Grassrooting Network Imaginaries*

Paul Routledge**

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with Andrew Cumbers** and Corinne Nativel***)

**Department of Geography and Geomatics, Centre for Geosciences, University of
Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ Scotland

Diversity and Operational Logics of Global Justice Networks

New forms of translocal political solidarity and consciousness have begun to
emerge, associated with the partial globalization of networks of resistance. These
formations - consisting of diverse networks of social movements, trade unions, NGOs
and other organizations - inhabit a political space outside of formal national politics
(political parties, elections), and address a range of institutions across a variety of
geographic scales (local, national, international). Social movements are increasing their
spatial reach in terms of constructing multi-scalar networks of support and solidarity for
their particular struggles, and also by participating with other movements in broad
networks to resist neoliberal globalization.

The forging of new alliances is creating what Esteva and Prakash (1998) consider
a pluriverse of interests - as different social movements operating in different socio-
political contexts experience the negative consequences of neoliberalism (Wallgren 1998)
- what some commentators have termed the ‘movement of movements’ (Mertes 2004,
Towney 2004), and what we term Global Justice Networks (GJNs). Underpinning such
developments is a conceptualisation of protest and struggle that respects difference, rather
than attempting to develop universalistic and centralising solutions that deny the diversity of interests and identities that are confronted with neoliberal globalisation processes. As such, it is argued that GJNs represent a participatory way of practising effective politics, articulating the ability of different movements to be able to work together without any single organisation or ideology controlling a particular network. Moreover, participation in a network has become an essential component of the collective identities of those involved, with networking forming part of their common repertoire of action and recruitment (Melucci 1996, Castells 1997). However, the forging of alliances between increasingly diverse interests implies alliances that might become ever more contradictory and problematic (Chin and Mittelman 1997). Indeed, it is our contention that the diversity inherent in GJNs will inevitably give rise to conflicting goals, ideologies, and strategies, and as a result, conflictual geographies of power. Such concerns are not only tied up with considerations of place and the ability to act politically in coalitions across diverse geographical scales (see Routledge 2003a), they are also associated with the (place-specific) operational logics of GJNs’ participant movements.

Due to the diversity of their participants, GJNs contain political, operational, and geographical ‘faultlines’. These include differences between ideological (e.g. Marxist, Feminist, Socialist, Anarchist) and post-ideological (e.g. autonomist) positionalities; reformist and radical political agendas; the resource and power differences between movements from the Global North and the Global South; and different types of activism associated with NGOs, political parties, and direct action formations (Towney 2004). Drawing upon the work of Deleuze and Guatarri (1987), Towney (2004) argues that there are two prominent logics of operation within the diversity of movements that comprise
the ‘movement of movements’. First, in the more traditional political parties, trades unions etc a ‘majoritarian’ logic of modernity predominates, where organizations display conventional hierarchical structures, with a recognized leadership, vertical social relations based on delegation, and formal organizational processes. Second, in more direct-action focused groups and organizations, a ‘minoritarian’ logic of interconnection predominates, where groups engage in a decentered, non-hierarchical network of horizontal, rhizomatic relations. Such groups tend to work outside of formal political structures, eschewing leadership roles and party structures. Their actions represent active challenges and alternatives to formal ways of making decisions (e.g. through governments), and they emphasize direct action, which implies taking responsibility for change yourself (e.g. through the blockading of military bases, or the occupation of land) rather than relying upon elected representatives (Carter and Morland 2004). In order to analyse how such operational logics become entangled within the workings of GJNs, we focus upon a particular network, People’s Global Action. Participant observation research within this network has been conducted during 2002-2004 by Routledge.

