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Grassrooting the Imaginary: Acting within the Convergence

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Enfolding

Glasgow apartment, Scotland, 1999.
I read an article in the *Guardian* newspaper. It was by the Indian author Arundhati Roy. In it she described the plight of the *advivasi* (tribal) people on the banks of India's holiest river, the Narmada. She made a call for international observers and participants to come and support/participate in the Monsoon-long *satyagraha*[1] that was going to be conducted in defiance of the construction of mega dams along the valley (that would, if all built, displace up to 15 million people). I decided to travel to India to participate in the struggle against the dams. At about the same time, by a series of chance encounters, through contacts with acquaintances and friends, I heard about the burning of fields of (Monsanto-owned) GM cotton in India's southern state of Karnataka by the Karnatakan State Farmer's Union. I also decided to visit them with the intention of setting up a research project. The Farmer's Union was to be the host of the second international conference of the recently formed international network of grassroots movements, People's Global Action. After participating in the *satyagraha* along the banks of the Narmada, I took a series of trains, buses, rickshaws to just south of Bangalore where the conference was to be held. There I met a charming, charismatic Spaniard who discussed with me the brief history of the network that I had just become tentatively entwined in. He introduced me to a gathering of people, who, through their proficiency in languages, experiences of political action, access to financial, technological and cultural resources, represented a range of social movements. Through my appearance at this gathering of individuals, so my further enfolding into the network commenced. I attended workshops, informal discussions, roundtables, plenaries, parties, communal meals, confidential asides, and social drinking. I became further entwined in the entangled relations, interactions, relays, intimacies, arguments, and jealousies that comprised the

1 Literally 'truth force'. Each Monsoon since 1991, the NBA (Narmada Bachao Andolan, Save the Narmada movement) has initiated nonviolent satyagrahas, whereby villagers in the submergence-threatened areas near the dams resist eviction from their homes, pledging to remain even at the risk of being drowned.

web of contacts that enabled these people to strategise, and the network to act. I became increasingly drawn and bound to this group of charismatic, experienced, hard working activists with a lust for life and rebellion. Subsequently, during the next five years, I travelled to some of the network's nodes, located in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, to hold face-to-face meetings with various activists. We are the network, all of us who resist.

A white, male academic and activist, I have been working and researching within this network of grassroots peasant movements in order to facilitate collective action and solidarity. After describing the network (*converging*) and my positionality and experiences within it (*following, threading, embodying*), I raise the issue of relationality between resisting subjects in order to discuss how movements might forge sustainable mutual articulations of resistance that negotiate differences in power, culture, resources, politics etc. I argue for a relational ethics of struggle, attentive to difference, that stresses the importance of collaboration between resisting subjects, and analyse some of the preliminary ways that such a networked imaginary might be 'grounded' in grassroots communities, reflecting upon my role (and others) in facilitating this process.

Acting within this network consists of a set of informational, experiential, emotional, and bodily practices (Juris 2004). As Riles (2001) notes, networks generate their own reality by reflecting upon themselves: "an ambition for political change through communication and information exchange" (2001: 3). So what follows is also communication and information exchange, articulating "not so much my position in the field, as the way the field is both within and without myself" (2001: 20).

Converging

People's Global Action (PGA) represents a network for communication and co-ordination 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, information-sharing, solidarity, coordination, and resource mobilisation (Routledge, 2003a). The network articulates certain symbolic unifying values – what I would term collective visions – to provide common ground for movements from which to articulate common opponents (e.g. neoliberalism) and coordinate collective struggles.[2]

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2 The collective visions of PGA, are as follows (Taken from the PGA website: www.agp.org):

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.

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); global and regional 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'[3] 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. As one such 'free radical' in PGA Asia, I want to consider an embodied relational ethics of struggle drawing in part from some of the insights from actor-network theory (ANT) and feminist political theory and some personal experiences that come from direct action.

Following and Threading

Ganges river delta, Bangladesh, 2002
Following the network, so many bodily memories. Sleeping on a wooden table in a corrugated hut, waiting for a meeting that never happened. Overcrowded rickshaw spewing exhaust fumes into our eyes and lungs. Bouts of diarrhoea and clenching stomach cramps. Blistering humid heat before cooling monsoon rains. Tip-towing on intermittent brick stepping stones amid the squelching mud. On a small motor-powered fishing boat, our group of activists sail down the Tetulia river in the Ganges delta, Bangladesh. Separated by the flooding blue-green river are tiny islands only large enough for one or two houses and few trees. Turbid delta braids, endless as the driving rain. Gathered nets, abandoned boats dancing to the river's swell. Mao Zedong entreated his cadres to move among the peasants like fish in water. In the Monsoon, that is literally what we do. Jungle, and fields of *padi*[4] and *paan*[5] form a necklace to the river

