

The Paradoxes of Progress: Globalization and Postsocialist Cultures

Rachael Stryker, University of California, Berkeley

Jennifer Patiko, Duke University

It has been a pleasure to edit this collection of revised and expanded papers, most of which have been culled from the program of the 2001 SOYUZ Symposium, "From the *Internationale* to the Transnational: Repositioning Post-Socialist Cultures," held at the University of California, Berkeley. The papers in this volume arise out of international scholars' enthusiastic interest in the local ramifications of globalization for postsocialist citizens. As the borders of nations once collectively situated behind the "Iron Curtain" continue to shift, we find that it is not only new geographic borders, but also new or recycled systems of meaning that are reorganizing populations, resources, and politics. This begs many important questions: In light of such immense change, what is happening on local, national, and global scales to the cognitive frameworks through which people understand their social and physical landscapes? What new subjectivities are being born of these shifts, and how do they shape the everyday practices through which people engage with globalization? And what is it about the turn *away* from the forms of political and economic organization associated with state socialism that particularizes these postsocialist experiences of globalization?

As these papers reveal, the peoples of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are formulating and exemplifying many creative answers to these questions. Indeed, the common strength of the papers presented in this volume, and the contribution that they make to postsocialist studies across disciplines, is their refreshingly emic approach. Eastern European and Russian scholars and informants speak here on issues as far-ranging as the possibilities for civil society at the end of the Cold War to the changing consumer choices, educational opportunities, and demographics associated with postsocialist marketization. In the process, these papers also identify the impact of globalization on such rarely-investigated communities as Moscow's voodoo healers, Slovenian conservationists, hopeful Latvian business students, traveling scientists of the Novosibirsk *Akademgorodok*, and Russian orphanage staff members, just to name a few.

To call on these seemingly disparate voices and to hear them for their collective messages is crucial at a time when many former socialist countries' economic and political agendas remain undetermined, despite the West's efforts to mold them in the image of already existing democracies and civil societies. Many

debates on how to create a successful “Transition” for the region revolve around issues of privatization, currency consolidation, and taming rogue segments of the economy; yet, the multifaceted transitions that are occurring on the ground level among ordinary citizens remain largely unexplored. The papers in this volume attend to this problem, reminding us that these less publicized, less championed transitions are determined not only by the governments or elite sectors of nations. Rather, postsocialist citizens at every level are “making sense” of change, simultaneously grappling with new problems and enjoying a savvy born from new opportunities for self-reflection and expression.

A key theme in the papers is that citizens of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe feel challenged by globalization to redefine progress. Under socialism, the immutable and monolithic quality of the state guided peoples’ understanding of progress; ideological emphasis was often placed on the collective well-being of the citizenry. Today, progress must be redefined through many endeavors that are responsive not only to the state, but also to transnational job markets and to global flows of commodities and ideas. For many people portrayed in this volume, the question is not whether postsocialist citizens have been truly “globalized,” but *how* they negotiate globalization. By compiling these papers, each of which attends carefully to particular groups, settings, and issues, we end up with a variegated, rich account of the rationales involved with postsocialism and globalization. These accounts reflect an awareness that “Transition” is not necessarily understood as unidirectional, but is often experienced and interpreted in contradictory ways. It also comes with an awareness of how various market, political, and social forces—local, national, and transnational—variously intersect in people’s lives.

This leads us, however, to another key theme in the papers: in the course of redefining “progress,” new questions, paradoxes, and contradictions emerge for citizens. The researchers included in this volume must consider what various components of globalization actually mean for people by investigating what new ideals and aspirations emerge, what kinds of constraints these bring, and how people ultimately pursue them. The authors are compelled to join their subjects in reconceiving dichotomies such as public and private as well as East and West, rich and poor, modern and traditional. They make an allowance for the relevance of such dichotomies, but only as their informants consider their options and loyalties in relation to these oppositions. From these accounts, we can come to a few conclusions about postsocialist globalization that do not rely on received wisdom about what “progress,” “civil society,” and “capitalism” are *supposed* to be like in this region or elsewhere in the world.