**People’s Global Action: a decentered networking logic?**

People’s Global Action (PGA) represents a network for communication and coordination between diverse social movements, whose membership cuts across differences in gender, ethnicity, language, nationality, age, class and caste. PGA Asia is concerned with five principal processes of facilitation and interaction between movements. It acts as a facilitating space for communication, (e.g. using letters, e-mail, web-sites, newsletters, telephone, fax, and face to face meetings such as conferences); information-sharing (e.g. concerning the effectiveness of particular tactics and strategies, knowledge on place-
specific legal issues and local geographies etc.); solidarity (e.g. demonstrations of support for particular struggles such as protests, letter writing campaigns etc.); coordination (e.g. organising conferences, meetings and collective protests etc.); and resource mobilisation (e.g. of people, finances, and skills) (Routledge 2003a). The network articulates certain unifying values – what we would term collective visions – to provide common ground for movements from which to coordinate collective struggles.1

The broad objectives of the network are to offer an instrument for co-ordination and mutual support at the global level for those resisting corporate rule and the neoliberal capitalist development paradigm, to provide international projection to their struggles, and to inspire people to resist corporate domination through civil disobedience and people-oriented constructive actions. PGA has also established regional networks – e.g. PGA Latin America, PGA Europe, PGA North America and PGA Asia – to decentralise the everyday workings of the network. The principal means of materialising the network have been thru the internet (PGA has established its own website (www.agp.org) and email list in order to facilitate network communication); conferences; activist caravans (organised in order for activists from different struggles and countries to communicate with one another, exchange information, and participate in various solidarity actions); and global days of action.

The PGA network is facilitated by social movements within the network but much of the organisational work has been conducted by ‘free radical’ activists and key movement contacts (usually movement leaders or general secretaries) who have helped organise conferences, mobilise resources (e.g. funds), and facilitate communication and information flows. These free radicals and key contacts constitute the ‘imagineers’ of the
network, who attempt to ‘ground’ the concept or imaginary of the network (what it is, how it works, what it is attempting to achieve) within grassroots communities who comprise the membership of the participant movements. In PGA Asia – the regional network of our study - there is an Asian convenor (All Nepal Peasant’s Association, ANPA), a South Asia sub-regional convenor (Indian Farmer’s Union, [BKU]), a Southeast Asia sub-regional convenor (Assembly of the Poor [AoP], Thailand), and a ‘free radical’ group of one Thai and four European activists.

In the PGA network there is a general rejection of organisational models based on representation, verticality and hierarchy. In their stead comes ‘non-hierarchical decentralisation’ and ‘horizontal coordination’ which reflect a de-centered networking logic. Such transnational networking processes generate the communicative infrastructure necessary for the emergence of transnational social movements, understood not as organizations or specific forms of contentious action, but rather as ‘transnational counterpublics’ (Olesen 2005: 94): open spaces for the self-organized production and circulation of oppositional identities, discourses, and practices. These refer to the larger social contexts in which networks are embedded and ‘are constituted by a range of geographically dispersed actors, and are often centered around local or national issues considered to be of relevance to people outside of the geographical location, or around issues with a cross border nature’ (Olesen 2005: 94).

Although PGA Asia is a grassroots-based, decentralized network, it nevertheless involves both newer and more traditional political formations, including NGOs, unions, and leftist parties. PGA Asia operates as a network wherein the participant grassroots movements (at both local and national scales) are governed by traditional organizational
structures and logics: hierarchy, elections, delegation, and, in some cases political party structures too. For example, among the movements involved in PGA Asia are the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) which holds internal elections for a series of hierarchical functional positions within the movement; the All Nepal Peasants Association (ANPA) which operates similarly, and is also affiliated with the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist); the Narmada Bachao Andolan, India (NBA) which has a powerful core group activists leaders (Routledge 2003b); the Borneo Indigenous Peoples’ and Peasants Union (Panggau) which has an elected secretariat and a mobile a ‘core catalyst’ group of between 20-30 people, who organize local communities throughout Sarawak, Malaysia; and the Assembly of the Poor, Thailand (AoP) which comprises a network of anti-dam, peasant, student and labour movements, with their own differing modes of operation.

