself in a different place in the scheme of things and his behavior has significance in a different way from the first person.

Roberts (2010) describes how new versions of the world get introduced into communities. The status of that world then is uncertain until that new version is rejected or absorbed. New versions are introduced in all walks of life, by scientists, theologians, artists, writers, businessmen, and politicians. "When a new way of treating something is introduced, it does not necessarily change the structure of

the real world. New patterns of behavior have to be accepted by the community to become part of the real world. Until a new pattern is accepted, the status of the corresponding world is uncertain” (pp. 291-292).

Once that world view is accepted by the community, the place of a particular citizen in that political community carries with it significance relative to that new world view. A person criticizing the government in a totalitarian culture is threatening the state; a person doing the same in a democratic culture is exercising free speech. How behavior is treated is indeed a political act and has profound implications. A person in a position to shape such world views, and thus, to place other persons in particular positions such that the behavior of those persons has a particular significance is in a position of great power within a particular culture. A person with that sort of position would be recognized as a kind of evaluator of that particular culture, as a type of critic, as he assigns others positions within the culture.

### **The Statures of Actor, Observer, and Critic**

Ossorio (2006) discussed the particular status of Critic. The status of Critic is connected to those of Actor and Observer. These three statures, Actor, Observer, and Critic (A-O-C), give access to the self regulatory competence of persons. A way to think of each of these statures is in terms of jobs or perspectives. Ossorio (2006) pointed out that the job of the Actor is to behave spontaneously to “act on one’s impulses, desires, and inclinations” (p. 242). The status Observer involves “(1) what is the case now, (2) what is happening now, (3) what has happened in the past and what happens generally, (4) what is the case generally, and (5) how things work” (Ossorio, 2006, p.243). in response to such observations, the job of the Critic is to evaluate whether my actions are satisfactory, efficient, good, and so forth. If things are going right, I then continue to act as I am. But if things are going wrong, my Critic perspective provides a “diagnosis and prescription” in a sense for correcting and improving my behavior, a “specification of what to do differently to help matters” (Ossorio, 2006, p.243). The statures of Actor, Observer, and Critic are connected in a type of feedback loop and serve as a basis for describing how persons self regulate.

Ossorio also discussed the developmental schema relative to how persons acquire this competence to self regulate. This schema included another person acting as observer-critic who teaches the first person how to choose more successfully under particular circumstances. This then is a general schema for the development of judgment. The statures of A-O-C are involved in choosing how to act under varying circumstances. Part of choosing competently will involve being aware of the relevant circumstances, knowing the relevant reasons, and weighing these reasons effectively (Ossorio, 2006, p. 228). Choosing can only be done by a person within the context of some community whether that is at the time a bowling team, a job situation, or a culture. Evaluating one’s choices then is done relative to the community. As Ossorio (2006) stated, the critic speaks “for Us” (p.258).

A person’s self regulatory and judgment competence will also be relative to

the various statuses a person enacts as a member of the culture and/or various communities within the culture. A person occupying the status of bank teller will behave differently from the waiter at the restaurant; even though both may greet their patrons with, "How can I help you?" If that teller serves you a hamburger on a hard roll and that waiter gives you a bill for your safe deposit box, each would be acting inappropriately relative to their statuses in their communities. That behavior is then subject to regulation by the person himself. But their behavior is also subject to regulation by their respective bosses. The bosses enacting the status of critic (in this instance, this would be equivalent to the status of status assigner) may correct the behaviors of the workers or change the workers' statuses as a result of the improper choices. The failure of the workers to enact the position of waiter or bank teller successfully, to self regulate, requires the boss to correct the behavior or reassign each a different status within those respective communities. In these cases, the bosses serve as status assigners, a particular status in a community or a culture.

Thus, acquiring statuses in a community and culture is not merely a result of how persons choose. A person gains or loses eligibility for statuses based on many factors, not the least of which is the kind of person a particular status assigner treats her as. The status assigner can act as a representative of a community and /or culture and assign members to particular statuses. In political communities, the status assignment of community status assigner historically has been determined by such things as family membership, force, money, votes, and so forth.