“Progress,” Civil Society, and the Nation-State

Several papers highlight some of the ways in which various postsocialist subjects are redefining progress *as a shift to civil society*. These papers reveal, on the

one hand, a general anxiety about state-related obstacles to such a shift, and on the other, a concern with the logistics and consequences of incorporating outside (often perceived as “Western”), ready-made models for progress towards “civil society.” One way that subjects mediate these two concerns is to call on “nationhood,” “national character,” and notions of “the people,” seeking to make today’s challenges and strategies intelligible through reference to collective histories and immutable truths. They also attempt to locate satisfactorily localized ways of dealing with issues of civil society and transnational politics, in ways that allow for new or alternative definitions of progress.

Langenohl’s paper on Russian collective memory situates Russia at the end of the Cold War, embroiled in a debate over contemporary “transnational moral responsibility” that includes a worldwide atonement for Cold War atrocities. By contrasting discourses of blame and victimhood through which World War II is remembered in Russia with the corresponding constructs of morality, responsibility, and history typically articulated in the global community (dominated by Europe and North America), Langenohl demonstrates that the collective memory of the Great Homeland War obstructs rather than promotes Russian responsibility to this newly relevant transnational frame. Russia removes itself from a global conversation about wartime macrocrimes, he argues, because of the state’s commitment to maintaining a memory of the “glorious past.” In doing so, the Russian government attempts to maintain its position—at least discursively—as a superpower, and thus to assume a sustainable militaristic relationship to Western countries.

Langenohl’s paper highlights how the Russian state’s aversion to self-criticism reinforces among the citizenry a persistent “Soviet” dichotomy of the immoral state versus the moral “people” (*narod*). Similar dichotomies are salient in the negotiations of “civil society” described here for other postsocialist cases. Djuric-Kazmanovic, a native Yugoslavian, leaves no doubt that it is the immediate and deadly reality of Serbian women’s antagonistic relationship with the state that leads her to question the ways in which the government does inhibit “real” progress, even during “postsocialism.” Pointing to the government’s “refusal to accept transition,” she decries “state-sponsored non-development” and organized gender violence. She calls upon citizens to fashion a more potent transition in which the recent liberation in Yugoslavia can serve as the vehicle not only for economic development, but also for social justice between men and women.

On a similar note, Aplenc’s research on Slovenian conservationists’ efforts to prevent the removal of the *Robbi* fountain in Ljubljana shows how remnants of socialist discourse can be argued against as well as coopted in the construction of “real” progress in postsocialist Slovenia. Aplenc frames the phenomenon of “non-action” among conservationists as a necessary step towards producing a very particular, emotionally resonant (and therefore successful) civil response. Aplenc describes the decision by a Slovenian citizen *not* to stage an expected act of civil

disobedience, but rather to link himself “to the Slovenian national character” by vocalizing the affective significance of the monument in his own and other local people’s lives; the author identifies here a “blurring” of public and private selves, indicative of a “conception of postsocialist civic engagement that both parallels as well as challenges its socialist origins” (43). Within Slovenia’s self-described burgeoning civil society, “national character” allows activists simultaneously to mourn the past and to look to a civic future both resonant with shared experiences and infused with a new and valid optimism.

While Aplenc and Djuric-Kazmanovic suggest postsocialist reconfigurations of “the people” and “nationhood” can be seen as a product of citizens’ critical appraisals of *state* priorities, Popescu and Henry examine some of the ways in which localized traditions and politics may or may not be reinscribed in response to “Western” notions of civil society. Popescu’s paper on images of rape and other violence against women in contemporary Romanian film asks whether “Transition” has provided a window of opportunity for Western models of civil society—particularly a feminist agenda—to penetrate Romanian popular culture. As Popescu writes: “Western feminists in academia are peeking over the border to see if the much expected gender revolution will take place and if their sisters from Eastern Europe are ready to do away with the patriarchy system” (48). If the voices of filmmakers and local feminists are any indication, however, Western feminists will have to wait for the revolution. Violent imagery has been introduced on the cultural market *simultaneously* with feminist agendas, an ironic trend born from localized attempts to reconfigure and reconcile the conflicting positions of women in key national narratives in light of globalization. Film aesthetics shift, but neither entirely do away with nor entirely reinscribe official gender discourses of the communist regime. These contradictions often speak ironically about the nation, its honor, and its victims; Popescu argues that the liminal, hybrid representations arising out of “Transition” might well provide fruitful opportunities to rethink feminist analytical approaches more generally.