This can create certain instabilities within the network, for many activists are unaware of the difference in operational logics between their own movements and the networking logic of PGA. For example, many activists interviewed, expressed the need for more familiar operational logics and structures in the PGA Asia process. Hence an activist in the Bangladesh Kisani Sabha (peasant women’s assembly) thought that the network was too loose and needed tangible structures to facilitate coordination, communication and contact:

PGA is a process but it should have particular institutions where people can get training, for example via an education program, and we need a communication point from where people can get information and use as a contact point. The network is too loose. We need and operational secretariat. Kisani Sabha is interested in coordinating a national PGA process in Bangladesh, but we need a tangible structure in Bangladesh for coordination, communication and contact. The Dhaka conference was the start of this (interview, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2004).
There are also different notions of power manifested in the PGA Asia network. Contemporary networking logics stress the process of exercising power rather than attempting to seize it. Hence within PGA Asia, the network form of power is one that is decentered and horizontal, with a diversity of movements practicing a diversity of tactics, hence no one governing ideology or strategy dominates the process. However, many of the constituent movements within PGA Asia articulate more traditional forms of organizational logic, predicated upon taking political power. For example, while the BKF operates autonomously from Bangladesh’s principal political parties (the BNP and Awami league), the Karnatakan State Farmer’s Union (KRRS) participates in electoral politics in order to draw attention to rural, grassroots issues, and ANPA is affiliated to the CPN(M-L), which as of August 2004 was participating in a coalition government in Nepal. Mirroring local level dynamics, conflicts between networking and more vertical command logics generate constantly shifting alliances as activists alternatively participate within, abandon, or create autonomous spaces with respect to broader social networks. Hence within PGA Asia, an earlier participant in the network, the Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI) has left the convergence to operate as the Asia secretariat for La Via Campesina, (network of peasant farmers).

**Networks and Relationality within PGA Asia**

Annelise Riles argues that networks generate their own reality by reflecting upon themselves: “an ambition for political change through communication and information exchange” (2001: 3). Network activity becomes a means to an end, and an end in itself. There is an extensive focus on process as people within the network discuss how best to
coordinate (via email, conferences, reports etc). Indeed, Riles argues that the quotidian work of networks - the work of creating documents, organizing conferences, securing funding, writing meeting minutes, conference evaluations - generates a set of personal relations drawing people together and also creating tensions, and divisions etc. She argues that personal relations are often the means of achieving network effectiveness, hence people and their actions and relations can be understood as an effect of the network.

Sustaining collective action over time is related to the capacity of a group to develop strong interpersonal ties that provide the basis for the construction of collective identities (Bosco 2001). As noted earlier, PGA has periodic international and regional conferences and meetings that provide material spaces within which representatives of participant movements can converge, and discuss issues that pertain to the functioning of the network. At the conferences, the hosts (a social movement or movements) explain the specific problems and ongoing history of their campaigns and each participant movement gets to introduce themselves and their struggle to the conference participants. Study tours are often organized at the conclusion of the conferences for the participants, in order to experience a particular struggle or conditions of a particular community. PGA caravans are organized to enable cross-movement exchanges and to encourage new movements into the convergence. The emphasis on such processes is the two-way communication regarding struggles, strategies, visions of society, and the construction of economic and political alternatives to neoliberalism. Such conferences, caravans, and meetings also enable strategies to be developed in secure sequestered sites, beyond the surveillance that accompanies any communicative technology in the public realm.
Moreover, such gatherings enable deeper interpersonal ties to be established between different activists from different cultural spaces and struggles.

PGA gatherings (such as the Dhaka conference) provide spaces for performing, representing, and physically manifesting alternative movement networks. These gatherings have played a vital role in face-to-face communication and exchange of experience, strategies and ideas. PGA conferences, and the network, provides an opportunity, beyond mass actions, for social movement networks to come together, represent themselves to themselves and others, generate emotional energy, broadcast oppositional discourses, and wage internal symbolic struggles. PGA is a collective ritual where alternative social movement networks become embodied. It represents an important mechanism through which alternative transnational counterpublics are produced and reproduced. For example, one activist in Panggau, explained his reasons for attending the Dhaka conference: “We wanted to share our experiences of struggle. We don’t have many linkages to other movements or the space to speak. For example at the World social Forum time is too limited. The Dhaka conference provided us with an opportunity and the space to speak” (interview, Kuching, Borneo, Malaysia, 2004).