Although a person is the author of her own behavior ( Ossorio,2006), part of being successful at that is casting other persons who can help her see her way clear in the day to day problems of usual living. Political leaders occupy one particular status that consists of relationships and social practices involving such problem solving.

### **Cultural Status Assigners**

Parents, clergy, politicians, therapists, judges, shamans, medicine men, prophets and messiahs can be characterized as statuses within a culture. These statuses involve relationships between one person or persons assigning and reassigning others to statuses within communities of the particular culture (Ossorio, 2006). These status assigners are of a particular type. They assign and reassign positions not merely relative to a particular community within a set of communities in a culture, but largely relative to the culture as a whole. The assignment is not a status relative to one's place in the neighborhood, or at the job, or on the local softball team. The assignment is about what kind of cultural member you are and is made by a person representative of the community and with the standing to make that culturally significant assignment.

The charismatic politician is such a person and assigns statuses not just one person at a time, but assigns to the entire community an enhanced status. By virtue of having membership in that community, any one person has had her behavior potential increased by such an assignment. The sports fan of a championship team, a devoted follower of his favorite rock band, and the voter whose candidate triumphs

in an election experience this wholesale increase in behavior potential.

### **Uncertainty and Status Reassignment**

Persons operate in conditions of uncertainty. Yet a person's self regulatory competence (A-O-C) allows one to act and evaluate one's actions and adjust one's actions as a result under those circumstances. But a range of conditions can undercut severely the effectiveness of day to day self regulation. These conditions involve circumstances in which the social practices a person is enacting fail to achieve the needed results. A person who needs food may not have the money to buy it, the competence to grow it, or the social relationships to ask for help. A person may need direction to apply for a job, to make amends with a friend, to find his way back home. This is a situation in which a person enacting the status of status assigner may intervene to reassign the person a status of greater behavior potential despite the oppressive conditions. Regardless of a person's usual situation, she is eventually blown into circumstances in which a little wizardry can go a long way.

Political leaders, in positions to make decisions based on their own or others knowledge, affect the whole community. A member of this community will look to this leader to make choices for the common good of the community or organization. He is speaking for the community and is held to that standard. Any problematic situation by its nature calls for a solution. Therefore, formulations of the problem and approaches (social practices) that can resolve the problem are also called for. A person does not readily try to rediscover what is already known by others and it makes little sense to do so unless one has doubts about what is known. The experts, the leaders carry that promise by virtue of their standing in the community and other community members, non leaders, look to them for these solutions.

Persons seeking counsel from these experts cast persons in those positions, positions to make sense of a particular portion of their worlds. The position of someone who will show you the way, the solution, the answer, that yellow brick road, is a fundamental status in any community (cf. Putman, 1990).

Millenarian movements and charismatic persons emerge in communities which are gravely threatened, communities that face a level of uncertainty multiplied many times by the failure of the usual community practices to take care of basic needs. It's not individual persons in one particular community of the larger group of communities that has some problematic situation but it is the whole community which is in a position of uncertainty and limited behavior potential.

A person treated by the dominant political culture as a peasant, a savage, a barbarian, a person of restricted and limited value, experiences his worth, his standing and therefore his behavior potential as limited. He is restricted from changing communities and self reassigning his position by limited resources, limited access to people of influence, or his community position as an inferior, limited being (recall that the original U.S. Constitution codified African and Native Americans as 3/5's persons). And if this person has a conspicuous appearance associating him with that status, he has few means to deceive others of his standing. He is severely limited in claiming increased potential.

The millenarian leader constructs a picture of a new world that reassigns the positions of his followers to places, statuses, that increase significantly their behavior potential, the range and value of the relationships a person in this community is eligible to act on. For these folks, the world must change, not just one community or organization, but the whole world. Their overall status, then, not one associated only with a particular group, has changed and changed for the better. Inspiration, hope, a vision--these among others the charismatic leader's new or renewed world view brings to the members of millenarian movements.