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

3 I have taken this term from a fellow activist within PGA.

4 Rice.

that shimmers emerald, turquoise and jade. We paddle across rain-sodden, river-encroached padi fields to meet landless peasants who have occupied islands in the river. We sleep on board the small wooden boat only to wake as the rain begins to fall. Under darkened monsoon skies, as hunting bats emerge from the jungle, we shelter in the boat's small cabin from the torrential rains. Siren whoops, rusting rooftops, huddled shadows wait at the river's edge. We meander our way across the vast river and its myriad tributaries.

The Monsoon flooding in the delta effaces the difference between the land and the river, creating a surreal landscape. Close to the river, the land is inundated, but only by a few inches. A fishing boat sails past herd of cows seemingly walking on water. Behind them a strip of land is sandwiched between strips of water. Beyond, small huts are nestled amongst clumps of trees, surrounded by water. Here, on the islands – or chars – that have emerged from the migrating river, the landless have occupied the land, fertile with alluvial soils. I travel with activists from the 'Aaht Sangathan' – or Eight organizations – which are involved in various struggles including organising landless peasants in Bangladesh to occupy the chars[6]. In particular, I am visiting Bangladesh at the invitation of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (the landless people's movement, BKF), which forms the largest group of the national network that is the Sangathan, which is in turn, part of PGA.

The PGA network comprises a multiplicity of connections, articulations, moments of action, meeting points, desires, intimacies etc. Every network comprises other networks, a multiplicity of individuals who are part of families, communities, social movements with all of their problematic, messy relationships, interactions, and dynamics. Networks are in part held together by the connective flow of narratives, or stories, that people tell. They provide a grounded expression of people's imaginations, experiences, interests and values. Stories express a sense of identity and belonging – who 'we' are, why a 'we' have come together, what 'we' stand for. Stories also communicate a sense of cause, purpose, and mission. They express aims, methods and cultural dispositions and can be deployed to attract external audiences. While my narrative can be related to other narratives, since at particular junctures they intersect, they remain quite different, voices from different realities, which converge momentarily. Each time we enter the flow of the network, we encounter some of the myriad connections, interactions, relays, social relations and discourses/texts that circulate in ever-changing forms and which differ from place to place (cf. Juris 2004). To understand acting in the network requires immersion in the waters of participation, in the specific nodes/places of the network, even as we freely flow through the network wherever it leads.

Bruno Latour (1993) argues that context is always made in process, rather than being pre-given. Contexts are constructed around/by specific projects (out of materials,

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5 Betel.

6 The Eight organizations have a membership of 1.3 million people and comprise: the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (landless peasants organization, 700,000 members); the Bangladesh Kisani Sabha (women peasants organization); the Bangladesh Floating Labour Union (migrant labourers); the Bangladesh Floating Women's Labour Union; the Bangladesh Adivasi Samiti (indigenous people's organization); the Bangladesh Rural Intellectual Front; the Ganochaya Sangskritik Kendro (cultural center); and the Revolutionary Youth Sabha (youth front).

resources etc.) that are available 'locally' to the project. As Laurier and Philo (1999) note, this demand for specificity, parallels demands of geographers that 'contextual thinking' always pay attention to the precise time-spaces which are involved (Gregory, 1994; Thrift, 1996). Every network is a node, every node a network, hence ANT's interest in how connections are fostered and sustained within networks, also includes consideration the nodes (people and places) of the network and how they influence, and in turn are influenced by, the weaving of webs and the drawing of connections. Understanding the dynamics of network operational logics entails thinking about power relations across space and not necessarily in any one place. This is a relational perspective that focuses on the effectiveness of connections (e.g. communication and operational links) between the actors in the network (Massey, 1994). Because, within the vortex of desire, feeling, imagination, symbols, speech, movement, action and terrain such experiences are lived as theater, ceremony, spontaneity or ritual as the demonstration of the will of those who are capable of and desirous of resistance. There are also ghosts here, as the past continues to haunt the actions of those who live in the present. There are also those unexpected moments; the fleeting contexts and predicaments which produce potential, and human capacities of expression and invention, i.e. the power of the imagination (Thrift, 2000: 214-215). In order to begin to understand how events are shaped as they happen, it is important to weave "a poetic of the common practices and skills which produce people, selves and worlds" (Thrift, 2000: 216).