However, networks are fragile entities which can be disrupted by a range of different issues. First, there is the constant problem of securing funding to provide the resources for conferences, caravans etc. Second, there is the ongoing problem of movements leaving the network. Third, the commitment of certain movements might wane, or be attracted to other networks. Hence the formation of the World Social Forum (and the regional Asian Social Forum) has seen both the participation of several of the movements also involved with PGA Asia (such as BKF, ANPA), and the loss of movements within
the global PGA network such as the FSPI as they have directed their energies towards the World Social Forum. In addition several movements involved in PGA Asia, such as ANPA, the BKF, and KRRS, are also participants in La Via Campesina network. Fourth, a network can be compromised by the ineffectiveness of the communication and operational links between its participant movements. For one Thai activist, the operational logic of the network is underpinned by ‘literate’ and conceptual communicational forms (e.g. the writing of emails and documents, the analysis of how networks function), whereas the operational logic of most grassroots movements is based upon oral communication:

There is a real limitation to the capacity of grassroots movements to take ownership of the process. Movements do not know each other very well, and some SE Asia movements do not really know the PGA process at all. Thus participation is limited and language affects this too. Most movements are based on oral communication, whereas the PGA process is more literate and concept-based, thus it is difficult for grassroots movements to understand (interview, Bangkok, Thailand, 2004).

In addition to these concerns is the crucial organization question of the relays of communication and information, in other words, how do the grassroots members of participant movements obtain information?

Relays of Communication and Information within PGA Asia

Although the ideal network imagines the free flow of information between all participants in all directions, the reality is invariably compromised by various factors. PGA is organised primarily through the Internet which acts as a communicative and coordinating thread in the PGA network, weaving different place-based struggles together so that they may converge in virtual space. Of course, in the global South, grassroots movements have varying and often limited access to electricity, let alone
computer technologies. Hence participant movements in PGA Asia effect communication and information relays via the imagineers (who have various international contacts owing to their participation in various networks including PGA Asia). They are the points where information accumulates: the movement offices in Kathmandu, Dhaka, Bangkok etc. and the free radicals’ lap tops and office computers.

As Jo Freeman (1970) noted a long time ago from her experiences in the feminist movement, there is no such thing as a 'structureless' group. The structure may be flexible, it may vary over time, it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities and intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals with different talents, predisposition's and backgrounds makes this inevitable. Thus 'structurelessness' becomes a way of masking power. Indeed, decision making often devolves to a surprisingly small number of individuals and groups who make a lot of the running in deciding what happens, where and when. Although they never officially ‘speak for’ others, much unofficial doctrine nonetheless emanates from them.

Within PGA Asia, the imagineers - because of their structural positions, communication skills and experience in activism and meeting facilitation - tend to wield disproportionate power and influence within the network. Globally mobile, they perform much of the routine work that sustains the network. They possess the cultural capital of (usually) higher education, and the social capital inherent in their transnational connections and access to resources and knowledge (Missingham 2003). Within political networks, such groups and individuals not only route more than their ‘fair share’ of traffic, but actively determining the ‘content’ that traverses them. They do not
(necessarily) constitute themselves out of a malicious will-to-power: rather, power defaults to them through the characteristics noted above and personal qualities like energy, commitment and charisma, and the ability to synthesise politically important social moments into identifiable ideas and forms (King 2004). They may also possess differential access to resources and mobility compared to others in the network (see Routledge 2003a). However, the existence of an ‘informal elite’ can also be partly due to the attitudes of grassroots activists themselves, who at times, tend to defer authority to key movement contacts and let them get on with the work of international networking. Hence, an activist in the KRRS, explained:

We need to involve the grassroots in the PGA process, but the attitude of local activists can be a barrier. They are often happy to depend upon me to organise the international side of the movement. When I report back about PGA events such as Dhaka, no-one really takes it very seriously, because they do not see a link between their movement and their daily lives, and PGA. This is also accentuated by the fact that few people in the movement speak English. But movements need to take responsibility for the PGA process (interview, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004).

Interwoven with the problem of differential activist powers, is the issue of the network’s imaginary, played out across material and virtual space.