As Roberts (2010) points out, "Another practical constraint on world creation is whether or not there are particular historical individuals available and willing to be cast for the parts required to bring off a dramaturgical pattern. You may have what it takes to be a first baseman, but you can't be a first baseman all by yourself" (p. 295). The Paradigm Case of world creation involves "casting" particular individuals to play the parts called for in the drama, and then treating those individuals accordingly. Members living in what has become an oppressive bordering on an impossible world are ready for such a movement. The charismatic leader gathers the community together, rallies the troops, inspires the followers, and pursues the new world.

Descriptive Psychology accounts for the concepts of relationships and position, and the assignment of such positions being a function of the communities in which a person has membership. A closer examination of the Ghost Dancers and the Zomians utilizing the concepts of culture will explicate the kinds of cultural collapse (Ghost Dancers) and resilience (Zomians) that accompanies the casting by a community for a charismatic figure and the positions of the community members readying them to be cast as the followers in the millenarian movement.

### **Millenarian Movements and the Parameters of Culture**

Prophets come on the scene during community crises. These crises threaten, upset, alter, and limit the community. Examining this disruption under each parameter of a culture will give us access to the kind of cultural/community destruction faced by Native Americans and the adjustments Zomia made to survive.

#### **Members**

In 1867, typhoid along with European diseases wiped out nearly 10% of the Paiute population. In addition the Indian wars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century also depleted the populations. Communities require persons and the loss of these community members can traumatize and devastate its stability. Eliminate a community's members and no other parameters of the culture matter.

Scott (2009) noted that various communities of Zomians had a plethora of ethnic groups represented. He specifically cited the Karen as a group difficult to characterize because of the variety of ethnicities represented. This community diversity also represented by the ability to speak several dialects by the members gave these communities flexibility in preserving membership. More outside groups could be absorbed because their languages were represented. As discussed above, the geography allowed escape as well to higher ground making pursuit by valley

state armies quite difficult and the survival of members more likely.

## **World**

Jack Wilson preached peace and a return to the old days as a counter to the view that Native American tribes were under continuous threat from the hegemonic Americans. Their world was being limited, cut up, and placed on reservations. Their world was not one in which autonomous tribes could move where food was available and practice their rituals in peace, but one in which, as hunted “savages”, they were subject to limitation and murder by the whites.

The groups of Zomia had their prophets to present a world view in which not only was the community portrayed as autonomous relative to the valley states but at times was portrayed as potentially triumphant over them. These prophets of change became community status assigners increasing the behavior potential of their members and sparking protest, revolt, and revolution.

In addition, Zomian traditions tended to be oral and therefore more easily portable. Scott (2009) argued that oral traditions characterizing a world view of a culture are more easily altered to explain a changing world than a written tradition. He pointed out as well that in many peasant revolts one of the first places attacked was the office of tax records. Those records were burned. Writing for peasants in much of history represented a restriction not a source of freedom. Oral traditions tended to give a community flexibility not only in retelling history to fit the present times, but also in promoting a more egalitarian, less hierarchical organization.

## **Statuses**

As the reservations of the Sioux were reduced in size and broken up, the members went from proud warriors to imprisoned individuals. To be a member of a particular community is to have a certain status relative to other communities with whom your community has relationships. Twenty years earlier, Sitting Bull had led the Sioux to a great victory. The actions of the US government altered profoundly that position of the Sioux.

Zomian communities tended to be politically egalitarian and rarely hierarchical. Scott (2009) argued that the existence of a clear hierarchy facilitated another state controlling that community. A hierarchical political structure reduced the number of persons a state had to deal with in order to control the community. By virtue of spreading the status of leader to many members, a community protected itself from another state controlling that community. Administering an occupied territory was particularly problematic when knowing who to go to for what was unclear.

