Book Review/Compte rendu

Paul Routledge and **Andrew Cumbers**, *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity*. Perspectives on Democratic Practice. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009, 224 pp. $US 84.95 hardcover (978-0-7190-7685-5)

What have been called the global justice or alternative globalization movements have been identified by numerous commentators as the most significant development in anticapitalist or antisystemic politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall and Soviet communism. Especially since the events of Seattle in 1999 (but dating at least to 1994s Zapatista uprising) the global justice movements have challenged the "End of History" triumphalism of neoliberal capitalism and posed prospects for an alternative global future based on justice and solidarity rather than profit and competition.

Despite the great interest generated by the global justice movements within academic (as well as various community) circles, and the veritable cottage industry of research and writing on the new global movements, there remain substantial gaps in understanding the particular practices, ideas, and, especially, places and sites of movement development and interaction. The growing resistance to neoliberal capitalism is not adequately reflected in popular academic notions of global civil society. As well, there have been relatively few works that examine the more durable institutions, what I prefer to call infrastructures of resistance, created and maintained within the movements that might sustain them in moving from ephemeral, reactive mobilization to longer term struggle and social transformation.

In *Global Justice Networks*, political geographers Paul Routledge and Andrew Cumbers promise to fill in, or at least narrow, some of these gaps. Routledge and Cumbers investigate a select range of practices within the global justice or alternative globalization movements, with primary cases involving People's Global Action (PGA), the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mining and General Workers (IFCEM-GW) and the Social Forum process. The focus is on specific network relations, strategic practices and, most significantly, venues or spaces of action. Notably the authors try to move beyond the unwarranted general-

izations and assumptions of unity that characterize too much discussion of alternative globalization movements and political organizing.

The globally networked forms of collective action that have animated alternative globalization struggles occur within place-specific, even site-specific, forms of political activity that take shape in a variety of expressions at specific times and in specific contexts yet connect over geographic space. The alternative globalization networks are not reflective of a coherent movement and are produced by and productive of a variety of social, political, cultural, and geographic fault lines and ruptures. These networks are at times overlapping, at times conflicted, often resonant and sometimes competing.

In order to properly appreciate, understand, and contextualize these movements, groups, and networks, it is necessary to understand the role of geographical factors such as space, place, and scale. This readable and accessible book is important for its emphasis on, and illustration of, shared spaces and practices that bring together disparate, dispersed and diverse actors, oftentimes in surprisingly large numbers. The geographical aspect of long-term network building and project development has been downplayed or underemphasized in studies of global justice movements. Too often the only shared spaces to receive extended analysis have been the ephemeral spaces of the dramatic street protests outside meetings of global capital, as during International Monetary Fund (IMF) or G8/G20 meetings.

Examining the geography of convergence spaces shows not only the interactions of solidarity that strengthen the movements (and the real ongoing work involved in constructing and maintaining network relations) but also the real tensions and challenges that exist on a regular and often ongoing basis. Notably the examples presented in *Global Justice Networks* all show the tensions and contradictions between the more mobile elites who can partake in global convergence spaces and the forced territoriality (by class, borders, racism, and gender among others) that constrain those who *are* the movement on the ground in local struggles but who cannot access the global aspect of the global justice movements of which they are fundamentally part.

As much as this work adds to the discussion, and should be recommended, there are some limitations. Routledge and Cumbers assert that the movements are genuinely translocal or transnational, yet the character of these connections is underdrawn in this work. The focus remains on local movements in local contexts with less emphasis on the transnational character of their works, apart from working on similar issues or intersecting at particular events or meetings. Similarly, the global scope of the movements is less than vigorously illustrated, apart from various

connections being made across borders. Disparate local struggles remain local and linkages to broader movements and politics are uncertain.

Even more dramatically, the authors claim, without really defending or supporting it, that the transnational connections and global scope of the global justice movements "are more significant for international oppositional movements than the Socialist Internationals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or the new social movements and anti-war movements of the 1960s." A curious claim given the utter failure of global movements in halting either wars or occupations in Iraq or Afghanistan. The global justice movement is also presented as providing "more sustained global networks of solidarity" than the supposedly more sporadic movements of the past. While claims of such significance are well and good, and possibly true, there is no basis for comparison here. One constant is that many commentators (as in new social movement theories of an earlier time) are quick to stress the novelty or uniqueness and significance of the latest movements.

In addition, the selection of cases is rather limiting and, indeed, a bit predictable given other studies of alternative globalization. As only one example, while a range of commentators note the significance of anarchism within contemporary alternative globalization movements, Routledge and Cumbers say virtually nothing about anarchist ideas, groups, movements, strategies, tactics, or inspiration. Not only do they avoid significant anarchist commentary on and analysis of contemporary movements and politics (of which there is much), they also fail to address anarchism even to refute claims of its significance within the current movements.

Indeed, there is a real lack of ideas presented throughout the text. There is concern with communication within network spaces but no sense of the development of shared perspectives, debates, or discussions over visions of ways forward or alternatives to neoliberal capitalist globalization. This is not to say that the authors should be making an argument for this or that idea, perspective, or outlook, but the global networks share ideas as much as anything, and the ideas transcend space more than the actual movement participants themselves. Their absence makes the spaces described by Routledge and Cumbers seen a little odd, even artificial or sterile.

On the whole, Routledge and Cumbers bring into focus the differently placed and variously resourced actors, in movements, trade unions, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), that make up the interacting, and sometimes competing, networks of global justice movements. They highlight the different attempts by different actors (peasants, industrial workers, students, caregivers) to forge mutual solidarities in pursuit of

social, economic and environmental justice. The focus on convergence spaces ("associations of differentially-placed actors and resources which are put into circulation in a continual effort to make political actions durable through time and mobile across space") aids a necessary move away from more abstract claims about global justice networks. Geographically dispersed social coalitions show that place-based is not necessarily place-restricted and political action can be spatially extensive.

Routledge and Cumbers conclude that the future success of global justice movements depends on the capacity to develop and sustain effective means of communication. Also crucial is the capacity to support territorially based actors within their local struggles. The strength of the present work, and a reason it should be essential reading for anyone interested in the contemporary movements, is in grounding in specific cases and contexts that which is too often superficially and excitedly (hopefully perhaps) presented as global.

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