**Spatial Dynamics of the Network**

While networks of resistance can and do operate transnationally, the struggles and the identities of resistance are often born locally through activists’ sense and experience of place (Pile and Keith 1997). As Ettinger and Bosco (2004) note, a network’s sense of place can be symbolic, referring to its home or common meeting ground, its spatial imaginary. Network’s have a fluid sense of place. This applies also to the movements that comprise the network. They too are multi-scalar participating in a variety of networks and multi-scalar actions. Meanwhile a network’s sense of space refers to its spatial arenas of
operation or potential operation. Although convergent spaces of networks of resistance are rooted in places, they are not necessarily local. What also gets diffused and organized across space is the “common ground” shared by different groups—often the result of groups’ entangled interests (Routledge 2003a). Participants within the PGA Asia network come from different cultures, political beliefs etc. but share common visions and hence share involvement in the network at various scales.

Some networks begin, evolve, and remain localized; others spread across space. Networks can expand as well as contract, and the geographic fluidity of a network can contribute to its resilience to external threats and thus to its sustainability. With a focus on processes, germane to an investigation is an understanding of network growth and contraction strategies, coalitional development and change, and an identification of the groups to which a network may connect and the circumstances and strategy of connection and dissolution. In PGA Asia, while certain movements have let the process, such as FSPI, others have joined the process, including AoP, the Vietnam Farmers’ Union and the Borneo Indigenous Peoples’ and Peasants Union. A network can be spatially decentralized but power may remain highly centralized, and vice versa. In PGA Asia, a spatially decentralized network contains a concentration of power within certain individuals (i.e. the imagineers) although these individuals are themselves spatially dispersed. The PGA Asia network could be seen as what Ettlinger and Bosco (2004) term a “constellation” or “federation” of overlapping relations between imagineers, social movements and other regional ‘constellations’ of the PGA network that coalesce in conferences, caravans, meetings and actions. At other times, these same individuals and movements may be engaged in other projects and actions (e.g. within their own national
and regional movement contexts, within other networks such as *La Via Campesina* etc.).

A network’s sense of place and space, are integrally related. The former represents a group’s common meeting and recruitment ground, its “home” (e.g. PGA conferences, where new movements from Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia all participated in the Dhaka conference for the first time); the latter represents a group’s capacity for growth and contraction and its resilience to change (e.g. PGA conferences, and caravans). Importantly, neither sense of place nor of space necessarily implies a latitudinal/longitudinal fix because sense of place may be symbolic or virtual, and understanding the dynamics of sense of space entails thinking about power relations across space and not necessarily in any one place. This is a relational perspective that focuses on connections between the nodes (people, localities), and between the nodes, imagineers and grassroots movement activists, not the nodes themselves (Massey 1994).

However, the technology for reaching out cannot extend networks where the notion of extension fails to capture the imagination (Riles: 2001: 26). Some grassroots activists interviewed in Nepal and Dhaka thought of PGA as an organization which arranged events for them, rather than imagining themselves as being part of the PGA Asia network. Other activists articulated the need for more traditional, tangible organizational structures than the notion of a ‘coordination tool’ implied. In part, this may be attributed to the entangled character of organizational logics, discussed earlier. The PGA imaginary remains abstract to many grassroots activists, for whom the networking logic of many direct action groups (and PGA) is unfamiliar. As one BKF activists remarked: “We have to disseminate information to people in rural areas, but so far they have not been able too visualise what the network is. We need a national
conference to begin the process of visualization of the PGA process in Bangladesh” (interview Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2004). In addition, as noted earlier activists do not see a link between their movement and their daily lives, and the PGA network. This leads us to a discussion of how the PGA process is ‘grassrooted’ in the countries of participant movements.