In addition, under this egalitarian system of management, no clear leader was available under crisis conditions. A crisis called for united action and a leader to coalesce the members loosely associated under such an egalitarian arrangement. A person would emerge rallying the people toward the cause of survival. Since no standard set of social practices was available to choose the leader, charismatic leaders, these prophets of change, had a path to claim that status based on championing a uniting world view of that particular community. Community crises

created strong and immediate needs for clear leadership. The prophet, the messiah, the charismatic figure filled this power vacuum. These individuals were usually “cosmopolitans” in Scott’s view (2009). That is, they tended to have traveled widely and were not associated with any one family or kinship structure. This gave them a quality of authenticity in that they were not beholden to any one family or group and could be more readily regarded as working for the good of the community. This presentation helped any one would-be prophet qualify as a community status assigner.

### **Social Practices**

The Sioux were reduced from proud hunters to failed farmers. The whites attempted to “civilize” the tribes by introducing social practices that would from the whites’ perspectives reduce their savagery. But this only undercut members’ behavior potential and increased humiliation.

Zomia enacted practices that enhanced their ability to escape and preserve the community and developed social practices that allowed survival in terrain that discouraged valley states from invading. Their housing was minimalist, frequently open to the environment on two sides. This architecture allowed for quicker escape. Their agriculture was not dependent on wet rice cultivation and therefore allowed for geographic change when that was called for. Large states could not easily predict the time of harvest for peoples practicing swiddening in contrast to predicting the ripening of rice. Therefore, it was much more difficult for these states to extract tribute from the hills peoples.

### **Language**

The government was determined to rid Native Americans of their savagery and one of the approaches was to send the children to white boarding schools, some as far away as Pennsylvania. This was no less than an attempt and a largely successful one to destroy a culture.

Ironically, many of the Zomian communities were multilingual. According to his thesis, Scott showed that such flexibility was not only a result of a culture that had shifted alliances over many years based on its self interest but also allowed that community to deal with other communities for trade and the like when these communities were not under threat from the large valley states. This increased the resilience of these Southeast Asian hills peoples.

### **Choice Principles**

As discussed above, the position of “culture hero” offers community members a pattern of choices with which to model their own lives. Sitting Bull occupied such a position in Sioux culture. The Americans attempted to reduce Sitting Bull’s status as a beacon for the Sioux. They were finally able to contain him on a reservation. But until his death, Sitting Bull refused to engage in “white” social practices such as farming. He was finally killed by reservation police (DeMallie, 1982). Sitting Bull refused to give up his status as Sioux, and he died attempting to retain that status. A gap occurred in the community between the need for that culture hero and the fulfillment of that status.

The Zomians developed choice principles and leaders able to rally the people in order to move the community not only from one psychological place to another but from one physical place to another. Scott (2009) noted that the “major league” prophets of Zomia inspired people to sell their livestock, leave their houses, follow the prophet and completely restart their lives.

The rise of the prophet Wovoka occurred during the destruction of the way of life of Native Americans. Their autonomy had been minimized. The basic human needs of peace, security, and significance were unfulfilled.

Wovoka’s prophesy and the Ghost Dance ritual served both as a promise of better days to come and a means to inspire the community toward action. Performing the dance gave the community a social practice to enact in the face of overwhelming odds and reaffirmed the culture that they saw being destroyed before their eyes (Overholt, 1974). What is real for a person is what that person is prepared to act on. Participation in the Ghost Dance was a way to treat the world as one that included once again Native Americans in a place of prominence.

This brief description of the struggles of the Sioux illustrates the cultural devastation that US government actions created. All the parameters of culture were affected. In such circumstances, a prophet is cast to right these wrongs, to restore the world to the ways of life as it should be, to bring back the buffalo, to bring back the warrior. The prophet has a place not unlike that of the culture hero, one who represents and can deliver the old ways, the better way of life. But these cultures barely survived (some would say they have not) and the poverty, alcoholism, and other indicators of ongoing distress have been present for generations.

