Global Imaginations

Introduction to Part Three

Part 1 of this volume examines the rise of new global forces and their destructive effects on individuals and communities once protected by hegemonic institutions. Part 2 explores the character of new global connections that function within, define, and reorganize an expanding transnational social space. In Part 3, we examine how the construction and deployment of "global imaginations" have become central to new political projects and controversies.

In the era of postwar globalization, nation states created protected enclaves in various spheres of economic, social, and political life. In the United States and Western Europe, postwar class compromises guaranteed manufacturing workers a privileged position in the global economy. In the United States institutions like the American medical establishment monopolized information, made decisions for patients, and delivered medical care through practices that individualized, isolated, and (in the case of breast cancer patients) stigmatized. On the other side of the political world socialist enterprises were largely protected from the ups and downs of international markets but also from public accountability for environmental pollution. At the same time an extensive welfare state gave citizens material security. These enclaving institutions benefited some at the expense of others: in general the prosperity of industrial workers and the distribution of social benefits in the wealthy "core" of the world system were directly related to inequality, poverty, oppression, and immobility in the dependent periphery and semiperiphery.

In the contemporary period, many of these systems of industrial, political, and social hegemony that once operated at the core have dissolved, collapsed, or become subject to external challenges. As Part 1 shows, these changes have been disastrous for once-protected industrial workers and populations, whose former positions, identities, and lives depended on the

viability of now-vanished institutions. As a result, they now find themselves uprooted, cast out, their worlds torn apart, their work degraded if they still have work, their claims denied if they still make claims. Stuck in the old order, they decline along with it. To them, the global surely is a destructive whirlwind of forces that has wreaked havoc on former ways of life.

For others, however, the reorganization of the global has had a different effect. Part 2 demonstrates that at least some groups in newly industrializing countries and other semiperipheral regions have taken advantage of the new cross-border flows of people, culture, and technology that have marked the crumbling or transformation of old national-level hegemonies. As a result, they find themselves more able than before to forge new identities, follow new opportunities, and pursue social transformations. For such groups, the old global order was not enclaving and protecting but more usually marginalizing or constraining. The increased transnational flows that accompanied the dissolution or transformation of old hegemonies have enabled such groups as Indian nurses, Irish software developers, and Brazilian feminists to launch themselves into an emerging transnational social space rather than sinking with the wreckage of the old order.

But there is a third position as well: the position of those whose relation to the old global order was originally more ambiguous. Such groups may have been sheltered or marginalized by old regimes, but they were neither completely dependent on those regimes nor capable of transcending them. As a result, they are neither destroyed by new global forces nor completely comfortable with them. They may see new connections, but these connections do not induce them to completely give up old identities, solidarities, values, or activities. Like the groups considered in Parts 1 and 2, they must also relate to the global, but unlike the others their situation is not sink or swim. They are neither drowning in the global's tsunami nor swimming in its currents: instead, the relative autonomy of their structural locations allows them to try to channel and control the global tide. Like people who live uncomfortably on low ground near the sea, they can try to build protective dikes or harness the power of the tides in service of their own projects. For them, to be sure, the global may imply threatening forces or promise potentially liberating connections. But unlike those who sink with the inundation of old orders or who swim in new global seas, groups in this third category find some niche in the new order from which they can collectively contest the global.

For these groups, the collapse or transformation of old orders has allowed the hidden to become visible: where global forces and connections were once difficult to perceive, the global has new relevance. New conflicts emerge, with conceptions of the global—global imaginations, if you will—at their center. It is not clear what sorts of hegemony (or what scattered hegemonies) will take shape from these new conflicts, but our chapters explore

how contemporary struggles are being fought over the power to define, refuse, create, join, or appeal to global forces and global connections. Thus, Steve Lopez shows how the dislocations that rapidly destroyed the lives of steelworkers in Pittsburgh did not affect Pittsburgh's unionized public service workers so directly. Public service workers are now threatened by the drive to make Pittsburgh more attractive to global investment by cutting local taxes and privatizing services, but they are able to respond by appealing to universal principles of justice superimposed on local images of vulnerable nursing home residents. Zsuzsa Gille's chapter studies Hungarian villagers and environmental activists who were once marginalized by the socialist state's protection of Hungarian industry, which shielded industrial hazards from public view. The disappearance of the socialist state does not allow these villagers to escape the pollution by swimming freely in the seas of global connections, but neither does it necessarily doom them to life in a cesspool. Instead, they reach out to the global environmental movement or bargain for morsels of profits from the global incinerator industry. Maren Klawiter shows how American breast cancer patients, once marginalized, individualized, and stigmatized by American medicine, politicize breast cancer by reversing its stigma, by attacking medical authority, and finally by linking breast cancer to global pollution. The breast cancer activists of the Toxic Links Coalition—like Hungarian villagers and Pittsburgh's public service workers—do experience the global as a threat but they are also able to mobilize successfully around it, in response to it.

Our studies of global imaginations are of course not intended as representative of all structural positions from which challenges to the global can emerge and take root, nor are they an exhaustive catalog of the ways in which global imaginations can become central to collective actors. Imaginations of the global can be organized around conceptions of global-as-forces or global-as-connections, and they can be deployed on behalf of (or against) political projects of widely divergent character. But whatever their content, and whatever the project in whose service they are mobilized, global imaginations must resonate locally in order to succeed as a discursive strategy. Indeed, one way to challenge global forces that seem to float freely above the horizon of local communities of workers, consumers, nursing home residents, and cancer patients and activists is precisely to counterpose and appeal to local solidarities, identities, images, and interests. Finally, we happen to study three movements located in the United States and Hungary. We thus ignore, for example, the possibility of challenges and conflicts over the global incorporation of former peripheral areas. These studies are intended to explore some of the ways in which the meaning and reality of "the global" are now being—and may be in the future—contested through collective action.

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