**Grassrooting the PGA process: Grounding the Imaginary**

Several processes have been particularly important in order to ground the idea of PGA: the PGA conference, feedback by conference delegates to their grassroots, and the imagineers. Most activists who attended the PGA Asia conference in Dhaka, had been invited by one of the key movement contacts of the network. Many had only recently heard of the PGA network, but the conference enabled them to learn more about the PGA process (interviews, Kathmandu, Dhaka, 2004). In addition, many movements held post conference de-briefing meetings at national and district levels to explain to people about the conference and the PGA process. As a Bangladesh Kisani Sabha activist explained, concerning the process in Bangladesh:

The Dhaka delegates disseminated information into the rural areas. I held several meetings for Kisani Sabha members in villages (in yard meetings outside activists’ houses) to discuss the PGA conference and process. Rural women and members of Kisani Sabha now know about PGA, have got new impressions and the sense that Kisani Sabha has an international role. So, rural women have got a sense of empowerment (interview, Dhaka, 2004).

The role of the imagineers has also been important in grassrooting the PGA imaginary. For poor BKF peasant communities of Khulna district in Bangladesh, or the AoP’s Karen communities in Northern Thailand, or Panggau’s Iban Pagan communities in Borneo, their only source of connection to the network is primarily through the activist
organisers who operate from the movements' offices, and who visit the communities as part of their organising practices. ‘Free radical’ activists (accompanying activist organizers) have also often traveled to visit social movements in Asia before PGA events such as conferences to discuss with them the PGA process, conduct workshops, and invite them to participate in forthcoming events. The imagineers act as ‘grassrooting vectors’ furthering the process of communication, information sharing and interaction within grassroots communities. For the poor of grassroots movements such relational dynamics can constitute an expansion of their geographical imagination and practical political knowledge. The presence of imagineers in grassroots communities embodies the network, and can constitute proof of sorts of the international character of the network - a tangible, visual example that peasants are part of something wider and larger. It also enables the concept of PGA to begin to take root in peoples imaginations. The imagineers tend to act as the driving force of the network imaginary coordinating disproportionate amounts of informational traffic, and actively determining the ‘content’ of that traffic. As noted earlier, certain decision-making power accrues to them by virtue of access to resources (time, money, language skills etc.), as well as personal qualities like energy, commitment and charisma. Social capital accrues to these imagineers by virtue of their key positionalities within the network, and the experience that they gain from this.

However, while networks are both local and global at all points, enabling analysts to refrain from a shift in scale between local and global (Latour 1993), movements themselves, and the communities from which they are comprised, are differentially connected to networks. As Sarah Whatmore (2002: 6) has suggested, the geographies of networks imply ‘the multiplicity of space-times generated in/by the movements and
rhythms of heterogeneous association. The spatial vernacular of such geographies is fluid, unsettling the coordinates of distance and proximity; local and global’. But (she continues) ‘this is not to ignore the potent affects of territorialization’, but rather to attend more closely ‘to the labours of division that (re)iterate their performance and the host of socio-material practices in which they inhere’ (pp 6).

For most of the grassroots activists of PGA Asia’s participant movements, their most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organisation is their locality: they mobilise to protect their community, their land, and their environment. However, these immediate issues of survival and livelihood nevertheless can act as motivations for people to participate (as social movement members) within transnational networks such as PGA Asia, in order to meet activists in other movements, to learn from them, and increase their understanding of the issues that affect them. What can get transnationalised in the network imaginary are notions of mutual solidarity – constructing the grievances and aspirations of geographically, culturally, economically and at times politically different and distant peoples as interlinked. Such mutual solidarity recognizes and respects differences between actors within networks while at the same time recognizing similarities (for example, in people’s aspirations). In this sense network imaginaries may help to reconfigure distance in different ways –which emphasizes commonalities rather than differences. As Olesen (2005) argues, “mutual solidarity builds on a greater level of openness to different forms of social struggle” [and] “entails a constant mediation between particularity and universality – that is, an invocation of global consciousness resting on recognition of the other” (2005: 111). A network imaginary that can invoke interconnectedness opens up potentials for mutual solidarity
that enables a diversity of struggles to articulate their particularities while simultaneously asserting and transcending identity.