How quickly these cultures were destroyed. Lewis and Clark’s expedition was at the beginning of the century. By the end of the 1800’s, Native Americans had had their way of life, one that had existed for centuries, virtually wiped out. The Ghost Dance can be described as a desperate attempt to change the world, but it was too late. There was little opportunity to turn the new vision into sets of working social practices that would include statuses of worth for the members of these tribes, the satisfaction of basic human needs, and ultimately the survival of the culture.

In contrast, the hills peoples of Zomia, over time, were able to evolve an escape culture that included millenarian leaders much of the time to provide a triumphant world view and unite community members against a common foe. The members of these societies developed these world views into social practices that provided for the resilience of these communities under threat.

Zomia evolved its multiple cultures over 2000 years. Geographical conditions allowed the Zomians to flee to the hills and helped create circumstances for survival. Social practices developed over time that could sustain the community and culture in the face of attacks from outside forces. This gave many of the Zomians opportunity to stay out of range of the valley states. These groups then adapted their social practices in order to achieve basic needs. Scott (2009) noted that as large valley states around the world have increased their reach, fewer “stateless” groups have been able to resist state inclusion. As a result, fewer millenarian movements



and charismatic leaders have emerged in these areas of the world recently.

The stories of the Ghost Dancers and the Zomians are reminders that leadership is critical under times of duress, when hope and vision and direction are paramount. But the lesson is as well that a leader does not make a community. The core and fundamental social practices have to develop to achieve basic human needs, including the potential to adjust to traumatic change. Other members participating in these practices make the new world work.

A set of communities, a tribe, an ethnic group, a state may be under threat from forces that have undercut the very fabric of what constitutes the accepted culture. Change is called for and persons under these conditions are in positions to alter relationships, engage in different or new social practices to help satisfy their basic needs not being achieved by the old practices. But if this set of communities as a whole is experiencing this disruption, then fewer options exist to reformulate ones position, to engage in new practices. Institutions that once worked in the culture may be seen as no longer viable. Persons then seek the expert, the guru, the elder, and the charismatic leader to reinvent the world. They have strong reasons to cast for such a person.

## Conclusion

And the people bowed and prayed  
 To the neon god they made  
 And the sign flashed out its warning  
 In the words that it was forming  
 And the sign said, "The words of the prophets are written on the  
 Subway walls and tenement halls"  
 And whispered in the sounds of silence (Simon, 1966).

A common saying goes something like this: "Not all men believe in God; but all men have their gods." Most of the time a person's life goes as expected. But persons, living in places like Somalia or Rwanda or residents of northeast Japan when the Tsunami hit in 2011, have experienced devastating world changes. Perhaps living in the richest country in the history of the world concretizes a point of view that the world will remain stable and that instability is a third world phenomenon. But Diamond (2005) made the case that there existed many great civilizations that could not sustain themselves under particular circumstances and vanished into history. The "Great Recession" of 2008 is a recent reminder that the world can change suddenly and profoundly.

Particular conditions, some man made and others a result of nature, can upset, render valueless a person's organized set of social practices and a world view that gives life a sense of coherence and significance. But if the core practices of the community no longer work, if a person's judgment and choices cannot bring intrinsic satisfaction associated with certain needs like safety, peace, competence, and significance, then that person will seek others to make sense of this world, to reassign a place of value, a place from which the world will work again.

Persons assign places, develop social practices, and create worlds. It's a behavioral world. Charismatic leaders and politicians, prophets and messiahs, strong men, dictators, kings and presidents are cultural status assigners in a political community. Under circumstances of uncommon uncertainty and potential devastation, the members of the community seek leaders to make their lives better by being in a position to help solve problems beyond the capabilities of ordinary members. This leader or leaders, these movements for change, give members a vision and a voice when they face the unthinkable.

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