

# The Possibilities of Doing Good: Social Movements in an Age of Neoliberalism

## *Introduction*

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In March 2009, Ronald Hector (Hecky) Villanueva organized and chaired a double panel at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) in Santa Fe, NM. In this section of the journal, we are publishing Hecky's full presentation from that panel, along with his notes for each slide. The presentation represents not only his own dissertation research, but also suggests the breadth of Hecky's engagement with our discipline and his intention to challenge anthropologists to connect in their work with active processes of social change.

As a fellow student also interested in social movement research, I was fortunate to attend this panel and to be present at Hecky's dissertation defense the following year. In his SfAA talk he took on several tasks – discussing scholarly work on social movements, introducing the panel, and discussing the subject of his own dissertation. Here I'd like to offer a brief framing for his presentation and dissertation work in order to help elucidate the following slides.

By titling both the panel and his talk "The Possibilities of Doing Good: Social Movements in an Age of Neoliberalism," Hecky argues that social movements are not merely sites of contention, but are also actively engaged in visioning and building the worlds they wish to see. Following the opening two slides, slides 3 and 4 position the panel within existing theoretical work on social movements, and begin to make Hecky's argument that Gawad Kalinga (GK) – the organization with which he conducted his dissertation fieldwork in the Philippines – and other groups engaged in social change participate not only in protest, but also in "problem solving, capacity building, and empowerment" (Notes, slide 3). In slide 5, Hecky presents a framework for understanding the work of social movements in relation to globalization and the spread of neoliberalism. He focuses in on GK and other groups "doing good" in slide 6, explaining how such movements incorporate various sources of support to address poverty and improve housing. Here Hecky offers a subtle but important distinction between

his work and much previous work on social movements. Unlike many authors who see social movements as necessarily working outside of dominant social structures, Hecky argues that social movements can blur the boundaries of civil society and the state in order to collaborate on projects addressing poverty. Hecky further explains the work of GK in slide 7, especially their overarching goal to build 700,000 homes across the Philippines in seven years. The following slide compares the work of GK to two microfinance organizations (the Grameen Bank and KIVA) and to Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST, translated as the Landless Workers Movement), other large organizations with goals to improve the living conditions of the poor in the global south. In slide 10, Hecky offers some analysis of the "stickiness" of President Obama's then-recent 2008 successful campaign, and compares it to previous political transitions in the Philippines.

In the final five slides, Hecky offers a framework for understanding GK as a social movement engaged in transformative social change. Slide 11 presents a set of innovative strategies that he sees movements undertaking in recent years, and slide 12 connects his framing of social movements' work to "do good" to a livelihood security framework used by the UA's Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology (BARA). Slide 13 draws from several sociological theories of social movements – Resource Mobilization (RM), Political Opportunity Structures (POS), and Collective Action Frames – to discuss GK's interesting position as a broad-based social movement. Slide 14 displays the various sponsors and members of GK, presenting the challenge of producing collective action from groups with oft-competing agendas. In the final slide, Hecky connects back to his initial framing for the paper and panel, positioning GK and other social movements that are "doing good" as transformative social actors that incorporate resources from an incredible diversity of actors in order to produce change.

While the content of this presentation offers a glimpse into the topic of Hecky's dissertation, the panel's structure and topic also reveal much about Hecky's personality as a scholar. In this panel Hecky brought together new and experienced researchers, forging connections in the content and engagements of scholarship. His intention to actively engage anthropologists in social change was evident at the panel, as it was to anyone who knew Hecky or belonged to a listserv of which he was a (very vocal) member.

In 2007 Hecky replied to a national anthropology listserv that had been hosting a debate on the relevance of anthropology. Hecky asked the list: "Our findings and insights may improve our understanding of human culture, but what next? Who will bridge the gap of theory to practice for the WORLD to use?" I can't think of a way to summarize Hecky's work or engagements in anthropology any more clearly than he does in these short lines. In seeking sites in which new, hopeful worlds are being made, Hecky's research pushes us to identify in our own work the possibility of translating theory into practice, and practice into global use, always working towards broader discussions and practical outcomes.

This presentation so clearly demonstrates Hecky's incredible devotion to his research and to the project of social change in the Philippines. We are proud to pay tribute to our friend and colleague by featuring this presentation in the *Arizona Anthropologist*.