While Popescu’s paper suggests the possible impotence of American models of civil society to influence Romanian culture, Henry presents a case in which the importation of Western money and guidance to support the development of “civil society” in Russia actually has unintended negative consequences, making the desired results all the more elusive. Focusing on the contradictions faced by Russian environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Henry recognizes that the state actively inhibits the progress of environmentalists through restrictive tax and registration laws; at the same time, she argues, conditional funding from Western donor organizations, intended to ameliorate the effects of “the unreceptive nature of transitional state institutions,” further exacerbates the problems of NGOs (70). She locates the problem with the ways Western donors impose naturalized ideas about resource management, issue framing, and politics upon Russian NGOs, and with NGOs’ preoccupation with qualifying for Western funds, which deprioritizes their

substantive environmental progress and the resonance of their agendas with local populations. Ultimately, Henry suggests that the funders' "civil society" model of progress is unlikely to be fulfilled in Russia's near future. Like those of Western feminists, Western donors' dreams of paving the way for democracy in Russia will have to wait.

“Progress,” Global Markets, and Movement

While the papers described above engage how the complex negotiations of “progress” simultaneously emerge out of citizens' relationships to the state and conceptualizations of the “nation's” place in the global political community, the remaining contributions draw our attention to the conspicuous *absence* of state regulation in the marketplace and the *loss* of social supports once provided by socialist states to their subjects. Again, these new economic realities are rife with contradictions for citizens, both privileged and impoverished. As these papers show, people often perceive themselves to be more “free” now to pursue personal progress through hard work, consumerism, and the embracing of “free market” ideals. While in this sense globalization has produced new opportunities for economic stability, it has also created many instabilities: most obviously in the circulation of symbols, goods, and people between postsocialist countries and those nations once set apart by the foreboding “Curtain.”

Lindquist's paper on Moscow's voodoo healers, for example, highlights an increased global flow of symbols into a formerly culturally constrained Russia and demonstrates how this complicates a purely nomothetic understanding of postsocialist citizens' understandings of globalization. By tracing a “bizarre interconnectedness” between global symbols of spirituality and healing for Russian voodoo healers, she comes to understand the ways in which these symbols broaden Russia's cultural ecumene. Healers take up transnational artifacts and objects to legitimize themselves as both spiritual and economic figures in their communities; at the same time they alleviate clients' anxieties about their futures. According to Lindquist, voodoo healers use these symbols in “deep” ways; how they choose to address issues of money, morality, good and evil is “evidence of a remarkable juncture of infrastructures of globality that carry forms and meanings in unpredictable directions” (107).

While Lindquist's work focuses on the importation of symbols as key to “strong” globalization, Jacquemet's research among Albanian translators reveals the multiple effects of foreign languages on Albanians' ability to globalize. According to Jacquemet, “newly acquired linguistic knowledge not only becomes a valuable commodity within the local/global marketplace, but, more importantly, produces a creolized zone of transidiomatic practices that shapes how multilingual Albanians imagine the rich world, interact with its local representatives, and desire to belong to a global community” (114). In this world, Jacquemet argues, interpreters for international organizations and foreign television programming contribute to new

linguistic environments in which people can participate in cosmopolitan practices. At the same time, “transidiomatic floaters,” the infiltration of Western phrases and ideas into local culture and vernacular, produces a global social imagination that *includes* Albanians, providing a possibility for participation in the world’s cultural markets. Thus for both Lindquist and Jacquemet, increased movement of symbols associated with globalization means more economic and social opportunities for former Soviet communities, as well as a sense of progress from participating in a global culture. Paradoxes that emerge from these processes are reconciled through a syncretic expression of local and global semiotics and language that pinpoints and quells anxieties regarding instability and isolation.