It was my intention to follow part of the network's flows, interactions and nodes of action, to obtain a 'sense' of it and to act within it. In part, I was able to follow the network wherever I chose to travel. Of course, this was due in large part due to the privileges of mobility, funding, class, nationality that accrue to the white, male, Western academic. Privileges that included the time to engage in critical evaluation while activists were resisting the impacts of neoliberalism on their local environment, and the ability to leave Asia whenever I wanted to (see Nast, 1994; Routledge, 2002).

Following is an active, embodied process. According to Deleuze and Guattari, following forgoes the autonomy of a fixed perspective in order to chart the course along which it flows, while being borne along by the flux of events and the singularities (e.g. nodes) it encounters, engaging in "a continuous variation of variables instead of extracting constants from them" (1987: 372). Following connects the singularities it encounters by is own movement between and within them, and seeks to draw a flow of connections, rather than enact a process of appropriation, between these experiences.

I followed the PGA network by being part of it – by going with and being part of the flow of interactions, communications, connections that comprise part of its action. For, in some senses I acted like a thread, linking parts of the network together. I followed the PGA network by being part of it – by going with and being part of the flow of interactions, communications, connections that comprise part of its action. I followed, participated, but also created certain encounters. Certain materials enabled such encounters to take place – computers, airplanes, buses, taxis, rickshaws, pen and paper etc. Indeed, agency is constructed through the combination of heterogeneous materials, human and non-human. However, what do we do with that agency? Communication between people, eye to heart to mind, replete with intonations and gestures, are crucial

to forming the crucial common grounding that enables the network to act. The ideas brainstormed, plans hatched, schemes discarded, itineraries planned, logistics worked through – all initially take place in interpersonal meetings away from the insecure sites of internet and telephone communication technologies. Moreover, such face-to-face meetings enable the embodying of a relational ethics of struggle (Juris 2004).

Embodying

Following the connective flow initiated by a newspaper article read in Scotland, brought me twice (in 1999 and 2000) to the Narmada river in India, and a participant in PGA and the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA, Save the Narmada movement). The movement – which consists of *adivasi*[7] subsistence farmers and wealthy cash-crop peasant farmers – has waged a non-violent struggle against the construction of mega-dams along the river valley since 1985 (see Routledge, 2003b).

Satyagraha camp: Domkhedi, Maharashtra, India, 2000
The rhythm of the camp begins as dawn breaks over the silver waters of the Narmada river. I'm awoken around 6am from my fitful sleep by the singing of Bhajans outside the Pawra hut in which I have slung my hammock. I lie there waiting for the sound of the *chai wallah*, beating his metal ladle on the side of his metal bucket, filled with black *chai* sweetened with unrefined sugar. By 7am tea has been served, and we begin to gather in the meeting tent, overlooking the river. By 7:30am the meeting has begun. First with prayers to the river goddess, Narmada, then meditation. Subsequently, introductions of newcomers to the camp are made, information disseminated about forthcoming actions, and future political projects are discussed. The meeting usually lasts approximately one and a half hours. Following that, the camp's occupants conduct *shramdan* (donated labour), such as creating water lines from the river to fill the camps drinking water supply. Only after this work is completed do we sit down on the baked earthen floors of an *adivasi* hut to eat breakfast. After that we have some free time to bathe, relax, and do our own work. The rest of the day is taken up with organising meetings, interviews and the ferrying of activists to various parts of the valley according to what activities are currently being arranged. If we are lucky then we drink another chai around 4pm. The only other meal, dinner, is usually just after sun has set. Following that, we have more meetings long into the night. At one such meeting a group of perhaps fifty people are huddled under the meeting tent in the hamlet. They are *adivasi* peasants, who have arrived by boat from their villages many miles down the river. Under the light of a single hurricane lamp, the faces of *adivasis* are dimly illuminated. A waning moon casts a silvery light across the Narmada. In the distance the thrum of the NBA motor boat fades into the darkness. One by one the assembled men relate their testimonies concerning the impacts of large dam construction in their valley – the trauma of displacement, the hardships and deceits of resettlement, the ongoing struggle for justice.

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7 Indigenous person.

Participants at the *satyagraha* during July September 2000 included local *adivasis*, farmers from the nearby Nimar Plains, Indian students, activists from a rang of Indian women's, environmental, and peasant organizations, and international activists, researchers, and student from Britain, Canada, United States and the Netherlands. Because space is bound into local to global networks, which act to configure particular places, places such as Domkhedi become the focus of a "distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations" (Massey, 1994: 156), and hence can be imagined as "articulated moments" (*ibid.*, 154) in the fluid spaces of networked social relations.