Many activists believed that an important step in bringing the PGA imaginary to the grassroots, lay not only in having local post-conference debriefing meetings, or meetings where imagineers spoke, but also to create a national PGA process within their respective countries (which would also involve caravan activities such as meetings between activists from different countries):

We need to bring the PGA process to the national level and then down to the grassroots workers, we need a national PGA process to which the grassroots are linked, via conferences, workshops, discussions, trainings. I have begun to talk to the grassroots communities in my district (Saptari) and in my union about my Dhaka experiences. But this has to be a collective process of growth. We also need to bring other international activists to the grassroots communities. The problem with the grassroots process is that we do not talk in depth, we need a national action plan for PGA (ANPA activist, interview Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004).

In addition, activists articulated the need to establish more ongoing grassroots programmes, whereby some of the experiences that activists would normally only get at conferences (such as learning about the dynamics of globalization, and the struggles of other movements) could be provided. This was seen as the responsibility of the participant movements in PGA Asia: “movements need to take responsibility for the PGA process. We need to make each local district organization have representatives on a PGA committee, and responsibility for international matters” (KRRS activist, interview, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004).

Global Justice Networks are never fully formed, but are constantly produced and reproduced through concrete networking practices involving significant conflict and contestation over issues related to power, language, authority, and entangled operational
logics within the network. Hence an important aspect of network dynamics entails deepening the process of network imagination within grassroots communities for whom digital technologies remain relatively inaccessible. Network imaginaries at the grassroots remain uneven and potentially ‘biodegradeable’ (Plows 2004: 104), i.e. they may dissipate without sufficient and constant nurturance. Moreover, while networking as a process constitutes much of the vitality of PGA Asia, the question remains as to whether such networking is sufficient to enable transformative political projects to be realized. Network imaginaries must be grounded in the geopoetics of resistance the cultural and ideological expressions of social movement agency - e.g. drawn from place-specific knowledges, cultural practices and vernacular languages - which inspire, empower, and motivate people to resist. They require sustainable form of material resistance to prevent the performative events of the network – the conferences, caravans and days of action – from becoming only memories in the imaginations of grassroots communities. As one Panggau activist noted

Demonstrations are not sustainable forms of resistance – for communities like the Iban, they are artificial forms of resistance, inappropriate to their culture and their communities’ local realities. Symbolic demonstrations may get into the press for a day, but afterwards little will change, and these communities are only left with memories. We need to develop consciousness (e.g. through educational trainings) about legal rights, and how to develop sustainable economies and sustainable forms of resistance. We need to discuss ways that movements can meaningfully support one another (interview Kuching, Borneo, Malaysia, 2004)

This view reflects broader concerns about the establishment of lasting alternatives to neoliberalism (interviews, Nepal, Thailand, Bangladesh, 2004). Such concerns have led to the emergence of certain projects from within the relationships generated through the PGA Asia convergence. For example, activists from the KRRS and Bangladesh Kisani
Sabha have begun a long term project in southern India to establish an agro-ecological community for women’s empowerment (personal communication, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004).

Global Justice Networks, such as PGA, can provide the organizational infrastructure necessary for the emergence of global fields of meaning and action against corporate globalization. Periodic conferences and caravans, and the ongoing organizing surrounding them, facilitate sustained exchange and interaction among diverse movements, networks, and organizations, generating common discourses, practices, and identities on regional and global scales. By providing concrete tools for communication and coordination, these networks allow geographically dispersed and, more or less, locally rooted actors to reach out across space, forge broader ties and connections, and ground the notion of mutual solidarity. The PGA ‘process’ thus helps constitute alternative counterpublics, which form the communicational basis for transnational social movements, understood as highly complex and contradictory spaces of convergence rather than unified collective actors. Beyond creating open spaces for reflection and debate, forums and conferences also provide “temporary terrains of construction” where activists generate and exchange innovative ideas, resources, and practices, and within which alternative social movement networks are physically mapped and embodied (Juris 2004). Activist gatherings provide alternative mechanisms for generating affective attachments that allow movements to continue reaching out to a broader audience. The sustainability of such processes will depend in part, on the extent to which network imaginaries are grounded successfully, and meaningfully, in grassroots communities.
References


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Endnotes

1 The collective visions of PGA, are as follows:

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; and all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation.

2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.

3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker.

4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism.

5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy (Taken from the PGA website: www.agp.org).

2 peasant

3 PGA Asia held a regional conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh in May 2004.