The remainder of the papers remind us, however, that many paradoxes of progress remain unresolved. Patico’s paper on the formulation of consumer identities among teachers in St. Petersburg, for example, demonstrates that although particular communities may want to live according to lifestyle standards they imagine as both “European” and “civilized,” the goods and privileges associated with such “civilization” are differentially accessible to post-Soviet citizens. While a few wealthy businesspeople may be able to afford them, many other ostensibly “worthy” people may have to settle for less expensive, but also less desirable, lower quality products of the global market. Patico argues that although market forces are understood to be out of people’s immediate control, consumers do read transnational flows of goods and money for information about their own positionings, both within their own cities and *vis-à-vis* global markets; they use particular kinds of knowledge and strategies in order to navigate these fields of power, and to minimize their feelings of having been “left behind” in the transformations of the 1990s. Consumer choices and anxieties over the origins of goods reveal the dichotomous nature of citizens’ experiences of marketization and globalization, for they perceive these processes as desirable as well as unjust, as representative of progress as well as decline, and in terms of both Europeanization and Third-Worldization.

Tunina and Stryker’s paper on preparing Russian adoptees for family life in the United States is similarly concerned with the ambivalence that surrounds engagement in transnational market relations, focusing in particular on the necessary shifts in identity that correlate with globalizing forces. At the same time that Russian adoptees are sent to the United States in search of a better life, they are also emotionally tied to their nation through their attachments within the orphanages. Although local stereotypes of “rich” Americans and “grateful Russian adoptees” serve to obscure this potentially problematic contradiction for both Russian orphanage staff and American adoptive parents, the undeniable failure of many Russian adoptees to become successful members of American families forces actors to confront the ways in which development discourse contributes to unrealistic expectations for both adoptive parents and adoptees. Russian orphanage staff and American adoption agencies are thus charged with providing new, more culturally sensitive approaches to preparing Russian children for new homes in the West.

More wide-scale movements of people also reflect the effect of transnational market dynamics on life choices and the ongoing re-envisioning of “progress” in a global context. Although we may think more often of impoverished people being forced across borders in search of work when we think about globalization, in former Soviet countries it is often educated elites whose lives have been most literally transnationalized. Stoilkova’s work on the large-scale emigration of Bulgaria’s intelligentsia to the United States and Timm’s work on the Swedish socialization of Latvian business students both demonstrate how sophisticated skills and knowledge endure as hot commodities on the global market; likewise, Ninetto’s paper on traveling Novosibirsk scientists demonstrates that “science” remains a relatively durable resource and asset of the former USSR. At the same time, the professional and material status for which these subjects’ education has prepared them may not be realizable at home due to drops in state funding for research, apathy regarding community development, or a general lack of employment opportunities. Some travel across national borders frequently or emigrate permanently, often in search of well-paid work in their specializations. Others remain “at home,” but their social circles, professional outlooks, and cultural preferences become globalized to such an extent that they feel almost as isolated from their parents’ generation and from many of their less privileged compatriots as they would have if they had emigrated.

If these last papers can be mined for a collective message, it is that “progress”—movement into a desired, modern future—may seem possible only by traversing the borders of the nation-state; at the same time, people are often confronted with the irony that their goals for the future have been nurtured along with a sense of national progress, national pride, and/or national character. Ultimately, it raises the question: “Can financial or professional success really be measured according to standards understood to be global and be achieved without abandoning or betraying one’s home or one’s past?”

Conclusion

Though their specific subject matters and approaches vary widely, the papers in this volume provide at least one collective conclusion: that “progress” is the source of much ambivalence for postsocialist citizens. Political, economic, and social processes associated with globalization have produced contradictory, sometimes elusive, and often deeply conflicted ways of pursuing success and survival at all levels of postsocialist life. Concepts of nationhood, civil society, and civilization take shape in tandem with competing allegiances, fragile resource bases, and lingering socialist pasts both mourned and denigrated. Careful examinations such as those we present here of the contradictions that are emergent in the lives of particular groups and individuals, however, put us well on the road to formulating new analytical models that will do more justice to the particularities of postsocialist globalization. If the experiences of the region’s professionals, activists, religious practitioners, and consumers seem to contradict and to exceed traditional definitions of “democracy,”

“capitalism,” and “progress,” it is out of these disjunctures that new frameworks for describing what *is* happening in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe begin to take form. The rest of the world’s speculation about “what comes next?” after Socialism may be over; the conversation between postsocialist subjects and the rest of the world about what is happening has already begun.

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