We – humans and non-humans – are constituted through the performance of myriad, heterogeneous, and messy moments and modes of being-in-the-world and through the living fabrics of association and relation that configure that world. By taking embodiment as the nexus of our situtadeness/embeddedness in the world is to foreground relationality, like ANT's networks and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomes (Whatmore, 2002: 117-118). Embodiment is about the content of social worlds, the material as well as the ephemeral: "The actors are themselves reconfigured in the light of the possibilities that flow through them" (Radley, 1996: 570). Woven into this notion of embodiment are the emotions, becomings and intensities that prefigure, set up, and work through encounters with human and non-human others.

Through the practices of our everyday lives, we conduct political acts through the adoption, negotiation, and rejection – through the performance – of a complex of identities (Madge, 1993). Performance deals with actions more than text, and with habits of the body. However, writing about performance is a difficult task, since the immediacy and intensity of the performance is dulled by its re-presentation in textual form – the event itself is distanced. This is because the *lived* character of resistance practices is imbued with a 'seizure of presence' (Bey, 1991: 23) that experiences reality as immediate. All that remains is this story that I add to the flow, evoked from some bodily memories.

Acting for a Relational Ethics

A *satyagraha* camp on the banks of the Narmada river. Occupied islands in the Tetulia river in the Ganges delta. Hundreds of activists from around the world gathered together in Bangalore for a week of discussions, strategies, testimonies, socialising. Each place represents an articulated moment of the PGA network. Different yet connected. Each imbued with a particular intensity regarding how "stuff is dispersed in, through, and across the spaces which are this world" (Laurier and Philo, 1999: 1067). More particularly, they are indicative of how various facets of the PGA network act in the world. The processes of interaction, communication, and mutli-scalar action are 'global' – in that, together, they form part of the multiplicity of action that comprises the PGA network – even as they are primarily composed of the ties between different 'localities'.

Collaborations, eye to heart to mind enable the embodiment of a relational ethics. Cultivating a dialogue on ethics in political activism enables the development of relations of honesty, truth, and interpersonal acknowledgement; and through

constructing a genuine moral language contributes to us becoming more fully conscious human beings (Pulido, 2003). Relational ethical positionalities need to be for dignity, self-determination, and empowerment that are non-dominating, and environmentally sustainable. However, such an ethics of political responsibility has to acknowledge that any collaborative 'we' constitutes the performance of multiple lived worlds, and an entangled web of power relationships, that privilege different parties under different contexts. The personal is both political and collective, enabling what Gibson-Graham term a 'partial identification' (1994: 218) between ourselves and resisting others, and articulation of a temporary common ground.

This contrasts with Habermasian notions of consensus reached through dialogue decided by the most persuasive argument, because a relational ethics acknowledges the plurality of voices and positionalities that comprise political collaborations. Multiplicity (of opinion, tactics, strategies and solutions), rather than consensus, comprises the outcome of a relational ethics, the struggle for which will involve choosing our battles in the light of political circumstances that are themselves in flux. The ways that this can be done, contingencies permitting, are as diverse as our imaginations. Contextualised, relational ethics of struggle, deployed in collaborative methodologies need to be a product of reciprocity between ourselves and resisting others, negotiated in practice (Bailey, 2001). This requires sensitivity to various degrees and kinds of difference (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality etc.), but also to the problematic and unequal relations of power that exists between collaborators. This necessitates working with the differences between collaborators, searching for mutual understanding.

It is based on the notion of difference in relation, constituted in an intersubjective manner in the context of always/already existing configurations of self and community (Whatmore, 1997). It is enacted in a material, embodied way, for example through relations of friendship, solidarity, and empathy. A relational ethics thus requires that we are sensitive to the contingency of things, and that our responsibility to others and to difference is connected to the responsibility to act (Slater, 1997). Such a responsibility, within the context of political struggle, implies that we take sides, albeit in a critical way. This acknowledges an embodied politics that is committed yet partial in perspective (Hyndman, 2003).

Creating common ground with resisting others serves to highlight and 'ground' differences (in language, ethnicity, power, access to resources etc.) in particular ways in particular places. For example, my participation in the *satyagraha* camp along the banks of the Narmada river, brought me and many different 'others' into close collaborative contact. When placed in such active proximity – through meetings, communal meals, sleeping etc. – difference (in ways of being, talking, acting) can be both recognised and negotiated.

Of course, there are problematic differences between activist collaborators pertaining to differences in political ideologies, gender relations, cultures, languages etc. Such differences are negotiated, in part, through the acceptance of the collective visions of the PGA network mentioned earlier. These provide a symbolic terrain of common ground that unites differences in solidarity against common enemies. They provide meeting points of constructed equivalence between the diverse multiplicities that

comprise different movements. The building of such equivalences is a process of ongoing negotiation, an engagement of political practices and imaginations in which ground is sought through which struggles can construct common cause (Massey, 2005). Because gender relations remain one of the most problematic differences within the network, gender workshops and education programmes have been initiated within PGA conferences and caravans, in order for the movement to begin to address these issues.

However, the technology for reaching out cannot extend networks where the notion of extension fails to capture the imagination (Riles, 2001: 26). While following and acting in the network I had numerous conversations with grassroots activists in a variety of struggles. Some grassroots activists in Nepal and Bangladesh thought of PGA as an organization which arranged events for them, rather than imagining themselves as being part of the PGA network. Other activists articulated the need for more traditional, tangible organizational structures than the notion of a network implied. As one BKF activist 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, activists do not necessarily see a link between their movement and their daily lives, and the PGA network. This leads us to a discussion of how the PGA imaginary is 'grassrooted' in the countries of participant movements.

Grassrooting the Imaginary

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.

While an important aspect of the work is to build interpersonal relationships with contacts within these movements, another is to coordinate joint actions across space, for example against particular neoliberal institutions such as the WTO. As Jeffrey Juris

argues, concerning the World Social Forum, PGA gatherings also "provide spaces for performing, representing, and physically manifesting alternative movement networks" (2004: 419). 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" (ibid).

PGA is a collective ritual where alternative social movement networks become embodied (Juris, 2004: 434). People's positionality in relation to others can be re-assessed, as an activist in the Slum dwellers network (within Thailand's AoP) noted about a PGA Asia conference in Dhaka in 2004: "There was a real chance for exchange between activists. We usually stereotype people by nation but when we meet face to face it breaks down the borders between us, and generates collective strength to make change" (interview, Bangkok, 2004). PGA is a performative ritual, a symbolic manifestation of the strength and diversity where diverse activist networks constitute themselves and symbolically map their relationship to one another through verbal and embodied communication (Juris, 2004). In addition, many movements hold post-conference de-briefing meetings at national and district levels to explain to people about the conferences and the PGA process. As a Bangladesh Kisani Sabha (peasant women's assembly) 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 *adivasi* communities along the Narmada's banks, and peasant communities in Bangladesh and Nepal for example, 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.

In Khulna district, Bangladesh, accompanied by friends from the BKF, I walked along brick lanes through flooded *padi* fields to local meeting after local meeting, there to share information with folks about the PGA network, and about future events and collaborations. Under the humming fan we drink sweet milky tea and I begin: "brothers and sisters peace be to you." 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.

However, owing to differential access to (financial, temporal) resources and network flows, differential material and discursive power relations exist within and between participant movements. 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. 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.

Transnational networks, such as PGA Asia, feature a constant movement of people, information, and resources, enabled by the multiple sites and scales at which participants work. Horizontal (and within movements somewhat vertical) networks interconnect villagers at the grassroots (of social movements), the imagineers, and even some NGO workers, who act and speak in various contexts to construct PGA Asia. These networks are also interlinked with a variety of media, journalists, academics, other social movements and organizations, and those networks which PGA Asia participant movements are also involved in (such as *La Via Campesina*). These interactions are also entwined with the ideas, information, and resources which flow through the skein of networks. Through the collective rituals of the network – the practices of meetings, conferences, protests, caravans and other forms of networking – participants come to embody activism and cultures of solidarity.

However, although networks are both local and global at all points, enabling network 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 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" (2002: 6). 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" (*ibid.*).

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 (Castells, 1997). Moreover, particular experiences of neoliberalism, and the formulation of understandings and responses, differ according to place. 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.

Networking is based upon the making of connections, across difference and distance. At base of networks are shared experiences as well as shared interests, which articulate a politics of relations. Thus networks consisting of different place-based movements are

held together by multiplicity and commonality. Networks facilitate multiple localized oppositions that articulate diverse critiques, approaches, and styles in various places of action (Schlosberg, 1999). In particular, 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. Mutual solidarity across place-based movements enables connections to be drawn that extend beyond the local and particular. 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 (Holloway and Pelaez, 1998).

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 (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).

As Juris (2004) points out, Global Justice Networks "are never fully formed, but are constantly produced and reproduced through concrete networking practices involving… conflict and contestation over issues related to power [and] authority," as well as language and operational logics within the network (469). 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. This will require the mutual articulation of grassroots and network practices and imaginaries. Sustainable forms of material resistance are required 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. Occupied islands in the Tetulia river, *satyagraha* camps on the banks of the Narmada, burning fields of GM cotton – we are the network, all of us who resist.

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